

Groton Daily Independent

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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))

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

Good Morning



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.

Sunday, June 9

U12 All at Sisseton Tourney

United Methodist: Worship at Conde at 8:30 a.m., at Groton at 10:30 a.m., coffee hour at 9:30 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at 9 a.m.

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

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

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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Gaza School Airstrike

An Israeli airstrike yesterday struck a school in central Gaza, killing more than 30 people, including 12 women and children, according to Palestinian authorities. The Israeli military said between 20 and 30 militants were operating at al-Sardi School, pointing to classrooms it says were used by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants to launch attacks.

Six thousand displaced Palestinians were sheltering at the school, according to the United Nations agency known as UNRWA, which said Israel did not provide prior warning. The agency, which runs the school, could not confirm whether militants were present. Israel said it had canceled two previously planned strikes on the school to avoid casualties. More than 36,000 Palestinians have been killed in eight months of war, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry. That includes roughly half of Hamas' 20,000-25,000 prewar militant force, according to US and Israeli estimates.

The news comes as Hamas leaders consider an Israeli-led and US-supported cease-fire proposal.

Gilgo 'Killing Plan' Found

Accused Long Island serial killer Rex Heuermann was charged with two additional second-degree murder counts yesterday, bringing the number of his alleged murder victims to six. The superseding indictment lists Jessica Taylor and Sandra Costilla as Heuermann's alleged victims in a case with ties to nearly a dozen other bodies found along Ocean Parkway since the 1990s. Heuermann has pleaded not guilty to all charges.

The latest indictment stems from a hard drive discovered in Heuermann's basement containing a file with alleged killing plans. Investigators recovered the text document detailing various preparation lists, including items needed for murder, potential risks, and cleaning tasks. Elsewhere, police also discovered violent pornography depicting acts similar to those done to the victims. DNA tests also linked hair discovered on both Taylor and Costilla's bodies to Heuermann.

The case first received attention after the bodies of four sex workers were discovered in 2010.

A Final Spin

Pat Sajak's final episode of "Wheel of Fortune" is set to air today. Sajak, who announced his retirement last year, has led the hangman-style game show for 41 seasons, hosting a record-breaking 8,010 episodes.

Sajak started his career as a DJ on Armed Forces Radio while serving in Vietnam before transitioning to a career in broadcasting. He was working as a TV weather forecaster in Los Angeles when he was tapped to take over from Chuck Woolery in 1981, bringing his dry wit and charm to the syndicated game show. The 77-year-old has won three Daytime Emmy Awards and a lifetime achievement award in 2011. His cohost, Vanna White, will continue her role until at least 2026. The show is the second most-watched show in syndication, averaging more than 8 million viewers each week.

TV and radio personality Ryan Seacrest is set to take over as host starting with Season 42 this fall.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NHL Stanley Cup Final kicks off tomorrow with the Edmonton Oilers taking on the Florida Panthers in Game 1 (8 pm ET, ABC) of the best-of-seven series.

"Hunger Games" author Suzanne Collins announces fifth novel to be released March 2025. ... and Lionsgate sets November 2026 release date for corresponding film.

"Hello, I'm Dolly" musical based on Dolly Parton's life in the works for 2026 Broadway debut. Netflix hit with \$120M defamation lawsuit by woman claiming to be inspiration for "Baby Reindeer" character.

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Science & Technology

SpaceX's Starship successfully reaches space on fourth uncrewed test launch; superheavy rocket booster and Starship both landed back on Earth, sustaining minor damage.

First example of "cellular origami" discovered; single-celled organism is built in a foldable structure, allowing it to extend 40 times its regular length, the equivalent of a human neck stretching 200 feet high.

Engineers develop mouth-based touchpad allowing patients with paralysis to interact with computers. Palm-sized 3D printer prototype allows users to fabricate small, customizable objects on the go.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.02%, Dow +0.2%, Nasdaq -0.1%) as investors await monthly jobs report data today. European Central Bank cuts interest rates for first time since 2019, lowers key rate to 3.75% from 4%.

US regulators to open antitrust probes into the roles Nvidia, OpenAI, and Microsoft have played in the AI industry. Food and Drug Administration rescinds 2022 marketing ban on Juul's e-cigarettes, placing Juul under scientific review; ban was paused previously amid court litigation.

Stock trading app Robinhood to acquire UK-based cryptocurrency exchange Bitstamp for \$200M in all-cash deal expected to close in first half of 2025.

Politics & World Affairs

Former Trump adviser Steve Bannon ordered to report to prison July 1 to begin four-month sentence for criminal contempt of Congress; Bannon is one of two former Trump advisers convicted on such charges.

Dutch voters kick off four-day-long election across 27 European Union countries to determine makeup of 720-member European Parliament; EU elections represent the world's second-largest democratic exercise after India.

At least 150 people feared dead in central Sudanese village following massacre believed to be carried out by Rapid Support Forces, a militant group fighting the Sudanese Armed Forces in a 14-month-long civil war.

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We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

Supreme Court Should Embrace Transparency

Rising concerns about the U.S. Supreme Court's lack of impartiality amid increasing calls for judicial recusals, reforms and transparency form a historical backdrop of anxiety as Americans are once more bracing themselves for a landmark ruling that will have a direct bearing on the future of our constitutional democracy, the Bill of Rights and the rule of law. In this case, *Trump v. United States*, the question is whether the president enjoys absolute immunity from criminal prosecution.

The Court will render a decision that may determine, as former President Donald Trump asserts, that the nation's chief executive should possess constitutional authority to order the assassination of his political opponents. The citizenry's anticipation of this historic decision, expected any hour in the final days of the Court's Term, has generated nationwide demands for transparency in the work of the High Bench at a juncture when public respect for governmental institutions, including the Court itself, is in sharp decline.

This is not the first time that the nation has anxiously held its breath while awaiting the Court's seminal rulings on matters that could re-shape our legal landscape and the future of the country. With *Brown v. Bd. of Education* (1954), Americans understood that a decision banning segregation in public schools would shake southern culture to its core and open avenues for racial equality promised by the 14th Amendment. In the *Pentagon Papers Case* (1971), everyone knew that the future of freedom of the press and the status of the First Amendment were at stake. In *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), the fundamental question of a woman's right to govern her own reproductive organs was in the hands of nine justices.

The public's heightened anxiety about judicial decisions that might displace the pillars of our nation can be allayed, to some degree, if there is among the citizenry, a respectable level of confidence in the work of the Court-- that it is above the fray and not a tool of political bias, and that its opinions are grounded in facts and law and are well-reasoned and defensible.

Public confidence in the Court can be bolstered through transparency. While the Justices do most of their work behind the scenes—in chambers and judicial conference—the reputations of the individual justices and hence the institution are well-served if citizens believe that rulings are not the product of judicial bias. Wise judges will recuse themselves from cases if there is even the "appearance" of bias. As Justice Felix Frankfurter wrote, "justice must satisfy the appearance of justice."

In this current climate, two Justices -- Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito -- are laboring -- fairly or unfairly -- under suspicions that their votes and perhaps opinions in the presidential immunity case promoted by Trump will be partisan. Thomas and Alito have rejected calls for their recusal and the fraught politics of the issue has ensnared the Court in a storm of controversy and doubt at a time when its reputation can least afford it.

As with most governmental problems, the remedy for institutional damage to the Court is transparency, with the focus on judicial recusal, to borrow from the federal code—28 U.S.C. Section 455—whenever a judge's impartiality "might reasonably be questioned." The Justices themselves can shoulder the responsibility for asking colleagues to withdraw if they refuse to recognize the basis for public perception of bias. Additional measures seem necessary to remove from the Justices themselves the sole responsibility for deciding when recusal is the right call.

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse's proposal, the "Supreme Court Ethics, Recusal and Transparency Act of 2023," which has been approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee, would require the Justices to adopt a code of conduct, create a mechanism to investigate alleged violations of the code, improve disclosure

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and transparency expectations and require Justices to publicly explain their recusal decisions. At a time when public confidence in the Court has declined, we need a measure to restore its reputation. This bill is a good start. It promotes the nation's commitment to the rule of law and confidence in the Court.

The benefit of an explanation for a Justice's refusal to withdraw from a case is transparency, precisely what the Court and the country need at this juncture in American history.

David Adler is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality and civic education. This column is made possible with the support of the South Dakota Humanities Council, South Dakota NewsMedia Association and this newspaper.

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Minnehaha County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle crash

Where: Jasper Street and 482nd Avenue, six miles east of Dell Rapids, SD

When: 8:41 a.m. June 6, 2024

Driver 1: Female, 35, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2009 Mazda CX-7

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Driver 2: Male, 19, serious, non-life-threatening injuries

Vehicle 2: 2023 Ram 4500

Seatbelt Use: Under investigation

Minnehaha County, S.D.- A 35-year-old Jasper, MN woman died from injuries sustained in a two-vehicle crash this morning near Dell Rapids, SD.

The names of the people involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2009 Mazda CX-7 was traveling westbound on Jasper Street, while the driver of a 2023 Ram 4500 was traveling southbound on 482nd Avenue. The Ram 4500 failed to stop at the stop sign at the intersection of those roads and struck the Mazda CX-7. Both vehicles left the 4-way intersection and came to rest in the southwest ditch. The driver of the Ram 4500 sustained serious, non-life-threatening injuries and was transported to a Sioux Falls Hospital. The driver of the Mazda CX-7 was pronounced deceased at the scene. Charges are pending.

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.

Queen of Hearts

Week 14 of the Queen of Hearts drawing was held Thursday with the jackpot of \$20,979. Ticket sales for the were \$1,855. The name drawn was Heather Merkel with chose card number 2, it was the Three of Hearts. She won the consolation prize of \$185.

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**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

Key takeaways from South Dakota primary:

Low turnout, high Republican drama

BY STU WHITNEY

South Dakota News Watch

Fewer than 2 out of 10 South Dakota voters went to the polls Tuesday in a primary election dominated by fallout from a legislative debate over landowner rights, which caused Republican turnover and set the tone for power clashes in Pierre.

The turnout was historically low, with 100,999 ballots cast out of 591,153 registered voters in the state. That's a percentage of 17%, below the state's primary turnout in presidential cycles of 2020 (28%), 2016 (22%) and 2012 (21%).

The state's largest county, Minnehaha, had a voting turnout Tuesday of 10%.

Part of the reason is that the Republican and Democratic presidential nominees are already decided, and there were no U.S. Senate or U.S. House primaries to spark voter interest.

In 2008, when the Democratic presidential primary race was still roiling between eventual winner Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, South Dakota's voter turnout was 37%, including 51% among Democrats.

On Tuesday, as in recent years, state legislative primaries were largely Republican exercises, with pro-business moderates and Freedom Caucus-style conservatives fighting for control of the state's dominant party.

Of the 100,999 ballots cast, just 19,869 were from Democratic or Independents voters, who are not permitted to vote in GOP primaries in South Dakota. There was only one Democratic primary in the state legislative races, compared to 44 on the Republican side.

Much of the discrepancy can be attributed not only to South Dakota's status as a deep-red state but also a dearth of competitive Democratic candidates, said Jon Schaff, a political science professor at Northern State University in Aberdeen.

GOP primary winners ran unopposed in 21 of the 35 state Senate races in 2022, and the last time a Democratic candidate won a statewide election was 2008.

"There's an argument to make that we see low turnout for these primaries because so many voters have little or nothing to vote for," said Schaff. "But shame on the Democrats. If you don't want the Republican primaries to be everything, then run a candidate. That's the bare minimum that political parties should be able to do."

Joe Kirby, an election reform advocate who is leading a 2024 ballot effort to make South Dakota an open primary state, agrees that state Democratic efforts need to be more robust.

But he also saw Tuesday's election results and low turnout as indicative of a system that is shutting too many voters out of the process.

Constitutional Amendment H, which has been certified for the Nov. 5 ballot, would establish "top-two" open primaries for governor, Congress and state legislative and county races. There would be one primary election for each designated office, with all candidates running against each other regardless of party affiliation. The top two vote-getters would advance to the general election.

Supporters of the amendment believe circumstances have shifted in their favor due to the power schism in state GOP ranks, which has rankled the moderate wing of the party.

"Our current system can produce odd and unpopular results because only a small group of voters participate or are allowed to participate," said Kirby. "Open primaries will change that."

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Landowner rights for the win

Of the 38 Republican legislative incumbents who ran to keep the same position Tuesday, 11 were defeated, foiled in many cases by a pipeline debate that surrounds the expansion of ethanol interests in South Dakota.

The issue of "landowner rights" was inflamed by proposed use of eminent domain for underground carbon pipeline projects that would capture the toxic gas from ethanol plants and carry it to other states for disposal.

It found a legislative litmus test with Senate Bill 201, part of a "Landowner Bill of Rights" compromise supported by Gov. Kristi Noem, who said it would "provide new protections for landowners and allow for economic growth to move forward."

The legislation allows the Public Utilities Commission to override county, municipal or township regulations on pipelines. Critics saw it as a sellout to the ethanol industry and made their voices heard during the primary campaign.

Among the incumbents who voted for Senate Bill 201 and lost their seats Tuesday were Sen. Jean Hunhoff of Yankton, whose 24 years in the state Legislature included 18 on the Joint Committee on Appropriations. She lost a primary challenge to Lauren Nelson in District 18.

Other incumbent casualties in the Senate who voted for SB 201 were Erin Tobin of Winner (District 21), David Johnson of Rapid City (District 33) and Michael Walsh of Rapid City (District 35).

In the House, the list included Tamara St. John of Sisseton (District 1), Byron Callies of Watertown (District 5), Tyler Tordsen of Sioux Falls (District 14), James Wangsness of Miller (District 23), Gary Cammack of Union Center (District 29) and Becky Drury of Rapid City (District 34).

"Clearly there was some power and a movement there," said Schaff, adding that the pipeline issue sparked increased spending in key races. "And the pretty clear lesson is that landowner rights on the whole was a winning message."

In one of the Senate's fiercest anti-pipeline vs. establishment battles, former House member Carl Perry ousted Katie Washnok, president of the Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and chairman of the Brown County Republicans, by a 52% to 48% margin in District 3.

Kevin Jensen of Canton, shifting from House to Senate in District 16 and criticizing pipeline and prison projects, trounced bank executive and former school board member Eric Hohman with 65% of the vote in the Lincoln County showdown.

In the end, though, not all was lost for mainstream Republicans.

Stephanie Sauder, a longtime educator and former mayor of Bryant, ousted fellow House member Fred Deutsch of Florence in a closely-watched race for District 4 Senate with 51%, a margin of 64 votes subject to possible recount.

Deutsch, a retired chiropractor, has built a political profile around anti-transgender legislation such as the bathroom bill of 2016 that aimed to bar trans students from using school restrooms that don't match their biological sex. The measure made national headlines and was vetoed by then-Gov. Dennis Daugaard.

Noem, who has talked publicly about Sauder babysitting her as a farm kid in Castlewood, remained neutral in this race. But Sauder was supported by Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree and House Speaker Hugh Bartels as well as now-retired Senate President Pro Tem Lee Schoenbeck.

Another heavily boosted establishment candidate, Amber Hulse of Hot Springs, prevailed in Senate District 30 by knocking off embattled incumbent Julie Frye-Mueller of Rapid City by a 46% to 42% margin.

Hulse, a former Miss South Dakota who interned at the White House during the Trump administration and has a law degree from Georgetown University, campaigned on bringing "fresh leadership" to one of the state's most conservative districts.

Frye-Mueller was censured by the Senate in February 2023 for workplace harassment involving a Legislative Research Council staffer. The staffer said Frye-Mueller harshly criticized the staffer's decision to have her baby vaccinated, saying the baby could "get Down syndrome or autism" or even die.

"I think Hulse was clearly being put up by the establishment as the 'Frye-Mueller killer,'" said Schaff. "And she was successful in doing that."

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Hand-counting initiatives fall short

In addition to legislative races, there were other signs that landowner rights and the location of pipelines and prisons have supplanted election skepticism as hot-button issues galvanizing the Republican right.

Spurred by electoral activist group South Dakota Canvassing, three counties (Gregory, Haakon and Tripp) voted on initiated measures on whether elections should be conducted by paper ballots only, with no electronic voting devices or tabulators.

Voters rejected the measure in all three counties, with Haakon voting 61% against, Tripp 57% against and Gregory 54% against.

"The results showed that our citizens are confident in how elections are conducted in Haakon County," Stacy Pinner, the county's auditor and top election official, told News Watch. "Our county commissioners attended town halls that I conducted and they're listening to our citizens' concerns."

Rick Weible, a computer analyst from Elkton and one of the state's most persistent election reformers, ran for District 8 Senate against Crabtree and lost by a margin of 72% to 28%.

The day after the election, Weible was driving to Texas to consult with candidates who are challenging voting results in that state. He told News Watch in a phone interview that he has no intention of challenging his lopsided loss to Crabtree.

"I ran to give voters a chance to have more options," said Weible, a Minnesota native who serves as an adviser to South Dakota Canvassing. "I'm glad that we live in a country where we can have challengers test the waters to find out if public officials are heading in the right direction or not. The voters in this district chose Crabtree, and I respect their decision."

Matthew Monfore, an evangelist and election skeptic from the West River town of Oral, ran for District 30 House in a crowded Republican field and finished with 4% of the vote.

Biden hits 75% in Democratic primary

Republican nominee and former president Donald Trump faced no opposition in South Dakota, which meant no GOP presidential primary on the ballot.

On the Democratic side, President Joe Biden was opposed by Dean Phillips, Marianne Williamson and Armando Perez-Serrato, with no "uncommitted" or write-in option.

Biden garnered 13,366 of the 17,922 ballots cast by Democratic and Independent voters to win with 75%, followed by Williamson (12%), Phillips (10%) and Perez-Serrato (4%).

The incumbent president hit 79% in the state's largest county, Minnehaha, which gave him 44% of the general election vote in 2020 against Trump.

A May 2024 poll co-sponsored by News Watch showed Trump ahead of Biden by nearly 20 points in South Dakota, with a margin of 50% to 31%. Third-party challenger Robert Kennedy Jr., who is not yet on the ballot in the state, polled at 11% percent, while 7% were undecided.

The last Democrat to finish within 10 points of a Republican nominee in a South Dakota presidential election was Barack Obama, whose 48% came up short against John McCain's 53% in 2008. Obama won the presidency.

The Associated Press contributed to this story produced by South Dakota News Watch, a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization. Read more in-depth stories at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email every few days to get stories as soon as they're published. Contact Stu Whitney at stu.whitney@sdnewswatch.org



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GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

Regular School Board Meeting

June 10, 2024 – 7:00 PM – GHS Library Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of May 13 school board meeting as drafted or amended.
2. Approval of May 2024 District bills for payment.
3. Approval of May 2024 Financial Report, Custodial Accounts, and Investments.
4. Approval of May 2024 School Lunch Report.
5. Approval of May 2024 School Transportation Report.
6. Authorize request of 2024-25 newspaper quotes with due date of 4:00 PM on July 8, 2024.
7. Authorize request of 2024-25 energy quotes (diesel/gas) with due date of 4:00 PM on July 8, 2024.
8. Authorize Business Manager to publish FY2025 Groton Area School District Budget with 7:30 PM public hearing set for July 8, 2024.
9. Approve Open Enrollment Applications #25-09, #25-10, #25-11, #25-12, #25-13, #25-14, #25-15 for the 2024-25 school year.

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Review and approve Fiscal Year 2023 District Audit.
2. Pre-authorize business manager to make district payments of \$149,626.00 to EMC Insurance and \$7,753.68 to TMS on July 1st.
3. Adopt Supplemental Budget #FY24-02.
4. Approve transfer of funds to custodial accounts.
5. Approve OST Summer workers and rates as follows: student worker rates: May-June \$11.75/hour, July and August \$12.00/hour for Leah Jones, Mckenna Tietz, Emma Davies, Drake Peterson, and Gavin Englund; and adult worker starting rates: May-June \$14.74/hour, July and August \$15.33/hour Janice Hoffman, Camryn Kurtz, Shaylee Peterson, Bryson Wambach, Kyleigh Englund, and Mckayla Johnston (\$2/hour differential for Certified Teacher).
6. Approve hiring Mary Johnson, MS Reading/Social Studies Teacher, for the 2024-2025 school year.
7. Approve hiring Caitlyn Fischbach, Assistant Volleyball Coach, for the 2024-2025 school year.
8. Approve hiring Landon Brown, Show Choir Director, for the 2024-2025 school year.
9. Approve hiring Jennifer Kunze, Special Education Paraprofessional, for the 2024-2025 school year at \$15.33/hour.
10. Approve hiring Aleshia Ambright, Special Education Paraprofessional, for the 2024-2025 school year at \$15.33/hour.
11. Approve resignation from Chattarida Sukhmon, Special Education Paraprofessional.
12. **Executive session pursuant SDCL1-25-2(1) for personnel.**
13. Issue Off-Staff Coaching Agreements for 2024-2025 school year.

ADJOURN



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

What further Trump sins and crimes will SD's highest elected officials excuse?

Governor, congressional delegates and attorney general condemn verdict while ignoring ex-president's immorality

DANA HESS

There used to be a time when you could count on how Republicans would react to the news of the day. They stood for the rule of law and high moral standards. Through the Trump years we have seen those standards erode and vanish in other states. Recently the Trumpian infection was on full display among South Dakota's top elected officials.

When the former president was convicted on 34 felony counts in New York, South Dakota's top Republicans all had something disparaging to say about the outcome. To varying degrees, Gov. Kristi Noem, U.S. Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and state Attorney General Marty Jackley all added their voices to the chorus of GOP naysayers claiming that Trump got a raw deal.

This criticism of the verdict is to be expected from Noem. She has spent so much time trying to mold herself into the former president's perfect vice presidential candidate that she not only drinks the Trump Kool-Aid, she bathes in it. It was disconcerting, however, to see the state's other top elected officials take such big gulps.

Thune's criticism centered on the "politically motivated" nature of the trial. His scorn, like his endorsement of Trump's candidacy for president, may be fueled by pragmatism. As a candidate for the top Republican job in the Senate, he would be called on to work closely with Trump if he is elected. Consequently, it may be best for Thune's chances if he toes the company line on Trump's conviction.

Rounds, who has not endorsed Trump, said the verdict would cause people to question the judicial system. He seemed more upset, however, by the notion that Trump will be able to use the verdict to raise funds for his campaign.

Johnson, who also has not endorsed Trump, confessed his own long-standing concerns about the trial, citing unnamed "legal experts from across the political spectrum" who predict that the convictions will be overturned on appeal.

Perhaps the most disconcerting voice in this South Dakota chorus belonged to state Attorney General Marty Jackley. The AG said he had deep concerns about New York's prosecution of Trump after the U.S. attorney and Federal Election Commission chose not to prosecute. While it was a state court that convicted Trump, Jackley managed to chalk it all up to a "failure of leadership by the Biden administration."

It's most disheartening to hear a man who has spent his life in the judicial system trashing the process. Would Trump and his minions have noticed if Jackley stayed silent? Maybe criticizing the verdict is the price elected Republicans have to pay if they want to stay out of Trump's crosshairs.

A lesson in how far Republicans have strayed from embracing the concept of law and order can be seen in the example of former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan. After the trial, Hogan, who is a candidate for the U.S. Senate, said there must be respect for the verdict. A Trump advisor immediately posted on X that Hogan's campaign was over.

Just as they once embraced the rule of law, Republicans could also be counted on to stake out the high

moral ground on any issue. Yet few, if any, Republican office holders — and certainly none from the South Dakota contingent — criticized the lack of morality that led Trump to his New York hush money trial.

It's a certainty that if Trump were a Democrat, Republicans would be quick to point out his shattered marriage vows, his dalliance with a porn star and the likelihood that a man who would cheat on his wife would think nothing of cheating on his business records to cover it up.

This has happened across the country as Republicans who were initially critical of Trump's role in the Jan. 6 insurrection later came to his defense. Election denialism seems to be the new gold standard for Republicans who hope to be Trump's vice presidential nominee.

It's disappointing to see Trump's brand of rule by complaint take such a firm grip on all of South Dakota's top elected officials. Time will tell what other Trump sins and crimes they'll have to excuse in the future to curry the man's favor or avoid the man's wrath.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

Costs and other concerns about low-turnout primary spark thoughts of change

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JUNE 6, 2024 4:16 PM

Every ballot cast in Lyman County for Tuesday's primary election was worth \$134 in taxpayer money, Lyman County Auditor Kalli Houchin estimated.

Only 67 people voted in the south-central South Dakota county — just over 6% of registered voters. Yet the county spent about \$9,000 on ballot printing, hiring election workers and other costs.

In Hughes County, which includes the capital city of Pierre, each of its 304 ballots cast was worth roughly \$70 in taxpayer funds. The county had less than 5% voter turnout.

Turnout across South Dakota in the primary was historically low at 17% — the lowest percentage since the state began combining presidential primaries with other primary races in 2000. Turnout was 27% among Republicans and 7% among Democrats, independents and non-politically affiliated voters (who are lumped together in the data because all of them are allowed to vote in Democratic primaries).

"If I could just go out and drag people in to vote, I would, but that's not something you can do," Houchin said.

Over half of South Dakota counties didn't break 20% voter turnout, even though every county held a fully staffed primary day costing its taxpayers thousands of dollars. Sanborn County had the lowest voter turnout at 4.84%, with 31 ballots cast.

Hughes County has five polling places, which are open to any registered voter in the county. Three are in Pierre while two are in rural areas. One person voted at the Harrold location, said Auditor Thomas Oliva, and 13 voted at the Blunt location. Yet the county paid six election workers \$18 an hour for those two sites.

"It's not what I like to see, but it's something that has to be provided for the people as a fundamental right," Oliva said. "As a taxpayer, not an auditor, I'm not very happy and I think it was a waste."

Frustration with costs of poorly attended primaries could factor into a statewide ballot question this fall. Supporters of the open primaries measure say closed primaries such as those held only for Republicans disenfranchise large numbers of voters. Open primaries would include all candidates for an office running in one primary, regardless of their party.

Low voter turnout and Republican upsets

But the low voter turnout number "isn't a fair gauge" of voter interest in this year's election, Oliva said.

In Tuesday's primary, there were no statewide Republican races to vote on: no intra-party challengers against U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, for example, and no presidential primary race since nobody filed to run against Donald Trump. The only statewide race on the Democratic ballot was the presidential primary,

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which included three challengers with little chance of beating President Joe Biden.

Additionally, there was a dearth of local contests. Democrats have struggled for years to find candidates in the state, so it's rare to have a Democratic primary. But even among Republicans, there were 26 uncontested Republican legislative primaries. Counties that had the worst voter turnout, such as Lyman and Hughes, didn't have a ballot for most Republicans in the county. Some Republican voters had only little-known races to vote on, like choosing delegates for the state party convention.

This year was the first in Todd County Auditor Barb DeSersa's 10-year tenure that her county hasn't had a Republican primary ballot.

"It kind of makes you nervous that there weren't contests this year," DeSersa said. "I hope everybody hasn't given up. It makes you wonder if people are hesitant to get involved with politics in today's climate."

The turnout of 27% for Republicans is actually good for a year like this with so little on the ballot, said Michael Card, associate professor emeritus of political science at the University of South Dakota, but it still leaves party nominees representing only a small slice of voters.

The most common strategy to increase voter turnout is to get voters interested in at least one race on the ballot — creating a sense of urgency or saliency that the results will impact them, Card added. That may have increased Republican turnout in some areas where legislative races included candidates from rival factions of the party.

"Conflict gets people to go," Card said.

Conflict can also push moderate voters away. In this case, the Republican voters who did show up tended to vote for more ideologically conservative challengers, ousting a group of 14 incumbents across the state, according to unofficial results. That group included many "stalwart Republican" types, Card said.

"If there are competing visions and ideologies for candidates, people not going out to vote may mean the individuals who are selected aren't representative of the overall population," Card said, "because only the true partisans or politicians end up selecting who's going to represent the party in the general election."

Non-voters show 'disgust' and 'disenchantment' with politics

Many of the counties that had the highest voter turnout in the state had nonpartisan issues on the ballot: Harding (40.89%) had a hotly contested school board race, Davison (40.79%) included a ballot question for Mitchell residents about dredging Lake Mitchell, and three counties — Gregory (39.47%), Tripp (37.4%) and Haakon (34.25%) — had ballot initiatives to ban vote-counting machines (each of which failed).

Oliva said he sees the national political climate turning off moderate voters, which might explain low voter turnout even in counties that had hotly contested races.

Pennington County, the second most populated in the state, where there were several heated legislative races, had 16% voter turnout. The state's most populated county, Minnehaha, had 10% voter turnout.

"It's put a bad taste in so many people's mouths and people are throwing their hands up — and not in a good way," Oliva said. "They're just not going to vote."

The Augustana Research Institute's Beacom Research Fellows program is studying low voter turnout in Sioux Falls with the local chapter of the League of Women Voters. Fellows studying the issue conducted a survey of registered voters in the city who haven't voted in recent years.

Suzanne Smith, associate vice president of enterprise data analytics and the Augustana Research Institute, mentors the fellows in their research. She said the biggest factor discouraging people from voting was attitudinal — a general "disgust" or "disenchantment" with politics.

Smith said a final report with recommendations to increase turnout is expected to be released at the end of this month. Preliminary ideas for the League of Women Voters include making better use of social media to encourage voting, communicating more with voters during non-election years to keep them registered and engaged, and using strategies to make voting part of the "social norm."

"I think we all believe the way democracy works is we get to weigh in on the rules that govern our society — city, school, county, state," Smith said. "Whether turnout is 6% or 26% of the population that's voicing an opinion, it raises the question of if it's representative of the will of the people. It's on us as individuals

to make sure the rules established do reflect what the bulk of the people in the community think.”

Auditors and experts across the state expect significantly higher participation in the Nov. 5 general election, with a presidential election, a U.S. House race, and at least six statewide measures among the items on the ballot.

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

End of pandemic internet subsidies threatens a health care lifeline for rural America

SD's Sen. Thune among lawmakers resisting continuation of program

BY: SARAH JANE TRIBBLE, KFF HEALTH NEWS - JUNE 6, 2024 9:00 AM

FORT HALL RESERVATION, Idaho — Myrna Broncho realized just how necessary an internet connection can be after she broke her leg.

In fall 2021, the 69-year-old climbed a ladder to the top of a shed in her pasture. The roof that protects her horses and cows needed to be fixed. So, drill in hand, she pushed down.

That's when she slipped.

Broncho said her leg snapped between a pair of ladder rungs as she fell, “and my bone was sticking out, and the only thing was holding it was my sock.”

Broncho arm-crawled back to her house to reach her phone. She hadn't thought to take it with her because, she said, “I never really dealt with phones.”

Broncho needed nine surgeries and rehabilitation that took months. Her hospital was more than two hours away in Salt Lake City and her home internet connection was vital for her to keep track of records and appointments, as well as communicate with her medical staff.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, federal lawmakers launched the Affordable Connectivity Program with the goal of connecting more people to their jobs, schools, and doctors. More than 23 million low-income households, including Broncho's, eventually signed on. The program provided \$30 monthly subsidies for internet bills, or \$75 discounts in tribal or high-cost areas like Broncho's.

Now, the ACP is out of money.

In early May, Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) challenged an effort to continue funding the program, saying during a commerce committee hearing that the program needed to be revamped.

“As is currently designed, ACP does a poor job of directing support to those who truly need it,” Thune said, adding that too many people who already had internet access used the subsidies.

There has been a flurry of activity on Capitol Hill, with lawmakers first attempting and failing to attach funding to the must-pass Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization. Afterward, Sen. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) traveled to his home state to tell constituents in tiny White River Junction that Congress was still working toward a solution.

As the program funding dwindled, both Democrats and Republicans pushed for new legislative action with proposals trying to address concerns like the ones Thune raised.

On May 31, as the program ended, President Joe Biden's administration continued to call on Congress to take action. Meanwhile, the administration announced that more than a dozen companies — including AT&T, Verizon, and Comcast — would offer low-cost plans to ACP enrollees, and the administration said those plans could affect as many as 10 million households.

According to a survey of participants released by the Federal Communications Commission, more than two-thirds of households had inconsistent or no internet connection before enrolling in the program.

Broncho had an internet connection before the subsidy, but on this reservation in rural southeastern Idaho, where she lives, about 40% of the 200 households enrolled in the program had no internet before

the subsidy.

Nationwide, about 67% of nonurban residents reported having a broadband connection at home, compared with nearly 80% of urban residents, said John Horrigan, a national expert on technology adoption and senior fellow at the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society. Horrigan reviewed the data collected by a 2022 Census survey.

The FCC said on May 31 that ending the program will affect about 3.4 million rural and more than 300,000 households in tribal areas.

The end of federal subsidies for internet bills will mean "a lot of families who will have to make the tough choice not to have internet anymore," said Amber Hastings, an AmeriCorps member serving the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes on the reservation. Some of the families Hastings enrolled had to agree to a plan to pay off past-due bills before joining the program. "So they were already in a tough spot," Hastings said.

Matthew Rantanen, director of technology for the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association, said the ACP was "extremely valuable."

"Society has converted everything online. You cannot be in this society, as a societal member, and operate without a connection to broadband," Rantanen said. Not being connected, he said, keeps Indigenous communities and someone like "Myrna at a disadvantage."

Rantanen, who advises tribes nationwide about building broadband infrastructure on their land, said benefits from the ACP's subsidies were twofold: They helped individuals get connected and encouraged providers to build infrastructure.

"You can guarantee a return on investment," he said, explaining that the subsidies ensured customers could pay for internet service.

Since Broncho signed up for the program last year, her internet bill had been fully paid by the discount. Broncho used the money she had previously budgeted for her internet bill to pay down credit card debt and a loan she took out to pay for the headstones of her mother and brother.

As the ACP's funds ran low, the program distributed only partial subsidies. So, in May, Broncho received a bill for \$46.70. In June, she expected to pay the full cost.

When asked if she would keep her internet connection without the subsidy, Broncho said, "I'm going to try." Then she added, "I'm going to have to" even if it means taking a lesser service.

Broncho said she uses the internet for shopping, watching shows, banking, and health care.

The internet, Broncho said, is "a necessity."

Sarah Jane Tribble, senior correspondent, is the lead reporter on the rural health desk of KFF Health News. She created the organization's first narrative podcast, "Where It Hurts," about the closure of a rural Kansas hospital. An Emmy winner, she has received honors for her work from the National Press Club, the National Institute for Health Care Management, and the Association of Health Care Journalists. Before joining KFF Health News, she covered the health care industry in Cleveland for NPR and PBS, and spent more than a decade as a reporter for major newspapers from the Carolinas to California.

On 80th anniversary of D-Day invasion, Biden and Macron honor WWII veterans at Normandy

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JUNE 6, 2024 11:49 AM

WASHINGTON — "They were brave, they were resolute, they were ready," President Joe Biden said Thursday at the Normandy American Cemetery overlooking Omaha Beach, one of five along France's northern coast where Allied troops invaded in 1944 and turned the tide in World War II.

Biden and dozens of U.S. lawmakers traveled to Normandy to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the D-Day invasion, the largest land, air and sea operation in military history.

More than 150,000 troops from the United States, Britain and Canada landed on the beaches on June 6, beginning a monthslong battle that eventually liberated Europe from Nazi Germany.

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Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron honored nearly a dozen D-Day survivors and other World War II veterans on a stage set before an enormous crowd that included service members, U.S. officials, members of Congress and Hollywood's Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg, who dramatized searing World War II scenes on film.

Caretakers and active-duty military members helped the veterans stand before Macron as he pinned France's Légion d'Honneur, its highest military honor, on their shoulders. Biden shook each veteran's hand upon receiving the medal.

Among those honored on stage were Hilbert Margol of Georgia, John Wardell of New Jersey, Robert Pedigo of Indiana, Calvin Shiner of California, Edward Berthold of Illinois, Dominick Critelli of New York, Bill Casassa of Kansas, Victor Chaney of Indiana, Raymond Glansberg of Florida, Richard Stewart of Ohio and Jack Kinyon of Illinois.

Roughly 20 miles east, Macron presented the same honor to British veterans at a separate event attended by King Charles III and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak at the British Normandy Memorial overlooking Gold Beach, according to reporters at the ceremony.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau delivered a speech at nearby Juno Beach, according to reporters present.

'Bands of brothers' attend

Biden and first lady Jill Biden met with 41 veterans from the Normandy campaign, 33 of whom served on D-Day, according to reporters traveling with the president. Biden gave each a commemorative coin bearing the presidential seal and images of troops on the beaches of Normandy.

About 180 American WWII veterans attended the ceremony, according to reporters present.

Many veterans, over or approaching age 100, sat on a shaded stage in wheelchairs, covered in blue blankets and wearing red, white and blue scarves.

Miniature American and French flags fluttered beside each white marble cross and Star of David in the rows and rows that mark thousands of Americans laid to rest in Colleville-sur-Mer, France.

More than 9,300 Americans are buried at the 172.5-acre cemetery. Just over 300 headstones are marked unknown. A Wall of the Missing bears nearly 1,600 names of Americans declared missing or lost at sea.

"Many, to state the obvious, never came home. Many survived that longest day and kept on fighting for months until victory was finally won. And a few notable bands of brothers are here with us today," Biden said during the ceremony that was livestreamed by several outlets, including C-SPAN.

More than 4,400 Allied troops died on the first day of the invasion, including 2,501 Americans.

"Just walk the rows of the cemetery as I had. Nearly 10,000 heroes buried side by side — officers and enlisted, immigrants and native born, different races, different faiths, but all Americans, all served with honor," Biden said.

'Isolationism was not the answer'

The day was laden with reminders that Russia's ground invasion in Ukraine is ongoing.

While Russia fought as an ally in the Battle of Normandy, shoring up the Eastern front, its modern-day President Vladimir Putin continues its assault and land grab in Ukraine.

"Isolationism was not the answer 80 years ago, and it's not the answer today," Biden said to applause.

"We know the dark forces that these heroes fought against 80 years ago. They never fade — aggression and greed, the desire to dominate and control, to change borders by force," Biden said, referring to Russia's Putin. "These are perennial, the struggle between a dictatorship and freedom is unending."

"The fact that they (WWII veterans) were heroes here that day does not absolve us from what we have to do today. Democracy is never guaranteed," Biden said.

Biden said the U.S. "will not walk away" from Ukraine.

"Because if we do, Ukraine will be subjugated, and it will not end there," Biden said.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy attended a separate D-Day event at Omaha Beach, according

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to White House press corps reporters who traveled with Biden to his second event of the day.

The latest \$60 billion security package for Ukraine took six months to clear Congress because of strong opposition on the far-right.

Biden said NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization formed four years after WWII that now counts more than 30 member states, is the "the greatest military alliance in the history of the world."

Precipitated by Russia's invasion in Ukraine, two additional European nations joined the alliance in 2023 and 2024 — Finland, which shares a long land border with Russia, and Sweden, just across the Baltic Sea.

The alliance has been the target of criticism from presumed 2024 Republican presidential nominee and former President Donald Trump. Notably in February, Trump said in a CNN interview that he would encourage Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to NATO countries, depending on their financial contributions to the alliance.

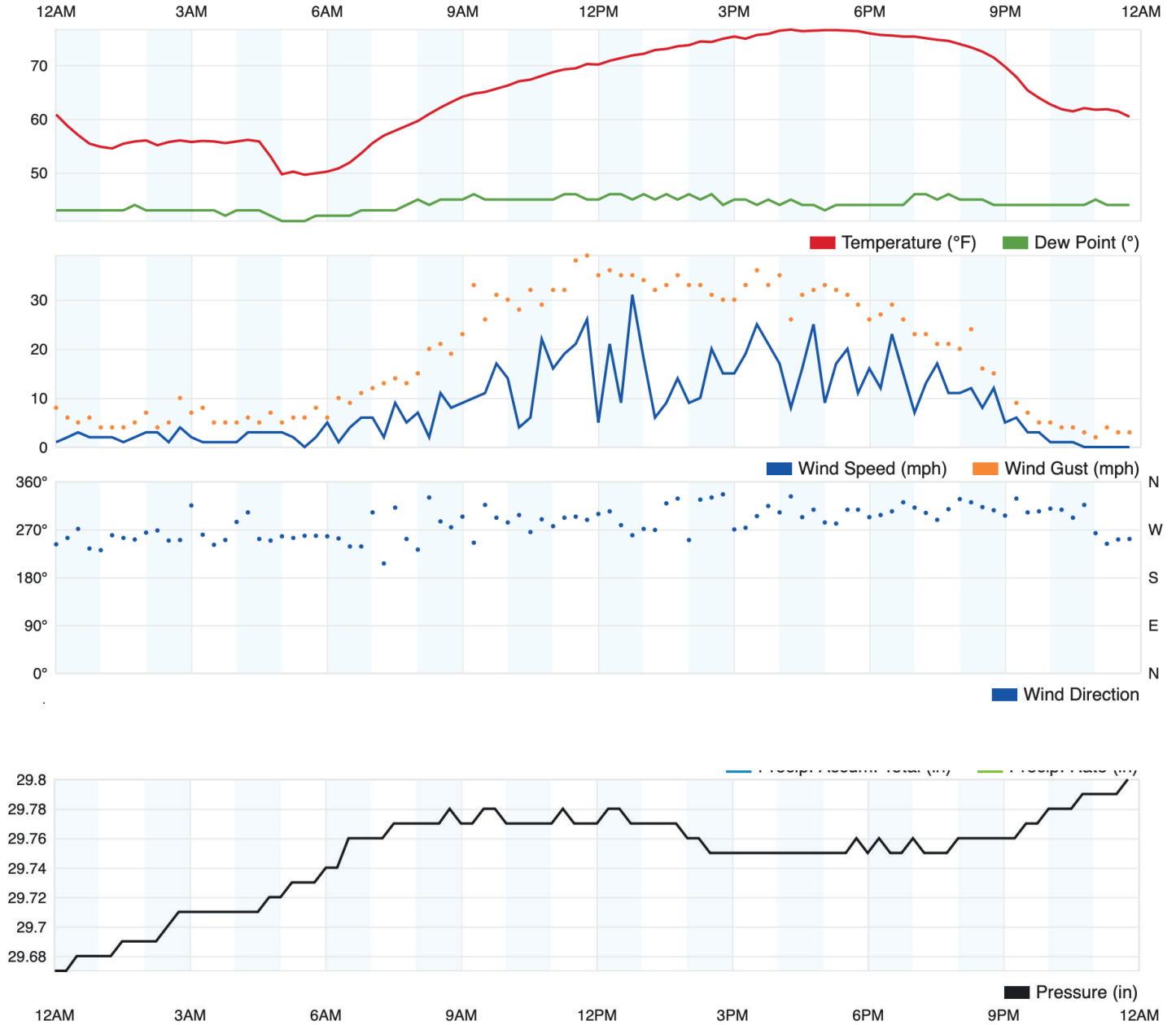
U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said during brief remarks Thursday that Allied nations must "again stand firm against aggression and tyranny" and "uphold the spirit of D-Day."

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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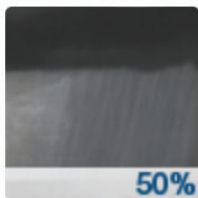
Today



High: 78 °F

Mostly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 49 °F

Chance Showers

Saturday



High: 77 °F

Sunny

Saturday Night



Low: 47 °F

Mostly Clear

Sunday



High: 71 °F

Mostly Sunny then Slight Chance Showers



Outlook Into The Weekend

June 7, 2024
4:17 AM

Today



Storms over south-central SD this morning, then over northeastern SD and west central MN this evening and overnight.

Highs:
73-82°

Saturday



Dry conditions
Northwest winds with gusts of 15-25 mph.

Highs:
70-77°

Sunday



Cool with a 20% chance of showers.

Highs:
66-72°



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A few disturbances moving through the area will bring showers and thunderstorms, mainly across south central SD this morning and over northeast SD and west central MN later this evening and overnight. The weekend will feature mostly dry conditions.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 77 °F at 5:08 PM

Low Temp: 49 °F at 4:56 AM

Wind: 39 mph at 11:44 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 37 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 99 in 2021

Record Low: 28 in 1901

Average High: 78

Average Low: 53

Average Precip in June.: .78

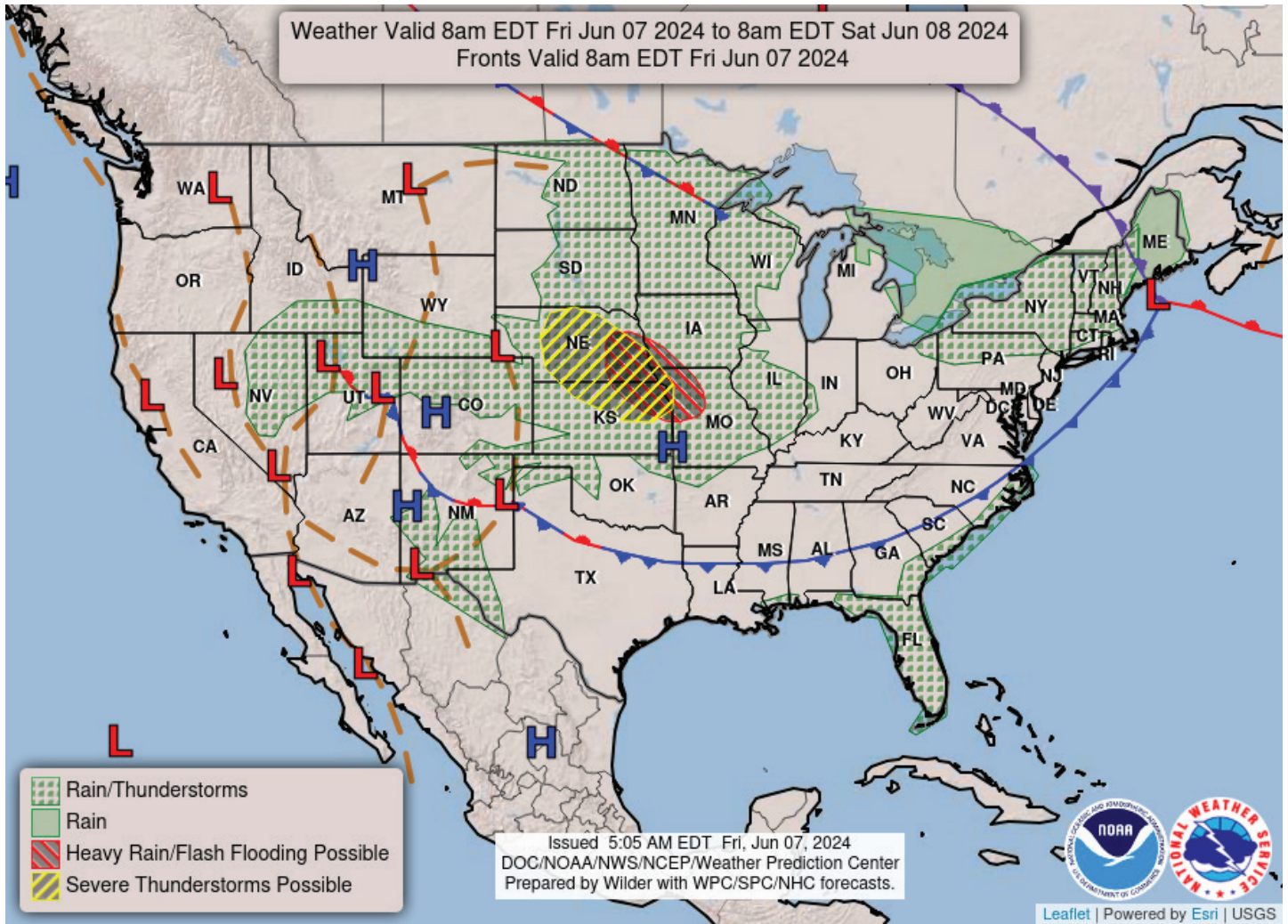
Precip to date in June: 0.07

Average Precip to date: 8.03

Precip Year to Date: 7.14

Sunset Tonight: 9:20:21 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:42:14 am



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Today in Weather History

June 7, 1982: Lightning struck a house in Sunshine Acres, north of Pierre, and the ensuing fire destroyed the interior. One person received minor burns. Over two inches of rain fell in Pierre causing Capital Lake to rise four feet. Water and mud flooded the State Maintenance Building.

June 7, 1993: A large F3 tornado destroyed a farmstead 9 miles southwest of Tulare. The tornado twisted the house on its foundation, virtually destroying it. This storm also destroyed a barn, three steel bins, three granaries, and two hog houses. Ten hogs were killed.

At least three more tornadoes damaged several farms in the Tulare and Redfield areas. A tornado hit one farm northwest of Tulare causing about 65,000 dollars in damage. Another tornado damaged a farm 5 miles west of Redfield.

1692: A massive earthquake strikes Port Royal in Jamaica, killing some 3,000 people. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the History Channel.

1816: The following is found on page 31, from the book, "History of the American Clock Business for the Past Sixty Year, and Life of Chauncey Jerome," written by Chauncey Jerome. The book was published in 1860. "The next summer was a cold one of 1816, which none of the old people will ever forget, and which many of the young have heard a great deal about. There was ice and snow in every month of the year. I well remember on the seventh of June, while on my way to work, about a mile from home, dressed throughout with thick woolen clothes and an overcoat on, my hands got so cold that I was obliged to lay down my tools and put on a pair of mittens which I had in my pocket. It snowed about an hour that day." This bitter cold event occurred in Plymouth, Connecticut.

1972 - Richmond VA experienced its worst flood of record as rains from Hurricane Agnes pushed the water level at the city locks to a height of 36.5 feet, easily topping the previous record of thirty feet set in 1771. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in the Laramie Mountains of eastern Wyoming produced golf ball size hail, and up to five inches of rain in just one hour. Half a dozen cities in the Upper Mississippi Valley reported record high temperatures for the date, including La Crosse, WI, with a reading of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)(Storm Data)

1988 - Snow whitened some of the mountains of northern California and northwestern Nevada. Twenty-six cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Rapid City SD with a reading of 104 degrees, and Miles City, MT, with a high of 106 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from southern Oklahoma and eastern Texas to northwestern Florida through the day and night. Thunderstorms spawned 22 tornadoes, including a dozen in Louisiana, and there were 119 reports of large hail and damaging winds. A strong (F-2) tornado at Gross Tete LA killed two persons, injured thirty others, and another strong (F-2) tornado injured 60 persons at Lobdell LA. Softball size hail was reported at Hillsboro TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

CONVENIENCE OR CONVICTION

Years of struggle had finally ended for George. He completed all of his requirements to become a high school teacher. After sending out many resumes one principal finally invited him for an interview. He looked forward to it with great excitement.

Sitting across from the principal he was asked, "In your biology classes, would you teach biology or evolution?"

Anxious to get the job he replied, "I would teach it any way you wanted me to teach it. It really does not matter to me."

In many of his letters Paul addressed the importance of being Christians of conviction. Writing to the church at Corinth he boldly declared: "Be on guard! Stand fast for what you believe. Be courageous. Be strong. And everything you do must be done with love!"

No apology here. Those words are as important when he wrote them as they are today. The spiritual danger to compromise our faith greets us everywhere we turn. The temptation to compromise our witness when we are called upon to speak boldly for Christ is difficult when the fear of rejection overwhelms us. And we often act unlovingly toward others when acts of kindness and thoughtfulness could be essential to bring and to win them to Christ.

Prayer: Lord, we pray that we will become strong in our faith through You. May we rely on Your strength and power to overcome the temptation to compromise. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. 1 Corinthians 16:13



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: 17 Hrs 3 Mins 49 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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 18 Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.06.24

21 28 30 31 37 12

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 33 Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.05.24

12 20 23 24 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 33 Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.05.24

4 11 20 45 49 21

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 2 Mins 48 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: 1 Days 17 Hrs 2 Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Judge dismisses Native American challenge to \$10B SunZia energy transmission project in Arizona

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

A U.S. district judge has dismissed claims by Native American tribes and environmentalists who sought to halt construction along part of a \$10 billion energy transmission line that will carry wind-generated electricity from New Mexico to customers as far away as California.

Judge Jennifer Zipps said in her ruling issued Thursday that the plaintiffs were years too late in bringing their challenge. It followed an earlier decision in which she dismissed their requests for a preliminary injunction, saying the Bureau of Land Management had fulfilled its obligations to identify historic sites and prepare an inventory of cultural resources.

The disputed stretch of the SunZia transmission line is in southern Arizona's San Pedro Valley and passes through an area that holds historic, cultural and religious significance for the tribes.

The Tohono O'odham Nation — along with the San Carlos Apache Tribe, the Center for Biological Diversity and Archeology Southwest — sued in January in hopes of stopping the clearing of roads and pads so more work could be done to identify culturally significant sites within a 50-mile (80-kilometer) stretch of the valley.

California-based developer Pattern Energy called the ruling a win for the region, citing the jobs and billions of dollars in economic development and investment that will result from the project.

"This decision provides assurance moving forward that projects that follow permitting processes and obtain proper approvals will not be threatened years later by baseless legal claims," Pattern Chief Development Officer Cary Kottler said in an email to The Associated Press. "We remain committed to carrying out our work with the same integrity and dedication that has always defined us, including in a manner that is respectful of tribal sovereignty and cultural resources protection."

The tribes did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The Tohono O'odham Nation vowed in April to pursue all legal avenues, and environmentalists said an appeal is likely.

"This power company has been working really hard to pretend they can moot the issue by destroying as much as possible as fast as they can," said Robin Silver, co-founder of the Center for Biological Diversity. "That doesn't work."

SunZia is among the projects that supporters say will bolster President Joe Biden's agenda for cutting greenhouse gas emissions. The planned 550-mile (885-kilometer) conduit would carry more than 3,500 megawatts of wind power to 3 million people.

The tribes asked a federal appeals court to intervene in April, arguing that the federal government has legal and distinct obligations under the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Environmental Policy Act and that the Bureau of Land Management's interpretation of how its obligations apply to the SunZia project should be reviewed.

The U.S. Interior Department, which oversees the Bureau of Land Management, declined to comment on the ruling.

Scorching heat keeps grip on Southwest US as records tumble and more triple digits forecast

By SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — The first heat wave of the year is expected to maintain its grip on the Southwestern United States for at least another day Friday, a day after records tumbled across the region with temperatures soaring past 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43 degrees Celsius) from southeast California to Arizona.

Although the official start of summer is still two weeks away, roughly half of Arizona and Nevada were

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under an excessive heat alert, which the National Weather Service extended until Friday evening. The alert was extended through Saturday in Las Vegas, where it's never been hotter this early in the year.

"High temperatures as much as 10 to 15 degrees above normal can be expected, with record high temperatures likely for some sites through Friday," the weather service in Las Vegas said. It said temperatures will slowly retreat over the weekend, but will remain above normal into early next week.

"It's so hot," said Eleanor Wallace, 9, who was visiting Phoenix from northern Utah Thursday on a hike celebrating her birthday with her mother, Megan Wallace.

The National Weather Service in Phoenix, where the new record high of 113 F (45 C) on Thursday leapfrogged the old mark of 111 F (44 C) set in 2016, called the conditions "dangerously hot."

There were no immediate reports of any heat-related deaths or serious injuries.

But at a campaign rally for presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump in Phoenix, 11 people fell ill from heat exhaustion by late afternoon and were taken to the hospital, where they were treated and released, fire officials said.

And in Las Vegas, with a new record of 111 (43.8 C) Thursday that also equaled the earliest time of year the high reached at least 110 (43.3 C), the Clark County Fire Department said it had responded to at least 12 calls for heat exposure since midnight Wednesday. Nine of those calls resulted in a patient needing hospital treatment.

Several other areas of Arizona, California and Nevada also broke records by a degree or two, including Death Valley National Park with a record high for the date of 122 (50 C) topping the 121 (49.4 C) dating to 1996 in the desert that sits 194 feet (59 meters) below sea level near the California-Nevada line. Records there date to 1911.

The heat has arrived weeks earlier than usual even in places farther to the north at higher elevations — areas typically a dozen degrees cooler. That includes Reno, where the normal high of 81 F (27 C) for this time of year soared to a record 98 F (37 C) on Thursday. Records there date to 1888.

The National Weather Service forecast mild cooling regionwide this weekend, but only by a few degrees. In central and southern Arizona, that will still mean triple-digit highs, even up to 110 F (43 C).

On Thursday in Phoenix, the unseasonably hot weather did not prevent Oscar Tomasio of Cleveland, Ohio, from proposing to his girlfriend, Megan McCracken, as they sweltered to the peak of a trail on Camelback Mountain with 3 liters of water each in tow.

"It was a grueling hike," Tomasio told The Associated Press. "It was extra hot, so we started extra early."

"The views were beautiful. We didn't make it quite to the top because she was a little nervous with the heat," he said. "So, I proposed to her when the sun rose."

McCracken confirmed they'd planned a sunrise hike and awoke about 5 a.m. in an effort to beat the heat and an impending closure of the trail.

"Probably not early enough," she said.

Megan Wallace, mother of the birthday girl from Utah who also came packing water bottles, said: "We started just a few minutes after 6 and it's like we came prepared, but we got through all of our water and it was hot — was hotter than we're used to."

Yemen's Houthi rebels detain at least 9 UN staffers and others in sudden crackdown, officials say

By JON GAMBRELL and BARAA ANWER Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — At least nine Yemeni employees of United Nations agencies have been detained by Yemen's Houthi rebels under unclear circumstances, authorities said Friday, as the rebels face increasing financial pressure and airstrikes from a U.S.-led coalition. Others working for aid groups also likely have been taken.

The detentions come as the Houthis, who seized Yemen's capital nearly a decade ago and have been fighting a Saudi-led coalition since shortly after, have been targeting shipping throughout the Red Sea corridor over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

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But while gaining more attention internationally, the secretive group has cracked down at dissent at home, including recently sentencing 44 people to death.

Regional officials, speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to brief journalists, confirmed the U.N. detentions. Those held include staff from the United Nations human rights agency, its development program, the World Food Program and one working for the office of its special envoy, the officials said. The wife of one of those held is also detained.

The U.N. declined to immediately comment.

The Mayyun Organization for Human Rights, which similarly identified the U.N. staffers held, named other aid groups whose employees were detained by the Houthis across four provinces the Houthis hold — Amran, Hodeida, Saada and Saana. Those groups did not immediately acknowledge the detentions.

“We condemn in the strongest terms this dangerous escalation, which constitutes a violation of the privileges and immunities of United Nations employees granted to them under international law, and we consider it to be oppressive, totalitarian, blackmailing practices to obtain political and economic gains,” the organization said in a statement.

Activists, lawyers and others also began an open online letter, calling on the Houthis to immediately release those detained, because if they don’t, it “helps isolate the country from the world.”

Yemen’s Houthi rebels and their affiliated media organizations did not immediately acknowledge the detentions. However, the Iranian-backed rebels planned for weekly mass demonstrations after noon prayers Friday, when Houthi officials typically speak on their actions.

It’s unclear what exactly sparked the detentions. However, it comes as the Houthis have faced issues with having enough currency to support the economy in areas they hold — something signaled by their move to introduce a new coin into the Yemeni currency, the riyal. Yemen’s exiled government in Aden and other nations criticized the move as the Houthis turning to counterfeiting. Aden authorities also have demanded all banks move their headquarters there.

“Internal tensions and conflicts could spiral out of control and lead Yemen into complete economic collapse,” warned Yemeni journalist Mohammed Ali Thamer in an analysis published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Bloomberg separately reported Thursday that the U.S. planned to further increase economic pressure on the Houthis by blocking their revenue sources, including a planned \$1.5 billion Saudi payment to cover salaries for government employees in rebel-held territory.

The war in Yemen has killed more than 150,000 people, including fighters and civilians, and created one of the world’s worst humanitarian disasters, killing tens of thousands more. The Houthis’ attacks on shipping have helped deflect attention from their problems at home and the stalemated war. But they’ve faced increasing casualties and damage from U.S.-led airstrikes targeting the group for months now.

Thousands have been imprisoned by the Houthis during the war. An AP investigation found some detainees were scorched with acid, forced to hang from their wrists for weeks at a time or were beaten with batons. Meanwhile, the Houthis have employed child soldiers and indiscriminately laid mines in the conflict.

The Houthis previously have detained four other U.N. staffers — two in 2021 and another two in 2023 who still remain held by the militia group. The U.N.’s human rights agency in 2023 called those detentions a “profoundly alarming situation as it reveals a complete disregard for the rule of law.”

The Houthis are members of Islam’s minority Shiite Zaydi sect, which ruled northern Yemen for 1,000 years until 1962.

Biden is to meet with Ukraine’s Zelenskyy in Paris as Russia leans into its battlefield offensive

By CHRISTOPHER MEGERIAN and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — U.S. President Joe Biden was due to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Paris on Friday as Kyiv’s army endures its hardest days of fighting since the early weeks of the war with Russia and prepares for what officials say could be a tough summer ahead.

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The United States is by far Kyiv's biggest supplier of wartime support, and Ukraine is trying to fend off an intense Russian offensive in eastern areas of the country. The push is focused on the Ukrainian border regions of Kharkiv and Donetsk but Ukrainian officials say it could spread as Russia's bigger army seeks to make its advantage tell.

The offensive is seeking to exploit Kyiv's shortages of ammunition and troops along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line.

That shortfall in weaponry came after U.S. military aid was held up in Congress for six months before Biden in April signed into law a \$61 billion military aid package for Ukraine.

The slow pace of delivery of pledged Western weaponry has long frustrated Zelenskyy, as has Biden's hesitation over supplying more hardware for fear of provoking Russian President Vladimir Putin. That has caused tension in their relationship.

The U.S. will send about \$225 million in military aid to Ukraine, U.S. officials said Thursday. The latest package includes munitions for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS, as well as mortar systems and an array of artillery rounds, officials said.

Easing their stance amid Russia's most recent onslaught and with Ukraine's army reeling, some NATO allies including the U.S. said last week they would allow Ukraine to use weapons they deliver to Kyiv to carry out limited attacks inside Russia.

That step brought a furious response from the Kremlin, which warned that Europe's biggest conflict since World War II could spin out of control.

Biden and Zelenskyy attended the 80th anniversary events of D-Day in Normandy, northern France, on Thursday, along with European leaders who have supported Kyiv's efforts in the war.

Biden pledged "we will not walk away" from Ukraine, drawing a direct line from the fight to liberate Europe from Nazi domination to today's war against Russian aggression.

Ukraine depicts its fight against the Kremlin's forces as a clash between Western democratic freedom and Russian tyranny. Russia says it is defending itself against a menacing eastward expansion of the NATO military alliance.

In a 20-minute speech Friday at the National Assembly, the lower house of the French parliament, Zelenskyy drew a parallel with the sacrifices made during World War II and his country's current fight.

"This battle is a crossroads," Zelenskyy said. "A moment where we can now write history the way we need it. Or we can become victims of history as it suits ... our enemy."

Zelenskyy, who spoke in Ukrainian, was frequently interrupted by lawmakers' applause and cheers. He prompted a standing ovation when he said in French: "Dear France, I thank you for standing by our side as we defend life."

French President Emmanuel Macron, meanwhile, announced late Thursday that France will provide Ukraine with its Mirage combat aircraft.

Macron has been a vocal supporter of Ukraine. He said in February that putting Western troops on the ground in Ukraine is not "ruled out."

Zelenskyy began a day of meetings in Paris with an official welcome ceremony at the golden-domed Invalides monument, site of Napoleon's tomb.

During the day, Zelenskyy was due to visit the Nexter arms manufacturer in Versailles, which makes the Caesar self-propelled howitzers that are among the weapons provided by France to Kyiv's forces.

He was also to meet with Macron at the Élysée Palace.

Zelenskyy's foreign trips aim to keep Ukraine's plight in the public eye, secure more military help for its fight against Russia's invasion and lock in long-term Western support through bilateral alliances.

France and Ukraine in February signed a 10-year bilateral security agreement. Zelenskyy has since signed similar bilateral agreements with many European countries.

Zombies: Ranks of world's most debt-hobbled companies are soaring, and not all will survive

By BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — They are called zombies, companies so laden with debt that they are just stumbling by on the brink of survival, barely able to pay even the interest on their loans and often just a bad business hit away from dying off for good.

An Associated Press analysis found their numbers have soared to nearly 7,000 publicly traded companies around the world — 2,000 in the United States alone — whiplashed by years of piling up cheap debt followed by stubborn inflation that has pushed borrowing costs to decade highs.

And now many of these mostly small and mid-sized walking wounded could soon be facing their day of reckoning, with due dates looming on hundreds of billions of dollars of loans they may not be able to pay back.

"They're going to get crushed," Valens Securities Managing Director Robert Spivey said of the weakest zombies.

Added Miami investor Mark Spitznagel, who famously bet against stocks before the last two crashes: "The clock is ticking."

Zombies are commonly defined as companies that have failed to make enough money from operations in the past three years to pay even the interest on their loans. AP's analysis found their ranks in raw numbers have jumped over the past decade by a third or more in Australia, Canada, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the U.S., including companies that run Carnival Cruise Line, JetBlue Airways, Wayfair, Peloton, Italy's Telecom Italia and British soccer giant Manchester United.

To be sure, the number of companies, in general, has increased over the past decade, making comparisons difficult, but even limiting the analysis to companies that existed a decade ago, zombies have jumped nearly 30%.

They include utilities, food producers, tech companies, owners of hospitals and nursing home chains whose weak finances hobbled their responses in the pandemic, and real estate firms struggling with half-empty office buildings in the heart of major cities.

As the number of zombies has grown, so too has the potential damage if they are forced to file for bankruptcy or close their doors permanently. Companies in the AP's analysis employ at least 130 million people in a dozen countries.

Already, the number of U.S. companies going bankrupt has hit a 14-year high, a surge expected in a recession, not an expansion. Corporate bankruptcies have also recently hit highs of nearly a decade or more in Canada, the U.K., France and Spain.

Some experts say zombies may be able to avoid layoffs, selloffs of business units or collapse if central banks cut interest rates, which the European Central Bank began doing this week, though scattered defaults and bankruptcies could still drag on the economy. Others think the pandemic inflated the ranks of zombies and the impact is temporary.

"Revenue went down, or didn't grow as much as projected, but that doesn't mean they are all about to go bust," said Martin Fridson, CEO of research firm FridsonVision High Yield Strategy.

For its part, Wall Street isn't panicking. Investors have been buying stock of some zombies and their "junk bonds," loans rating agencies deem most at risk of default. While that may help zombies raise cash in the short term, investors pouring money into these securities and pushing up their prices could eventually face heavy losses.

"We have people gambling in the public markets at an unprecedented level," said David Trainer, head of New Constructs, an investment research group that tracks the cash drain on zombies. "They don't see risk."

WARNING SIGNS Credit rating agencies and economists warned about the dangers of companies piling on debt for years as interest rates fell but got a big push when central banks around the world cut benchmark rates to near zero in the 2009 financial crisis and then again in the 2020-21 pandemic.

It was a giant, unprecedented experiment designed to spark a borrowing binge that would help avert

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a worldwide depression. It also created what some economists saw as a credit bubble that spread far beyond zombies, with low rates that also enticed heavy borrowing by governments, consumers and bigger, healthier companies.

The difference for many zombies is they lack deep cash reserves, and the interest they pay on many of their loans is variable, not fixed, so higher rates are hurting them right now. Most dangerously, zombie debt was often not used to expand, hire or invest in technology, but on buying back their own stock.

These so-called repurchases allow companies to "retire" shares, or take them off the market, a way to make up for new shares often created to boost the pay and retention packages for CEOs and other top executives.

But too many stock buybacks can drain cash from a business, which is what happened at Bed Bath & Beyond. The retail chain that once operated 1,500 stores struggled for years with a troubled transition to digital sales and other problems, but its heavy borrowing and decision to spend \$7 billion in a decade on buybacks played a key role in its downfall.

Those buybacks came amid big paydays for top management, which Bed Bath & Beyond said in regulatory filings were intended to align with financial performance. Pay for just three top executives topped \$140 million, according to executive data firm Equilar, even as its stock sunk from \$80 to zero. Tens of thousands of workers in all 50 states lost their jobs as the chain spiraled to its bankruptcy filing last year.

Companies had a chance to cut their debt after then-President Donald Trump's 2017 tax overhaul slashed corporate rates and allowed repatriation of profits overseas. But most of the windfall was spent on buybacks instead. Over the next two years, U.S. companies spent a record \$1.3 trillion repurchasing and retiring their own stock, a 50% jump from the prior two years.

SmileDirectClub went from spending a little over \$1 million a year on buying its own stock before the tax cut to spending \$780 million as it boosted pay packages of top executives. One former CEO got \$20 million in just four years. Stock in the heavily indebted teeth-straightening company plunged before it went out of business last year and put 2,700 people out of work.

"I was like, 'How did this ever happen?'" said George Pettigrew, who held a tech job at the company's Nashville, Tennessee, headquarters. "I was shocked at the amount of the debt."

Another zombie, JetBlue, suffered problems felt by many airlines, including the lingering impact of lost business during the pandemic. But it also was hurt by the decision to double its debt in the past decade and purchase hundreds of millions of dollars of its own stock. As interest costs soared and profits evaporated, that stock has dropped by two-thirds, and JetBlue has not made enough in pre-tax earnings to pay \$717 million in interest over four straight years.

JetBlue said the AP's way of screening for zombies isn't fair to airlines because big purchases of aircraft "are an intrinsic part of the business model" that cut into profits and don't reflect a company's true health. It added that it's been shoring up its finances recently by cutting costs and putting off purchases of new planes. JetBlue also hasn't done a major stock buyback in more than three years.

In some cases, borrowed cash has gone straight into the pockets of controlling shareholders and wealthy family owners.

In Britain, the Glazer family that owns much of the Premier League's Manchester United soccer franchise loaded up the company with debt in 2005, then got the team to borrow hundreds of millions a few years later. At the same time, the family had the team pay dividends to shareholders, including \$165 million to the Glazers themselves, while its stadium, the Old Trafford, fell into disrepair.

"They've papered over the cracks but we've been in decline for more than a decade," fan lobbying group head Chris Rumfitt said after a recent downpour sent water cascading from the upper stands in what spectators dubbed "Trafford Falls." "There have been zero investments in infrastructure."

The Glazers, who separately own the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers, recently brought in a new part owner at Manchester United who has promised to inject \$300 million into the business. The stock is falling anyway, down 20% so far this year to \$16.25, no higher than it was a decade ago.

Manchester United declined to comment.

Zombie collapses wouldn't be so scary if robust spending by governments, consumers and larger, more

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stable companies could act as a cushion. But they also piled up debt.

The U.S. government is expected spend \$870 billion this year on interest on its debt alone, up a third in a year and more than it spends on defense. In South Korea, consumers are tapped out as credit card and other household debt hit fresh records. In the U.K., homeowners are missing payments on their mortgages at a rate not seen in years.

A real concern among investors is that too many zombies could collapse at the same time because central banks kept them on life support with low interest rates for years instead of allowing failures to sprinkle out over time, similar to the way allowing small forest fires to burn dry brush helps prevent an inferno.

"They've created a tinderbox," said Spitznagel, founder of Universa Investments. "Any wildfire now threatens the entire ecosystem."

TIME RUNNING OUT? For the first few months of this year, hundreds of zombies refinanced their loans as lenders opened their wallets in anticipation that the Federal Reserve would start cutting in March. That new money helped stocks of more than 1,000 zombies in AP's analysis rise 20% or more in the past six months across the dozen countries.

But many did not or could not refinance, and time is running out.

Through the summer and into September, when many investors now expect the first and only Fed cut this year, zombies will have to pay off \$1.1 trillion of loans, according to AP's analysis, two-thirds of the total due by the end of the year.

For its calculations, the AP used pre-tax, pre-interest earnings of publicly-traded companies from the database FactSet for both years it studied, 2023 and 2013. The countries selected were the biggest by gross domestic product: the U.S., China, Japan, India, Germany, the U.K., France, Canada, South Korea, Spain, Italy and Australia.

The study did not take into account cash in the bank that a company could use to pay its bills or assets it could sell to raise money. The results would also vary if other years were used due to economic conditions and interest rate policies. Still, studies by both the International Monetary Fund and the Bank for International Settlements, an organization for central banks in Switzerland, generally support AP's findings that zombies have risen sharply.

Most of the publicly traded companies in the countries studied — 80% of 34,000 total — are not zombies. These healthier companies tend to be bigger with more cash, and many have reinvested it in higher-yielding bonds and other assets to make up for the higher interest payments now. Many also took advantage of pandemic-era low rates to refinance, pushing out repayment due dates into the future.

But the debt hasn't gone away, and could become a problem for these companies as well if rates don't fall over the next few years. In 2026, \$586 billion in debt is coming due for the companies in the S&P 1500.

"They aren't on anyone's radar yet, but they are a hurricane. They could be a Category 4 or Category 5 if interest rates don't go down," Valens Securities' Spivey said. "They're going to lay people off. They're going to have to cut costs."

Some zombies aren't waiting.

Telecom Italia struck a deal last year to sell its landline network but debt fears continue to push down its stock, so it has moved to put its subsea telecom unit and cell tower business up for sale, too.

Radio giant iHeartMedia, after exiting bankruptcy five years ago with less debt, is still struggling to pay what it owes by unloading real estate and radio towers. Its stock has fallen from \$16.50 to \$1.10 in five years.

Exercise company Peloton Interactive has laid off hundreds of workers to help pay debt that has more than quadrupled to \$2.3 billion in just five years even though its pretax earnings before the new borrowing weren't enough to pay interest. Stock that had soared to more than \$170 a share during the pandemic recently closed at \$3.74.

"If rates stay at this level in the near future, we're going to see more bankruptcies," said George Cipolloni, a fund manager at Penn Mutual Asset Management. "At some point the money comes due and they're not going to have it. It's game over."

Paris Olympics organizers unveil a display of the five Olympic rings mounted on the Eiffel Tower

PARIS (AP) — The Paris Olympics organizers on Friday unveiled a display of the five Olympic rings mounted on the Eiffel Tower as the French capital marks 50 days until the start of the Summer Games.

The structure of rings, made of recycled French steel, will be displayed on the south side of the 135-year-old landmark in central Paris, overlooking the Seine River. Each ring is 9 meters (30 feet) in diameter.

Thousands of athletes will parade through the heart of the French capital on boats on the Seine along a 6-kilometer (3.7-mile) route in the opening ceremony at sunset on July 26.

There will be no shortage of iconic venues at the Paris Olympics.

The tower, nicknamed La Dame de Fer (The Iron Lady), will feature prominently in the July 26-Aug. 11 Paris Games and the following Paralympics.

Men's and women's volleyball players will compete at the foot of the 330-meter (1,083-foot) monument. They will be watched by nearly 13,000 fans at the temporary Eiffel Tower Stadium on the nearby Champ de Mars, where Parisians and tourists like to have picnics on the grass or watch July 14 firework displays.

The Olympic and Paralympic medals in Paris are being embedded with pieces from a hexagonal chunk of iron taken from the tower.

The hugely popular landmark in central Paris has seen soaring visitor numbers in the leadup to the 2024 Games.

Two huge cranes were used overnight Friday to lift the 30-ton structure and mount it between the first and second floors of the tower.

The Olympic rings will be illuminated every night with 100,000 LED bulbs through the Paralympic Games that start Aug. 28, 17 days after the Olympics' closing ceremony.

The Paralympics will bring together 4,400 athletes from 180 countries in 549 events and 22 sports. Many sports will take place near landmarks including the Eiffel Tower, Versailles and the Grand Palais.

Attacks on businesses linked to US brands rattle Baghdad as anger over the war in Gaza surges

By ABDULRAHMAN ZEYAD and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — A dozen masked men jump out of two SUVs and a white pickup and storm a KFC in Baghdad, smashing everything in sight before fleeing the scene. A few days earlier, similar violence played out at Lee's Famous Recipe Chicken and Chili House — all American brands popular in the Iraqi capital.

Though no one was seriously hurt, the recent attacks — apparently orchestrated by supporters of Iran-backed, anti-American militias in Iraq — reflect surging anger against the United States, Israel's top ally, over the war in Gaza.

Iraqi governments have for years walked a delicate line between Washington and Tehran, but the eight-month war in Gaza has critically upped the stakes.

The conflict erupted after the militant Hamas group stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and taking 250 hostage. Israel's subsequent offensives in Gaza have killed more than 36,000 Palestinians in the territory, according to the Health Ministry there.

Days after the war broke out, a coalition of Iran-backed militias dubbed the Islamic Resistance in Iraq launched dozens of attacks on bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq and eastern Syria.

Those attacks stopped in February — but only after a series of retaliatory U.S. strikes following a drone hit on a base in Jordan that killed three American soldiers.

The attacks on U.S.-linked businesses and brands in Iraq in late May and earlier this week represent a change in tactics intended to maximize anti-U.S. sentiment over Washington's support for Israel.

The KFC attack unfolded like a robbery — except the attackers weren't after the money.

Security camera footage shows the masked men bursting into the fast food restaurant as horrified workers and customers escape through a back exit. The men then proceed to smash windows and LED

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screens, break chairs, tables, kitchen appliances — and whatever else they could find.

Minutes later, security forces arrive at the scene and fire warning shots as perpetrators run back into their cars and speed away.

In other incidents, a sound bomb was hurled outside the Caterpillar company store, rattling the neighborhood and leaving a small pothole in the street.

Some of the displays of anti-U.S. sentiment have been less volatile.

Protesters carrying Palestinian and Iraqi flags last week marched up to the PepsiCo offices in Baghdad, chanting “No to agents” and “No to Israel.” Another protest took place outside the offices of Procter & Gamble.

Iraqi forces armed with assault rifles and backed by armored vehicles with mounted machine guns now guard the targeted premises and franchises.

Two officials from Iran-backed militias in Iraq confirmed to The Associated Press that the attackers were their supporters, and that their goal is to promote a boycott of American brands and deter their presence in the country.

It’s also an attempt to bolster the militias’ image, the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with their groups’ regulations.

Abu Ali al-Askari, spokesperson for the powerful Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah paramilitary group, on Monday urged supporters to get rid of Israel’s “espionage affiliates covered in civilian garb” — a reference to businesses and organizations perceived as linked to the U.S. and Israel.

Essa Ahmad, who organized over 30 protests in support of Gaza, said during a recent Baghdad rally that he and other youth activists want Iraqis to boycott products “that support Israel,” though he says they don’t condone violence.

Firebrand Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr — a rival of the Iran-backed factions who, though retired from politics, is still widely popular among many Iraqi Shiites — has called for Iraq to expel the U.S. ambassador.

Political analyst Ihsan al-Shammari sees the targeting of U.S. and Western brands as playing into the decades-old rivalry between Tehran and Washington.

“These attacks have political goals,” he said. They send a message “that any investment or presence of Western companies in Iraq cannot survive.”

Renad Mansour, a senior research fellow at the Chatham House in London, says Iraq has been a “playground” for both Washington and Tehran, leaving Baghdad’s governments with little sovereignty and agency.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, who came to power with the backing of a pro-Iran coalition, has tried to appease his anti-U.S. allies without stoking tensions with Washington or jeopardizing foreign investments in Iraq.

Iraq and the U.S. in recent months began formal talks to draw down some 2,000 U.S. troops stationed in Iraq under an agreement with Baghdad, mainly to counter the militant Islamic State group.

“The prime minister of Iraq ... has pushed this idea that Iraq is out of war and is focusing on reinitiating the relationship with the U.S. and looking at the relationship with Iran and pushing for Iraq’s sovereignty,” Mansour told the AP. “Of course, the war on Gaza has impacted this.”

The Interior Ministry said it arrested some suspects in the rioting and was searching for others.

But the two militia figures claimed the government doesn’t dare go after the rioters despite being aware of who they are, fearing an escalation. They warned of more attacks on U.S. interests, should the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq stall further.

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Alina Romanowski condemned the targeting of American and international franchises in a post on the social media platform X, saying they could impact foreign investment in Iraq’s economy.

U.S. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said the attacks on “what are essentially franchises of U.S. companies harm Iraqi workers, Iraqi patrons, sometimes Iraqi capital that is being employed there.”

“So they are attacks eventually against the Iraqi people,” Miller said. “We think the Iraqi government ought to take appropriate measures to respond to those attacks and hold people accountable.”

Iraq's security spokesperson Maj. Gen. Tahseen al-Khafaji told the AP that the rioters will be pursued — as will anyone who threatens the country's security and economic well-being.

"We are making significant efforts to safeguard investments and the progress achieved by the current government," al-Khafaji said. "It is essential to protect these accomplishments and create a safe environment for investors."

Still, al-Askari warned security officials not to stand in the way of efforts to "take out" American interests in Iraq.

How AP analyzed Gaza Health Ministry's death toll data

By The Associated Press undefined

The Associated Press analyzed the death toll in the Israel-Hamas war using data provided by the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip. The analysis found that the proportion of women and children killed has declined over time.

The ministry, which is part of the Hamas-run government in Gaza, does not distinguish between civilian and combatant deaths, so the proportion of women and children killed is seen as the best available proxy for the civilian death toll.

The ministry has periodically released the underlying data upon which its daily updates to the death toll are based. The data sets released on social media in late October, early January, late March, and the end of April, named individuals the ministry says died because of the war.

The AP analysis was based on those individuals the Health Ministry identified with full names, genders, birth dates and Israeli-issued identification numbers. In April, nearly 23,000 deaths fit these criteria.

The death toll that the ministry publicizes daily, and which is often repeated by foreign media, is significantly higher and is not limited to those people who have been fully identified.

The ministry's daily death toll — which stood at 34,622 at the end of April and 36,379 at the end of May — is not accompanied by the underlying data. Its count includes bodies that have not been claimed by families, or were decomposed beyond recognition, or whose records were lost in Israeli raids on hospitals — plus individuals with incomplete records.

The proportion of women and children who died in the war has declined over time even as the overall death toll has risen, the Health Ministry's data shows: from 64% in October (4,344 out of 6,745 fully identified people), to 62% by early January (8,711 out of 14,117), to 57% in late March (11,296 out of 19,859) to 54% as of April 30 (12,479 out of 22,961.)

Women and children made up 38% of the newly and fully identified deaths in the month of April (1,183 out of 3,102), the Health Ministry's data shows.

Beginning with its March snapshot, the Health Ministry data included dead bodies that were not fully identified, mainly because they lacked Israeli-issued ID numbers: There were 402 in March and 1,699 in April in this category.

The data provided to AP was imperfect in other ways. Among those people fully identified, some were listed twice by the ministry. There were 531 individuals counted twice in March, and 11 individuals counted twice in April.

The AP excluded from its analysis any dead bodies that were not fully identified, as well as the duplicates; filtering these out did not have a material impact (less than 1%) on the proportion of women and children killed.

When the war ends, the Health Ministry will likely be able to fully identify more bodies and get a clearer record of the war's overall toll and its impact on different groups of people.

Takeaways from AP analysis of Gaza Health Ministry's death toll data

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israel-Hamas war appears to have become much less deadly for Palestinian women and children, according to an AP analysis of Gaza Health Ministry data.

The shift is significant because the death rate for women and children is the best available proxy for civilian casualties in one of the 21st century's most destructive conflicts.

Women and children made up fewer than 40% of those killed in the Gaza Strip during April, down from more than 60% in October. The decline both coincides with Israel's changing battlefield tactics and contradicts the ministry's own public statements.

Here are takeaways from The Associated Press' reporting.

FATALITY TRENDS AND THE TACTICS OF WAR After Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, Israel launched an intense aerial bombardment on densely populated Gaza, and then invaded with thousands of ground troops backed by tanks and artillery.

By the end of October women and people 17 and younger accounted for 64% of the 6,745 killed who were fully identified by the Health Ministry.

After saying it had achieved many key objectives, the Israeli army began withdrawing ground troops earlier this year. It has focused lately on drone strikes and limited ground operations.

As the intensity of fighting has scaled back, the death toll has continued to rise, but at a slower rate — and with seemingly fewer civilians caught in the crossfire. During the month of April, women and children made up 38% of the fully identified deaths, the Health Ministry's most recent data shows.

A TALE OF TWO DEATH TOLLS The ministry announces a new death toll for the war nearly every day. It also has periodically released the underlying data behind this figure, including detailed lists of the dead.

The AP's analysis looked at these lists, which were shared on social media in late October, early January, late March, and the end of April.

As recently as March, the ministry claimed over several days that 72% of the dead were women and children, even as underlying data showed the percentage was well below that.

Israeli leaders have pointed to such inconsistencies as evidence that the ministry is inflating the figures for political gain.

Experts say the reality is more complicated and that the ministry has been overwhelmed by war, making it difficult to track casualties.

CIVILIAN DEATHS FUEL CRITICISM OF ISRAEL The true toll in Gaza could have serious repercussions.

Israel faces heavy international criticism over unprecedented levels of civilian casualties in Gaza and questions about whether it has done enough to prevent them in an eight-month-old war that shows no sign of ending. An airstrike in Rafah last month killed dozens of Palestinians, and one on a school-turned-shelter in central Gaza on Thursday killed at least 33 people, including 12 women and children, health officials said.

Two international courts in the Hague are examining accusations that Israel has committed war crimes and genocide against Palestinians — allegations it adamantly denies.

Israel says it has tried to avoid civilian casualties, issuing mass evacuation orders ahead of intense military operations that have displaced some 80% of Gaza's population. It also accuses Hamas of intentionally putting civilians in harm's way as human shields.

The fate of women and children is an important indicator of civilian casualties because the Health Ministry does not break out combatant deaths. But it's not a perfect indicator: Many civilian men have died, and some older teenagers may be involved in the fighting.

MANY DEATHS COUNTED IN GAZA REMAIN 'UNIDENTIFIED' The ministry said publicly on April 30 that 34,622 had died in the war. The AP analysis was based on the 22,961 individuals fully identified at the time by the Health Ministry with names, genders, ages, and Israeli-issued identification numbers.

The ministry says 9,940 of the dead — 29% of its April 30 total — were not listed in the data because they remain "unidentified." These include bodies not claimed by families, decomposed beyond recognition or whose records were lost in Israeli raids on hospitals.

An additional 1,699 records in the ministry's April data were incomplete and 22 were duplicates; they were excluded from AP's analysis.

Among those fully identified, the records show a steady decline in the overall proportion of women and children who have been killed: from 64% in late October, to 62% as of early January, to 57% at the end of March, to 54% at the end of April.

Some critics say the ministry's imprecise methodologies – relying on families and "media reports" to confirm deaths – have added additional uncertainty to the figures.

The Health Ministry says it has gone to great lengths to accurately compile information but that its ability to count and identify the dead has been hampered by the war.

HEALTH MINISTRY STANDS BY ITS COUNT Dr. Moatasem Salah, director of the ministry's emergency center, rejected Israeli assertions that his ministry has intentionally inflated or manipulated the death toll.

"This shows disrespect to the humanity for any person who exists here," he said. "We are not numbers ... These are all human souls."

He insisted that 70% of those killed have been women and children and said the overall death toll is much higher than what has been reported because thousands of people remain missing or are believed to be buried in rubble.

Israel last month angrily criticized the U.N.'s use of data from Hamas' media office – a propaganda arm of the militant group – that reported a larger number of women and children killed. The U.N. later lowered its number in line with Health Ministry figures.

The number of Hamas militants killed in the fighting is also unclear. Hamas has closely guarded this information, though Khalil al-Hayya, a top Hamas official, told the AP in late April that the group had lost no more than 20% of its fighters. That would amount to roughly 6,000 fighters based on Israeli pre-war estimates.

The Israeli military has not challenged the overall death toll released by the Palestinian ministry. But it says the number of dead militants is much higher at roughly 15,000 – or over 40% of all the dead. It has provided no evidence to support the claim, and declined to comment for this story.

Michael Spagat, a London-based economics professor who chairs the board of Every Casualty Counts, a nonprofit that tracks armed conflicts, said he continues to trust the Health Ministry and believes it is doing its best in difficult circumstances.

"I think (the data) becomes increasingly flawed," he said. But, he added, "the flaws don't necessarily change the overall picture."

Women and children of Gaza are killed less frequently as war's toll rises, AP data analysis finds

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The proportion of Palestinian women and children being killed in the Israel-Hamas war appears to have declined sharply, an Associated Press analysis of Gaza Health Ministry data has found, a trend that both coincides with Israel's changing battlefield tactics and contradicts the ministry's own public statements.

The trend is significant because the death rate for women and children is the best available proxy for civilian casualties in one of the 21st century's most destructive conflicts. In October, when the war began, it was above 60%. For the month of April, it was below 40%. Yet the shift went unnoticed for months by the U.N. and much of the media, and the Hamas-linked Health Ministry has made no effort to set the record straight.

Israel faces heavy international criticism over unprecedented levels of civilian casualties in Gaza and questions about whether it has done enough to prevent them in an 8-month-old war that shows no sign of ending. Two recent airstrikes in Gaza killed dozens of civilians.

The AP analysis highlights facts that have been overlooked and could help inform the public debate, said Gabriel Epstein, a research assistant at the Washington Institute for Near East policy who has also

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studied the Health Ministry data.

The declining impact on women and children -- as well as a drop in the overall death rate -- are "definitely due to a change in the way the IDF is acting right now," Epstein said, using an acronym for the Israeli army. "That's an easy conclusion, but I don't think it's been made enough."

AS THE WAR EVOLVES, A SHIFT OCCURS When Israel first responded to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, which killed some 1,200 people, it launched an intense aerial bombardment on the densely populated Gaza Strip. Israel said its goal was to destroy Hamas positions, and the barrage cleared the way for tens of thousands of ground troops, backed by tanks and artillery.

The Gaza death toll rose quickly and by the end of October women and people 17 and younger accounted for 64% of the 6,745 killed who were fully identified by the Health Ministry.

After marching across most of Gaza and saying it had achieved many key objectives, Israel then began withdrawing most of its ground forces. It reduced the frequency of aerial bombings and has focused in recent months on smaller drone strikes and limited ground operations.

As the intensity of fighting has scaled back, the death toll has continued to rise, but at a slower rate -- and with seemingly fewer civilians caught in the crossfire. In April, women and children made up 38% of the newly and fully identified deaths, the Health Ministry's most recent data shows.

"Historically, airstrikes (kill) a higher ratio of women and children compared to ground operations," said Larry Lewis, an expert on the civilian impacts of war at CNA, a nonprofit research group in Washington. The findings of the AP analysis "make sense," he said.

Another sign that Israel softened its bombing campaign: Beginning in January, there was a sharp slow-down in "new damage" to buildings in Gaza, according to Corey Scher, a satellite mapping expert at City University of New York who has monitored buildings damaged or destroyed since the war began.

DAILY DEATH TOLLS AT ODDS WITH UNDERLYING DATA The Health Ministry announces a new death toll for the war nearly every day. It also has periodically released the underlying data behind this figure, including detailed lists of the dead.

The AP's analysis looked at these lists, which were shared on social media in late October, early January, late March, and the end of April. Each list includes the names of people whose deaths were attributable to the war, along with other identifying details.

The daily death tolls, however, are provided without supporting data. In February, ministry officials said 75% of the dead were women and children -- a level that was never confirmed in the detailed reports. And as recently as March, the ministry's daily reports claimed that 72% of the dead were women and children, even as underlying data clearly showed the percentage was well below that.

Israeli leaders have pointed to such inconsistencies as evidence that the ministry, which is led by medical professionals but reports to Gaza's Hamas government, is inflating the figures for political gain.

Experts say the reality is more complicated, given the scale of devastation that has overwhelmed and badly damaged Gaza's hospital system.

Lewis said while the "beleaguered" Health Ministry has come under heavy scrutiny, Israel has yet to provide credible alternative data. He called on Israel to "put out your numbers."

HIGH CIVILIAN DEATH TOLL IS A LIABILITY FOR ISRAEL The true toll in Gaza could have serious repercussions. Two international courts in the Hague are examining accusations that Israel has committed war crimes and genocide against Palestinians -- allegations it adamantly denies.

Israel has opened a potentially devastating new phase of the war in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where an estimated 100,000 civilians remain even after mass evacuations. How Israel mitigates civilian deaths there will be closely watched.

Israeli airstrikes in Rafah last month set off a fire that killed dozens of people, and on Thursday an airstrike on a school-turned-shelter in central Gaza killed at least 33 people, including 12 women and children, local health officials said.

Israel says it has tried to avoid civilian casualties throughout the war, including by issuing mass evacuation orders ahead of intense military operations that have displaced some 80% of Gaza's population. It

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also accuses Hamas of intentionally putting civilians in harm's way as human shields.

The fate of women and children is an important indicator of civilian casualties because the Health Ministry does not break out combatant deaths. But it's not a perfect indicator: Many civilian men have died, and some older teenagers may be involved in the fighting.

PARSING GAZA HEALTH MINISTRY DATAThe ministry said publicly on April 30 that 34,622 had died in the war. The AP analysis was based on the 22,961 individuals fully identified at the time by the Health Ministry with names, genders, ages, and Israeli-issued identification numbers.

The ministry says 9,940 of the dead – 29% of its April 30 total – were not listed in the data because they remain “unidentified.” These include bodies not claimed by families, decomposed beyond recognition or whose records were lost in Israeli raids on hospitals.

An additional 1,699 records in the ministry's April data were incomplete and 22 were duplicates; they were excluded from AP's analysis.

Among those fully identified, the records show a steady decline in the overall proportion of women and children who have been killed: from 64% in late October, to 62% as of early January, to 57% by the end of March, to 54% by the end of April.

Yet throughout the war, the ministry has claimed that roughly two-thirds of the dead were women and children. This figure has been repeated by international organizations and many in the foreign media, including the AP.

The Health Ministry says it has gone to great lengths to accurately compile information but that its ability to count and identify the dead has been greatly hampered by the war. The fighting has crippled the Gaza health system, knocking out two-thirds of the territory's 36 hospitals, closing morgues and hampering the work of facilities still functioning.

Dr. Moatasem Salah, director of the ministry's emergency center, rejected Israeli assertions that his ministry has intentionally inflated or manipulated the death toll.

“This shows disrespect to the humanity for any person who exists here,” he said. “We are not numbers ... These are all human souls.”

He insisted that 70% of those killed have been women and children and said the overall death toll is much higher than what has been reported because thousands of people remain missing, are believed to be buried in rubble, or their deaths were not reported by their families.

AS DEATH TOLL RISES, THE DETAILS ARE DEBATEDTo be sure, this war's death toll is the highest of any previous Israel-Palestinian conflict. But Israeli leaders say the international media and United Nations have cited Palestinian figures without a critical eye.

Israel last month angrily criticized the U.N.'s use of data from Hamas' media office – a propaganda arm of the militant group – that reported a larger number of women and children killed. The U.N. later lowered its number in line with Health Ministry figures.

Israel's foreign minister, Israel Katz, lashed out on the social platform X: “Anyone who relies on fake data from a terrorist organization in order to promote blood libels against Israel is antisemitic and supports terrorism.”

AP's examination of the reports found flaws in the Palestinian record keeping. As Gaza's hospital system collapsed in December and January, the ministry began relying on hard-to-verify “media reports” to register new deaths. Its March report included 531 individuals who were counted twice, and many deaths were self-reported by families, instead of health officials.

Epstein, the Washington Institute researcher, said using different data-collection methodologies and then combining all the numbers gives an inaccurate picture.

“That's probably the biggest problem,” he said, adding that he was surprised there hadn't been more scrutiny.

The number of Hamas militants killed in the fighting is also unclear. Hamas has closely guarded this information, though Khalil al-Hayya, a top Hamas official, told the AP in late April that the group had lost no more than 20% of its fighters. That would amount to roughly 6,000 fighters based on Israeli pre-war

estimates.

The Israeli military has not challenged the overall death toll released by the Palestinian ministry. But it says the number of dead militants is much higher at roughly 15,000 – or over 40% of all the dead. It has provided no evidence to support the claim, and declined to comment for this story.

Shlomo Mofaz, director of Israel's Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, said such estimates are typically based on body counts, battlefield intelligence and the interrogations of captured Hamas commanders.

Mofaz, a former Israeli intelligence officer, said his researchers are skeptical of the Palestinian data.

In previous conflicts, he said his researchers found numerous "inconsistencies," such as including natural deaths from disease or car accidents among the war casualties. He expects that to be the case this time as well. The large number of unidentified dead raises further questions, he said.

Michael Spagat, a London-based economics professor who chairs the board of Every Casualty Counts, a nonprofit that tracks armed conflicts, said he continues to trust the Health Ministry and believes it is doing its best in difficult circumstances.

"I think (the data) becomes increasingly flawed," he said. But, he added, "the flaws don't necessarily change the overall picture."

Celtics rout Mavericks 107-89 in Game 1 of NBA Finals behind Brown, returning Porzingis

By KYLE HIGHTOWER AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Kristaps Porzingis didn't want to make predictions about how his body would respond heading into the NBA Finals after he spent more than a month on the sideline with a calf injury.

Just fine, it turned out.

Jaylen Brown scored 22 points, Porzingis made an immediate impact off the bench and added 20 and the Boston Celtics powered past the Dallas Mavericks 107-89 on Thursday night in Game 1.

Derrick White finished with 15 points for Boston, which led by 29 points in the first half and connected on 16 3-pointers in a powerful start to its quest for an 18th NBA title.

Porzingis, a 7-footer who had been sidelined since April 29, added six rebounds and three blocks in 21 minutes.

"Tonight was affirmation to myself that I'm pretty good," Porzingis said. "I'm not perfect but I can play like this and I can add to this team."

The last Celtics player to enter the court for pregame warmups, he said he received a jolt of energy from a home crowd, which erupted when he emerged from the tunnel.

"The adrenaline was pumping through my veins," Porzingis said.

Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla wasn't concerned about the layoff affecting Porzingis' aggressiveness.

"That's the KP that helped us get to where we are today," Mazzulla said. "It doesn't matter how long the guy is off, he's going to make plays."

All-Star Jayson Tatum finished with 16 points and 11 rebounds. Six players scored in double figures for the Celtics, who host Game 2 on Sunday.

"Getting back to this point and being here is really a big deal," Tatum said. "But two years ago we won the first game and we know the outcome of that series. We still have a lot of work to do."

Dallas cut the deficit to eight points in the third quarter, but Boston answered with a 14-0 run to quickly pull away again.

"That's when the game started," Brown said.

Luka Doncic led Dallas with 30 points. P.J. Washington added 14 points and eight rebounds. But Dallas couldn't find offensive consistency beyond that, totaling just nine assists on its 35 field goals for the game. The Mavericks didn't score 25 points in any quarter.

Doncic said the lopsided loss wouldn't diminish the spirit of a team that lost the opening game in three of four series this postseason.

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"Either you lose or you win," Doncic said. "First to four, we've got to focus on the next game."

Former Celtic Kyrie Irving struggled throughout, finishing with 12 points. He received a loud and extended chorus of boos Thursday when he was introduced before the game. It continued throughout the game whenever he touched the ball.

The treatment came after Irving sparred with Boston fans and was fined for using an obscene gesture during a 2022 playoff visit to TD Garden.

"I thought it was going to be a little louder in here. I'm expecting the same thing (in Game 2). The crowd's trying to get me out of my element," Irving said. "It's not the first time I've lost in Boston. I don't want to make it a habit."

The Celtics, seeking their first championship since 2008, showed little rust from their 10-day layoff after sweeping the Indiana Pacers in the Eastern Conference finals.

They flowed with energy throughout, sharing the ball in the halfcourt and getting the ball to shooters for open 3s. They also attacked the interior of the Dallas defense and got to the rim for several dunks.

Meanwhile, apart from Doncic, who shot 12 of 26 from the field, Dallas struggled early to get into its sets and couldn't find a consistent groove offensively.

The Mavericks led by one midway through the first quarter. The Celtics responded by outscoring them 44-16 to make it 58-29 in the second.

Things changed over the next 12 minutes of game action when Dallas used a 35-14 run, including 15 points by Doncic, to cut Boston's lead to 72-64. But the Celtics were back up 86-66 entering the fourth.

Dallas had just five assists through the first three quarters, the fewest any NBA team has had through 36 minutes in any game in the last three seasons.

"We've got to move the ball," Dallas coach Jason Kidd said. "The ball got stuck too much."

Porzingis ended his 10-game hiatus when he came off the bench with 7:17 left in the first quarter in place of starter Al Horford. With the exception of a white compression sleeve on his right leg, it was hard to tell Porzingis was coming off an injury.

He got into the mix quickly, knocking down a pair of free throws after being fouled by Doncic. A possession later, the Latvian connected in his first field goal when he dropped on a short jumper over Doncic.

He wasn't done.

Minutes later he got loose in the paint for a two-handed dunk over Derrick Lively. On Dallas' next possession, Porzingis was there to swat away Jaden Hardy's layup attempt. The Celtics pushed the ball up the court and got the ball back to their big man, who calmly buried a 16-footer.

It was part of a 17-5 surge by Boston over the final 5:24 of the quarter that saw Porzingis go 4 for 5 from the field, score 11 points, block two shots and grab three rebounds. Boston carried a 37-20 lead into the second quarter.

Porzingis finished the half with 18 points on 7-of-9 shooting.

Like Reagan before him, Biden looks to capture magic of Pointe du Hoc story

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — President Joe Biden will return to Normandy for a second day during his trip to France as he tries to rally Americans in defense of democracy from Pointe du Hoc, a legendary spot along the coast where Army Rangers scaled cliffs during the D-Day invasion.

The site's prominence in American folklore was partly established by President Ronald Reagan, who delivered one of his most famous speeches there in 1984.

Like Reagan before him, Biden hopes to use the tale of the Rangers' victory to advance his own vision for the country's global role. The Democratic president is wrestling with two grueling wars — one between Russia and Ukraine in Europe, the other between Israel and Hamas in the Middle East — while also trying to reorient U.S. foreign policy to confront China's rising power in Asia.

Although overseas speeches are typically nonpartisan, Biden's rhetoric will dovetail with his reelection message, which has portrayed Donald Trump as a threat to American values and democracy. The former Republican president, who is seeking another term in the White House, has continued to lie about his

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2020 election loss and threatened to dismantle U.S. commitments overseas.

Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security adviser, told reporters that Biden's speech would focus on sacrifices made by U.S. soldiers during "an existential fight between a dictatorship and freedom."

"He'll talk about 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," Sullivan added.

Before flying to Normandy, Biden is expected to sit down with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Paris on Friday. It's their first meeting since Biden signed legislation authorizing additional military assistance for Ukraine. The U.S. is preparing \$225 million in ammunition shipments, including rockets, mortars, artillery rounds and missiles.

The speed and breadth of American support has been a source of tension between the two presidents, with Biden wary of steps that could lead to direct conflict with Russia and Zelenskyy eager for any edge against his country's invaders.

On Thursday, both were at Omaha Beach for the 80th anniversary of D-Day. Speaking from the American cemetery nearby, Biden said the U.S. "will not walk away" from Ukraine.

"To surrender to bullies, to bow down to dictators, is simply unthinkable," he said. "If we were to do that, it means we'd be forgetting what happened here on these hallowed beaches."

Pointe du Hoc is located nearby, between Omaha and Utah beaches. Before D-Day, the Nazis were believed to have stationed artillery there, which would have allowed them to shell critical landing zones for Allied troops.

Army Rangers used ropes and ladders to scale Pointe du Hoc's cliffs while under fire. When they reached the top, they realized that the artillery had already been moved elsewhere and only decoys remained. The weapons were tracked down nearby and disabled, and the Americans spent two days repelling Nazi counterattacks.

The mission was memorialized by Reagan on the 40th anniversary of D-Day in 1984.

"These are the boys of Pointe du Hoc," he said. "These are the men who took the cliffs. These are the champions who helped free a continent. These are the heroes who helped end a war."

Reagan's speech, coming as the Cold War with the Soviet Union remained underway, was also a call for the U.S. to not turn its back on Europe.

"We in America have learned bitter lessons from two World Wars," he said. "It is better to be here ready to protect the peace, than to take blind shelter across the sea, rushing to respond only after freedom is lost. We've learned that isolationism never was and never will be an acceptable response to tyrannical governments with an expansionist intent."

It's a view that would likely put him out of step with the modern Republican Party, which under Trump's leadership has become increasingly skeptical of foreign entanglements.

Biden highlighted the contrast during his State of the Union this year.

"It wasn't that long ago when a Republican president, Ronald Reagan, thundered, 'Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,'" a reference to another famous speech in Berlin. "Now, my predecessor, a former Republican president, tells Putin, 'Do whatever the hell you want.'"

Trump made that comment at a February rally in South Carolina, warning European allies not to be "delinquent" in their military spending or he would refuse to help them as president.

Hundreds of asylum-seekers are camped out near Seattle. There's a vacant motel next door

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

KENT, Wash. (AP) — Kabongo Kambila Ringo stood outside the tent where he has been staying with his pregnant wife and ate from a clear plastic tray of Girl Scout cookies melting in the midday sun.

He was one of around 240 asylum-seekers camping in a grassy lot along a highway south of Seattle, wondering if police would follow through on threats to arrest them for trespassing, and hoping officials instead might let them move into the vacant motel next door.

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"It's very difficult," the 29-year-old from Congo told The Associated Press in French. "There's not enough to eat. There's not even a way to wash ourselves."

The cluster of tarp-covered tents that have covered the field in Kent, a Seattle suburb, since last weekend highlights the strain facing many communities — even some far from the U.S.-Mexico border — as President Joe Biden attempts to restrict asylum and neutralize immigration as a political liability ahead of this fall's election.

Some Democratic-led northern cities have seen huge influxes of migrants. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has sent more than 40,000 asylum-seekers to Chicago, mostly by bus or plane.

The Seattle area has seen fewer, but with homelessness already an immense challenge — nearly 10,000 people sleep outside in King County every night, officials say — even that has stressed the region's capacity.

More than 2,000 asylum-seekers have come through a suburban church, Riverton Park United Methodist in nearby Tukwila, since 2022 after word got out that it was willing to help. The church has made room for hundreds of migrants to stay every night and has raised money to place families in motels.

Hundreds were moved from tents at the church to hotels or other short-term rentals as extreme cold hit over the winter. But as money ran out, they have faced rolling evictions.

Ringo said war forced him and his wife to flee Congo in 2022. They took a ship to Brazil then spent two years walking to the U.S. border in Arizona, where they arrived March 23. He was detained, while his wife was taken to a hospital.

A man he met in detention gave him the church's address, and when he was released, he said, his brother bought him a plane ticket to Seattle, where he reunited with his wife, now eight months pregnant.

Many of those who have been camping in Kent — primarily migrants from Congo, Angola and Venezuela — previously stayed at the church or were evicted from motels.

Lacking other options and awaiting permission to work in the U.S., they set up camp outside a disused Econo Lodge. The county purchased the 85-room motel during the COVID-19 pandemic as emergency quarantine housing.

"We want to pressure the county and the city to open the hotel for this group of migrants," said Ian Greer, a volunteer for a coalition of migrant services organizations that has been assisting the asylum-seekers.

Under a legal agreement between the county and the city, the motel can only be used for quarantine housing and other city-approved uses. Officials say they have no immediate plans to open it for the migrants.

"We understand the rationale for the request by asylee seekers to use the hotel in the short term, but the reality of doing so is much more complicated than simply unlocking the doors and turning on the lights," Kristin Elia, a spokesperson for the King County Executive's Office, said in an emailed statement. "Full operations and capital for an emergency shelter, even in the short term, are beyond the County's available resources."

Kent police last weekend posted a 48-hour eviction notice at the encampment, saying the migrants did not have permission to be at the county-controlled property. But as the deadline came and went Tuesday, authorities backtracked, giving the migrants breathing room as they hope for long-term shelter.

Late last year, King County provided \$3 million in grant funding to respond to the migrant influx, helping house more than 350 individuals and families. In April, it awarded four nonprofits \$2 million to provide shelter, food, legal services and other assistance. When some migrants camped in a Seattle park last month, the city moved dozens of families into motels and is paying for them to remain at least until July.

Beginning next month, a flood of new money from the state should help. The county will receive \$5 million to respond to the influx — money officials are still assessing how to use. The state's Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance will begin giving out \$25 million to nonprofits and local governments to develop a statewide network to support recently arrived migrants.

Riverton Park United Methodist is hoping to raise \$200,000 for hotel vouchers by the end of this month, saying that given how long it takes to review spending proposals, the state money might not be available until September.

Children ran around in the steamy grass Wednesday as the sun dried out tents after heavy rains. The facilities consisted of five portable toilets and two hand-sanitizer stations. Larger tents served as kitchen and

pantry. Volunteers dropped off food and toiletries. Migrants adjusted tarps and chatted beneath canopies.

Linda Gutiérrez recalled leaving Venezuela: "There is no medicine in Venezuela. Our family is dying of hunger," she said in Spanish. They went first to Colombia, then Chile. When they were forced to leave Chile, she said, they made their way through the perilous Darien jungle — the dense and roadless rainforest that divides South America from Central America — with her children and young grandchildren to the U.S.

They eventually reached Riverton Park United Methodist, where they stayed for five months, she said. They were then placed in a nearby motel, but only for a month.

In the encampment she met Jose Guerrero, from Puerto Cabello — the same area west of Caracas where she lived. Guerrero came to the U.S. with his wife after leaving their three children in the care of grandparents.

"All of us here have been struggling for months," Guerrero said. "My hope is that the mayor, the county, the leaders, open that hotel. As you can see, it's empty and abandoned. All of us, together, we can maintain it and get it ready to house us."

The prosecution is wrapping up in Hunter Biden's gun trial.

There are 2 more witnesses expected

By RANDALL CHASE, MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, COLLEEN LONG and CLAUDIA LAUER Associated Press WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — Federal prosecutors are wrapping up their gun case against Hunter Biden, with two more witnesses expected Friday in their effort to prove to jurors that the president's son lied on a mandatory gun purchase form when he said he wasn't "an unlawful user of, or addicted to" drugs.

Prosecutors were still planning to call a drug expert and an FBI chemist, capping a week that has been largely dedicated to highlighting the seriousness of his drug problem through highly personal and sometimes salacious testimony.

Jurors heard from his ex-wife and a former girlfriend who testified about his habitual crack use and their failed efforts to help him get clean. They saw images of the president's son bare-chested and disheveled in a filthy room, and half-naked holding crack pipes, and they watched video of his crack cocaine weighed on a scale.

Prosecutors say the evidence is necessary to prove that Hunter, 54, was in the throes of addiction when he bought the gun and therefore lied when he checked "no" on the form. His attorney, Abbe Lowell, has argued Hunter did not think of himself as an "addict" when he bought the gun and did not intend to deceive anyone.

Meanwhile, President Joe Biden worked to walk the line between president and father, telling ABC in an interview that he would accept the jury's verdict and ruling out a pardon for his son. Earlier this week he issued a statement saying: "I am the President, but I am also a Dad. Jill and I love our son, and we are so proud of the man he is today."

Biden is in France this week for D-Day anniversary events. First lady Jill Biden, who attended court most of the week, flew from France Thursday and was expected at the trial again Friday before returning to France for a state dinner.

Hunter Biden 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.

He has pleaded not guilty. He'd hoped to resolve the gun case and another separate tax case in California with a plea deal last year, the result of a yearslong investigation into his business dealings. The deal had him pleading guilty to lower-level charges that would have resolved both cases and spared him the spectacle of a trial so close to the 2024 election. It fell apart after Judge Maryellen Noreika questioned unusual aspects of the proposed agreement and the lawyers couldn't resolve them.

Hunter Biden said he got charged because the Justice Department bowed to pressure from Republicans who argued the Democratic president's son was getting special treatment, and who have escalated their attacks on the criminal justice system since Donald Trump's recent conviction in New York City in a hush money case.

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Lowell said he would call the president's brother James as a witness, but it's unclear yet whether Hunter Biden will testify.

But jurors have already heard his voice. Prosecutors have played lengthy audio excerpts in court of his 2021 memoir "Beautiful Things," in which he writes about his lifelong addiction issues and spiraling descent after death of his brother Beau in 2015. The book, written after he got sober, covers the period he had the gun but doesn't mention it 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. He pointed out to jurors that some of the questions on the firearms transaction record are in the present tense, such as "are you an unlawful user of or addicted to" drugs.

And he's suggested Hunter Biden might have felt he had a drinking problem at the time, but not a drug problem. Alcohol abuse doesn't preclude a gun purchase.

The reason law enforcement raised any questions about the revolver is because Hallie Biden, Beau's widow, found it unloaded in Hunter's truck on Oct. 23, 2018, panicked and tossed it into a garbage can at a nearby market. She testified about the episode Thursday.

She told jurors she considered hiding the gun but thought her kids might find it, so she decided to throw it away.

"I realize it was a stupid idea now, but I was panicking," she said. "I didn't want him to hurt himself, and I didn't want my kids to find it and hurt themselves."

Hallie Biden, who had a brief romantic relationship with Hunter after Beau died, testified that from the time Hunter returned to Delaware from a 2018 trip to California until she threw his gun away, she did not see him using drugs. That time period included the day he bought the weapon.

But much of her testimony focused on Oct. 23, 2018 — 11 days after he bought it. Hunter was staying with her and seemed exhausted. Asked by the prosecutor if it appeared that Hunter was using drugs around then, she said, "He could have been."

As Hunter slept in her home, Hallie Biden went to check his car. She said she was hoping to help him get or stay sober, free of both alcohol and cocaine. She said she found the remnants of crack cocaine and drug paraphernalia. She also found the gun Hunter purchased in a box with a broken lock that kept it from fully closing. There was ammunition too.

She put in a leather pouch put the pouch in a bag and tossed it into in the trash can at Janssen's Market. He noticed it missing and asked her whether she had taken it.

"Are you insane?" he texted. He told her to go back to the market to look for it.

Surveillance footage played for jurors showed her digging around in the trash can for the gun, but it wasn't there. She asked store officials if someone had taken out the trash. Hallie testified Hunter told her to file a police report because the gun was registered in his name. She called the police while she was still at the store.

Officers located the man who inadvertently took the gun along with other recyclables from the trash and retrieved it. The case was eventually closed because of lack of cooperation from Hunter Biden, who was considered the victim.

Jurors also heard from the officers who handled the case, from the man who found the gun and from the store clerk who sold Hunter the revolver.

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 also faces a separate trial in September on charges of failing to pay \$1.4 million in taxes.

Joe Manchin isn't a candidate 5 months before the election. But he still has time to change his mind

By JOHN RABY Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — Every election cycle, it seems, Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia tries to find the best fit for himself, dragging both sides of the political aisle — and an entire home-state electorate — along for a wobbly ride.

Five months before the general election, he's still not a declared candidate for any office, but he's hitched up the guessing-game wagon one more time. And there's still time, albeit shrinking, to mull potential runs for governor, the Senate or even the U.S. presidency.

After recently switching his party affiliation from Democrat to independent, the 76-year-old Manchin is content to leave the Senate in January "and be able to hold a more normal life, if you will."

But in true Manchin fashion, he leaves the gate open just a crack.

"Never say never, because you never know," he said.

The rutted path he's chosen, while not necessarily surprising, leaves voters who haven't lost interest altogether once again trying to figure out where Manchin is headed. One who has tried to keep up, retired West Virginia Wesleyan political history professor Robert Rupp, brings his own metaphor to the discussion.

"This is a whirling dervish," Rupp said.

CAREER CROSSROADS Career-changing moves for Manchin have come in bunches lately.

Manchin announced his party registration switch on June 1, saying he wanted to "continue to fight for America's sensible majority." Manchin had been thinking about it at least as far back as last August.

In November, Manchin announced he wouldn't run for reelection as a Democrat.

Then in December at a Washington roast, Manchin teased a potential third-party run for the White House, joking that the nation could use someone slightly younger than the leading contenders. But in February, Manchin announced he would not run for president, saying he didn't want to be a "spoiler."

Manchin had been in the Senate since 2010, when he won a special election following the death of Robert C. Byrd during Manchin's second term as governor. He's been there ever since, though he considered returning home to run again for governor in 2016. Instead, he endorsed Jim Justice, who won as a Democrat before himself switching to the Republican Party months after taking office.

In 2019, rather than make another run for governor in the 2020 election and take on Justice, who had become a rival, Manchin decided to remain a senator. That decision proved fruitful as he emerged as a linchpin vote and must-have dealmaker for Democrats in the closely divided Senate. Key Biden administration initiatives on energy and infrastructure likely would not have happened without his buy-in.

ANOTHER RUN FOR GOVERNOR When Manchin switched parties last month, ears perked up and whispered questions began to circulate: What's he up to now? The logistics of several possible paths forward offered a glimmer of possible answers.

When he registered as an independent, Manchin met a deadline — barely — in West Virginia for candidates to file their political affiliation 60 days prior to an Aug. 1 deadline to run in this year's election. That has fueled speculation that he could decide to seek a third term as governor, an office where he was popular. He received nearly 64% of the vote to win his first term in 2004 and 70% of the vote in nabbing a second term in 2008.

West Virginia has turned heavily Republican since then. Former President Donald Trump overwhelmingly won the state in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. Both chambers of the state legislature now have GOP supermajorities. About 40% of registered voters are Republicans, compared with 30% for Democrats and about 25% with no party affiliation.

If Manchin tries for a return to the governor's office, he'd face an election rematch with Republican Patrick Morrisey and an awkward campaign showdown with Democrat Steve Williams, the mayor of Huntington and the party's chosen nominee. In the 2018 U.S. Senate race, Manchin defeated Morrisey by just over 3 percentage points. In late May, Manchin said publicly that he wouldn't run for governor and would support Williams.

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Along with reversing course on that statement, Manchin would again have to grapple with the sustained popularity in West Virginia of Trump, whose name will adorn the top of West Virginia's ballot. Morrissey, the state's attorney general, is a staunch supporter of Trump, who became popular in Appalachia for making broad promises to put coal miners back to work amid a grim economic outlook in the industry.

Trump did not bring the industry back. The number of coal jobs in West Virginia fell from 11,561 at the start of his presidency to 11,418 at the end in 2021, slowing coal's precipitous decline but not stopping it. Still, Manchin and Democrats often found themselves targeted as enemies of coal in a state where it was still widely seen as a cornerstone of the economy.

Despite a long line of legendary politicians in its history, only two West Virginia governors have been elected to three terms: Republican Arch. A. Moore Jr. in 1968, 1972 and 1984, and Republican Arthur Boreman during the state's infancy in 1863, 1864 and 1866.

THIRD TIME A SENATOR Without Manchin in the Senate race, Republicans are oozing with confidence that Justice can pick up his West Virginia seat. If all other races across the country stayed with their current parties, that alone would be enough for them to retake the majority next year. And Democrats are defending 23 seats, including five held by independents, compared to just 10 seats for Republicans.

A decision by Manchin to get back in the race as an independent would be awkward as well because it would set up a matchup against both Justice and Democrat Glenn Elliott, whom Manchin endorsed in the May primary.

Justice and Manchin had a falling-out after Justice switched parties eight months into his first term as governor in 2017. Justice made that announcement on stage with Trump during a rally in Huntington. Justice, a wealthy businessman who owns several coal mines, is a staunch supporter of Trump and won his endorsement.

After Manchin became an independent, Elliott said on X, formerly Twitter, that he had no reason to believe Manchin had any interest in the Senate race.

A Senate race could be Manchin's toughest in four decades in state politics — and his most expensive. Manchin has raised \$11.7 million with \$8.5 million cash on hand, compared with \$3 million raised with \$931,000 cash on hand for Justice, and \$125,000 raised with \$65,000 cash on hand for Elliott, according to the latest Federal Election Commission records.

OTHER OPTIONS In April, the leadership of No Labels, a national bipartisan organization, ended its search for a presidential candidate. Manchin had been viewed as one of the top high-profile prospects to seize on widespread dissatisfaction with President Joe Biden and Trump.

If Manchin were to use his independent status to reverse course again and make an independent presidential run, he'd need to hurry. He's already missed the filing deadline for the general election in seven states, and deadlines are looming in 10 others in June and July, according to the Federal Election Commission.

One other option lurks in the shadows as the senator mulls his future. In Morgantown, West Virginia University President Gordon Gee plans to retire when his contract is up next June. A search for his replacement is in the early stages.

Manchin, a WVU graduate, has not addressed speculation that he might have interest in Gee's job. A spokeswoman sidestepped questions about it last year. But in the kind of language that Manchin clearly loves to see as others speculate about his path forward, the Dominion Post reported that the university said its search will have "no preconceived outcomes or candidates."

A new account rekindles allegations that Trump disrespected Black people on 'The Apprentice'

By GARANCE BURKE and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

Gene Folkes had just been jettisoned as a contestant on "The Apprentice" and was commiserating with a crew member at a bar inside the lobby of Trump Tower. He was indignant — and not just at having been kicked off the reality show after its star, Donald Trump, had delivered his catchphrase: "You're fired."

One of two Black contestants chosen for that season in 2010, Folkes was insulted that Trump had called

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him inarticulate and accused him of illiteracy in a lengthy boardroom tirade minutes earlier.

As the crew member, a Black woman who worked as a contestant manager, consoled him, Trump suddenly appeared at the bar.

"He came up and he asked me: 'Is this your woman? Because you two would make a really great couple, you both have the same background,'" Folkes told The Associated Press.

The contestant manager quietly reminded Trump that she worked for him. Then, Trump made a comment similar to something he uttered in the boardroom that never aired on TV, Folkes said.

"He said again, 'It's not like I used the N-word,' and then he walked off, and that was that," said Folkes, a New York-based consultant, podcast host and U.S. Air Force veteran.

As Trump seeks to make inroads with African American voters in his third run for the White House, fresh allegations are surfacing about his disrespectful behavior toward Black people inside the Midtown skyscraper that launched his show and political career. There are still questions about whether any of that behavior was caught on tape.

Bill Pruitt, a former producer on "The Apprentice," published a recent account alleging that Trump actually used the racist slur to refer to Kwame Jackson, a Black contestant who was a finalist on the show's first season. A spokesperson for Trump's campaign has vehemently dismissed the account as false and politically motivated. President Joe Biden's campaign, meanwhile, spotlighted Pruitt's account on social media.

Trump, who hosted "The Apprentice" from 2004 to 2015, has long denied such claims and called former contestants criticizing him "failing wannabes" motivated by greed. But he has been trailed in his professional and political life by charges of racism, from a 1973 discrimination lawsuit against his real estate business, to his push to carry out executions of five Black and Latino youths who were later exonerated of rape allegations, to his yearslong fanning of the conspiracy theory that President Barack Obama — the nation's first Black president — was not born in the United States.

The former Republican president's first campaign in 2016 was rocked by allegations about his conduct on "The Apprentice" and other appearances during his association with NBC, notably in footage in which he said he could sexually assault women and get away with it because he was a "star." MGM Studios, which bought the production company that made the show, has since been acquired by Amazon.

Almost a decade after he left his reality TV role to run for president, Trump's television career remains central to his biography and political rise. It presented Trump Tower to tens of millions of people as a symbol of power and success before Trump launched his first campaign from the building's lobby. Last week, the same lobby was the setting for his first appearance after being convicted of 34 felony counts in a hush money scheme to influence the 2016 election.

"The Apprentice' is probably underrated as a source of that kind of image construction," said Joel Penney, a professor at Montclair State University who studies the intersection of pop culture and politics. "There's nobody who could possibly compete on the level of name recognition, brand recognition, that kind of familiarity."

THE ROLES OF NBC AND AMAZON "The Apprentice" and its spinoffs were on air for more than a decade, featuring people from all walks of life and later celebrities who competed in contrived business challenges to win Trump's favor — and potentially a job with his organization.

Hundreds of cast and crew members signed non-disclosure agreements, limiting their ability to reveal what happened inside Trump Tower or any outtakes featuring the ex-president. The show's producer as well as the network that broadcast it also have refused to release unaired footage. Over the last week, after the AP reached out to more than two dozen former crew members and contestants about Trump's behind-the-scenes behavior, some said they wondered how contractual agreements may have insulated Trump from blowback about politically volatile comments.

Folkes said he believes his exchanges with Trump inside the bar were recorded since he was still wearing a mic.

After his firing in October 2010, Folkes blogged about his experience on the show. He said he soon got a call from NBC executives. According to a document provided by Folkes, in early November NBC's then-vice president for legal affairs, Shelly Tremain, sent him a cease-and-desist order and said the network

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would seek to recover \$1 million if he kept talking about his participation in the series or violating his "application agreement."

Folkes fired back to Tremain's team in an email, saying his portrayal on the show was "unfortunate, inaccurate, stereotyping being applied to a member of a protected class," according to a copy of the message viewed by the AP. "Review the boardroom scene of episode 5 in its entirety for a very clear picture of the false portrayal and stereotyping ... I harbor no interest in publicly commenting about Mr. Trump."

Folkes said the network did provide him with extra therapy sessions following his firing, which he said helped him to process the reputational damage he suffered as a contestant. NBC declined to comment about him and Tremain did not respond to a message.

"After a decade of (military) service, I can take a lot of stress. It's not like, 'Oh, he fired me and hurt my feelings,'" Folkes said. "When I say I am offended, that is a high bar to cross."

Trump spokesperson Steven Cheung said in a statement that "these completely fabricated accusations" had already been debated in 2016 "and thoroughly debunked," dismissing all of them as rooted in campaign politics.

"Now that Crooked Joe Biden and the Democrats are losing the election, and President Trump continues to dominate, they are bringing up old fake stories from the past because they are desperate," he said.

Folkes previously spoke out against Trump's candidacy and his comments toward and about female cast and crew members in an AP investigation published in October 2016. After reading the AP story, "Access Hollywood" producers said they dug into their own show's archive, uncovering a 2005 tape in which Trump made lewd remarks about being sexually aggressive toward women.

The tape sparked outrage and calls from some Republicans for Trump to drop out a month before the election. He didn't — and won. But many of his opponents have continued to press those involved in "The Apprentice" to release their archives, partly out of a belief that a tape of Trump using the racist slur exists.

Entertainment giant MGM said in 2016 that it owned the archive of the reality TV show and contractual obligations kept it from unilaterally releasing any unaired, archived material. In 2022, the online shopping giant Amazon finalized its acquisition of MGM, one of the oldest studios in Hollywood. Amazon MGM Studios declined to comment.

The show's executive producer Mark Burnett also has said that he doesn't have the ability or right to release footage from the show. NBC has stated that it does not own the series footage and only licensed it from Burnett for broadcast.

A NEW ACCOUNTWriting for Slate in an article published last week, Pruitt described a meeting with Trump in the show's boardroom set, where he famously would dismiss contestants.

According to Pruitt's account, one of Trump's company's managers suggested picking Jackson over Bill Rancic, the other remaining contestant and a white man. After a debate over Jackson's performance on the show, Pruitt writes, Trump winced before asking if America would accept a Black man winning, referring to Jackson by the racist slur.

Pruitt said he was coming forward now because his non-disclosure agreement — which carried a possible \$5 million fine if violated — expired this year. He told the AP that he recalled all quotes in his article to the best of his ability and that the conversation was recorded.

"He's about to run for a second term as president of the United States and I heard him use a term that should have and would have abolished him from politics forever had more people heard about it," Pruitt said. "Anyone who is capable of using it shouldn't be leading the country."

The Trump campaign denied Pruitt's claim that Trump used the slur. "Prove it," wrote Cheung, the campaign spokesperson, on the X platform, adding that Biden's allies were "peddling" the story "because Biden is hemorrhaging support from Black Americans." The Democratic president has seen his support among Black voters fall sharply since taking office.

In 2005, a year after Pruitt claims Trump used the slur, the former president proposed a "Blacks" versus "whites" version of "The Apprentice" on "The Howard Stern Show," telling listeners he was considering creating an episode pitting "nine Blacks against nine whites, all highly educated, very smart, strong,

beautiful people.”

In an interview, Jackson said Trump never said the slur to his face. But he said Pruitt’s account and the conversation about an alleged Trump recording spotlighted the nation’s inability to resolve broader questions of what kind of speech voters will tolerate in 2024.

“The bigger problem for me is none of this really matters because America is entirely comfortable with both overt and covert racism. And whether there is a smoking gun that says Trump called me an N-word and a tape appears tomorrow, what will that change? How will that make a difference?” said Jackson, president of his own brand marketing, diversity and inclusion consulting firm.

POLITICAL PRESSURE Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee, argues Biden’s immigration and economic policies have deprived Black communities of jobs and resources. He and his allies have suggested he can cut into Biden’s margins with Black voters, long a core Democratic constituency.

He has also sought to get a boost from his criminal charges and suggested in February to a mostly Black audience that African Americans related to him more because he had been indicted.

Biden has pointed to several measures benefitting Black Americans, including more funding for historically Black colleges and universities, forgiveness of federal student loan debt and pardons for federal possession of marijuana charges. His campaign has also sought to draw attention to Trump’s past.

On Monday, Biden’s campaign posted a TikTok video featuring coverage of Pruitt’s allegations, as well as the affirmation of Omarosa Manigault Newman, who went from a show contestant to White House aide to a Trump critic, that she had heard a tape of Trump using the slur.

“Donald Trump is exactly who we all knew he was — a lifelong racist,” a woman says in the TikTok. “Black voters kicked Donald Trump out of the White House in 2020, and we’re going to do it again this November.”

Marshawn Evans Daniels, who was one of two Black contestants competing on the fourth season of “The Apprentice,” said she never heard Trump use racist language on set.

“‘The Apprentice’ was a baptism in the highest levels of business and I was always praised,” said Evans Daniels, an attorney, author and consultant. “I never had a negative experience but that doesn’t usually happen when you are there in the room.”

That same season, winner Randal Pinkett was rewarded with a job working for Trump. But Pinkett, who is also Black, said Trump treated him differently than other previous winners and asked him to share his title with a white contestant.

“If I give Donald the benefit of the doubt, then what he did to me was racially insensitive,” said Pinkett, now a CEO of an international consulting firm who has also previously criticized Trump. “If I do not give him the benefit of doubt, which I do not, it was racist. And it therefore does not surprise me that he would say the N-word.”

Is the US job market beginning to weaken?

Friday’s employment report may provide hints

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Tentative signs have emerged that the U.S. economy is cooling in a way that would be welcomed by the Federal Reserve’s inflation fighters: Companies are posting fewer available jobs, consumer spending has slipped and wage growth, while still healthy, is gradually slowing.

Those trends mark a contrast from the start of the year, when hiring was robust and Americans were still spending at a solid clip — factors that may have also helped keep inflation stickier than the Fed wanted. Yet with the economy no longer accelerating, economists and financial markets have begun to worry about the opposite scenario: What if the economy weakens more than is needed to cool inflation? Could it eventually turn into a recession?

The U.S. jobs report for May, which the government will issue Friday morning, may offer some insights. Economists have forecast that the report will show that employers added 180,000 jobs in May, about the same as the 175,000 for April. The unemployment rate is expected to have remained at 3.9%, which would mark the 28th straight month in which the rate has stayed below 4% and would be the longest

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such streak since 1953.

"It's going to be interesting to understand if the economy is running out of gas or coasting into summer solid hiring," said Nela Richardson, chief economist at the payroll processor ADP.

Richardson spoke Wednesday after ADP released its own data for May, which showed that employers — excluding government agencies — added 152,000 jobs last month.

If May's hiring data comes in close to economists' forecasts, it would fall well below the average monthly gain of 269,000 in the first three months of 2024. Still, a figure of around 180,000 would probably be welcomed as sufficient to keep the economy growing without threatening to overheat it. Steady increases in the number of people with jobs provides support for consumer spending, the primary driver of the economy.

Frank Fiorille, vice president of compliance and data analytics at Paychex, a payroll provider for small businesses, said that hiring actually accelerated among their clients last month.

"That sort of mom-and-pop, Main Street small business — we're hearing still pretty positive things," Fiorille said.

Fed officials will be scrutinizing Friday's data on job growth and pay gains as they consider their next steps on interest rates, in particular when to begin cutting their benchmark rate. In its fight against inflation, the central bank raised its key rate 11 times beginning in March 2022 to its current 22-year peak. When the policymakers meet next week, they are poised to leave their benchmark rate unchanged but will update their economic projections, and Chair Jerome Powell will hold a news conference.

When the Fed began aggressively raising rates, most economists expected the resulting jump in borrowing costs to cause a recession and drive unemployment to painfully high levels. Yet the job market has proved more durable than almost anyone had predicted. Even so, Americans remain generally frustrated by high prices, a continuing source of discontent that could imperil President Joe Biden's re-election bid.

And now, growing signs suggest that the job market is settling back to something close to a pre-pandemic normal. The number of open jobs fell sharply in April for a second straight month, the government reported Tuesday, to the lowest level in three years. Still, openings remain well above pre-pandemic levels.

And the number of Americans who are quitting their jobs has also fallen back to pre-pandemic levels, a sharp shift from two years ago, when quits soared to record highs in the economic recovery from the pandemic. Workers typically quit when they have — or think they can find — a new, often higher-paying job, so the slowdown in quits has helped cool wage growth. Milder pay increases can help slow inflation because companies typically pass on their higher labor costs to their customers by raising prices.

A key reason why the economy is still producing solid net job growth is that layoffs remain at historic lows. Just 1.5 million people lost jobs in April. That's the lowest monthly figure on record — outside of the peak pandemic period — in data going back 24 years.

After struggling to fill jobs for several years, it turns out, most employers are reluctant to lay off workers.

Third term for Modi likely to see closer defense ties with US as India's rivalry with China grows

By DAVID RISING and ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Fresh from declaring victory in India's election, Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered few details on the agenda for his third term, but went out of his way to underline he would continue to focus on raising the country's military preparedness and clout.

That should come as good news to the United States and its other allies, as they focus increasingly on keeping China's sweeping maritime claims and growingly assertive behavior in the Indo-Pacific region in check.

"The government will focus on expanding defense production and exports," Modi told a crowd of supporters at his party's headquarters after election results came in. He spoke of his plan to increase security by lowering India's dependence on arms imports. "We will not stop until the defense sector becomes self sufficient."

Defense cooperation with the U.S. has greatly expanded under Modi, particularly through the so-called

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Quad security grouping that also includes Australia and Japan.

It's a two-way street, giving the U.S. a strong partner neighboring China, which Washington has called its "pacing challenge," while strengthening India's defense credibility against a far more powerful rival.

"India is currently a frontline state as far as the Americans are concerned," said Rahul Bedi, a New Delhi-based defense analyst. "The Indian navy is a major player in the Indian Ocean region."

The defense relationship was also at the top of U.S. President Joe Biden's agenda when he congratulated Modi on the election results.

In a call, "the two leaders emphasized their deepening the U.S.-India comprehensive and global strategic partnership and to advancing their shared vision of a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific region," the White House said.

It added that National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan would soon travel to New Delhi "to engage the new government on shared U.S.-India priorities."

It was about a year into Modi's second term when India's defense focus took a sharp turn toward China, when troops from the two nuclear neighbors clashed in 2020 in the Galwan Valley in the disputed northern border region of Ladakh and 20 Indian soldiers were killed.

"China really is India's long term strategic challenge, both on the border and in the Indian Ocean as well," said Viraj Solanki, a London-based expert with the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"This has resulted in a number of defense partnerships by India shifting, or just focusing on countering China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region," he said.

Beijing has a close relationship with Pakistan, India's traditional rival, and China has been increasing defense cooperation with India's neighbors, including Nepal and Bangladesh, as well as the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

"China is really trying to engage more with these countries and develop its own influence and presence," Solanki said. "I think that is a concern for New Delhi and something that will lead to increased competition in the Indian Ocean over the next few years."

In congratulating Modi on the election results, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that a "sound and stable" relationship between India and China was "in the interest of both countries and conducive to the peace and development of the region."

She also added that China stood "ready to work with India," but her comments were significantly more muted than the Foreign Ministry's remarks on Modi's last win in 2019 — before the border fight. At that time, the Foreign Ministry called the two nations "important neighbors" and said China wanted to "deepen political mutual trust, carry out mutually beneficial cooperation and push forward the closer partnership between the two countries."

Modi has always governed with his party in the majority, but after a lackluster performance in the election will now be forced to rely on coalition partners, and will face a stronger and invigorated opposition.

The main opposition Congress party is unlikely to challenge Modi's defense reforms, but has been critical of how he has handled the border issue with China and may pressure him on that front, Bedi said.

"Modi has not been entirely truthful, or very economical with the truth as far as the situation in Ladakh is concerned," he said. He referred to a Defense Ministry document that was published online, and quickly removed, which had suggested Chinese troops entered Indian territory during the 2020 confrontation.

"The opposition, I am sure, will raise questions and ask the government to come clean on what the real situation is."

Under Modi's program of military modernization and reform, his government has sought to grow the private defense manufacturing sector, a space previously occupied solely by the government-run organizations, and has eased foreign direct investment regulations to try and encourage companies to establish themselves in India.

In a flagship project, the country launched its first home-built aircraft carrier in 2022, part of a plan to deploy two carrier battle groups to counter China's rising maritime power.

Much of India's military equipment is of Russian origin, and delays on delivery and difficulties of procuring

spare parts due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also provided impetus for India to diversify defense procurement, looking more to the U.S., France, Israel and elsewhere, Solanki said.

As it seeks to strengthen ties with India, Washington has agreed to a deal that will allow General Electric to collaborate with Hindustan Aeronautics to produce fighter jet engines.

Speaking at the Shangri-La defense conference in Singapore last weekend, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the countries were also co-producing armored vehicles.

"The relationship that we enjoy with India right now is as good or better than our relationship has ever been," he said. "It's really strong."

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

By WAFSA SHURAF 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 at least 33 people, including 12 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 offensive. 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 parts of the Gaza Strip they have previously invaded, underscoring the resilience of the militant group despite Israel's nearly eight-month onslaught.

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 operations and bombardment in northern Gaza, they said.

The hospital initially reported that nine women and 14 children were among those killed in the strike on the school. The hospital morgue later amended those records to show that the dead included three women, nine children and 21 men. It was not immediately clear what caused the discrepancy. An Associated Press reporter had counted the bodies but was unable to look beneath the shrouds.

Separate strikes in central Gaza killed another 15 people, nearly all men.

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.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the spokesman for the Israeli military, said it carried out a "precise strike" based on concrete intelligence that militants were planning and conducting attacks from inside three classrooms. He said only those rooms were attacked.

"We conducted the strike once our intelligence and surveillance indicated that there were no women or children inside the Hamas compound, inside those classrooms," he said.

Hagari said there were around 30 suspected militants in the three rooms. He said the military had confirmed killing nine of them, and displayed a slide showing their names and photos. He provided no other evidence to substantiate the military's claims.

Casualties from the 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.

The school was in Nuseirat, one of several built-up refugee camps in Gaza dating to the 1948 war sur-

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rounding 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.

Philippe Lazzarini, the commissioner-general of UNRWA, said in a post on X that 6,000 people were sheltering in the school when it was hit without prior warning. He said UNRWA was unable to verify claims that armed groups were inside.

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 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.

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.

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 Jabalia 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.

Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu set to address the US Congress on July 24

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to address a joint meeting of Congress on July 24, setting the stage for what is expected to be a contentious speech at a crucial moment for the ongoing Israel-Hamas war.

Congressional leaders confirmed the date of the address late Thursday after formally inviting Netanyahu to come speak before lawmakers last week. It is the most recent show of wartime support for the longtime ally despite mounting political divisions over Israel's military assault on Hamas in Gaza.

"The existential challenges we face, including the growing partnership between Iran, Russia, and China,

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threaten the security, peace, and prosperity of our countries and of free people around the world," House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Republican, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat, along with Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries, said in the letter. "To build on our enduring relationship and to highlight America's solidarity with Israel, we invite you to share the Israeli government's vision for defending democracy, combatting terror, and establishing a just and lasting peace in the region."

Netanyahu's appearance before a growingly divided Congress is sure to be controversial and met with plenty of protests both inside the Capitol from lawmakers and outside by pro-Palestinian protesters. And it will put on stark display the growing election-year divisions among Democrats over the prime minister's prosecution of the monthslong war against Hamas.

Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish elected official in the U.S. — who delivered a stinging rebuke of Netanyahu in March — said in a separate statement Thursday night that he has "clear and profound disagreements" with the Israeli leader but joined in the request for him to speak "because America's relationship with Israel is ironclad and transcends one person or prime minister."

Other Democratic lawmakers more critical of Netanyahu's strategy are expected to be no-shows for the address. Sen. Bernie Sanders, the independent from Vermont, said: "Netanyahu is a war criminal. I certainly will not attend."

Netanyahu's visit to the Capitol also comes as the relationship between President Joe Biden and the leader of the Jewish state has increasingly frayed in recent months. Biden has privately and publicly criticized Netanyahu's handling of the war and criticized the Israeli government for not letting more humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Late last week, Biden announced a proposed agreement to end the fighting in Gaza, putting growing pressure on Netanyahu to accept the deal. Many Israelis have been urging him to embrace the terms, but his far-right allies have threatened to leave his coalition government if he does.

That could expose Netanyahu to new elections, scrutiny over security failures that led to the war and, if he loses the prime minister post, prosecution on longstanding corruption charges.

The first phase of the deal described by Biden would last for six weeks and include a "full and complete cease-fire," a withdrawal of Israeli forces from all densely populated areas of Gaza and the release of a number of hostages, including women, older people and the wounded, in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

The second phase would include the release of all remaining living hostages, including male soldiers, and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. The third phase calls for the start of a major reconstruction of Gaza, which faces decades of rebuilding from the war's devastation.

Netanyahu has repeatedly called a permanent cease-fire in Gaza a "nonstarter" until long-standing conditions for ending the war are met, appearing to undermine the proposal that Biden described as an Israeli one.

A number of Democratic lawmakers who have been supportive of Israel since the start of the war have said their attendance at Netanyahu's address will be dependent on his decision to accept the peace deal at hand.

Johnson first suggested inviting the Israeli leader, saying it would be "a great honor of mine" to invite him. In the press release Thursday, Johnson said Netanyahu responded to the invitation in kind.

"I am very moved to have the privilege of representing Israel before both Houses of Congress and to present the truth about our just war against those who seek to destroy us to the representatives of the American people and the entire world," Netanyahu said, according to the release.

Widow of Beau Biden tells jurors in Hunter Biden's gun trial that she threw firearm in a trash can

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, RANDALL CHASE, COLLEEN LONG and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — The widow of Hunter Biden's brother told jurors in his federal gun trial Thursday about the moment she found the revolver in his truck, describing how she put it into a leather pouch, stuffed it into a shopping bag and tossed it in a trash can outside a market near her home.

"I panicked, and I wanted to get rid of them," she testified about finding the gun and ammunition in the vehicle's console in October 2018. "I didn't want him to hurt himself, and I didn't want my kids to find it and hurt themselves."

The purchase of the Colt revolver by Hunter Biden — and Hallie Biden's frenzied disposal of it — are the fulcrum of the case against him. Federal prosecutors say the president's son was in the throes of a heavy crack addiction when he bought the gun. 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.

Hunter Biden, who has pleaded not guilty, has said the Justice Department is bending to political pressure from Republicans and that he's being unfairly targeted.

Meanwhile, President Joe Biden said in an interview with ABC he would accept the jury's verdict and ruled out a pardon for his son. And the first lady left France, where she attended D-Day anniversary events with the president, to head back to Delaware. She was expected to attend the trial again Friday before returning to France for a state dinner.

Hallie Biden, who had a brief romantic relationship with Hunter after Beau Biden died in 2015, testified that from the time Hunter returned to Delaware from a 2018 trip to California until she threw his gun away, she did not see him using drugs. That time period included the day he bought the weapon.

Much of her testimony focused on Oct. 23, 2018 — 11 days after he bought the gun and when she tossed it. Hunter was staying with her and seemed exhausted. Asked by the prosecutor if it appeared that Hunter was using drugs around then, she said, "He could have been."

As Hunter slept in her home, Hallie Biden went to check his car. She said she was hoping to help him get or stay sober, free of both alcohol and cocaine. She said she found the remnants of crack cocaine and drug paraphernalia. She also found the gun Hunter purchased in a box with a broken lock that kept it from fully closing. There was ammunition too.

Hallie said she considered hiding the gun but thought her kids might find it, so she decided to throw it away.

"I realize it was a stupid idea now, but I was panicking," she said.

Hunter Biden watched expressionless from the courtroom during her testimony. She told jurors that she found crack at her home and saw him using it. She was with him occasionally when he saw dealers. Prosecutor Leo Wise asked Hallie about her own 2018 trip to California, where she visited Hunter at the Roosevelt Hotel, and asked her whether she was also using drugs.

"Yes, I was," she said.

"And who introduced you to it?"

"Hunter did," Hallie said as Hunter rested his face on his hand and looked down.

"It was a terrible experience that I went through, and I'm embarrassed and ashamed, and I regret that period of my life," she added.

Hallie testified she stopped using drugs in August 2018, but Hunter continued smoking crack.

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

After Hallie Biden threw the unloaded gun in the trash can at Janssen's Market, he noticed it missing and asked her whether she had taken it.

"Are you insane?" he texted. He told her to go back to the market to look for it.

Surveillance footage played for jurors showed her digging around in the trash can for the gun, but it wasn't there. She asked store officials if someone had taken out the trash.

Hallie said Hunter told her to file a police report because the gun was registered in his name. She called the police while she was still at the store.

Officers located the man who inadvertently took the gun along with other recyclables from the trash and retrieved it. The case was eventually closed because of lack of cooperation from Hunter Biden, who would have been considered the victim. Jurors also heard from the officers who handled the case and from the man who found the gun.

The Democratic president's son arrived at court Thursday with a copy of his memoir, "Beautiful Things," tucked under his arm. The book, written after he got sober in 2021, figures heavily into prosecutors' case: They've played audio excerpts for jurors in which he details his descent into drugs and alcohol following the death of his brother in 2015 from cancer.

Defense attorney Abbe 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, but not a drug problem. Alcohol abuse doesn't preclude a gun purchase.

Jurors have also heard from the gun store clerk, who testified about how he walked Hunter Biden through a few options before he settled on the gun. The clerk then watched as the customer filled out the firearms transaction record, a required document for the purchase of a gun, and saw him check off "no" to the question of whether he was "an unlawful user of or addicted to" marijuana, stimulants, narcotics or any other controlled substance.

Gordon Cleveland, the former clerk at StarQuest Shooters & Survival Supply, said he saw Biden sign the form, which includes a warning about the consequences of submitting false information.

In his cross-examination Thursday, Lowell pointed out that some of the questions on the form are in the present tense, such as "are you an unlawful user of or addicted to" drugs. He has suggested Hunter Biden did not believe he had an active drug problem.

The proceedings are unfolding after the collapse of a plea deal 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.

The president's sister, Valerie, was in court Thursday. First lady Jill Biden spent the first part of the week there before leaving for France. Allies worry about the toll the proceedings will take on the president, who is deeply concerned about the health and sustained sobriety of his only living son.

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 also faces a separate trial in September on charges of failing to pay \$1.4 million in taxes.

The trial is playing out 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.

D-Day anniversary haunted by dwindling number of veterans and shadowed by Europe's new war

By JOHN LEICESTER, SYLVIE CORBET and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

OMAHA BEACH, France (AP) — As young soldiers, they waded through breaking waves and gunfire to battle the Nazis. Now bent with age, the dwindling number of World War II veterans joined a new generation of leaders on Thursday to honor the dead, the living and the fight for democracy on the shores where they landed 80 years ago on D-Day.

The war in Ukraine shadowed the ceremonies in Normandy, a grim modern-day example of lives and cities that are again suffering through war in Europe. Ukraine's president was greeted with a standing

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ovation and cheers. Russia, a crucial World War II ally whose full-scale invasion of its smaller neighbor in 2022 set Europe on a new path of war, was not invited.

The 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 were tinged with fear that World War II lessons are fading.

"There are things worth fighting for," said 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.

U.S. President Joe Biden directly linked Ukraine's fight for its young democracy to the battle to defeat Nazi Germany.

"To surrender to bullies, to bow down to dictators is simply unthinkable," Biden said. "If we were to do that, it means we'd be forgetting what happened here on these hallowed beaches."

As now-centenarian veterans revisited old memories and fallen comrades buried in Normandy graves, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presence at the international D-Day commemoration fused World War II's awful past with the fraught present. The dead and wounded on both sides in Ukraine are estimated in the hundreds of thousands.

Despite Russia's absence, French President Emmanuel Macron paid homage to those who fought on the eastern front "and the resolute commitment of the Red Army and all the people who were part of the then-Soviet Union."

But it was the landing on June 6, 1944, and the battles in Normandy that followed that ultimately drove the Nazis from France.

"You came here because the free world needed each and every one of you, and you answered the call," Macron said. "You came here to make France a free nation. You're back here today at home, if I may say."

The French president awarded the Legion of Honor to 14 U.S. veterans and a British female veteran. Among the Americans was Edward Berthold, a pilot who carried out his three missions over France in May 1944, before taking part in an operation in Saint-Lo, in Normandy, on D-Day. He flew 35 combat missions in all during World War II.

Berthold later read aloud a letter he'd written home the next day, showing that even as a young man he was aware of D-Day's importance.

"Wednesday night, June 7th, 1944. Dear Mom, just a few lines to tell you we are all ok. We flew mission number 10 on D-Day," he wrote. "It certainly was a terrific show, what we could see. This is what everyone has been waiting for."

Macron also bestowed the Legion of Honor on 103-year-old Christian Lamb, the daughter of a Royal Navy admiral who was studying in Normandy in 1939 when her father called her back to London. There, Lamb created detailed maps that guided the crews of landing craft on D-Day.

The French president bent down to Lamb in a wheelchair, pin the medal and kiss her on both cheeks, describing her as one of the "heroes in the shadows."

Conscious of the inevitability of age and time for World War II veterans, throngs of aficionados in period uniforms and vehicles, along with tourists soaking up the spectacle, flooded Normandy for the 80th anniversary. At the international ceremony later, the veterans received a standing ovation as they were paraded before the stands in a stately line of wheelchairs to avoid the long walk across the beachfront promenade.

"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. 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 pomp, France's Christophe Receveur offered his own tribute, unfurling an American flag he had bought on a trip to Pennsylvania to honor those who died on D-Day.

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"To forget them is to let them die all over again," the 57-year-old said as he and his daughter, Julie, carefully refolded the flag into a tight triangle. 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.

For Warren Goss, a 99-year-old American veteran of D-Day who landed in the first waves on Utah Beach, the sacrifice was affirmed by a visit years later to the same place where his comrades fell.

"I looked at the beach and it was beautiful, all the people, the kids were playing and I see the boys and girls were walking, holding hands, with their life back," he told the Danish king and prime minister, who hung on his words.

The fair-like atmosphere on the five code-named beaches — Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword — was 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.

But the real VIPs of the commemorations across the Normandy coast were the veterans who took part in the largest-ever land, sea and air armada that 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 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.

The United Kingdom's King Charles III and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak were among those at a ceremony to honor the troops who landed there and on Sword Beach, while Prince William and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau joined others at ceremony for the Canadian troops at Juno Beach.

In his address, the king told the crowd that the world was fortunate that a generation "did not flinch" when they were called upon.

"Our obligation to remember what they stood for and what they achieved for us all can never diminish," he said.

Speaking in French, Charles also paid tribute to the "unimaginable number" of French civilians killed in the battle for Normandy, and the bravery and sacrifice of the French Resistance.

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.

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

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

The Philippines goes all in for natural gas, a climate pollutant

By ED DAVEY Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Sea turtles still scramble from the waters of Batangas Bay, paddling up the sand to bury their eggs. Coral reefs that some marine biologists call the Amazon of the ocean lie just offshore, home to giant clams, nurturing small fish, which in turn are prey for manta rays.

But above the surface the land is changed. The fishing village of Santa Clara is now surrounded by four power generating stations, all burning natural gas.

The construction isn't over. Four more power plants that burn natural gas are planned for the coastline. What was a string of fishing villages is now an industrial zone.

The Philippines is going all in for electricity made via climate-damaging combustion, with almost two dozen power stations planned and the ambition to become a gas hub for the entire Asia Pacific region.

When natural gas is super-chilled into a liquid, special tanker ships can transport millions of cubic feet

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of it at a time, and the global trade in liquified natural gas or LNG is growing fast.

It's one of the world's largest natural gas power buildouts and will contribute to climate change at a time when alternative, renewable electricity has never been cheaper.

"It's mindboggling that the Philippines, a climate-vulnerable country, would still pursue dirty fuels which exacerbate climate disasters," said Gerry Arances, executive director of the Philippine nonprofit Center for Energy, Ecology and Development.

Natural gas causes warming of the atmosphere both when it leaks out, unburned, and when it is burned for heat or electricity. Experts who have studied the country found its future growth could be met entirely with renewables; reliance on natural gas will make power more expensive for Filipinos and there will be other environmental costs.

Wilma Abanil, a grandmother of four, witnessed changes after the first plant opened in 2002. Within two years, the fish catch was falling, she said. It grew worse as more plants opened.

"Before when you worked really hard, you could send your children to school," Abanil said. "We were happy. We could support our family. These days we have nothing."

While Philippine fish exports are going up nationally, officials records show the catch from Batangas Province in a slide. Many residents blame the power plants. There is overfishing, too.

"We heard they will build more," Abanil said. "What will happen to us?"

But Philippine Department of Energy fossil fuels director Rino Abad defended the plans. "We just have to make our best choice which is natural gas," he said in a Zoom interview, describing it as the least expensive energy source, flexible and very clean. "We cannot increase our energy capacity by RE (renewable energy) alone."

He noted the country is not building any new power plants that burn coal, which is dirtier.

Abad disputed the size of the expansion, saying 14 plants are planned. But that appears to include only those in the department's formal pipeline and not others that are at an earlier stage or more recently announced.

Today, the Philippines accounts for less than 4% of overall natural gas use in Southeast Asia, Abad said. Indonesia and Thailand use several times more.

Philippine environmental guidelines protect the coral reefs, he said, for example limiting the temperature of hot water discharged from power plants.

All the plants surrounding Santa Clara are owned by First Gen, the Philippines' leading natural gas energy company. First Gen did not reply to requests for comment.

Many energy watchers disagree that in 2024, it's essential to build new fossil fuel plants for electricity, or that it's the least expensive. Natural gas plants require a constant supply of fuel that rises and falls in price on international markets, unlike solar, wind and geothermal electricity, which cost very little to run once they are built.

Relying on "very expensive, unreliable, imported fuel," is a mistake, said Sam Reynolds of the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, which analyzed the Philippines' energy plan in several white papers. Electricity made from burning liquefied natural gas is between two and three times as expensive for Filipinos than electricity made from renewables, he found.

And coastal power plants can cause environmental damage in a number of ways. Their hot water discharge can kill corals; changing the coastline alters flows of seawater and sand, which can disrupt delicate ecosystems, and tanker ships risk importing invasive species.

The risk assessment for a San Miguel plant currently under construction next door described corals in the area surrounding the power station as already in a poor state.

President of the Philippine Association of Marine Science, Jayvee Saco and others are concerned that corals further offshore could suffer the same fate. In the worst case, "future generations will only see the beauty of the reef in books or museums," he said in an interview at his laboratory at Batangas State University. Seagrass will die first, then sea cucumbers, then fish, he said, as a machine flipped vials containing samples behind him.

A study by marine biologists at Ateneo de Manila University found coastal areas under stress from the five power plants that already operate in the area.

A spokeswoman for San Miguel said via email its monitoring shows marine life has not been affected and a "thriving marine ecosystem" remains. The company has created employment and liquified natural gas is "internationally recognized as a transition fuel to cleaner energy," she said.

But there is no such international recognition. For years, evidence has accumulated that natural gas power is not much better for the climate than coal, if at all. That's because it's made up mostly of methane. It burns cleaner than coal, as the industry claims, but when it leaks out, unburned, which it does, it is more than 80 times more harmful to the climate than CO2.

The Philippines may have made its decision to invest heavily in natural gas in part on the advice of the U.S. Agency for International Development, which encouraged the expansion, arguing in a 2021 paper that the country could realize "strong economic and environmental benefits" by using LNG to meet its energy needs. The paper came out as U.S. natural gas companies rapidly turned the United States into the world's largest LNG exporter. U.S. President Joe Biden has recently delayed consideration of new export terminals.

Twenty years ago, in this same part of the Philippines, communist insurgents took up arms against an earlier generation of power plants that had displaced them. The New People's Army launched a pre-dawn assault on soldiers guarding a nationally-owned power plant in Batangas. Several were killed on both sides in the gunfight.

There are echoes of that conflict today: Some protestors against the LNG buildout say they've been threatened. Aaron Pedrosa, a lawyer for the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, said in an interview in Manila that soldiers often round them up, then offer money to keep quiet.

If they refuse? "Some have been abducted," he said. "You can be charged with anti-terrorism laws. Some leaders have been killed because they were, 'resisting arrest.'"

The Philippine Army didn't respond to requests for a comment.

Back in Santa Clara, Joseph Vargas, president of a fishing association and husband of Abanil, says most communities have seen no benefit from the power plants built so far, even though Philippine law requires financial support for livelihoods in affected areas. Residents in four villages visited by The Associated Press agreed. He too has experienced pressure against protesters. He said soldiers wouldn't allow them to fish, as a punishment.

"We were harassed until we stopped," he recalled, "and they said if we continue, something bad will happen to us."

Tornado hits Michigan, killing toddler, while Ohio and Maryland storms injure at least 13

By LEA SKENE and MELINA WALLING Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — A tornado that ripped through suburban Detroit earlier this week downed trees that smashed through the roof of Abby Sata's family home, sending water gushing below.

Though they now have a giant crane taking trees off the house, they were lucky no one was hurt. The tornado that damaged Sata's home in Livonia, Michigan, tore through several neighborhoods and felled a tree that killed a toddler on Wednesday. It 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.

Sata, 21, said she got a storm warning on her phone but no indication that a tornado was lurking.

"I was in shock," she said. "It would have been very helpful. Even three seconds before the tornado would have given me a heads-up."

The twister in Livonia "spun up almost as quickly as it started to dissipate," said Jaclyn Anderson, a meteorologist with the Detroit office of the National Weather Service. The tornado, which was of a type known for being weak and brief, traveled a path of about 5 miles (8 kilometers). More powerful tornadoes generated from intense storms can stay on the ground for 30, 40 or even 100 miles and are much easier to anticipate and issue warnings for, she said.

While tornado-forecasting equipment has improved “tenfold” over the past few decades, relying on a combination of weather radar and local observations, Anderson said short-lived tornadoes can still be “quite challenging when it comes to getting warnings out.”

Forecasters create tornado outlooks every day, factoring in different weather elements, said Victor Gensini, an associate professor at Northern Illinois University who studies tornadoes and extreme weather. But sometimes those conditions happen on a small scale — for instance, a sudden breeze coming off a lake.

It has been a grim spring for tornadoes in the U.S. April had the second-highest number of tornadoes for that month on record in the country.

In suburban Maryland, a line of storms produced unusually strong tornadoes that felled trees, damaged buildings and downed power lines Wednesday night.

But while Gensini did say that the national numbers are a little above average at the moment, it’s too early to make definitive statements about the tornado year as a whole. He said the U.S. can get as many as 1,500 tornadoes a year, and this time of year is statistically the most likely for tornado activity in the U.S.; many of them just aren’t in high-profile places or aren’t captured in clear images.

“The tornadoes that have occurred this year have been very visible,” he said.

Gensini, who also studies how climate change is affecting tornado activity, said that the science of attributing twister-spawning storms to climate change is still in its infancy, and it can be hard to connect the dots to one individual tornado. But looking at broader-scale trends, his team has found an increasing likelihood of tornadoes developing in regions farther south and east in the U.S. than in the past.

Tornado warnings were issued for parts of several other states on Wednesday night, including Ohio, New Jersey and Delaware. In Ohio, a suspected tornado ripped away a gas station canopy and heavily damaged a restaurant and a discount store early Thursday in the eastern village of Frazeyburg. Eight people suffered minor injuries, mostly from flying debris, said Jeff Jadwin, the emergency management director in Muskingum County.

While tornadoes are not unheard of in Maryland, they are relatively rare — especially outbreaks of the volume seen Wednesday night. At least five people were injured and the weather service issued 22 tornado warnings Wednesday, the fourth-most issued in a single day by the office that covers much of Maryland, the District of Columbia, northern Virginia and the eastern West Virginia panhandle, according to Kevin Rodriguez, lead meteorologist at the weather service office in Sterling, Virginia.

“It was a very busy night,” said National Weather Service Hydrologist Jeremy Geiger. “It’s one of those things, all the right ingredients that come together at the right time. So that’s always the question.”

Geiger said it wasn’t a super high-energy storm system, but the wind shear and other factors gave it a boost and created the rotation that allows tornadoes to form. He said the system was especially challenging because forecasters were issuing flash flood warnings and tornado warnings simultaneously, with some residents being advised to seek high ground and others sheltering in the basement.

In Gaithersburg, Maryland, George Mhaano told WJLA-TV that a crane might be needed to lift a tree off his home, so he would probably stay at a hotel. When the tornado hit, Mhaano said he heard loud thuds and banging on the window, so he hid in a bathtub. Later, firefighters came knocking and told him to get out, which he did.

“Thank God, I wasn’t hurt. And thank God, everyone at my house was at church,” Mhaano told WJLA-TV. “This is just material. It can be replaced or fixed. No one got hurt, so that’s all that matters.”

Texas sheriff says 7 suspects arrested, 11 migrants hospitalized after sting near San Antonio

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Eleven people were hospitalized and seven smuggling suspects were arrested Thursday after authorities found more than two dozen migrants who had been driven from the border packed in a secret compartment of a trailer with little water and in sweltering heat.

Acting on a tip about a smuggling operation, authorities followed the trailer as it was towed to a rural

residence outside San Antonio, Bexar County Sheriff Javier Salazar said.

A total of 26 migrants were found at the residence that Salazar described as a "shack" with holes in the floor and no water. Of those, 11 were taken to a hospital with heat-related and minor injuries, Salazar said.

The migrants had been in the trailer's secret compartment for three hours, Salazar said. Temperatures in San Antonio were in the high 90s Thursday afternoon and were expected to top 100, according to the National Weather Service.

No specific information was released about the conditions of the migrants who were hospitalized, but Salazar said, "We think everybody is out of the woods, as far as losing their life."

The smuggling sting came two days after President Joe Biden unveiled plans to enact immediate significant restrictions on migrants seeking asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border as the White House tries to neutralize immigration as a political liability ahead of the November elections.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican, has fought the Biden administration over immigration policies for years. Abbott launched Operation Lone Star, a multibillion-dollar state border security effort that has led to court battles with the federal government over river buoys and razor wire to stop migrants crossing the Rio Grande, and other border related measures. Texas also has bused tens of thousands of migrants to Democratic-run cities across the U.S.

San Antonio was the site of the nation's deadliest human smuggling episode in June 2022. Fifty-three migrants, including eight children, died after being trapped in a sweltering semi-trailer that had been driven from the border city of Laredo. The trailer had a malfunctioning air-conditioning unit. When authorities found it on a remote San Antonio road, 48 migrants were already dead and five more later died at hospitals. The dead migrants were from Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.

All of the migrants found Thursday appeared to be adults, Salazar said. The nationalities of most of them was not immediately known, but one woman told authorities she was from Guatemala and that she had paid \$16,000 to be brought to the U.S.

Salazar said he did not know when the migrants crossed the border but believed they were driven to the area from Laredo, about 160 miles (260 kilometers) away.

Salazar blamed Mexican cartels for the operation broke up Thursday, and noted bullet proof vests and rifles were found on the property. Some of the people found at the residence ran, but authorities believed they caught everyone involved.

"Clearly cartel related," Salazar said. "This is the fault of the bloodthirsty organizations that are bringing them across and putting them in harm's way."

Salazar noted how well hidden the migrants were as they were being moved.

"You could be standing right there next to it and not know that thing contains 26 people," Salazar said. "They're hiding in plain sight."

Families of US hostages in Gaza plead with Americans: Don't forget your fellow citizens

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jonathan Dekel-Chen dreams of the moment when his abducted 35-year-old son, Sagui, is reunited with his wife and three young children, including a daughter born two months after the devastating attack on Israel that initiated the war.

Ruby Chen longs to recover the remains of his 19-year-old son, Itay — a soldier who Israeli intelligence says was killed in the Oct. 7 attack — so that he can be buried and his "soul" finally given "a place to rest" in accordance with Jewish practices.

For many Americans, the Israeli-Hamas war is seen through the daily reports of Israeli ground incursions and airstrikes in Gaza and warnings of a looming famine. There are college campuses riven by protests and great uncertainty over cease-fire prospects.

But the families of the Americans taken hostage are laser-focused on one thing: their loved ones. They fear that with all the tumult of the war, Americans often forget about their fellow citizens who remain

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missing. They're doing whatever they can to make sure they aren't forgotten and to keep pushing to get them -- or their remains -- back home.

"For most of us, we are doers. So we wake up in the morning and we say, what are we doing today? What's on the agenda?" said Ronen Neutra, whose son, Omer, a dual U.S.-Israeli citizen and Israel Defense Forces soldier who was ambushed and pulled from a tank on Oct. 7. "What can I do to make sure that my son will come back home today?"

The families were in Washington this week for meetings with U.S. government officials, including national security adviser Jake Sullivan and Attorney General Merrick Garland, whose Justice Department is investigating the deaths and kidnapping of Americans at the hands of Hamas. The meetings came at a sensitive time as the Biden administration endeavors to get Israel and Hamas to commit to a cease-fire deal to end the eight-month-old war.

Speaking as a group Wednesday to The Associated Press, the families recounted their shared sadness, angst and uncertainty but also their hopes for a resolution that would result in the release of scores of hostages, including their loved ones. Eight Americans are believed to be held by Hamas, including three who were killed.

The three-part proposal described on May 31 by President Joe Biden calls for a full and complete cease-fire, a withdrawal of Israeli forces from densely populated areas of Gaza and the release of hostages — first, women, the elderly and the wounded and later, all living remaining captives, including male soldiers.

"The only way they are going to emerge alive from these Hamas tunnels is through some sort of negotiated agreement with the devil, which is Hamas," said Dekel-Chen, whose son was kidnapped while protecting his kibbutz, Nir Oz, which endured a disproportionate toll of murders and hostage-taking by Hamas.

"Hamas clearly has to be forced or coerced to enter negotiations and complete them," he said, and must decide whether it's about "perpetual warfare and perpetual suffering of its own people" or about "some better future." The Israeli government, for its part, must "stay the course" and "put aside any kind of narrow political interests" for the good of the country, he said.

That won't necessarily be easy, given the possibility that a cease-fire deal would shatter Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition and make him more vulnerable to a conviction in his corruption trial.

Netanyahu says he is committed to bringing the hostages home, but also says he won't end the war without destroying Hamas. He and hard-liners in his coalition fear a full Israeli withdrawal before reaching this goal could allow Hamas to claim victory and reconstitute itself.

The meetings with American officials were the latest in a series of sit-downs that began last fall, shortly after the Hamas attack in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages.

So much has changed since then.

The resulting Israeli assault on Gaza has displaced most of the territory's population and killed over 36,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians. Israel has drawn global criticism, with a U.N. court ordering Israel to halt its offensive in the southern city of Rafah, while American universities from Columbia to Stanford have been convulsed by protests.

In Israel, thousands have protested the government, criticizing Netanyahu over his approach to the war and demanding he do more to bring back the roughly 80 hostages believed to be alive, along with the remains of 43 pronounced dead. Many hostage families have been at the forefront of the protest movement.

The American hostage families were measured in discussing the Israeli government's approach, placing the onus more on Hamas.

And they say the warm embrace they have received from U.S. officials exposes a disconnect with the general American public, which they consider to be more apathetic to their plight and ignorant of the fact that so many hostages remain in captivity.

"I think there's also a lack of knowledge," Chen said. "I think the majority of the U.S. people are not aware that on October 7th, this was also an attack on the United States."

Compounding the sadness eight months into the war is a steady drip of somber Israeli government an-

nouncements of additional hostage fatalities — most recently on Monday, when the military declared four hostages who'd been kidnapped on Oct. 7 as now dead. Adding to the pain, the four men had been seen alive in videos released by Hamas, meaning they died in captivity, possibly from Israeli fire.

Chen spent months hoping his son, an NBA-loving soldier in the Israel Defense Forces, was alive only to learn earlier this year that he had been killed.

"He was taken hostage even though he was killed. Who does that? Savages. Who takes dead people as negotiation chips?" he said.

Andrea Weinstein received similar news after the Israeli government in late December disclosed the deaths of her sister Judy — previously thought to be among the living hostages — and her sister's husband, Gad Haggai. Weinstein, a teacher with a creative spirit who used puppets to help students find their voices, was on a morning walk with her husband when the attack unfolded, her sister said.

Their bodies remain in Gaza.

Optimistic feelings come in cycles for Omer Neutra's mother, Orna, who said she could not have imagined eight months ago that the family would still be in the same position now. She is hopeful but also guarded.

"October 6, it was a different life," she said. "Nothing is the same for us."

Man charged in Gilgo Beach serial killings kept 'blueprint' of crimes on computer, prosecutors say

By PHILIP MARCELO and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

RIVERHEAD, N.Y. (AP) — The New York architect accused of murdering multiple women and leaving their corpses scattered along the Long Island coast kept a "blueprint" of his crimes on his computer, prosecutors revealed Thursday as they brought charges against Rex Heuermann in two more killings.

Heuermann, 60, appeared before a judge to be arraigned in the deaths of Jessica Taylor and Sandra Costilla, two young women who were long suspected of being the victims of men preying on sex workers. He had previously been charged with murdering four other women in a string of deaths known as the Gilgo Beach serial killings.

Taylor disappeared in 2003. Costilla was killed 30 years ago, in 1993, and her inclusion in the case indicates that prosecutors now believe Heuermann was killing women for much longer than previously thought.

The new charges came after recent police searches of Heuermann's Massapequa Park home and a wooded area on Long Island tied to the investigation.

In a court filing, prosecutors said they were able to use new forensic testing methods to match hairs found on or near the vicinity of both victims to a DNA profile that is a likely match to Heuermann. Additionally, prosecutors say they recovered a file on a hard drive in his basement used to "methodically blueprint" his killings.

The all-caps document features a series of checklists with tasks to complete before, during and after the killings, as well as practical lessons for "next time." Among the dozens of entries written are reminders to clean the bodies and destroy evidence, to "get sleep before hunt" and to "have story set."

One section, titled "things to remember," appears to highlight lessons from previous killings, prosecutors said, such as using heavier rope and limiting noise in order to maximize "play time." A "body prep" checklist includes, among other items, a note to "remove head and hands."

Prosecutors believe that entry may connect Heuermann to yet another victim, Valerie Mack, whose partial skeletal remains were discovered near the body of Taylor after her disappearance in 2000.

Heuermann has not been charged in the death of Mack. But asked during a news conference after Thursday's hearing if he was a suspect, District Attorney Ray Tierney replied, "That's fair to say."

Tierney also acknowledged that the "blueprint" document, which Heuermann had attempted to delete, was a "significant impetus" for the renewed search across Long Island in recent weeks, as it was recovered in March from the more than 350 electronic devices seized from the suspect's home.

Heuermann pleaded not guilty to killing Taylor and Costilla during the hearing and was ordered held without bail. His lawyer, Michael Brown, said outside court that Heuermann is "obviously in a bad place

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in terms of the new charges.”

Afterward, Tierney said the additional charges provide “some small measure of closure” for the victims’ families.

Since late 2010, police have been investigating the deaths of at least 10 people — mostly female sex workers — whose remains were discovered along an isolated highway not far from Gilgo Beach on Long Island’s south shore.

Those victims disappeared over a span of at least 14 years. Vexed detectives made only halting progress in identifying possible suspects. Investigators long said it was likely that not all of the deaths were the work of the same killer. Some of the victims vanished in the mid-1990s. Investigators concluded that an 11th person who disappeared in 2010 from the barrier island community of Oak Beach had accidentally drowned.

Heuermann, who lived across a bay from where the bodies were found, was arrested last July. Prosecutors said a new investigative task force used mobile phone location data and DNA samples to link the architect to some of the victims. He was charged with killing four of the women: Megan Waterman, Melissa Barthelemy, Amber Lynn Costello and Maureen Brainard-Barnes.

Investigators who searched Heuermann’s home extensively and dug up his yard last summer returned to the house last month and spent nearly a week searching it again. They focused their efforts mostly in the basement, according to a lawyer for Heuermann’s wife.

That followed a search in April of a wooded area in Manorville, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) east of Heuermann’s home, and in the Southampton hamlet of North Sea, where Costilla’s remains were discovered decades ago.

Tierney said the planning document was recovered in March, providing the impetus for the recent searches.

Prosecutors also said they found a book in Heuermann’s possession by the retired FBI agent John Douglas, “The Cases That Haunt Us.” They say the planning document referenced specific pages in another work by Douglas, “Mind Hunter,” that allude to the personality types of serial killers and profiles of those who use mutilation and sexual violence.

Jessica Taylor, 20, vanished in 2003 while working as an escort in New York City. Some of her remains were discovered in Manorville that year. Other remains were found during a 2011 search of the beach scrub by the side of Ocean Parkway, the road where the other Gilgo Beach victims were found.

Taylor’s mother, Elizabeth Baczkziel, was at the courthouse for Thursday’s hearing. She held up childhood photos of her daughter but didn’t speak to reporters. Her lawyer, Gloria Allred, read a statement from Baczkziel in which she described her daughter as “loving, compassionate and so funny,” and said she would have made a great mother.

“My darling daughter, you will never be forgotten,” the statement said. “You will forever be in our hearts.”

Valerie Mack, 24, who had been working as an escort in Philadelphia, disappeared in 2000 and was last seen by her family in Port Republic, New Jersey, near Atlantic City. Some of her skeletal remains were discovered that year in the Manorville woods. More of her remains were found in 2011 during the search around Gilgo Beach.

Initially known as “Jane Doe No. 6,” Mack’s remains went unidentified until 2020, when genetic testing revealed her identity.

Costilla was 28 when she was killed and had lived in New York City.

A decade ago, Suffolk County prosecutors said publicly that they believed Costilla had been killed by John Bittrolff, an area carpenter who was convicted of murdering two other women whose bodies were found in the same part of Long Island.

But Bittrolff was never charged with Costilla’s death due to lack of evidence and has insisted he didn’t kill anyone.

“After today’s confirmation that John Bittrolff had nothing to do with the death of Sandra Costilla, I sincerely hope that the Gilgo Beach Task Force will conduct an actual, meaningful investigation into the murders of Rita Tangredi and Colleen McNamee to find their real killer,” his lawyer Jon Manley said Thursday, referring to the two women Bittrolff was convicted of killing.

Heuermann's lawyer, Brown, said he planned to request the prosecution's files on Bittrolff. "Quite frankly, the police department and the district attorney's office all had the finger pointed at Bittrolff for that murder," he said. ____

Offenhardt reported from New York City.

Trump ally Steve Bannon must surrender to prison by July 1 to start contempt sentence, judge says

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Steve Bannon, a longtime ally of former President Donald Trump, must report to prison by July 1 to serve his four-month sentence for defying a subpoena from the House committee that investigated the U.S. Capitol insurrection, a federal judge ruled Thursday.

U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols in Washington granted the Justice Department's request to make Bannon begin his prison term after a federal appeals court panel last month upheld his contempt of Congress conviction.

Bannon is expected to seek a stay of the judge's order, which could delay his surrender date.

"I've got great lawyers, and we're going to go all the way to the Supreme Court if we have to," Bannon told reporters outside the courthouse. He added: "There's not a prison built or jail built that will ever shut me up."

In a social media post Thursday, Trump accused prosecutors of being "desperate" to jail Bannon. Trump repeated his claim that Republicans are being persecuted by a politically motivated justice system — rhetoric that has escalated in the wake of the presumptive Republican presidential nominee's conviction last week on 34 felony charges in his New York hush money trial.

Nichols, the judge who ordered Bannon to report to prison, was nominated to the bench by Trump in 2018.

Bannon was convicted nearly two years ago of two counts of contempt of Congress: one for refusing to sit for a deposition with the Jan. 6 House Committee and the other for refusing to provide documents related to his involvement in Trump's efforts to overturn his 2020 presidential election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

Nichols had initially allowed him to remain free while he fought his conviction because the judge believed the case raised substantial legal questions. But during a hearing in Washington's federal court, Nichols said the calculus changed after the appeals court panel said all of Bannon's challenges lack merit.

"I do not believe the original basis for my stay exists any longer," Nichols said.

Bannon can appeal his conviction to the full U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit and the U.S. Supreme Court. Prosecutor John Crabb told the judge it was "very unlikely" Bannon would succeed in getting his conviction thrown out.

Bannon's lawyer at trial argued that the former adviser didn't ignore the subpoena but was still engaged in good-faith negotiations with the congressional committee when he was charged.

The defense has said Bannon had been acting on the advice of his attorney at the time, who told him that the subpoena was invalid because the committee would not allow a Trump lawyer in the room and that Bannon could not determine what documents or testimony he could provide because Trump has asserted executive privilege.

Defense lawyer David Schoen told the judge it would be unfair to send Bannon to prison now because he would complete his entire sentence before he exhausted his appeals. Schoen said the case raises "serious constitutional issues" that need to be examined by the Supreme Court.

"In this country, we don't send anyone to prison if they believe that they were doing something that complied with the law," he told reporters.

A second Trump aide, trade adviser Peter Navarro, was also convicted of contempt of Congress. He reported to prison in March to serve his four-month sentence.

Navarro, too, had maintained that he couldn't cooperate with the committee because Trump had invoked

executive privilege. But courts have rejected that argument, finding Navarro couldn't prove Trump had actually invoked it.

The House Jan. 6 committee's final report asserted that Trump criminally engaged in a "multi-part conspiracy" to overturn the lawful results of the 2020 election and failed to act to stop his supporters from attacking the Capitol, concluding an extraordinary 18-month investigation into the former president and the violent insurrection.

Bannon is also facing criminal charges in New York state court alleging he duped donors who gave money to build a wall along the U.S. southern border. Bannon has pleaded not guilty to money laundering, conspiracy, fraud and other charges, and that trial has been postponed until at least the end of September.

Election certification disputes in a handful of states spark concerns over 2024 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 month 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 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.

Scientists have traced the origin of the modern horse to a lineage that emerged 4,200 years ago

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The horse transformed human history — and now scientists have a clearer idea of when humans began to domesticate the horse.

Around 4,200 years ago, one particular lineage of horse quickly became dominant across Eurasia, suggesting that's when humans started to spread domesticated horses around the world, according to research published Thursday in the journal *Nature*.

There was something special about this horse: It had a genetic mutation that changed the shape of its back, likely making it easier to ride.

"In the past, you had many different lineages of horses," said Pablo Librado, an evolutionary biologist at the Spanish National Research Council in Barcelona and co-author of the new study. That genetic diversity

was evident in ancient DNA samples the researchers analyzed from archaeological sites across Eurasia dating back to 50,000 years ago.

But their analysis of 475 ancient horse genomes showed a notable change around 4,200 years ago.

That's when a specific lineage that first arose in what's known as the Pontic-Caspian Steppe, a plains region that stretches from what is now northeastern Bulgaria across Ukraine and through southern Russia, began to pop up all across Eurasia and quickly replaced other lineages. Within three hundred years, the horses in Spain were similar to those in Russia.

"We saw this genetic type spreading almost everywhere in Eurasia — clearly this horse type that was local became global very fast," said co-author Ludovic Orlando, a molecular archaeologist at the Centre for Anthropobiology and Genomics of Toulouse in France.

The researchers believe that this change was because a Bronze Age people called the Sintashta had domesticated their local horse and begun to use these animals to help them dramatically expand their territory.

Domesticating wild horses on the plains of Eurasia was a process, not a single event, scientists say.

Archaeologists have previously found evidence of people consuming horse milk in dental remains dating to around 5,500 years ago, and the earliest evidence of horse ridership dates to around 5,000 years ago. But it was the Sintashta who spread the particular horses they had domesticated across Eurasia, the new study suggests.

Researchers believe the very earliest horse ancestors arose in North America, then sauntered across the Bering Strait into Asia around a million years ago. They flourished in Asia, but went extinct in the Americas.

People had domesticated other animals several thousand years before horses — including dogs, pigs, cattle, goats and sheep. But the new research shows that the shrinking genetic diversity associated with domestication happened much faster in horses.

"Humans changed the horse genome stunningly quickly, perhaps because we already had experience dealing with animals," said Laurent Frantz, who studies the genetics of ancient creatures at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and was not involved in the study.

"It shows the special place of horses in human societies."

Biden calls for solidarity with Ukraine at D-Day anniversary ceremony near the beaches of Normandy

By ZEKE MILLER and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

COLLEVILLE-SUR-MER, France (AP) — President Joe Biden marked the 80th anniversary of D-Day on Thursday by pledging "we will not walk away" from Ukraine, drawing a direct line from the fight to liberate Europe from Nazi domination to today's war against Russian aggression.

"To surrender to bullies, to bow down to dictators, is simply unthinkable," he said during a ceremony at the American cemetery in Normandy. "If we were to do that, it means we'd be forgetting what happened here on these hallowed beaches."

D-Day was the largest amphibious assault in history, and Biden called it a "powerful illustration of how alliances, real alliances make us stronger." He said that was "a lesson that I pray we Americans never forget."

The comment by the Democratic president was a reminder that American commitments around the globe hang in the balance during this year's U.S. election. Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee, has said he would not defend European allies that are "delinquent" in their own security spending.

The possibility of Trump's return to the White House has left many of the continent's leaders fearful that transatlantic unity, which was sealed in blood on D-Day and strengthened in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, could fray or even rupture.

Trump has expressed little enthusiasm for Ukraine's defense, criticizing the "endless flow of American treasure" and calling for Europe to shoulder more of the burden. He has also voiced admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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Trump shared his own D-Day anniversary message on social media, praising U.S. soldiers as "immortal heroes." He was silent on the country's alliances.

Concerns about American reliability extend beyond Trump. Biden struggled to secure bipartisan congressional approval for U.S. military assistance for Ukraine, and months of delay contributed to Russian advances on the battlefield.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was in Normandy for anniversary events on Thursday and is expected to sit down with Biden in Paris on Friday. It will be their first meeting since Biden signed legislation with new money for Ukraine's defense, and Zelenskyy has continued to push for faster and more aggressive U.S. support.

One such step took place recently, when Biden eased limitations on how Ukraine can use American weapons, allowing for some strikes into Russia in order to defend Kharkiv, a city near the border between the two countries.

Putin reacted angrily, saying he is prepared to use nuclear weapons to protect Russian sovereignty and suggesting that he could provide Russian weapons to those willing to strike Western targets.

The war and persistent threats of escalation were an ominous backdrop to the D-Day ceremony, and Biden warned that "democracy is more at risk across the world than any point since the end of World War II."

While paying tribute to the American troops that stormed Normandy's beaches on June 6, 1944, Biden said "let us be worthy of their sacrifice."

"We must remember that the fact that they were heroes here that day does not absolve us of what we have to do today," he said. "Democracy is never guaranteed. Every generation must preserve it, defend it and fight for it. That's the test of the ages."

Biden also highlighted "hundreds of thousands of people of color and women who courageously served despite unjust limitation on what they could do for their nation."

Before the ceremony, Biden and first lady Jill Biden met with more than two dozen American veterans near Omaha Beach, where the fiercest D-Day fighting took place. Those who could stand were helped out of wheelchairs to pose for photos. Most shook hands with Biden or saluted; one hugged him.

Biden told a veteran that "you saved the world." The president led the audience in singing happy birthday to another. Steve Spielberg and Tom Hanks, the Hollywood heavyweights behind movies and television shows about World War II, were nearby.

When Army veteran Robert Gibson approached, the first lady clutched his arm to help him stand next to the president as they shook hands.

"Don't get old," the 100-year-old man from New Jersey joked to the 81-year-old president, who was a toddler on D-Day.

This anniversary of the invasion is a particularly somber one because it will be among the last with living veterans. The youngest survivors are in their late 90s. Biden met one veteran who is 104.

In an interview with The Associated Press a few days ago, Gibson described himself as "living on borrowed time."

He was part of the second wave of troops that landed on Utah Beach. Gibson said he expected this year would be the last anniversary ceremony that he could attend, but he was pleased to be back one more time.

"I want to see the beach again," he said.

At the end of his visit to the American cemetery, Biden paused in front of the grave of John S. Greenfield, an Army private first class from Delaware. Greenfield landed at Omaha Beach with the 115th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division.

As his regiment fought inland, Greenfield was killed during a German ambush, 10 days after D-Day. Greenfield's family learned of his death when a package of cigarettes that has been mailed to him as a gift was returned undelivered, according to the Wilmington Morning News. The word "deceased" had been written over his name.

Standing at Greenfield's grave, Biden made the sign of the cross and touched the letters engraved on the white marble headstone.

A new 'Hunger Games' book — and movie — is coming

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Inspired by an 18th century Scottish philosopher and the modern scourge of misinformation, Suzanne Collins is returning to the ravaged, post-apocalyptic land of Panem for a new "The Hunger Games" novel.

Scholastic announced Thursday that "Sunrise on the Reaping," the fifth volume of Collins' blockbuster dystopian series, will be published March 18, 2025. The new book begins with the reaping of the Fiftieth Hunger Games, set 24 years before the original "Hunger Games" novel, which came out in 2008, and 40 years after Collins' most recent book, "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes."

Lionsgate, which has released film adaptations of all four previous "Hunger Games" books, announced later on Thursday that "Sunrise on the Reaping" will open in theaters on Nov. 20, 2026. Francis Lawrence, who has worked on all but the first "Hunger Games" movie, will return as director.

The first four "Hunger Games" books have sold more than 100 million copies and been translated into dozens of languages. Collins had seemingly ended the series after the 2010 publication of "Mockingjay," writing in 2015 that it was "time to move on to other lands." But four years later, she stunned readers and the publishing world when she revealed she was working on what became "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes," released in 2020 and set 64 years before the first book.

Collins has drawn upon Greek mythology and the Roman gladiator games for her earlier "Hunger Games" books. But for the upcoming novel, she cites the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume.

"With 'Sunrise on the Reaping,' I was inspired by David Hume's idea of implicit submission and, in his words, 'the easiness with which the many are governed by the few,'" Collins said in a statement. "The story also lent itself to a deeper dive into the use of propaganda and the power of those who control the narrative. The question 'Real or not real?' seems more pressing to me every day."

The "Hunger Games" movies are a multibillion dollar franchise for Lionsgate. Jennifer Lawrence portrayed heroine Katniss Everdeen in the film versions of "The Hunger Games," "Catching Fire" and "Mockingjay," the last of which came out in two installments. Other featured actors have included Philip Seymour Hoffman, Josh Hutcherson, Stanley Tucci and Donald Sutherland.

"Suzanne Collins is a master storyteller and our creative north star," Lionsgate chair Adam Fogelson said in a statement. "We couldn't be more fortunate than to be guided and trusted by a collaborator whose talent and imagination are so consistently brilliant."

The film version of "Songbirds and Snakes," starring Tom Blyth and Rachel Zegler, came out last year. This fall, a "Hunger Games" stage production is scheduled to debut in London.

AI 'gold rush' for chatbot training data could run out of human-written text

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

Artificial intelligence systems like ChatGPT could soon run out of what keeps making them smarter — the tens of trillions of words people have written and shared online.

A new study released Thursday by research group Epoch AI projects that tech companies will exhaust the supply of publicly available training data for AI language models by roughly the turn of the decade -- sometime between 2026 and 2032.

Comparing it to a "literal gold rush" that depletes finite natural resources, Tamay Besiroglu, an author of the study, said the AI field might face challenges in maintaining its current pace of progress once it drains the reserves of human-generated writing.

In the short term, tech companies like ChatGPT-maker OpenAI and Google are racing to secure and sometimes pay for high-quality data sources to train their AI large language models — for instance, by signing deals to tap into the steady flow of sentences coming out of Reddit forums and news media outlets.

In the longer term, there won't be enough new blogs, news articles and social media commentary to sustain the current trajectory of AI development, putting pressure on companies to tap into sensitive data now considered private — such as emails or text messages — or relying on less-reliable "synthetic data"

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spit out by the chatbots themselves.

"There is a serious bottleneck here," Besiroglu said. "If you start hitting those constraints about how much data you have, then you can't really scale up your models efficiently anymore. And scaling up models has been probably the most important way of expanding their capabilities and improving the quality of their output."

The researchers first made their projections two years ago — shortly before ChatGPT's debut — in a working paper that forecast a more imminent 2026 cutoff of high-quality text data. Much has changed since then, including new techniques that enabled AI researchers to make better use of the data they already have and sometimes "overtrain" on the same sources multiple times.

But there are limits, and after further research, Epoch now foresees running out of public text data sometime in the next two to eight years.

The team's latest study is peer-reviewed and due to be presented at this summer's International Conference on Machine Learning in Vienna, Austria. Epoch is a nonprofit institute hosted by San Francisco-based Rethink Priorities and funded by proponents of effective altruism — a philanthropic movement that has poured money into mitigating AI's worst-case risks.

Besiroglu said AI researchers realized more than a decade ago that aggressively expanding two key ingredients — computing power and vast stores of internet data — could significantly improve the performance of AI systems.

The amount of text data fed into AI language models has been growing about 2.5 times per year, while computing has grown about 4 times per year, according to the Epoch study. Facebook parent company Meta Platforms recently claimed the largest version of their upcoming Llama 3 model — which has not yet been released — has been trained on up to 15 trillion tokens, each of which can represent a piece of a word.

But how much it's worth worrying about the data bottleneck is debatable.

"I think it's important to keep in mind that we don't necessarily need to train larger and larger models," said Nicolas Papernot, an assistant professor of computer engineering at the University of Toronto and researcher at the nonprofit Vector Institute for Artificial Intelligence.

Papernot, who was not involved in the Epoch study, said building more skilled AI systems can also come from training models that are more specialized for specific tasks. But he has concerns about training generative AI systems on the same outputs they're producing, leading to degraded performance known as "model collapse."

Training on AI-generated data is "like what happens when you photocopy a piece of paper and then you photocopy the photocopy. You lose some of the information," Papernot said. Not only that, but Papernot's research has also found it can further encode the mistakes, bias and unfairness that's already baked into the information ecosystem.

If real human-crafted sentences remain a critical AI data source, those who are stewards of the most sought-after troves — websites like Reddit and Wikipedia, as well as news and book publishers — have been forced to think hard about how they're being used.

"Maybe you don't lop off the tops of every mountain," jokes Selena Deckelmann, chief product and technology officer at the Wikimedia Foundation, which runs Wikipedia. "It's an interesting problem right now that we're having natural resource conversations about human-created data. I shouldn't laugh about it, but I do find it kind of amazing."

While some have sought to close off their data from AI training — often after it's already been taken without compensation — Wikipedia has placed few restrictions on how AI companies use its volunteer-written entries. Still, Deckelmann said she hopes there continue to be incentives for people to keep contributing, especially as a flood of cheap and automatically generated "garbage content" starts polluting the internet.

AI companies should be "concerned about how human-generated content continues to exist and continues to be accessible," she said.

From the perspective of AI developers, Epoch's study says paying millions of humans to generate the

text that AI models will need “is unlikely to be an economical way” to drive better technical performance.

As OpenAI begins work on training the next generation of its GPT large language models, CEO Sam Altman told the audience at a United Nations event last month that the company has already experimented with “generating lots of synthetic data” for training.

“I think what you need is high-quality data. There is low-quality synthetic data. There’s low-quality human data,” Altman said. But he also expressed reservations about relying too heavily on synthetic data over other technical methods to improve AI models.

“There’d be something very strange if the best way to train a model was to just generate, like, a quadrillion tokens of synthetic data and feed that back in,” Altman said. “Somehow that seems inefficient.”

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 became on Thursday the first European country to ask a United Nations court for permission to join South Africa’s case accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza.

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.

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 and shows no sign of doing so.

“There should be no doubt that Spain will remain on the right side of history,” Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said after his foreign minister made the announcement.

Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua, Libya and the Palestinians are waiting for the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands, to grant approval to their requests to join the case.

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 since killed 36,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which doesn’t distinguish between combatants and civilians.

“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.”

Once admitted to the case, Spain would be able to make written submissions and speak at public hearings.

Spain’s request is the latest move by Sánchez’s left-wing coalition 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. 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 condemned 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.”

Sánchez’s backing of the Palestinians is generally supported in Spain, where some university students have followed their American counterparts in protesting on campuses. Spaniards will vote in elections for the European Parliament elections on Sunday.

Last year, the International Court of Justice allowed 32 countries, including Spain, to join Ukraine’s case alleging that Russia breached the genocide convention by falsely accusing Ukraine of committing genocide

in its eastern Luhansk and Donetsk regions, and using that as a pretext for the invasion.

Preliminary hearings have already been held in the genocide case against Israel, but the court is expected to take years to reach a final decision.

Albares said the decision by Spain's government had the immediate objective of adding pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to follow the court's interim measures to stop bloodshed in Rafah.

"I insist once again that these interim measures must be complied with," Albares said. "Whether this is genocide or not, that is for the court to decide, and Spain of course will support its decision."

Israel sent troops into the southern city of Rafah in early May in what it said was a limited incursion, but those forces are now operating in central parts of the city. Last week, Israeli strikes hit near a U.N. Palestinian refugee agency facility in Rafah, saying they were targeting Hamas militants. An inferno that followed ripped through nearby tents housing displaced families, killing at least 45 people.

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.

Netanyahu is also facing a separate legal challenge from the International Criminal Court, whose prosecutor is seeking an arrest warrant against the Israeli leader and others, including leaders of the Hamas militant group. The U.N. General Assembly endorses the ICC, but the court is independent.

Southern Baptists are poised to ban churches with women pastors. Some are urging them to reconsider

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

From its towering white steeple and red-brick facade to its Sunday services filled with rousing gospel hymns and evangelistic sermons, First Baptist Church of Alexandria, Virginia, bears many of the classic hallmarks of a Southern Baptist church.

On a recent Sunday, its pastor for women and children, Kim Eskridge, urged members to invite friends and neighbors to an upcoming vacation Bible school — a perennial Baptist activity — to help "reach families in the community with the gospel."

But because that pastor is a woman, First Baptist's days in the Southern Baptist Convention may be numbered.

At the SBC's annual meeting June 11-12 in Indianapolis, representatives will vote on whether to amend the denomination's constitution to essentially ban churches with any women pastors — and not just in the top job. That measure received overwhelming approval in a preliminary vote last year.

Leaders of First Baptist — which has given millions to Southern Baptist causes and has been involved with the convention since its 19th century founding — are bracing for a possible expulsion.

"We are grieved at the direction the SBC has taken," the church said in a statement.

And it's not alone.

By some estimates, the proposed ban could affect hundreds of congregations and have a disproportionate impact on predominantly Black churches.

The vote is partly the culmination of events set in motion two years ago.

That's when a Virginia pastor contacted SBC officials to contend that First Baptist and four nearby churches were "out of step" with denominational doctrine that says only men can be pastors. The SBC Credentials Committee launched a formal inquiry in April.

Southern Baptists disagree on which ministry jobs this doctrine refers to. Some say it's just the senior pastor, others that a pastor is anyone who preaches and exercises spiritual authority.

And in a Baptist tradition that prizes local church autonomy, critics say the convention shouldn't enshrine a constitutional rule based on one interpretation of its non-binding doctrinal statement.

By some estimates, women are working in pastoral roles in hundreds of SBC-linked churches, a fraction of the nearly 47,000 across the denomination.

But critics say the amendment would amount to a further narrowing in numbers and mindset for the

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nation's largest Protestant denomination, which has moved steadily rightward in recent decades.

They also wonder if the SBC has better things to do.

It has struggled to respond to sexual abuse cases in its churches. A former professor at a Southern Baptist seminary in Texas was indicted in May on a charge of falsifying a record about alleged sexual abuse by a student in order to obstruct a federal investigation into sexual misconduct in the convention.

SBC membership has dipped below 13 million, nearly a half-century low. Baptismal rates are in long-term decline.

The amendment, if passed, wouldn't prompt an immediate purge. But it could keep the denomination's leaders busy for years, investigating and ousting churches.

Many predominantly Black churches have men as lead pastors but assign pastor titles to women in other areas, such as worship and children's ministries.

"To disfellowship like-minded churches ... based on a local-church governance decision dishonors the spirit of cooperation and the guiding tenets of our denomination," wrote Pastor Gregory Perkins, president of the SBC's National African American Fellowship, to denominational officials.

The controversy complicates the already-choppy efforts by the mostly white denomination to diversify and overcome its legacy of slavery and segregation.

Amendment proponents say the convention needs to reinforce its doctrinal statement, the Baptist Faith and Message, which says the office of pastor is "limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

"If we won't stand on this issue and be unapologetically biblical, then we won't stand on anything," said amendment proponent Mike Law, pastor of Arlington Baptist Church in Virginia.

Since Baptist churches are independent, the convention can't tell them what to do or whom to appoint as a pastor.

But the convention can decide which churches are in and which are out. And even without a formal amendment, its Executive Committee has begun telling churches with women pastors that they're out. That included one of its largest, Saddleback Church of California.

When Saddleback and a small Kentucky church appealed to the annual meeting in 2023, delegates overwhelmingly refused to take them back.

The amendment would give such enforcement actions more teeth.

Some churches with women pastors quit on their own in the past year. They range from Elevation Church, a North Carolina megachurch, to First Baptist of Richmond, Virginia, which had close SBC ties from the convention's founding.

Law contended the issue has been a "canary in the coalmine" for liberal denominations, several of which began ordaining women and later LGBTQ+ people.

"Southern Baptists are facing a decisive moment," he said in a video on a pro-amendment website. "Here's the trajectory of doing nothing: Soon Southern Baptist churches will start openly supporting homosexual clergy, same-sex marriage and eventually transgenderism."

Others point out that Pentecostal and other denominations have had women pastors for generations and remain theologically conservative.

Some SBC churches with women pastors are heavily involved with the convention, while others have minimal connections and identify more closely with historically Black or other progressive denominations.

Also, some SBC churches interpret the 2000 faith statement as only applying to senior pastors. As long as the church leader is male, women can serve other pastoral roles, they say.

Such churches may leave if SBC leaders interfere with congregations following "their conscience, biblical convictions, and values by recognizing women can receive a pastoral gift from God in partnership with male leadership," said Dwight McKissic, a pastor from Arlington, Texas, on the social media platform X.

Other churches say women can be in any role, including senior pastor, and churches can agree to disagree if they embrace most of the SBC faith statement.

That category includes First Baptist of Alexandria. Though its current senior pastor is male, it recognizes "God's calling to ordain any qualified individual, male or female, for pastoral ministry," the church said in

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a statement.

First Baptist leaders declined interview requests, but it has posted extensively about the issue on its website.

It said while it plans to send representatives to the SBC annual meeting, it was warned to expect a motion to deny them voting privileges.

"I do believe we need to be heard and represented," Senior Pastor Robert Stephens told members in a video-recorded meeting.

The SBC's top administrative body opposes the amendment. Investigating churches' compliance would consume an unsustainable amount of time and energy over something that shouldn't be a litmus test for fellowship, wrote Jeff Iorg, president of the SBC Executive Committee, in a Baptist Press commentary.

Baptist Women in Ministry, which began within the SBC in the 1980s but now works in multiple Baptist denominations, has taken note. The Rev. Meredith Stone, its executive director, said some women pastors within the SBC have reached out for support.

The group plans to release a documentary, "Midwives of a Movement," about 20th century trailblazers for women in Baptist ministry, on the eve of the SBC meeting.

"As they are saying women have less value to God than men in the church, we want to make sure that women know they do have equal value and that there are no limits to how they follow Christ in the work of the church," Stone said.

Today in History: June 7

Supreme Court rejects contraceptive ban in *Griswold v. Connecticut*

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, June 7, the 159th day of 2024. There are 207 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 7, 1965, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, struck down, 7-2, a Connecticut law used to prosecute a Planned Parenthood clinic in New Haven for providing contraceptives to married couples.

On this date:

In 1712, Pennsylvania's colonial assembly voted to ban the further importation of enslaved people.

In 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia offered a resolution to the Continental Congress stating "That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States."

In 1848, French painter and sculptor Paul Gauguin was born in Paris.

In 1892, Homer Plessy, a "Creole of color," was arrested for refusing to leave a whites-only car of the East Louisiana Railroad. (Ruling on his case, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld "separate but equal" racial segregation, a concept it renounced in 1954.)

In 1929, the sovereign state of Vatican City came into existence as copies of the Lateran Treaty were exchanged in Rome.

In 1942, the Battle of Midway ended in a decisive victory for American naval forces over Imperial Japan, marking a turning point in the Pacific War.

In 1967, author-critic Dorothy Parker, famed for her caustic wit, died in New York at age 73.

In 1981, Israeli military planes destroyed a nuclear power plant in Iraq, a facility the Israelis charged could have been used to make nuclear weapons.

In 1993, Ground was broken for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland.

In 1998, in a crime that shocked the nation, James Byrd Jr., a 49-year-old Black man, was hooked by a chain to a pickup truck and dragged to his death in Jasper, Texas. (Two white men were later sentenced to death for the crime.)

In 2021, Maggie Murdaugh, 52, and her son Paul Murdaugh, 22, from a prominent South Carolina legal family, were found shot and killed on their family's land. (In the aftermath of the deaths, Maggie Murdaugh's

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husband, Alex Murdaugh, would be jailed on dozens of charges, including the theft of millions of dollars in legal settlements.)

In 2006, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (AH'-boo MOO'-sahb ahl-zahr-KOW'-ee), the founder of al-Qaida in Iraq, was killed by a U.S. airstrike on his safe house.

In 2013, Death row inmate Richard Ramirez, 53, the serial killer known as California's "Night Stalker," died in a hospital.

In 2016, Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump claimed their parties' presidential nominations following contests in New Jersey, California, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota and South Dakota.

In 2018, the Washington Capitals claimed their first NHL title with a victory over the Vegas Golden Knights in Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final in Las Vegas.

In 2022, Russia claimed to have nearly taken full control of one of the two provinces that make up Ukraine's Donbas, bringing the Kremlin closer to its goal of capturing the eastern industrial heartland of coal mines and factories.

In 2023, smoke from Canadian wildfires poured into the U.S. East Coast and Midwest, covering the capitals of both nations in an unhealthy haze, holding up flights at major airports and prompting people to fish out the face masks of the coronavirus pandemic.

Today's Birthdays: Movie director James Ivory is 96. Actor Virginia McKenna is 93. Singer Tom Jones is 84. Poet Nikki Giovanni is 81. Former talk show host Jenny Jones is 78. Americana singer-songwriter Willie Nile is 76. Actor Anne Twomey is 73. Actor Liam Neeson is 72. Actor Colleen Camp is 71. Author Louise Erdrich (UR'-drihk) is 70. Actor William Forsythe is 69. Record producer L.A. Reid is 68. Latin pop singer Juan Luis Guerra is 67. Former Vice President Mike Pence is 65. Rock singer-musician Gordon Gano (The Violent Femmes) is 61. Rock musician Eric Kretz (Stone Temple Pilots) is 58. Rock musician Dave Navarro is 57. Actor Helen Baxendale is 54. Sen. Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., is 52. Actor Karl Urban is 52. TV personality Bear Grylls is 50. Rock musician Eric Johnson (The Shins) is 48. Actor Adrienne Frantz is 46. Actor-comedian Bill Hader is 46. Actor Anna Torv is 45. Actor Larisa Oleynik (oh-LAY'-nihk) is 43. Former tennis player Anna Kournikova is 43. Actor Michael Cera is 36. Actor Shelley Buckner is 35. Rapper Iggy Azalea is 34. Actor-model Emily Ratajkowski is 33. Rapper Fetty Wap is 33.