

Groton Daily Independent

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Wednesday, June 19

Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes with ham, mixed vegetables, sunset salad, whole wheat bread.
Legion at Battle of Omaha, Neb.
U12 W/R hosts Watertown, 5:30 p.m. (2)
U10 R/B hosts Milbank, 6 p.m. (2)
SB at Warner (U8 at 5:30 p.m. (1), U10 Blk at 6:30 p.m. (1), U12 at 7:30 p.m. (1))
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.

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



Groton CM&A: Family Fun Night, 7 p.m. (Julia (Grenz) and Jordan Kroll will be sharing their message)
Olive Grove Men's League

Thursday, June 20

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, vegetable capri blend, apricots, whole wheat bread.
Junior Teeners at Redfield, 5:30 p.m. (2)
U12 R/B hosts Aberdeen 11-12, 5:30 p.m. (2)
U10 B/W hosts Aberdeen, 5:30 p.m. (2)
U8 R/B at Claremont
SB at Webster (U8 at 6 p.m. (1), U10 Blk at 6 p.m. (2), U12 at 7 p.m. (2))
SB U14 at Oakes, 6 p.m. (1)
Wage Memorial Library Story Time, 10 a.m.
Transit Fundraiser, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Groton Community Center
Youth Golf Lessons at Olive Grove

Friday, June 21

Senior Menu: Chicken pasta salad, grape juice, dinner roll, apple crisp, carrots and peas.
Junior Legion at Clark Tournament
Junior Teeners at Aberdeen Smitty's, 5 p.m. (2)
SB 10 Gld at Frederick 6 p.m. (1)
T-Ball G/B scrimmage, 6 p.m.
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1440

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'Parole in Place' Policy

President Joe Biden unveiled a new policy yesterday granting a path to permanent residency for hundreds of thousands of immigrants without legal status in the US. The "parole in place" program applies to people with no criminal record who have lived in the US for at least 10 years and have been legally married to a US citizen as of June 17.

Those who qualify can live and work in the US for three years while they apply for citizenship. An estimated 500,000 spouses and 50,000 children, with a parent married to a US citizen, stand to meet the basic requirements—there are roughly 1.1 million immigrants in the US with citizen spouses.

Announced on the 12th anniversary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, the policy also includes faster work permit approvals for DACA applicants and follows Biden's recent executive action to reduce migrants at the US-Mexico border. Applications are expected to open by the end of summer.

Boeing CEO Testifies

Boeing CEO David Calhoun appeared before a Senate investigative panel yesterday amid concerns about safety lapses in Boeing's production line and its handling of whistleblowers. Calhoun, who has led the company since 2020, will retire at year's end.

Boeing has experienced a series of incidents that have renewed scrutiny on its manufacturing process, including fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019 that killed 346 people, as well as a midair door plug blowout on an Alaska Airlines flight in January. The aerospace company faces multiple federal investigations over its quality control and previously submitted an action plan to Congress proposing improvements to its internal audit procedures. Boeing oversees much of its own inspection oversight, particularly after the Federal Aviation Administration outsourced much of the work to Boeing in the early 2000s.

Ahead of Calhoun's testimony, a whistleblower came forward with allegations that Boeing used faulty parts on its planes due to improper storing and tracking practices.

Club Q Shooter Sentenced

A federal judge sentenced Club Q mass shooter Anderson Lee Aldrich to 190 years and 55 concurrent life sentences in prison yesterday after the 24-year-old pleaded guilty to 74 hate crime and gun charges. The shooter is currently serving a sentence of more than 2,000 years in Colorado for murder charges related to the attack at the LGBTQ+ nightclub.

The shooter, who is nonbinary, opened fire in November 2022 with an AR-15 style rifle and a handgun at Club Q in Colorado Springs, killing five people and wounding 19 others. The shooter was tackled and disarmed by clubgoers before being taken into custody. The massacre came over a year after the assailant was arrested for threatening to detonate a bomb and commit a mass shooting.

The Justice Department defines hate crimes as harmful, and often violent, acts against individuals on the basis of specified group characteristics like religious affiliation, sexuality, or race. Nearly 14,000 hate crimes are reported in the US annually.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The Edmonton Oilers stave off elimination in topping the Florida Panthers 5-3; Panthers lead 3-2 in the best-of-seven Stanley Cup Final series.

Justin Timberlake arrested for driving while intoxicated in the Hamptons after failing field sobriety tests; Timberlake pleaded not guilty to the charge.

Netflix announces "in-person experience" venues set to open in Dallas, Texas, and King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, in 2025; the venues would combine shopping, food, and experiences tied to Netflix's major franchises.

Universal Music Group partners with AI startup SoundLabs to offer up "voice-cloning" technology to its roster of artists.

Anouk Aimée, Oscar-nominated French actress best known for starring role in "A Man and a Woman," dies at 92.

Science & Technology

Astronomers witness the activation of a massive black hole roughly 300 million light-years away; nearby matter began falling inside, releasing significant amounts of radiation that reached Earth in late 2019.

Ancient earthquake repositioned India's Ganges River by an estimated 60 miles roughly 2,500 years ago, potentially largest such event on record.

Engineers design robot capable of jumping close to 400 feet in the air, more than 100 times its own height; current robot-jumping record is around 110 feet.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.3%, Dow +0.2%, Nasdaq +0.03%).

AI chipmaker Nvidia becomes world's most valuable company with market capitalization of \$3.3T.

Retail sales stagnate, growing 0.1% in May as April sales are revised down to a 0.2% drop.

Electric vehicle maker Fisker—valued at \$2.9B when it went public in 2020—files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy after reportedly failing to secure investment from Nissan.

Autonomous trucking solutions company Waabi raises \$200M in Series B funding led by Uber and Khosla Ventures.

Politics & World Affairs

New Mexico's South Fork Fire places at least 7,000 residents under an evacuation order as the wildfire grows to over 20,000 acres as of this writing.

Record-breaking heat wave sweeps through Midwest, Northeast.

House Ethics Committee has issued 25 subpoenas as part of expanded probe into Rep. Matt Gaetz's (R, FL-1) alleged conduct, including sexual misconduct, drug use, accepting improper gifts, and obstruction; Gaetz denies all allegations.

US federal budget deficit projected to rise 27% to \$1.9T this year; jump is attributed to factors including increases in foreign military spending, student loan relief, and Medicaid.

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Airport, soccer field discussion continues

What's in store for the city's airport?

Airplane hangars. Solar runway lights. Contracts for use of the runway. But some of those improvements may not be immediate.

The Groton City Council received an update on the airport located north of town during Tuesday's council meeting.

Darrell Hillestad asked the council to allow him to work with IMEG and City Attorney Drew Johnson on a couple of projects, including figuring out plans for hangar spaces and agreements for crop dusters to use the runway.

There have been a few requests from individuals to use the runway for agriculture purposes, but there currently isn't any type of agreement for that usage, Hillestad said. That could lead to damage to the runway.

"It's a nice airport, and I want to keep it that way," he said. "It's something we can't ignore."

Hillestad suggested a \$2,500 fee for a contract, with 25 cents paid per acre they spray. If the individuals doesn't do any damage at the runway, they could get \$2,000 back.

However, he added, any contract will go back before the council before being approved.

Some improvements may take longer, as Hillestad said he's been told any hangar construction has to be approved by the federal government, so it probably won't happen quickly.

A temporary trailer house has been placed at the airport for meetings or to get out of the sun, he said.

Soccer field building being priced out

The city plans to work with the school district and Groton Soccer Association on options for a new building at the soccer fields on the west side of town.

The current sheds at the soccer fields are damaged and need to be fixed and/or replaced. Whitney Sombke with the soccer association asked about a timeframe on getting a new building or repairs as there

is a youth soccer camp scheduled for late July. She added the soccer association is happy to contribute.

Councilman Brian Bahr asked to look for pricing on prebuilt buildings so the city, school district and soccer association can discuss a new building.

Referencing some pre-built building prices, Bahr added, "\$6,600 bucks is a lot of money, but it's for the kids."

- Elizabeth Varin

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Rumble in the Jungle set for Monday and Tuesday

The first Rumble in the Jungle boys basketball team camp will be held Monday and Tuesday in Groton. It is scheduled to be an annual event. The public can come and watch - there is a \$5 admission fee. Tuesday will be bracket play with that schedule being released on Monday.

Monday, June 24

Time

Noon
1:00 p.m.
2:00 p.m.
3:00 p.m.
4:00 p.m.
5:00 p.m.
6:00 p.m.

Court #1

Groton vs. RC Christian
Dawson-Boyd vs. Lennox
Groton vs. Viborg-Hurley
Dawson-Boyd vs. Dakota Valley
Groton vs. Mobridge
Dawson-Boyd vs. RC Christian
Situational Tournament

Court #2

Viborg-Hurley vs. Mobridge
Dakota Valley vs. Aberdeen Christian
Mobridge vs. RC Christian
Lennox vs. Aberdeen Christian
Viborg-Hurley vs. Aberdeen Christian
Lennox vs. Dakota Valley
Situational Tournament



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Meade County Fatal UTV Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: 21601 Ricard Road, six miles northeast of Piedmont, SD
When: 3:47 p.m. Monday, June 17, 2024

Driver 1: Male, 47, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2020 Tracker XTR1000 UTV
Seatbelt/Helmet Use: No
Passenger 1: Female, 46, serious, non-life-threatening injuries
Seatbelt/Helmet Use: No

Meade County, S.D.- A 47-year-old man died Monday afternoon in a single vehicle crash six miles north-east of Piedmont, SD.

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

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2020 Tracker XTR1000 UTV was traveling north on Ricard Road about three miles south of Tilford Road. The Tracker failed to negotiate a turn, left the roadway and struck a fence in the ditch that was part of a cattle guard in the road. The Tracker tripped and overturned. Both the driver and passenger were ejected from the vehicle. The driver died from his injuries at the scene. The passenger was transported to a nearby hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

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

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

Names Released in Meade County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: SD Highway 79, mile marker 124, 11 miles north of Sturgis, SD

When: 10:21 a.m. Friday, June 14, 2024

Driver 1: Cody Alan Thomson, 44-year-old male from Summerset, SD, no injuries

Vehicle 1: 2022 Ford F-350 Super Duty

Seatbelt Use: No

Passenger 1: Steven Russell Baumker, 44-year-old male from Rapid City, SD, no injuries

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Driver 2: Carol Jean Olson, 83-year-old female from Faith, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 2: 2016 Chrysler 300

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Meade County, S.D.- An 83-year-old woman died Friday morning when a trailered boat came unhitched and collided with her vehicle head-on near Sturgis, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Carol J. Olson, the driver of a 2016 Chrysler 300 was traveling south on SD Highway 79 near mile marker 124. At the same location, Cody A. Thomson, the driver of a 2022 Ford F-350 pulling a trailered pontoon boat, was traveling north when the trailer coupler disconnected from the pickup and the safety chains failed to control the trailer and boat. The trailer and boat entered the southbound lane and collided with the Chrysler. The trailer, boat, and Chrysler came to rest on the southbound shoulder and in the west ditch. Olson received fatal injuries. There were no injuries to the driver and passenger of the pick-up.

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

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

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June 10-16, 2024

Last week was another busy one out in Washington. Our main focus this past week in Washington was the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), an annual piece of legislation that authorizes funding for our national defense. This is the tenth NDAA that I have helped author as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC). I am pleased to report that this year's NDAA includes several wins for our national defense, such as a \$25 billion topline increase in defense spending. It also includes wins for our men and women in uniform, including a 4.5 percent pay raise for military members. More to come on what else is in the NDAA later this week. Hear about the rest of my week in my Weekly Round[s] Up:



South Dakotans I met with: South Dakota members of the National Association of Home Builders; Ryan Rollinger, Principal at Harrisburg High School; students from Dell Rapids High School; South Dakota students participating in the National History Day National Competition; and Ronan Maher, a high school student from Sioux Falls who earned the Congressional Award – Gold Medal.

Speaking of South Dakota students, my office is currently hiring South Dakota college students to serve as interns. Positions are available in our Washington, D.C. office and our state offices in Sioux Falls, Pierre and Rapid City. Fall internships typically run from September to December but can be tailored to fit specific schedules. Interns will receive a stipend and our office will work closely with all universities to meet the necessary criteria for interns to receive college credit. Get more information and apply at rounds.senate.gov/internships.

Met with South Dakotans from: Dell Rapids, Harrisburg, Rapid City and Sioux Falls.

Other meetings: Bob Thomas, treasurer at the Alzheimer's Impact Movement; and Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google to discuss AI policy.

Votes taken: 7 – most of these were on nominations to judge positions in Massachusetts and positions on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. We also voted on the Right to IVF Act. I voted no. Similar to the earlier bill on contraception, Senate Democrats are once again bringing a vote on a non-issue to scare the American people. IVF is legal and available in every state across the country. My Senate Republican colleagues and I all introduced a resolution to reaffirm our support for IVF.

Hearings: I attended one hearing in the Senate Banking Committee, where we heard from Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Director Rohit Chopra. I had the opportunity to ask him about a variety of topics impacting financial customers in the United States, including artificial intelligence and Regulation E. You can watch a clip of that here.

Classified briefings: I had one classified briefing on carrier survivability.

Title IX rule: I introduced a Congressional Review Act resolution of disapproval with my colleagues Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.) and Bill Cassidy (R-La.) to save Title IX from a Biden administration rule that tramples on rights for girls and women. Broadly, opposition to this Title IX rule is targeted at the Education Department importing Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) protections into Title IX, extending protection to gender identity and sexual orientation. This radical shift will allow biological males who identify as females to compete in women's and girls' sports. The Biden Administration's glaring misinterpretation of the protections offered by Title IX will harm women who have the right to a level playing field. You can read more about this CRA here.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Castlewood, Fort Pierre, Highmore, Huron, Miller, Rapid City and Sioux Falls.

Steps taken this past week: 49,016 steps or 24.4 miles



Lawsuit over abortion amendment challenged in federal court

Court fight comes after statewide poll showed majority support among South Dakotans for Constitutional Amendment G on Nov. 5 ballot.

**By Stu Whitney
South Dakota News Watch**

The organization behind a constitutional amendment to legalize abortion in South Dakota has asked a federal judge to prevent an anti-abortion group from pursuing action against the ballot measure in state court.

Dakotans for Health, which sponsored the Amendment G petition drive, filed a motion Tuesday to enforce a 2023 permanent injunction that it said invalidates a lawsuit filed June 13 in Minnehaha County by the Life Defense Fund, which has actively opposed the abortion measure.

The Life Defense Fund, led by Republican state legislator Jon Hansen and longtime anti-abortion advocate Leslee Unruh, alleged in their lawsuit that petition circulators violated a residency affidavit requirement introduced into state law in 2018.

That law was later superseded by Senate Bill 180, which was enjoined in federal court in January 2023 as part of a permanent injunction signed by U.S. District Judge Lawrence Piersol.

Dakotans for Health co-founder Rick Weiland said in a statement Tuesday that Hansen and Unruh are "wrong on the facts and wrong on the law. They aren't even aware that the law they are trying to use to claim our petition should be invalidated was itself invalidated over a year and half ago and no longer exists."

Hansen did not immediately comment Tuesday but told News Watch that Life Defense Fund's lawyer will be sending a statement.

Amendment on Nov. 5 ballot

South Dakota is currently under a 2005 state trigger law activated in June 2022 when the Supreme Court left it up to states to determine reproductive rights with its ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.

The law makes it a Class 6 felony for anyone "who administers to any pregnant female or prescribes or procures for any pregnant female" a means for an abortion, except to save the life of the mother.

If passed, Amendment G would prevent the state from regulating abortions during the first trimester. During the second trimester, the state could regulate the abortion decision, but any regulation must



Registered voters sign a petition for a constitutional amendment to expand abortion rights in South Dakota at the Minnehaha County Administration Building on May 26, 2023, in Sioux Falls, S.D. The amendment has been certified for the Nov. 5 general election ballot. (Photo: Stu Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)

(Photo: Stu Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)

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be reasonably related to the physical health of the mother. During the third trimester, abortion could be prohibited except if it is necessary to preserve the life or health of the pregnant woman, according to her physician.

On May 16, South Dakota Secretary of State Monae Johnson's office certified the measure for the Nov. 5 ballot, saying that a random sample showed 46,098 signatures were deemed valid, well over the threshold of 35,017.

Nearly a month later, the Life Defense Fund and lawyer Sara Frankenstein of Rapid City filed a complaint in state circuit court asking that the amendment be disqualified. It also asked the court to prohibit "Dakotans for Health and those who worked with or for it" from being involved in petition in petition or ballot measure campaigns for a period of four years.

Lawsuit continues same arguments

Of the five counts detailed in the complaint as alleged violations, several are recast from clashes between Life Defense Fund and Dakotans for Health during the petition campaign and legislative session.

Among those accusations are that circulators left petitions unattended, failed to provide a circulator handout as required by law, and purposely confused the public with a "bait and switch" involving the grocery tax and abortion measures.

Attorney General Marty Jackley sent a letter to Dakotans for Health on Oct. 31, 2023, that mentioned "video and photographic evidence" of such encounters and warned of potentially illegal actions taken by petition circulators. No charges were filed.

Jim Leach, the Rapid City lawyer who represents Dakotans for Health, called the allegations "deception and overblown" in a February interview with News Watch.

The first count listed in the Life Defense Fund lawsuit alleges that Dakotans for Health circulators violated a residency affidavit requirement introduced into state law in 2018 with House Bill 1196, sponsored by former Republican state Rep. Mark Mickelson.

Coined the "Mickelson Law" by the plaintiffs, the law created a state registry of petition circulators and required them to submit personal information and wear identification badges. It included a provision that an affidavit be filed with the secretary of state's office with information attesting to residency of each petition circulator.

"Failure to substantially comply with the provisions of this section shall disqualify the petitions from a petition circulator not in substantial compliance with this section from being considered," the law read.

Former liberal blogger Cory Heidelberger sued the state and was represented by Leach, who argued that the law violated circulators' First Amendment rights based on their political viewpoint. They were successful and the law was struck down.

Then came Senate Bill 180, passed in 2021 with a similar objective as HB 1094 but focused solely on



Dakotans for Health co-founder Rick Weiland talks to supporters at a press conference May 1, 2024, at the downtown library in Sioux Falls, S.D. Weiland said his group collected 55,000 signatures for a ballot amendment to enshrine the right to abortion in the South Dakota Constitution. (Photo: Stu Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)

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paid circulators, citing the state's need to protect the integrity of its elections.

Judge Piersol issued a preliminary injunction in response to a lawsuit from Leach and Dakotans for Health, and on Nov. 1, 2022, the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the injunction, calling the law's disclosure requirements "intrusive and burdensome ... as such, they are a severe burden on speech."

The injunction was remanded to district court, where Piersol ruled that the state was "permanently enjoined from enforcing Senate Bill 180."

Life Defense Fund argued in its current complaint that because "no bill amending the Mickelson Law is currently in force, the Mickelson Law stands in its original form, unamended. The Mickelson Law is the current law in effect in South Dakota."

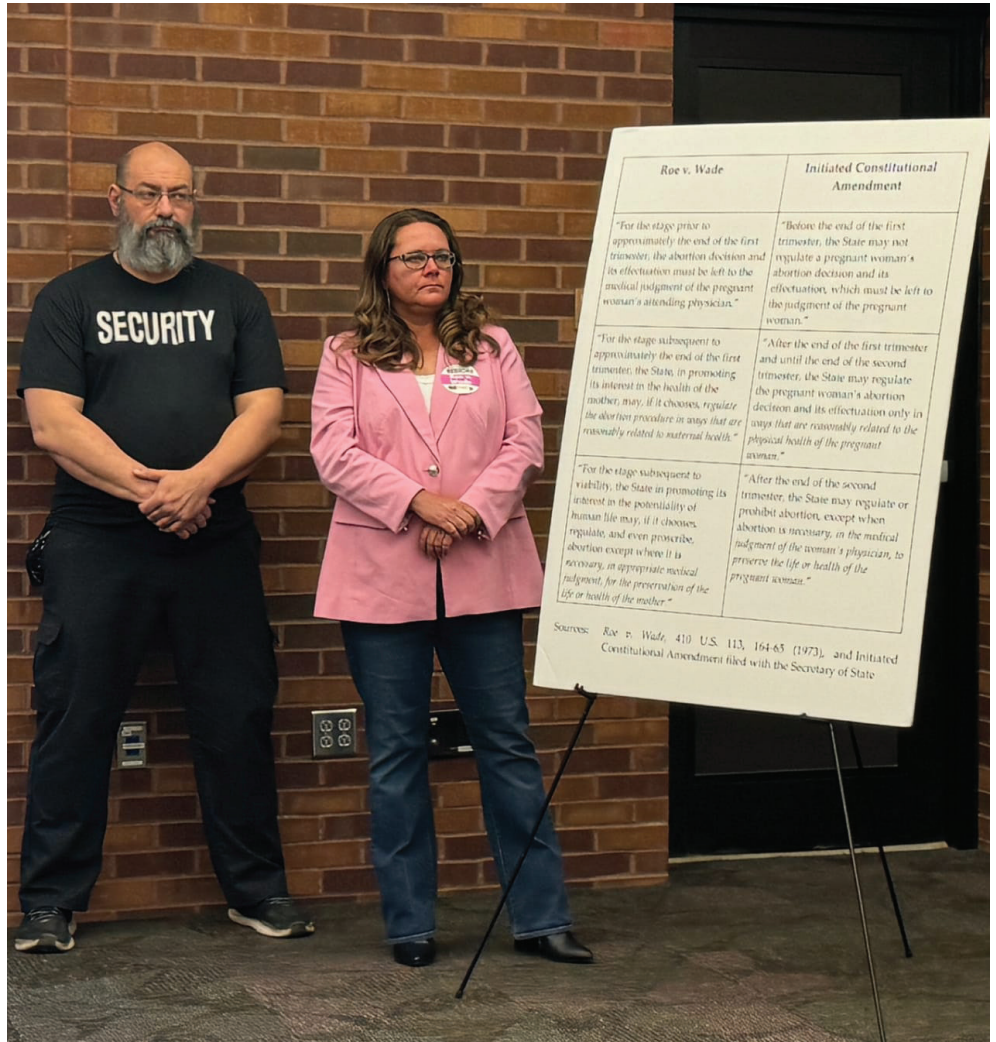
Dakotans for Health, in its federal filing, included a document showing lawyers for the state acknowledging in writing to the plaintiffs on Jan. 24, 2023: "The permanent injunction includes the 30-day residency requirement challenged in your lawsuit."

May poll found majority support for amendment

A statewide poll co-sponsored by News Watch and the Chiesman Center for Democracy at the University of South Dakota conducted in May showed that 53% of respondents support Constitutional Amendment G, compared to 35% opposed and 11% undecided.

That's an increase from a similar poll conducted in November 2023, when 46% of respondents said they were for the measure and 44% were against it.

This story was 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.



Tiffany Campbell of Dakotans for Health (right) stands next to a security guard at a press conference May 1, 2024, at the downtown library in Sioux Falls, S.D. Campbell helped lead a petition drive for a ballot amendment to enshrine the right to abortion in the South Dakota Constitution. (Photo: Stu Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)

(Photo: Stu Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)

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Groton Transit Fundraiser

Thursday, June 20th, 2024

5:00 pm - 7:00pm at

Groton Community Center

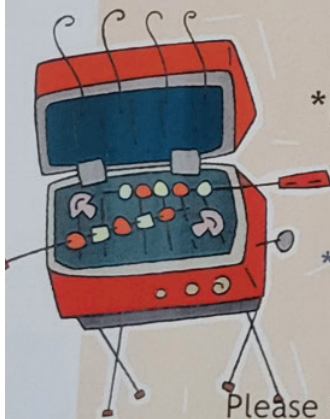
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First-Inning Burst Enough To Lead American Legion Post 77 19U Past Groton Post 39

By GameChanger Media

Chippewa Falls Post 77 19U scored nine runs in the first inning, which helped them defeat Groton Post 39 13-3 on Tuesday in the Battle of Omaha Tournament.

Groton Post 39 were the first to get on the board in the first when Carter Simon drew a walk, scoring one run.

American Legion Post 77 19U flipped the game on its head in the bottom of the first, scoring nine runs on five hits to take a 9-1 lead. The biggest blow in the inning was a double by Brayden Hagmann that drove in three.

American Legion Post 77 19U added to their early lead in the bottom of the second inning after Parker Krizan singled, and Brecken Boisvert scored after tagging up, each scoring one run.

American Legion Post 77 19U added to their early lead in the bottom of the third inning after Krizan singled, and Brady Smith hit into a fielder's choice, each scoring one run.

Carter Berg earned the win for American Legion Post 77 19U. They surrendered two hits and three runs (two earned) over three innings, striking out two and walking six. Kellen Antonsen pitched three innings in relief for Groton Post 39. The reliever allowed three hits and two runs (one earned) while, striking out one and walking none. Jarret Erdmann took the loss for Groton Post 39. The reliever went two-thirds of an inning, giving up four runs (three earned) on three hits, striking out none and walking four. Gavin Englund began the game for Groton Post 39. The starting pitcher allowed three hits and seven runs over one-third of an inning, striking out none and walking four.

Bradin Althoff, Colby Dunker, and Teylor Diegel each collected one hit for Groton Post 39. Simon led Groton Post 39 with one run batted in. Ryan Groeblinghoff paced Groton Post 39 with two walks. Overall, the team had patience at the plate, accumulating six walks for the game.

Hagmann went 3-for-4 at the plate to lead American Legion Post 77 19U in hits. Krizan, Smith, Lucas Logslett, and Hagmann each drove in two runs for American Legion Post 77 19U. American Legion Post 77 19U had patience at the plate, accumulating eight walks for the game. Ethan Sowieja and Ian Denning led the team with two bases on balls each. American Legion Post 77 19U turned one double play in the game.

Groton Post #39 will play Perham Buzz U18 at 10 a.m. today in the final day of the Battle of Omaha Tournament.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Explaining the lawsuit against South Dakota's abortion-rights ballot measure

Claims are rooted in years of prior legislating and litigating

BY: SETH TUPPER - JUNE 19, 2024 6:00 AM

A new court fight over South Dakota's abortion-rights ballot measure could hinge on a complicated answer to a simple question: Does a set of six-year-old petition requirements still exist?

The court fight started Thursday, when the Life Defense Fund filed a lawsuit in state court. The lawsuit challenges the legitimacy of a citizen-initiated Nov. 5 ballot question that would reinstate abortion rights. The Life Defense Fund is a ballot question committee organized to oppose the measure.

Dakotans for Health is the ballot question committee that supports the measure and gathered the petition signatures to put it on the ballot. Instead of filing a response in state court, Dakotans for Health asked a federal judge on Tuesday to intervene on its behalf. To understand why, it's necessary to retrace a series of legislative and court battles dating to 2018.

That's when the Republican-dominated Legislature enacted restrictions on the petition process that citizens use to place measures on the ballot. The restrictions were intended to prevent non-South Dakotans from circulating petitions, in part by requiring petitioners to provide information proving their South Dakota residency.

One year later, in 2019, some lawmakers said out-of-state petitioners were circumventing the law. So the Legislature repealed part of the 2018 law and replaced it with a new law. Among other things, the 2019 law required all petition circulators to publicly disclose personal information including their address, email and phone number.

A ballot question committee, SD Voice, and a liberal blogger, Cory Heidelberger, successfully sued to block the 2019 law. They said the law violated their First Amendment free speech rights, had a chilling effect on petition circulators, and imposed "unwarranted new restrictions on the ballot measure process, for the purpose of further consolidating power in South Dakota's dominant political party."

In 2020, legislators responded with another new law applying similar requirements, but only to paid petition circulators. Dakotans for Health successfully sued to block that law. A federal appellate judge in the case wrote, "While South Dakota has important interests in protecting the integrity of the ballot initiative process, it has no interest in enforcing overbroad restrictions that likely violate the Constitution."

Both the 2019 and 2020 laws included a 30-day residency requirement for petition circulators. That specific requirement was challenged in yet another lawsuit, filed by the League of Women Voters. The league agreed to drop its narrower lawsuit when Dakotans for Health succeeded with its wider suit.

According to the Life Defense Fund, the end result of all that lawmaking and litigating is that the original 2018 law still stands. It's still "good law," the group claims, because none of the subsequent bills that sought to repeal or amend it are currently in force. Those bills were challenged by opponents and blocked by the courts.

The Life Defense Fund therefore asserts that the abortion-rights petitioners were obligated to comply with the 2018 law, which requires sworn statements including information proving the petitioners' South Dakota residency. The Life Defense Fund says Dakotans for Health failed to obey that law, and "therefore the entire petition is disqualified."

Dakotans for Health says the Life Defense Fund lawsuit is an illegal attempt to resurrect the 30-day residency requirement for petitioners and "flout" the related court decisions. That's why Dakotans for Health

is asking a federal judge to prevent any state court from enforcing the residency requirement.

There are other allegations in the Life Defense Fund lawsuit: petition circulators failed to provide a required handout to signers, some signatures were counted as valid even though they'd been crossed out on the petition, some signers didn't list the county where they're registered to vote, some signers were allegedly duped into thinking they were signing a petition about repealing the sales tax on groceries, and so on.

"This will be proven by witness testimony," Sara Frankenstein, the attorney for the Life Defense Fund, told South Dakota Searchlight.

Dakotans for Health, represented by attorney Jim Leach, asserts that the Life Defense Fund's other allegations are insufficient to achieve its aim of removing the abortion-rights measure from the ballot. The petition circulator residency questions are "critical to the possible success" of the lawsuit, Dakotans for Health says in its federal court memorandum.

Nancy Turbak Berry, a Democratic former legislator who leads a coalition advocating for the ballot measure, panned the Life Defense Fund's legal strategy.

"It is a press release masquerading as a lawsuit, designed solely to allow the opponents of reproductive freedom to peddle more inflammatory lies," she said.

Dakotans for Health filed its ballot petition in May with about 55,000 signatures. The Secretary of State's Office validated the petition after sampling the signatures and estimating that 46,098 of them were from South Dakota registered voters — more than the 35,017 needed to qualify for the ballot.

Abortions are currently banned in South Dakota, except to "preserve the life of the pregnant female." The ballot measure would legalize abortions in the first trimester of pregnancy but allow the state to impose limited regulations in the second trimester and a ban in the third trimester, with exceptions for the life and health of the mother.

South Dakota Searchlight's Joshua Haiar contributed to this report.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

'Firehose' of information confronts legislators studying internet use by children and AI

Topics inspire hundreds of bills in statehouses across the country

BY: JOHN HULT - JUNE 18, 2024 7:16 PM

Hundreds of bills about artificial intelligence and internet use by minors have been filed in statehouses in recent years.

Even Heather Morton, who tracks state legislation as an analyst for the nonpartisan National Conference of State Legislatures, has a hard time keeping up.

"This probably feels a little bit like a firehose," Morton told South Dakota lawmakers.

"Yes, it does," said Rep. Mike Weisgram of Fort Pierre.

Weisgram is co-chairing a summer study committee, which met for the first time Tuesday in Pierre. The Legislature opted to appoint the committee after rejecting proposed regulations on AI and internet use by minors during last winter's legislative session.

Nearly all states studying AI, social media

More than 300 bills or resolutions have appeared on AI so far this year, Morton said.

There are proposals to force the disclosure of AI use, to require state agencies to develop AI policies, to ensure the provenance of the data used to train AI systems and to give patients the right to consent to the use of AI by their doctors.

There have even been proposals on "whether or not an AI system can or could be considered or granted status as a person," Morton said.

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The creation of study groups represented the single largest category of enacted AI laws, she said. That's what South Dakota did after rejecting a proposal from Sen. Liz Larson, D-Sioux Falls, that would have required disclosure of AI use in electoral communications, and another from Sen. David Johnson, R-Rapid City, to criminalize AI-generated "deepfakes" that put real people into sexually explicit photos or videos without their consent.

Lawmakers in Pierre did pass a law to criminalize AI-generated child pornography, which had the support of Attorney General Marty Jackley.

On the social media side, Arkansas and Ohio passed laws requiring kids to verify their age to use social media platforms. Those bills are on hold due to lawsuits filed on free speech grounds, Morton said. TikTok, meanwhile, challenged a Montana law banning that app within that state's borders.

"There is a preliminary injunction stopping Montana from enforcing that law," Morton said.

With internet pornography, Morton pointed to states like Texas, which passed a bill requiring age verification to access websites where a third or more of the content is adult-oriented. That particular law has survived an attempt to block it, but the adult entertainment industry's Free Speech Coalition has appealed in hopes of bringing it to the U.S. Supreme Court.

AI: Not new, but rapidly growing

José-Marie Griffiths, president of Dakota State University, said AI has been around in some form since the mid-1950s. There are four basic types:

Sequential algorithms, which are like a "recipe" of instructions used by systems to do a job, like alphabetizing names.

Pattern recognition, which can be used to find anomalies in datasets, making it possible for banks to send you an alert if your credit card is used in a foreign country.

Classification, which could involve using systems to differentiate between images, initially with the aid of a human.

Statistical prediction, which uses probabilities to determine what might come next.

As useful as AI can be, Griffiths said, the inevitability of its use by bad actors will require humans – and other AI systems – to combat new threats.

"Data poisoning," or inserting incorrect data into an algorithm to disrupt or do damage, is of particular concern. DSU is studying data poisoning on roadways, where someone could disrupt traffic signals by feeding bad data into the systems controlling them.

"But you could do a lot more damage by going into the GPS system and just tweaking it a couple of degrees, literal degrees, and you'd have chaos everywhere, because everybody would be just off enough," Griffiths said. "And that can be done."

Educators toe into AI without state regulation

Joe Graves, secretary of the Department of Education, said the state hasn't moved to regulate AI in schools.

"Frankly, DOE is not aware of any districts struggling or seeking direction on what to do or what not to do with artificial intelligence in the classroom," Graves said. "So right now, we're taking a fairly hands off approach."

The Associated School Boards of South Dakota has adopted a model AI policy, he said. It defines AI, prohibits its use by students unless directed to use it by their teachers, and says it's OK for teachers to use it in the creation and refinement of lesson plans but cautions against "overuse" for that purpose.

Last fall, the school boards, school administrators and state education department partnered with DSU for a four-session AI training with David De Jong, dean of the College of Education for DSU.

The idea was to get a sense of how teachers might use AI, and to teach them how to ask the right questions of systems like ChatGPT and use the answers to refine their lesson planning.

Graves told the committee he wasn't asked about social media or adult websites by the group's lead-

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ers and was therefore unprepared for that part of the discussion. But when asked about smartphones, Graves said, he's become personally convinced that they've had a deleterious effect on students – in and outside the classroom.

"I'm not sure that a smartphone should be in the hands of a teenager, period," Graves said.

Tech representative: Don't go too far

David Edmonson of the tech industry trade group TechNet said states should first build data privacy laws. Only then should they target specific uses of AI, and they should only create new agencies or regulations when existing ones are shown to be ill-equipped to handle AI-related problems.

To do otherwise could stifle innovation and slow the adoption of valuable AI technologies that create efficiencies or save lives, he said.

He pointed to a California proposal that would require a watermark on AI-generated content. The ubiquity of digital tools with some AI elements, Edmonson said, would mean that "basically every single advertising image that would exist in print, online or on TV, would have to have a disclosure stating that that AI was used."

With social media age verification laws, Edmonson's message was blunt: Don't pass them.

The trouble, he said, is that a law requiring proof of age sweeps up adults and forces them to hand off personal information to private companies to engage in speech protected by the First Amendment.

Yet Edmonson's group supports age verification for pornography site access, as long as there are clear markers, such as the Texas standard that requires verification for sites where a third or more of the content is adult-oriented.

That struck Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls, as illogical.

"If we can do age verification for pornography, I don't know why we couldn't do that for social media," Venhuizen said.

Rep. Bethany Soye, R-Sioux Falls, is also a member of the group. She introduced a bill for age verification on adult websites during the 2024 session. It passed the House of Representatives but failed in the Senate.

Soye asked Edmonson about suggestions that minors should not be allowed to use social media because social media companies require users to sign contracts.

"Another way that they're viewing this is that children don't have the capacity to enter into a contract," Soye said.

Edmonson called the contracts question "an evolving area of the law," and said he couldn't offer any expertise on it.

Soye said the committee should find constitutional scholars who could address that question at a future meeting. Other group members suggested bringing in Attorney General Jackley to discuss efforts to address tech issues across state lines, some of which involve concerted efforts by state attorneys general, or to create subcommittees to dig into specific aspects of social media, adult content and AI.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

Minnehaha auditor plans recount of two elections; commissioner calls timing 'irresponsible'

South Dakota snowbirds protest rejection of ballots in primary and worry their votes won't count in November election

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JUNE 18, 2024 4:29 PM

The top election official in South Dakota's most-populated county continued to cast doubt Tuesday on past election results reported by the county, while explaining plans to recount the results of two elections by hand and saying 132 ballots rejected during the June 4 primary will remain omitted from the official count.

Dozens of people crowded into a Minnehaha County Commission meeting in downtown Sioux Falls to hear County Auditor Leah Anderson's comments.

Anderson, a Republican elected in 2022, has associated with people who refuse to accept the results of the 2020 election. Last week, Anderson appeared in an online interview with election conspiracy theorist Mike Lindell, the CEO of the MyPillow company.

Recount of 2020 presidential election ballots

Anderson announced in a news release last week that she reviewed digital data from the 2020 presidential election in Minnehaha County, saying there were "alarming" discrepancies between the official canvassing results and audit logs. Anderson alleged there were over 24,000 ballots unaccounted for by tabulator machines, based on the data she reviewed. She presented a screenshot of a spreadsheet of her findings to the county commission Tuesday morning.

Anderson told reporters after the meeting she plans to open the sealed ballots cast during the 2020 election, review them all by hand and check them against the canvassed results from the election. She told commissioners the full audit will take more than a couple of weeks.

She told South Dakota Searchlight she will confer with the Minnehaha County state's attorney about the process, since it's "not clearly covered in South Dakota codified law," and that any audit would be public and conducted by an auditing board.

"I will move forward with it until someone tells me legally I can't," Anderson said.

County Commissioner Joe Kippley told Anderson it's "irresponsible" to release her findings when the county has just finished its primary election and is planning to recount three close races and conduct a 100% post-election hand recount in the next week.

"To release this and a screenshot of a spreadsheet that's supposed to be some smoking gun, there's just no 'there' there. And to release that halfway through? That would be my critique of the conduct here," Kippley said. "If we're looking for faith and credibility and integrity in a process, we should follow that process."

Rachel Soulek, director of the Division of Elections for the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office, said in an emailed statement that Anderson is making "some big claims she never brought forward to our office."

Soulek added that no discrepancies were found when the 2020 election results were canvassed days after the election. Soulek also suggested that the data Anderson reviewed might not be complete, since counties are only required to keep election materials for 22 months after the election.

"They were able to start ridding and recycling materials well before Ms. Anderson took office," Soulek said, in part. "... Ms. Anderson's claims are mostly taken out of context of what is fact, and used to run her own narrative."

Minnehaha County Commissioner Dean Karsky said he supports Anderson's plans.

"I, for one, am looking forward to an explanation of the 24,508 ballot difference," Anderson said. "It's the auditor's job to find that, and if something is there I'd like to know about it, what it is."

Auditor plans to audit 13,000 ballots in 3 hours

Anderson plans to conduct a full hand recount of the county's June 4 primary results at 10 a.m. on June

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25 in the Minnehaha County Administration Building. The ballots were originally tabulated by machines. Anderson will direct 51 workers to audit all 13,058 primary ballots, which she estimates will take three hours to complete. State statute requires a post-election audit of only 5% of ballots, but Anderson said that isn't "adequate."

At \$18 an hour and including breaks and training, she said that'll cost the county about \$4,500 — though she added that some workers have elected to volunteer or not accept payment for their time.

"For anyone who says they'd like to volunteer that time, we're going to make sure we have that documented ahead of time," Anderson told commissioners.

Moody County, north of Minnehaha County, conducted its post-election audit on June 13. Auditor Tawny Heinemann said it took her counting board of five people about an hour to audit 104 ballots for two races.

"It was very similar to our mock post-election audit time," Heinemann said. "Seeing and hearing from other auditors who've wrapped up their post-election audits, it seems pretty consistent: An hour for a hundred votes is kind of what I'm seeing, with most doing two races."

Heinemann added that "everything checked out and balanced" for Moody County's post-election audit. Counties have 15 days after the state canvass to conduct their post-election audit.

Minnehaha County's 100% post-election audit will follow a recount of three close local races on June 24 at 9 a.m.

RV snowbirds voice concerns with discarded primary ballots

Kevin and Carol Alishouse don't have a brick and mortar residence. They drive an RV and use the DakotaPost mail forwarding service when they're out of state.

Since they list the mail forwarding service as their voter registration address, they are placed in a "voting reservation," Kevin said. Precinct 4-16 in Minnehaha County consists only of DakotaPost clients. Your Best Address mail forwarding service is Precinct 5-16.

A precinct board rejected 132 absentee ballots in Precinct 4-16 during the primary election after the president of the South Dakota Canvassing Group, Jessica Pollema, challenged the ballots. Pollema also challenged ballots cast in Precinct 5-16, but those ballots were not thrown out.

The challenges were based on a South Dakota law that requires voters to live within the state for at least 30 days before registering to vote.

Now the Alishouses are worried their votes in the presidential election in November will be challenged and thrown out, Carol told commissioners. The Alishouses' ballots were one of the 41 accepted in Precinct 4-16 during the primary.

"We are now discriminating against a group of people who South Dakota welcomed and wanted their money. You take my taxes very willingly — thousands and thousands of dollars we pay here. We have concealed-carry licenses, we have hunting licenses," Carol said.

Auditor Leah Anderson said the rejected ballots will not be included in recounted races.

Meanwhile, Pennington County Auditor Cindy Mohler told South Dakota Searchlight that ballots cast in the primary election through mail forwarding services in the western South Dakota county were also challenged. The county's absentee board dismissed the challenge.

Amber Hobert, president of DakotaPost, said 173 of the company's 5,400 customers voted in the June primary — 132 of the ballots were rejected, and 41 were accepted.

Customers who list DakotaPost on their voter registration forms are legal South Dakota residents, Hobert said. They have to provide a copy of their South Dakota driver's license when they register to vote (or the last four digits of their Social Security number), and the business ensures that customers are present in-person when they sign up and provide two forms of ID approved through the U.S. Postal Service.

"These people are United States citizens. They're citizens of South Dakota, and the Constitution protects the right to vote," Hobert said. "I don't think the 30-day law is very well crafted, and there are some serious legal concerns around the law."

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.

Biden to unveil protections for some undocumented spouses, easier DACA work visas

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JUNE 18, 2024 9:13 AM

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration Tuesday will announce deportation protections for long-term undocumented immigrants married to U.S. citizens, along with quicker approval of work permits for those in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

President Joe Biden will formally make the announcement during an afternoon White House event to celebrate the 12th anniversary of the DACA program. The initiative was launched during the Obama administration and was meant to temporarily protect undocumented children brought into the United States without authorization.

The new policies were previewed by senior administration officials to reporters late Monday.

The new DACA policy will allow those recipients who have graduated from an accredited university and have an offer by a U.S. employer for a highly skilled job to quickly qualify for one of the existing temporary work visas, such as an H-1B visa.

The new policies came two weeks after Biden enacted his harshest crackdown on immigration with a partial ban on asylum proceedings at the southern border. Immigration remains a top issue for voters and for Biden's GOP rival, former President Donald Trump.

Democrats and immigration advocates have long pressed the Biden administration to instill permanent protections for the nearly 579,000 DACA recipients as they await a decision from the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals that could deem the program unlawful. The legal dispute is likely to head to the Supreme Court.

Many immigration policy experts have called DACA outdated, because there are now thousands of undocumented people who are not eligible for the program because they were not even born yet. To qualify, an undocumented person needs to have continuously resided in the U.S. since 2007.

Biden pushed to take action

Americans with undocumented spouses have expressed their frustration and pushed for the Biden administration to use executive action to grant relief for the more than 1.1 million Americans who fear their undocumented spouses could face deportation.

The deportation protections to those married to a U.S. citizen are a one-time action expected to allow roughly 500,000 noncitizen spouses and their children to apply for a lawful permanent residence — a green card — under certain requirements.

To qualify, a noncitizen must have resided in the U.S. for 10 years as of Monday, June 17, 2024, and be married to a U.S. citizen since that date as well. That spouse who is a noncitizen also cannot be deemed a security threat.

The Department of Homeland Security will consider those applications, which are expected to be open by the end of summer, on a case-by-case basis, a senior administration official said.

This move is also expected to affect roughly 50,000 children who are noncitizens and have an immigrant parent married to a U.S. citizen.

For those children to qualify, they have to be 21 or younger, unmarried "and the marriage between the parents has to have taken place before the child turned 18," a senior administration official said.

Under current U.S. immigration law, if a noncitizen enters the country without authorization, they are ineligible for permanent legal status and would be required to leave the U.S. and reenter legally through a green card application by their U.S. spouse, which is a lengthy process that can take years.

"The challenges and uncertainty of this process result in many eligible spouses not applying for permanent residence," a senior administration official said.

Application info coming

More information on the application and eligibility process will be published in the Federal Register in

the coming weeks, a senior administration official said.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which oversees the legal immigration system, has a similar program that allows noncitizens who are immediate family members of U.S. military service members to obtain green cards without leaving the country.

"This announcement utilizes existing authorities to keep families together," a senior administration official said. "But... only Congress can fix our broken immigration system."

Any immigration reform from Congress is unlikely, with Republicans in control of the House and Democrats controlling the Senate. A bipartisan border security deal fell apart earlier this year. There was no pathway to citizenship in that deal for DACA recipients or longtime immigrants.

The closest Congress came to bipartisan immigration reform was in 2013, when the "Gang of Eight," made up of four Republican and four Democratic senators, crafted a bill that would create a pathway to citizenship for millions of undocumented people.

It passed the Senate, but Republican House Speaker John Boehner never brought the bill to the floor for a vote.

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

For child care workers, state aid for their own kids' care is 'life-changing'

A few states are working to underwrite child care costs for early educators

BY: ELAINE S. POVICH, STATELINE - JUNE 18, 2024 7:00 AM

SMITHFIELD, R.I. — Child care worker Marci Then, 32, looked over at two 4-year-olds in her care who were tussling over a toy plate in a model kitchen set. "Are we sharing?" she gently asked them. They both let go.

Then works at Little Learners Academy child care center near Providence, Rhode Island. Her daughter, Mila, 4, is enrolled there, so Then is able to keep a watchful eye on her in addition to about a dozen other 4-year-olds. Mila calls her mother "Miss Marci" at school, but "Mom" at home.

Most of the time, Mila is in another room with a different worker at the center, adhering to rules that don't allow parent caregivers to watch their own children in a licensed setting. But for today, Mila is around her mom for a bit to show a reporter around.

Mila proudly chirps her age, then helps put toys away so the kids can quietly gather for circle time.

Then said that without help she would not have been able to afford the \$315 a week for Mila to come to Little Learners. But she is taking advantage of a one-year state pilot program that authorizes the use of federal funds to pay for care for the children of early education workers.

"It's been life-changing for me," said Then, a single mom who is also responsible for a disabled young adult whom she adopted. Without it, "I'd have to rearrange my life."

In 2022, Kentucky lawmakers changed the employer child care assistance program to specifically include child care workers at all income levels who work at least 20 hours a week. Other states, including Rhode Island, have since launched programs modeled after the one in Kentucky. The Kentucky program was to end Sept. 30, but Stephanie French, spokesperson for the state's Cabinet for Health and Family Services, wrote in an email that the state will be using a combination of federal and state funding to continue the program.

At least half a dozen states now have similar programs or are considering legislation to start them, according to EdSurge, a news site that covers education issues.

Supporters, including Republicans and Democrats, see retaining child care employees as a benefit not only to the workers and the centers facing worker shortages, but also to the states' economies. For many

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people, the lack of affordable child care is a barrier to joining the workforce.

Charlene Barbieri, founder and owner of four Little Learners Academy locations in Rhode Island, said in an interview that it is difficult to hire and keep qualified employees. The child care subsidy program helps, she said.

"Early learning here is very expensive as we know, right?" Barbieri said. "So any supplemental programs, monetary or otherwise, are exceptionally beneficial.

"We have had many teachers come to us to say that if this program wasn't here, we could not afford to send our children to child care and still help our families by bringing in additional income," she said.

Rhode Island lawmakers added the child care subsidy to its fiscal 2025 budget this spring, moving the program out of the "pilot" category. Democratic Gov. Dan McKee is expected to sign the budget this week.

"It's a good program, and we've seen great results with it," Rhode Island House Speaker Joseph Shekarchi, a Democrat, said in an interview. "We have a labor shortage across the whole spectrum of our labor market. So, by giving [caregivers] free child care, they're able to get back in and take care of other kids, which allows more people to enter the workforce."

Other states that have launched programs or are considering them include Arizona, Colorado, Indiana, Iowa and Nebraska, according to EdSurge.

The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, a research center at the University of California, Berkeley, estimated that if every state followed Kentucky's lead, some 234,000 workers with children under age 6 could benefit.

"We see it as a no-brainer," said Anna Powell, senior research and policy associate at the center, who co-authored a report on the program. "The educators are parents — why shouldn't they be at the front of the queue? Every time an educator stays in the field, it benefits many parents."

Budget challenges

In some states, though, budget woes are challenging lawmakers who want to make their pilot program a permanent one.

Arizona had a one-year Education Workforce Scholarship program that assisted child care workers and public school teachers with paying for their own kids' child care, but that program was funded with federal pandemic dollars and ends June 30. It's unlikely to be renewed because of state budget shortfalls.

Child care workers who now get that assistance would instead need to apply for aid through the state's broad child care assistance program. That program, administered by the Arizona Department of Economic Security, is based on income levels, Tasya Peterson, a department spokesperson, wrote in an email to Stateline.

Barbie Prinster, executive director of the Arizona Early Childhood Education Association, a nonprofit that represents child care centers, said 3,541 children were approved for care subsidies under the early educator program this year, about three-quarters of them from families with a child care worker. The rest are from teachers' families.

She predicted that hundreds of workers may have to quit if the subsidy isn't renewed.

"I think providers are employing more moms that have young children because of this subsidy," she said.

In Nebraska, state Sen. John Fredrickson, a Democrat and the dad of a 5-year-old son, introduced a bill this session that would have granted no-cost child care to employees of state-licensed child care programs, whether in-home care or at centers, who work at least 20 hours a week.

He estimated the potential subsidy, which he modeled on Kentucky's idea, could have brought in 2,175 parent-providers. If each worker cared for eight children, there would be 16,000 children receiving care, and at least that many parents working, he estimated.

Fredrickson said the initial fiscal estimate for the bill was about \$20 million, which proved to be a heavy lift, so he halved it to \$10 million. But even that proved to be too much, he said, and the effort failed. He plans to reintroduce his bill next year.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, a Republican, approved a bill May 1 extending a child care subsidy pilot pro-

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gram for early childhood caretakers and educators, regardless of income, for two years at a cost of \$10.2 million using the state's Childcare Development Fund.

Colorado agreed to continue a program for child care providers with children ages 6 weeks to 13 years old, giving them full child care benefits, regardless of the employee's income.

And Indiana agreed to study the issue of child caregiver and early educator compensation.

'Good for Rhode Island'

Sitting together in a hearing room just off the Rhode Island House chamber earlier this month, Democratic state Reps. Mary Ann Shallcross Smith and Grace Diaz said they understand the issue of caring for children firsthand. Both are mothers, though their children are grown now, and both are experienced child care center owners.

Shallcross Smith remembers putting up flyers in the local drug store, advertising her in-home care. She now owns 15 centers. When the issue of paying child care workers for their own kids' tuition came up this year, she was all for it, and went to House Speaker Shekarchi with her arguments.

"No. 1, it's good for Rhode Island," she said, adding that it's also good for business.

Diaz, a mother of five, said she, too, talked to the speaker. But perhaps the biggest driver in getting the program into the state budget, she recalled, was the day that they brought a bunch of little kids from various child care settings to the Capitol to be a living example of the need.

"When they saw the little kids at the State House, they all wanted a picture," Diaz said.

Back on the Little Learners playground, care worker Kayla Champagne, 39, of Lincoln, Rhode Island, smiled up at her 3-year-old son, Jaxson, who peeked over the top of a climbing structure. Champagne, who has three other children ages 18, 14 and 8, is relieved that she can take advantage of a program that helps her pay for Jaxson's care.

She used to work at another day care place but could only afford to send Jaxson there a few days a week, she said. At Little Learners, staff helped her apply for the state subsidy.

"That's one of the reasons I left my other child care to come here," she said. "Now I can work full time while having four kids."

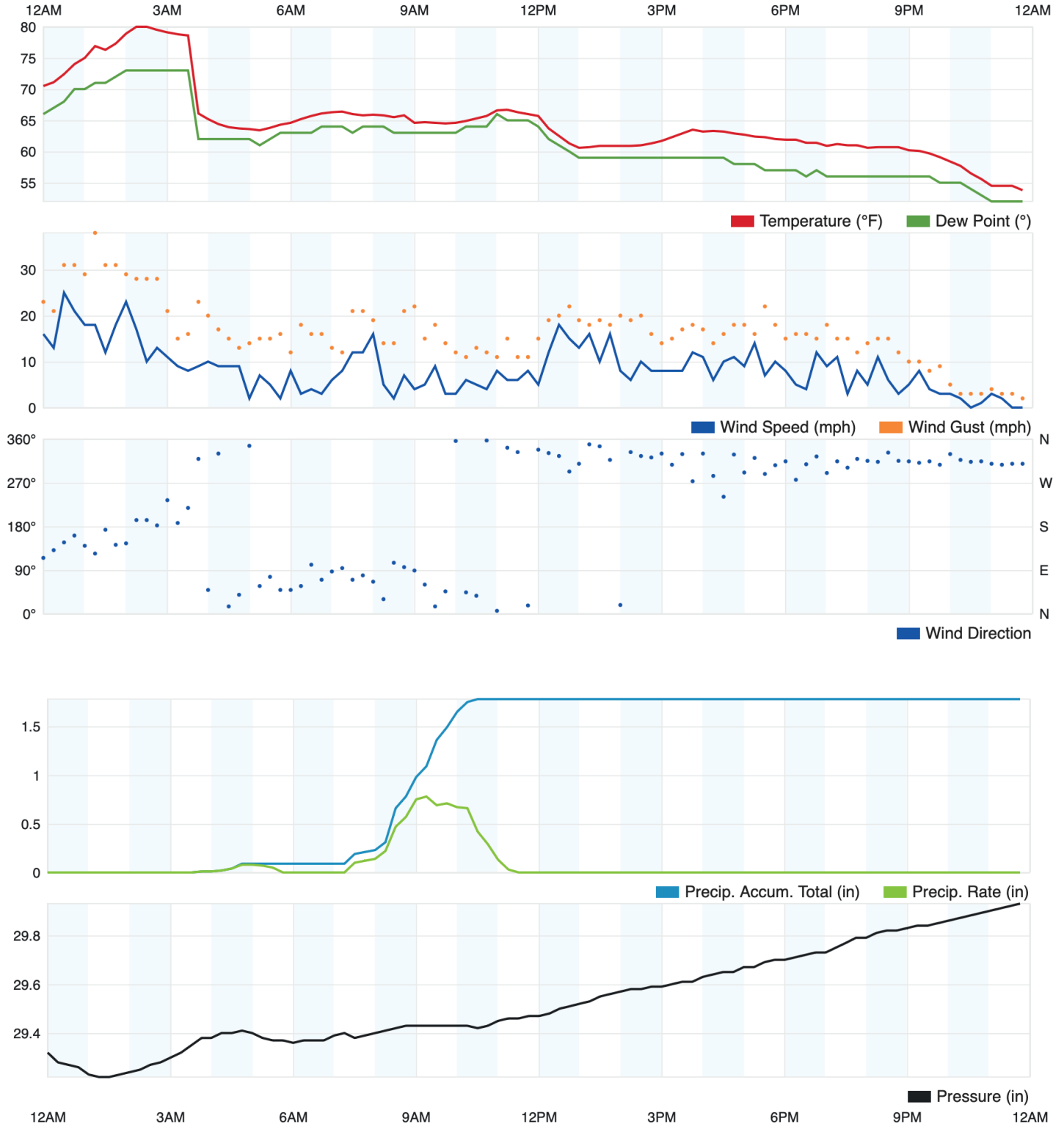
Rhode Island Current reporter Nancy Lavin contributed to this report.

Elaine S. Povich covers education and consumer affairs for Stateline. Povich has reported for Newsday, the Chicago Tribune and United Press International. Stateline is part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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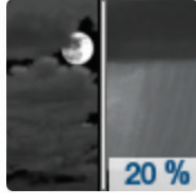
Juneteenth



High: 72 °F

Mostly Sunny

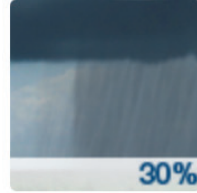
Tonight



Low: 54 °F

Mostly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance
Showers

Thursday



High: 72 °F

Chance
Showers

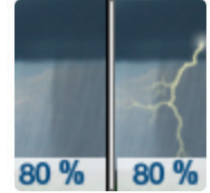
**Thursday
Night**



Low: 59 °F

Showers

Friday



High: 79 °F

Showers then
T-storms



Pleasant Day in Store

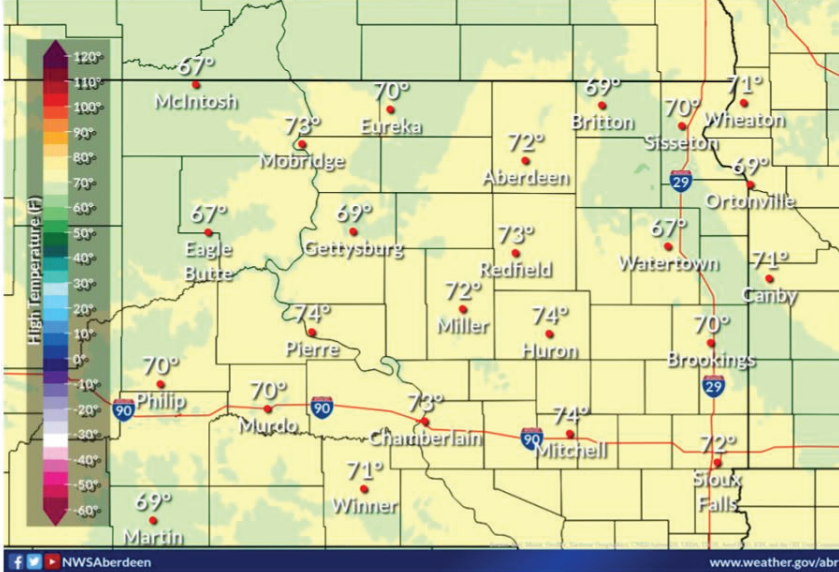
June 19, 2024
4:29 AM

Rain chances return Thursday - Saturday

Today's High Temperature Forecast

Below normal temperatures for this time of year

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Jun 19, 2024 4:18 AM CDT



Probability of Precipitation Forecast (%)

	6/20 Thu				6/21 Fri				6/22 Sat			
	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm
Aberdeen	10	15	15	35	70	90	80	80	80	55	15	25
Britton	0	10	25	30	65	85	85	85	85	60	25	30
Brookings	20	55	55	50	65	80	55	70	90	80	25	15
Chamberlain	40	55	50	55	80	65	30	45	70	30	10	15
Clark	10	40	30	55	75	90	70	85	90	60	25	25
Eagle Butte	15	30	35	50	85	85	70	65	60	35	25	25
Ellendale	5	10	15	25	65	85	80	80	80	55	15	25
Eureka	5	15	15	35	70	85	80	70	70	45	15	25
Gettysburg	15	35	35	50	85	90	75	70	70	40	20	25
Huron	25	50	50	60	80	85	55	70	85	50	20	20
Kennebec	30	70	45	55	80	65	35	50	65	25	15	15
McIntosh	5	15	15	35	70	75	70	75	65	35	25	30
Milbank	5	40	40	35	65	90	85	90	95	75	30	25
Miller	30	45	35	60	85	90	65	70	75	35	20	20
Mobridge	5	15	20	35	75	85	75	65	65	35	20	25
Murdo	30	65	50	60	80	65	35	50	60	30	15	15
Pierre	15	50	35	50	85	85	50	55	55	30	15	15
Redfield	15	30	30	50	80	90	75	80	80	45	20	20
Sisseton	0	20	30	30	60	85	90	90	90	70	30	25
Watertown	10	35	40	50	70	90	70	80	90	70	25	25
Webster	5	30	30	40	70	90	80	90	90	65	25	30
Wheaton	0	20	25	25	50	80	90	90	90	70	30	25



**National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD**

A brief break today in the active weather pattern as high pressure moves east across the Dakotas. Mostly dry conditions can be expected with light winds, while highs rise into the upper 60s to low 70s. Rain chances return to the forecast tonight, and especially by Friday. Strong to severe storm potential returns Friday as well.

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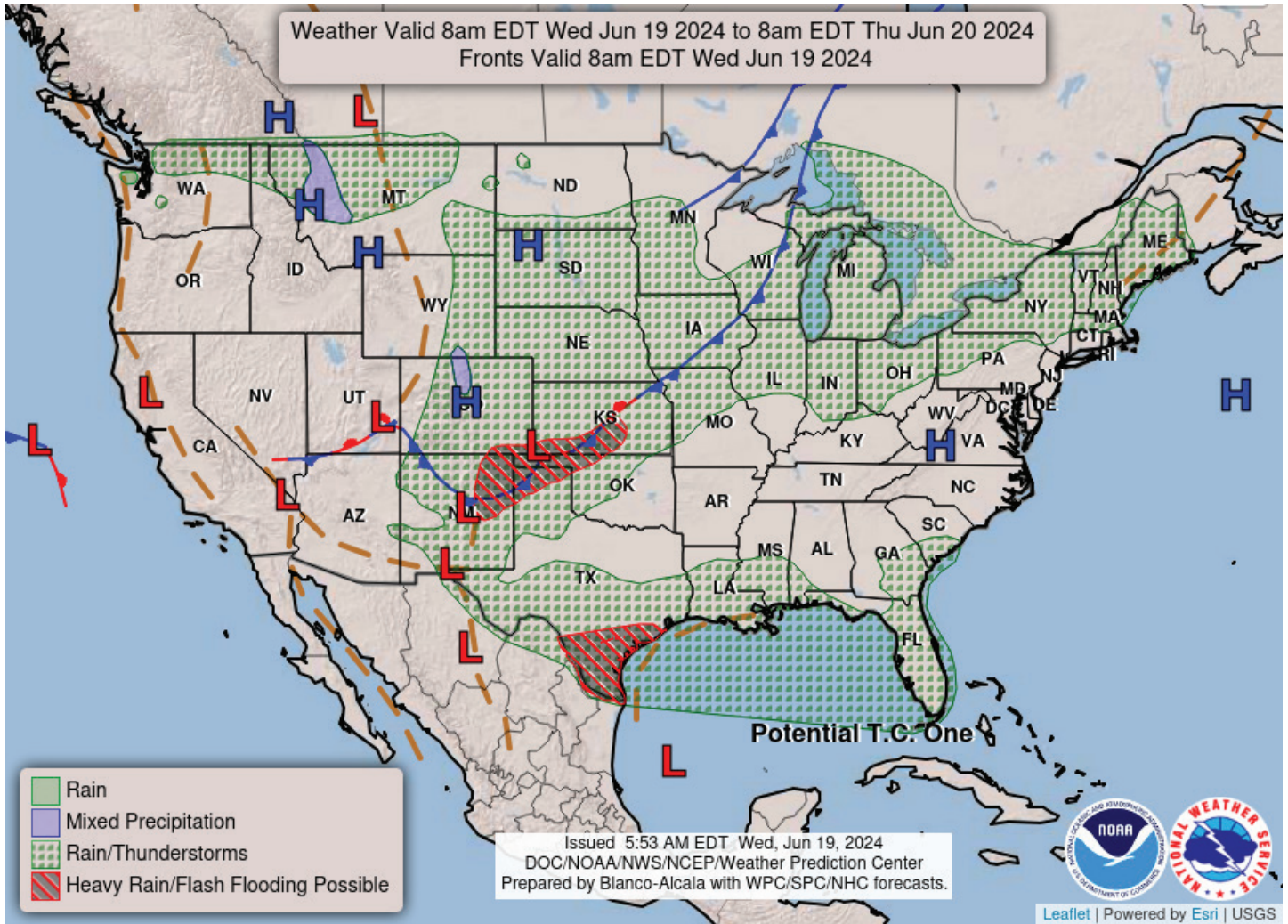
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 80 °F at 2:14 AM
Low Temp: 54 °F at 11:07 PM
Wind: 38 mph at 1:13 AM
Precip: : 1.78

Day length: 15 hours, 44 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 108 in 1933
Record Low: 38 in 1948
Average High: 81
Average Low: 56
Average Precip in June.: 2.29
Precip to date in June: 2.28
Average Precip to date: 9.54
Precip Year to Date: 9.35
Sunset Tonight: 9:26:04 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:42:01 am



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Today in Weather History

June 19, 1894: A tornado moved NNE, passing 12 miles northwest of Bowdle, ending in extreme south-eastern Campbell County. A child was killed, and the mother and four other children were severely injured. A man was killed in another home, and his wife was injured. Fourteen homes were damaged or destroyed. Clothes were said to be torn to shreds and scattered for miles. This tornado was estimated to be an F3.

June 19, 1931: A tornado moved east from just south of St. Lawrence, passing south of Wessington. Buildings were destroyed on eight farms. Two farms were said to be wiped out, house and all. A woman was injured as she tried to rescue chickens. Cattle, horses, and over 100 hogs were killed. This tornado had an estimated strength of an F3.

June 19, 2013: Slow moving thunderstorms brought some large hail along with very heavy rains and flash flooding to parts of northeast South Dakota. One thunderstorm produced quarter hail and winds over 50 mph, which caused significant damage to a bean field along with damaging the siding of the house south of Wilmot in Roberts County. Several roads in Wilmot had water running over them for several hours. Over three inches of rain caused water to go over a part of Highway 123 south of Wilmot. The heavy rain of three to four inches brought many flooded roads in and around Veblen in Marshall County.

1794: A violent tornado commenced west of the Hudson River in New York. The tornado traveled through Poughkeepsie then crossed the border into Connecticut where it went through the towns of New Milford, Waterbury, North Haven, and Branford. It then continued into Long Island Sound. The tornado did extensive damage, and the funnel was reported by one observer to look like the "aurora borealis."

1835 - A tornado tore through the center of New Brunswick NJ killing five persons and scattering debris as far as Manhattan Island. The tornado provided the first opportunity for scientists to study firsthand the track of such a storm. (David Ludlum)

1938 - A cloudburst near Custer Creek, MT, (near Miles City) caused a train wreck killing forty-eight persons. An estimated four to seven inches of rain deluged the head of the creek that evening, and water flowing through the creek weakened the bridge. As a result, a locomotive and seven passenger cars plunged into the swollen creek. One car, a tourist sleeper, was completely submerged. (David Ludlum)

1972 - Hurricane Agnes moved onshore near Cape San Blas FL with wind gusts to 80 mph, and exited Maine on the 26th. There were 117 deaths, mainly due to flooding from North Carolina to New York State, and total damage was estimated at more than three billion dollars. Up to 19 inches of rain deluged western Schuylkill County PA. The rains of Hurricane Agnes resulted in one of the greatest natural disasters in U.S. history. Agnes caused more damage than all other tropical cyclones in the previous six years combined (which included Celia and Camille). (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - It was a warm June day, with plenty of thunderstorms east of the Rockies. Lightning knocked out power at Throckmorton, TX, and ignited an oil tank battery. A woman in Knox City TX was struck by lightning while in her car, and a man was struck by lightning near his home in Manatee County FL. Strong thunderstorm winds overturned several outhouses near Bixby OK, but no injuries were reported. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Temperatures soared above 100 degrees in the central U.S. for Father's Day. Fifteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date. Severe thunderstorms in Minnesota and Wisconsin produced softball size hail near River Falls WI, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Menomonie WI. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Fourteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date as searing heat spread from the southwestern deserts into the High Plains Region. Record highs included 98 degrees at Billings, MT, 107 degrees at Valentine, NE, and 112 degrees at Tucson, AZ. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - What would eventually be known as the "Inland Hurricane" stuck south central Kansas. This storm system produced a swath of 65 to 120 mph winds across six counties and caused \$80 million dollars in damage. The peak recorded wind gust was 116 mph, which reaches low-end category 3 on the Saffir-Simpson hurricane wind intensity scale. On the enhanced Fujita Scale the 116mph winds would be rated an EF2. The storm knocked out power to all the Wichita TV stations, and they were off the air for hours. All but one of the Wichita Radio Stations, including the Wichita NOAA Weather Radio Station KEC-59, was knocked off the air. (National Weather Service Wichita)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

LASTING IMPRESSIONS

One dreadful day, many years ago, a large sailboat capsized on Lake Michigan. It was near the shore, and the lifeguard on duty, Edward Spencer, jumped into the lake and rescued all seventeen people who were on board. Finally, he fell exhausted on the shore and was taken to a hospital to recover. As he was carried into the emergency room, he kept asking, "Did I do my best?"

Years later, Dr. R.A. Torrey, an evangelist, was telling this story in a revival in Los Angeles. Suddenly, a man electrified the audience. He stood up and shouted, "Dr. Torrey, Edward Spencer is here."

Shaken, Dr. Torrey asked, "Would you please come to the platform?" Slowly, the white-haired Spencer made his way to the platform as the people applauded wildly.

Dr. Torrey looked at him with grateful eyes and asked, "Is there anything that stands out in your mind in the saving of those seventeen people?"

"Only one thing, Dr. Torrey," he replied. "Of the seventeen, not one of them thanked me."

"Ingratitude is the mother of every vice," is a famous French saying. And the Spanish add, "The earth produces nothing worse than an ungrateful man."

Why is it so difficult to say, "Thanks?" Is it pride? Is it self-centeredness - the attitude that I don't need you or anyone else? Is it because we are weak and want to appear strong? Is it a false impression of our own value?

How interesting that the last verse of the Psalms reads, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."

Prayer: Lord, give us an alert mind to recognize the many gifts we receive each day. Give us grateful hearts. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Bible Verse: Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Psalm 150:6



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: 06.18.24

21 22 50 55 67 20

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$80,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 6 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.17.24

3 12 28 29 35 3

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$3,320,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 21 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.18.24

5 14 18 37 48 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 36 Mins 23 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.15.24

2 10 19 25 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 36 Mins 23 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.17.24

30 41 42 67 68 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 5 Mins 23 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.17.24

30 48 53 58 66 9

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$56,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 5 Mins 23 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

AUTO RACING: Blaney seeks second straight NASCAR win at New Hampshire; F1, IndyCar return to action

By The Associated Press undefined

All Times Eastern

NASCAR CUP SERIES

USA TODAY 301

Site: Loudon, New Hampshire.

Schedule: Saturday practice, 12:35 p.m., qualifying, 1:20 p.m.; Sunday race, 2:30 p.m. (USA).

Track: New Hampshire Motor Speedway.

Race distance: 301 laps, 318.5 miles.

Last year: It took 30 tries, but Martin Truex Jr. led 41 laps after starting second to earn his first victory on the 1.058-mile oval in a race postponed a day by showers. His Toyota won by 0.396 seconds over Joey Logano's Ford, followed by Kyle Larson, Kevin Harvick and Brad Keselowski as former Cup Series champions claimed the top five spots.

Last race: Reigning Cup champion Ryan Blaney won the first stage after starting second, was fourth in the second and went on to lead 201 of 350 laps for his first victory this season in the inaugural Iowa Corn 350. Blaney also clinched a playoff berth, closing the deal this time with plenty of fuel in his Penske Ford after running dry two weeks ago while leading the final lap in Madison, Illinois.

Fast facts: William Byron was second with 2020 Series champion Chase Elliott third, propelling Elliott to the points lead by eight over Larson. Denny Hamlin is third. ... Blaney jumped five spots to seventh. ... Truex announced over the weekend that he will retire from full-time racing after this season, his 19th.

Next race: June 30, Nashville, Tennessee.

Online: <http://www.nascar.com>

NASCAR XFINITY SERIES

SciAps 200

Site: Loudon, New Hampshire.

Schedule: Friday practice, 4:05 p.m., qualifying, 4:35 p.m.; Saturday race, 3:30 p.m. (USA).

Track: New Hampshire Motor Speedway.

Race distance: 200 laps, 211.6 miles.

Last year: John Hunter Nemechek started second in a Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota and led a race-high 137 of 206 laps to earn his second consecutive Xfinity win and fourth of the season. He won the wreck-filled race under the white flag after the 10th caution.

Last race: Sam Mayer took charge on an overtime restart and won the HyVee 250 in the series' return to Iowa Speedway after a four-year hiatus. He led 47 laps in his Chevy for his second victory this season, winning by 0.146 seconds over Riley Herbst (Ford) with Corey Heim (Toyota) third.

Fast facts: Chandler Smith started sixth and won the first two stages in a Toyota before finishing eighth. He jumped a spot to second in the standings and trails Cole Custer by a point. ... The top 10 featured four Chevys, followed by Ford and Toyota with three each. ... Shane Van Gisbergen wrecked in stage 2 to finish 34th after consecutive victories. ... Toyota has won seven of the past eight at New Hampshire, with Chevy the only other winner in 2022.

Next race: June 29, Nashville, Tennessee.

Online: <http://www.nascar.com>

NASCAR TRUCK SERIES

Last race: Corey Heim gained the lead on lap 134 at Madison, Illinois, beat pole-winner Ty Majeski on a restart on lap 138 and won for the fourth time this season, all in the last eight races.

Next race: June 28, Nashville, Tennessee.

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Online: <http://www.nascar.com>

FORMULA ONE

Spanish Grand Prix

Site: Montmelo, Spain.

Schedule: Friday practice, 7:30 a.m., 11 a.m.; Saturday practice, 6:30 a.m., qualifying, 10 a.m.; Sunday race, 9 a.m. (ESPN).

Track: Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya.

Race distance: 66 laps, 190.907 miles (307.236 km).

Last year: Max Verstappen wasn't challenged from the pole on the way to his fifth win of the season. Verstappen also earned a bonus point for the fastest lap. Mercedes teammates Lewis Hamilton and George Russell were second and third, respectively.

Last race: Verstappen won his third consecutive Canadian Grand Prix, beating McLaren's Lando Norris by 3.879 seconds for his sixth victory in nine races this season.

Fast facts: Verstappen has won 50 of the past 75 F1 races and ranks third in career wins behind Hamilton (103) and seven-time champion Michael Schumacher (91). He leads Ferrari's Charles Leclerc by 56 points.

Next race: June 30, Spielberg, Austria.

Online: <http://www.formula1.com>

INDYCAR

Grand Prix of Monterey

Site: Monterey, California.

Schedule: Friday practice, 5 p.m.; Saturday practice, 1 p.m., qualifying, 5:15 p.m.; Sunday race, 6 p.m. (USA).

Track: Raceway Laguna Seca.

Race distance: 95 laps, 212.61 miles.

Last year: Chip Ganassi Racing's Scott Dixon beat Team Penske's Scott McLaughlin by 7.318 seconds to win the former season finale. Dixon led 20 laps for his third victory over the final four races.

Last race: Will Power won at Road America at Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin, to end a 34-race drought stretching just over two years and move atop the standings.

Fast facts: Nolan Siegel, 19, will debut for Arrow McLaren in the No. 6 Chevrolet after signing a deal on Wednesday. He joins Pato O'Ward and Alexander Rossi and is coming off an LMP2 class team victory in the 24 Hours of Le Mans. ... The race now marks the series' midway point.

Next race: July 7, Lexington, Ohio.

Online: <http://www.indycar.com>

NHRA DRAG RACING

Virginia Nationals

Site: Dinwiddie, Virginia.

Track: Virginia Motorsports Park.

Last event: Tony Schumacher won in Top Fuel and Austin Prock won in Funny Car at Bristol, Tennessee.

Fast facts: The event returns after a one-year absence.

Next event: June 27-30, Norwalk, Ohio.

Online: <http://www.nhra.com>

WORLD OF OUTLAWS

Last events: David Gravel and Corey Day won events last weekend at Knoxville, Iowa.

Next events: Wednesday through Saturday at Brandon, South Dakota.

Online: <http://worldofoutlaws.com/sprintcars>

What's a heat dome?

Here's why so much of the US is broiling this week

By TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

FENTON, Mich. (AP) — With much of the Midwest and the Northeast broiling — or about to broil — in extreme summer heat this week, meteorologists are talking about heat waves and heat domes.

Both mean it's really hot — and people will hear those terms a lot more as the world heats up. What's the difference?

Here's what to know:

What's a heat dome? It's helpful to think of a heat dome as what's happening in the atmosphere. A heat wave is how that affects people on the ground, said Ken Kunkel, a research professor of atmospheric sciences at North Carolina State University.

When a high-pressure system develops in the upper atmosphere, it causes the air below it to sink and compress. That raises temperatures in the lower atmosphere.

Because hot air expands, it creates a bulging dome.

The boundaries of this week's heat dome are not well-defined, Kunkel said, but the National Weather Service has said that the most extreme heat is expected in the Ohio Valley and the Northeast.

The eastern heat dome follows an earlier-than-usual one this month in the Southwest. Last year, there were 645 heat-related deaths in Phoenix.

What is a heat wave? A heat wave is defined by how intense the heat is, how long it lasts and where it occurs, said Jeff Masters, a meteorologist with Yale Climate Connections.

In general, several days of 90-plus degree temperatures in Texas are "no big deal," Masters said. But farther north, it is forecasted to be in the mid- to high-90s over the Midwest and Northeast this week, with heat indexes of 100 F (38 C) or greater.

"The population's just not conditioned to that sort of heat," he said.

The National Weather Service said that some areas likely will reach daily records, with the heat wave lasting all week and into the weekend in some places.

The combination of clear skies and the higher summertime angle of the sun can result in high heat index readings, a measure of temperature combined with humidity. Humidity makes the weather feel hotter because the body cools itself by sweating and has to work harder when the air's already moist.

The Detroit area will be in the mid-90s, with a heat index around 100 Fahrenheit (38 C) in some urban areas for the next few days. The normal high temperature for this time of year in Detroit is in the low 80s. Specifically, June 18th's normal high is 81 F, meteorologist Brian Cromwell said.

Chicago broke a 1957 temperature record on Monday with a high of 97 degrees F (36.1 degrees C). Hot and muggy conditions will continue this week, with peak heat indexes near 100 F (38 C), said the National Weather Service in Chicago.

In Cincinnati, Ohio, Tuesday's high will be around 96 F (36 C), but will feel like 104 F (40 C), according to the weather service. The high heat will continue through the weekend.

Albany, New York, will see temperatures of 95 F (35 C) or hotter from Tuesday through Thursday, when it will peak at 97 F (36 C), with heat indexes at 100 F (38 C) or more, the weather service forecasted. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said Tuesday that she has activated the National Guard to assist in any heat emergencies.

The U.S. last year experienced the most heat waves since 1936, experts said. An Associated Press analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data found that the excessive heat contributed to more than 2,300 U.S. deaths, the highest number in 45 years of records.

Who's under the heat dome? The heat dome will affect a broad swath of the eastern half of the country, from roughly the Great Plains states up through Maine.

Some locations could see their hottest temperatures on record for any month, Masters said. A new study found that climate change is making giant heat waves move more slowly and affect more people for a longer time, with higher temperatures over larger areas.

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Almost 77 million people in the United States were under extreme heat alerts Tuesday.

Another excessive heat warning, caused by a heat dome, is expected in the Phoenix area on Thursday and Friday, when the highs could reach 114 F (45.5 C) and 116 F (47 C), respectively, said National Weather Service meteorologist Ted Whittock. Tuesday's forecasted high of 105 F (40.5 C), meanwhile, is normal for this time of year.

He said his office has issued two excessive heat warnings in the past few weeks because of higher-than-normal high pressure that created heat domes.

Two more players from South Dakota baseball plead guilty to lesser charge in rape case

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Three of six South Dakota players from a baseball team made up of high school-aged players who were charged as adults last summer with rape have pleaded guilty to a lesser felony charge.

Two former members of the American Legion team from Mitchell pleaded guilty Monday to being an accessory to a felony, KELO-TV reported. Another player reached the same plea deal earlier this month. All three could face up to five years in prison when they're sentenced in August.

Three other players who were charged as adults last August still face the original counts of second-degree rape and aiding and abetting second-degree rape. They have a status hearing July 1.

Meanwhile, another three players were charged in juvenile court.

According to prosecutors, the victims were 16 when they were sexually assaulted during a tournament in Rapid City last June.

The American Legion sponsors summer baseball leagues for high school-aged players throughout the U.S.

Biofuel groups envision ethanol-powered jets. But fueling the effort has not been easy

By JACK DURA and JOSH FUNK Associated Press

MENOKEN, N.D. (AP) — Some day, the passenger jets that soar 35,000 feet (10.6 kilometers) over Dan McLean's North Dakota farm could be fueled by corn grown on his land and millions of other acres across the Midwest.

It's a vision the U.S. airline industry embraces and agricultural groups see as a key to ensuring strong future sales of ethanol, a fuel that consumes more than one-third of the nation's corn crop and offers a cleaner-burning alternative for the nation's airlines.

But making that dream a reality hasn't been easy, in part because even as farmers would benefit from a huge new market for corn, the plan relies on federal tax credits triggered by capturing carbon dioxide at refineries and then moving the gas hundreds of miles through pipelines that would snake across the Midwest, including beneath farmers' fields.

Some of those farmers, along with environmentalist and property rights groups, have gone before regulatory authorities in several Midwest states to oppose the lines, and frequently they have succeeded in at least slowing the process. A key decision is expected soon in Iowa.

"This whole thing is private industry -- rich private industry -- getting tax money, strictly tax money to bury this stuff," said McLean, who opposes a line that would cross his farmland east of Bismarck. "That tax money is coming out of everybody's pocket, and they're going to walk away from it, and we're going to be left with a big poisonous pipe running across the country."

Supporters have faced such criticism for years as they seek approval of pipelines and tax credits. The credits would mean profits for refineries and help make the cost of the new fuel competitive with traditional jet fuel. But opponents see the pipelines as an expensive and potentially dangerous effort that tramples on property rights and fails to reduce greenhouse gases.

Gaining approval of pipelines has proved arduous.

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Several companies have dropped their pipeline plans in the face of opposition and delay. The leading remaining company is Summit Carbon Solutions, which is seeking to build a 2,000-mile (3,200-kilometer) pipeline system through five Midwestern states — North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota and Iowa — with carbon dioxide emissions ultimately buried underground in North Dakota.

North Dakota regulators last year denied a siting permit for Summit but later agreed to reconsider. South Dakota regulators in September rejected Summit's application, but company officials said they would file again.

Summit must seek approval from individual counties in Nebraska, and one county earlier this year denied a permit. In Minnesota, regulators are doing an environmental review with future hearings planned.

An upcoming decision by the Iowa Utilities Board about whether to grant a pipeline permit and approve Summit's eminent domain requests will be key to the larger effort throughout the Midwest. Iowa is the nation's leader in corn and ethanol production.

To the renewable fuels industry, failure to gain approval of the pipelines could jeopardize a giant new aviation fuel market they believe would continue decades into the future, even as electric vehicles gradually replace gas-powered cars and traditional vehicles get more efficient.

"There's a lot at stake here. We have a market that we can open up that can really underpin rural prosperity for the next two or three decades," said Monte Shaw, executive director of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association.

Essential to their efforts is a complicated formula that regulators established to approximate how much each ethanol plant contributes to global warming. Ethanol production already produces less carbon than gasoline production, but the industry must reduce that further to qualify for tax credits that require biofuel have a carbon score at least 50% lower than gasoline.

The Treasury Department recently tweaked that formula, taking into account the role farming practices, like planting cover crops and using no-till techniques, play in reducing carbon production. However, the rules require farmers to take all those steps so it will still likely be hard for ethanol to qualify without either carbon pipelines or a combination of several other expensive measures, like ensuring an ethanol plant is powered by renewable energy or biogas.

That's why many in the biofuels industry argue that carbon capture pipelines are the best option to obtaining tax credits.

Without the sustainable aviation fuel market, Shaw and others contend corn prices could ultimately collapse in future years as demand from motorists wanes.

Currently, the roughly 200 U.S. ethanol plants have the capacity to produce 18 billion gallons of ethanol annually, though some are idle so the industry produces about 15 billion gallons a year, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Passenger jets now burn about 25 billion gallons a year and that is expected to grow to 35 billion gallons annually by 2050.

And whereas most gasoline is now blended with 10% ethanol, sustainable aviation fuel would use a 50% blend of ethanol. It also requires about 1.7 gallons of ethanol for every gallon of jet fuel.

"We refer to carbon capture and sequestration as the key that unlocks the sustainable aviation fuel market," Shaw said.

Ethanol trade groups estimate that federal tax credits for sustainable aviation fuel, combined with the existing credit for renewable fuels, can provide between \$1.85 and \$2.25 per gallon depending on the carbon intensity of the each ethanol plant. California, Minnesota and Illinois also have separate tax credits that can be added to the federal credits for fuel sold in those states.

With one of the biggest state tax credits of \$1.50 in Minnesota or Illinois, some sustainable aviation fuel could receive nearly \$4 per gallon in tax credits.

There is also a separate federal tax credit available for carbon sequestration but the rules won't allow producers to claim it simultaneously with the main federal credit for sustainable aviation fuel, resulting in a smaller total tax credit.

The biggest ethanol trade groups — the Renewable Fuels Association and Growth Energy — say all tax

credits combined would help make sustainable aviation fuel competitive with traditional jet fuel that has been selling for about \$2.5 to \$3 a gallon. And costs could drop if ethanol plants start producing the jet fuel on a large scale.

One small plant in Georgia is now producing 10 million gallons a year of sustainable aviation fuel from ethanol, but Geoff Cooper, president of the Renewable Fuels Association, said he expects the industry's capacity to grow over the next five years to close to 800 million gallons annually.

Agricultural economists have estimated farmers would receive about \$441 million more by 2050 if sustainable aviation fuel boosts ethanol demand from the current current 15 billion gallons to 28.5 billion gallons.

Russia and North Korea sign partnership deal that appears to be the strongest since Cold War

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un signed a new partnership that includes a vow of mutual aid if either country is attacked, during a Wednesday summit that came as both face escalating standoffs with the West.

The deal, which the leaders said covered areas including security, trade, investment, and cultural and humanitarian ties, could mark the strongest connection between Moscow and Pyongyang since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Both leaders described it as a major upgrade of their ties.

The two met as Putin visited North Korea for the first time in 24 years. The summit came as the U.S. and its allies express growing concerns over an arms arrangement in which the country provides Moscow with badly needed munitions for its war in Ukraine in exchange for economic assistance and technology transfers that could enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear weapons and missile program.

Kim said that the deal was the "strongest ever treaty" between the two nations, putting the relationship at the level of an alliance, and vowed full support for Russia's war in Ukraine. Putin said that it was a "breakthrough document" reflecting shared desire to move relations to a higher level.

The North Korean leader gave Putin a lavish welcome, meeting him at the airport Tuesday night, where the two shook hands, hugged twice and then rode together in a limousine in a huge motorcade that rolled through the capital's brightly illuminated streets, where buildings were decorated with giant Russian flags and portraits of Putin.

After spending the rest of the night at a state guest house, Putin attended a welcoming ceremony at the city's main square, filled with what appeared to be tens of thousands of spectators, including children holding balloons and people wearing coordinated t-shirts in the red, white and blue of the Russian and North Korean flags. Huge crowds lined up on the streets to greet Putin's motorcade, chanting "Welcome Putin" and waving flowers and North Korean and Russian flags.

Putin and Kim saluted an honor guard and walked across a red carpet. Kim then introduced key members of his leadership including Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui; top aide and ruling party secretary Jo Yong Won; and the leader's powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong.

As the talks began, Putin thanked Kim for North Korea's support for his war in Ukraine, part of what he said was a "fight against the imperialist hegemonistic policies of the U.S. and its satellites against the Russian Federation."

Putin hailed ties that he traced back to the Soviet army fighting the Japanese military on the Korean Peninsula in the closing moments of World War II, and Moscow's support for Pyongyang during the Korean War.

Kim said Moscow and Pyongyang's "fiery friendship" is now even closer than during Soviet times, and promised "full support and solidarity to the Russian government, army and people in carrying out the special military operation in Ukraine to protect sovereignty, security interests and territorial integrity."

It wasn't immediately clear what that support might look like. Kim has used similar language in the past, consistently saying North Korea supports what he describes as a just action to protect Russia's interests and blaming the crisis on the U.S.-led West's "hegemonic policy."

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North Korea is under heavy U.N. Security Council sanctions over its weapons program, while Russia also faces sanctions by the United States and its Western partners over its aggression in Ukraine.

U.S. and South Korean officials accuse the North of providing Russia with artillery, missiles and other military equipment for use in Ukraine, possibly in return for key military technologies and aid. Both Pyongyang and Moscow deny accusations about North Korean weapons transfers, which would violate multiple U.N. Security Council sanctions that Russia previously endorsed.

Along with China, Russia has provided political cover for Kim's continuing efforts to advance his nuclear arsenal, repeatedly blocking U.S.-led efforts to impose fresh U.N. sanctions on the North over its weapons tests.

In March, a Russian veto at the United Nations ended monitoring of U.N. sanctions against North Korea over its nuclear program, prompting Western accusations that Moscow is seeking to avoid scrutiny as it buys weapons from Pyongyang for use in Ukraine.

Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov told reporters in Pyongyang that the two leaders exchanged gifts after the talks. Putin presented Kim with a Russian-made Aurus limo and other gifts, including a tea set and a naval officer's dagger. Ushakov said that Kim's presents to Putin included artworks depicting the Russian leader.

Russia media said earlier that Kim will host a reception, and Putin is expected to leave Wednesday evening for Vietnam.

In addition to security, Putin said the partnership includes cooperation in political, trade, investment, cultural and humanitarian fields, as well as security. He added that Russia would not rule out developing military-technical cooperation with North Korea under the deal.

According to the Kremlin's website, the two leaders also signed an agreement on building a road bridge on their shared border, and another on cooperation in healthcare, medical education and science.

Kim was quoted as saying that the agreement was of a peaceful and defensive nature. "I have no doubt it will become a driving force accelerating the creation of a new multipolar world," he was quoted to say.

In Washington, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Putin's visit to North Korea illustrates how Russia tries, "in desperation, to develop and to strengthen relations with countries that can provide it with what it needs to continue the war of aggression that it started against Ukraine."

The North may also seek to increase labor exports to Russia and other illicit activities to gain foreign currency in defiance of U.N. Security Council sanctions, according to a recent report by the Institute for National Security Strategy, a think tank run by South Korea's main spy agency. There will likely be talks about expanding cooperation in agriculture, fisheries and mining and further promoting Russian tourism to North Korea, the institute said.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest point in years, with the pace of both Kim's weapons tests and combined military exercises involving the United States, South Korea and Japan intensifying in a tit-for-tat cycle.

The Koreas also have engaged in Cold War-style psychological warfare that involved North Korea dropping tons of trash on the South with balloons, and the South broadcasting anti-North Korean propaganda with its loudspeakers.

A US aircraft carrier and its crew have fought Houthi attacks for months. How long can it last?

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

ABOARD THE USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER IN THE RED SEA (AP) — The combat markings emblazoned on the F/A-18 fighter jet tell the story: 15 missiles and six drones, painted in black just below the cockpit windshield.

As the jet sits on the deck of the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier in the Red Sea, its markings illuminate the enemy targets that it's destroyed in recent months and underscore the intensity of the fight to protect commercial shipping from persistent missile and drone attacks by the Iranian-backed Houthi

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rebels in Yemen.

But they also hint at the fatigue setting in, as the carrier, its strike group and about 7,000 sailors close in on their ninth month waging the most intense running sea battle since World War II. That raises difficult questions about what comes next as U.S. military and defense leaders wrangle over how they will replicate the carrier's combat power if the ship returns home to Norfolk, Virginia.

Already, the carrier's deployment has been extended twice, and sailors post dark memes around the ship about only getting one short break during their steadily growing tour. Some worry they could be ordered to stay out even longer as the campaign drags on to protect global trade in the vital Red Sea corridor.

At the Pentagon, leaders are wrestling with what has become a thorny but familiar debate. Do they bow to Navy pressure to bring the Eisenhower and the other three warships in its strike group home or heed U.S. Central Command's plea to keep them there longer? And if they bring them home — what can replace them?

U.S. officials say that they're weighing all options and that a decision is expected in the coming weeks.

U.S. commanders in the Middle East have long argued that they need an aircraft carrier in the volatile region. They say that it's an effective deterrent to keep Iran in check and that the ship gives them critical and unique war-fighting capabilities against the Houthis, who say their attacks are aimed at bringing an end to the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

The massive ship is a flexible, floating flight line that can launch fighter jets on a moment's notice, without any of the limits that host nations in the Middle East can place on Air Force aircraft taking off from bases on their soil. And those carrier-based jets can get within striking distance of Houthi weapon systems quickly without crossing borders.

"What the carrier brings is an offensive platform that's mobile, agile and doesn't have any access, basing or overflight restrictions," said retired Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, who headed U.S. Central Command for three years, ending in 2022. "It's sovereign U.S. territory. You can do as you want with those airplanes on that carrier. So that gives you enormous flexibility when you consider response options across the region."

Rear Adm. Marc Miguez — who commands Carrier Strike Group Two, which includes the Eisenhower and supporting ships — agrees that the aircraft carrier is crucial to America's military.

"Every time that there's a crisis on the globe, what's the first thing the president asks? 'Where are the U.S. aircraft carriers?'" Miguez told The Associated Press during a visit to the Eisenhower and the USS Laboon, one of the guided-missile destroyers accompanying it.

On any given day, Navy F/A-18s roar off the Eisenhower and take out Houthi missiles or drones preparing to launch. The U.S. warships have fired volleys of Tomahawk missiles into Yemen to destroy warehouses of weapons, communications facilities and other targets.

Pentagon leaders worry that without the Eisenhower, they will need to tap more Air Force fighter jets based in surrounding countries, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

But many Arab nations place flight or other restrictions on the types of offensive strikes the U.S. can do from their land because of regional sensitivities. Others worry about triggering another war between Saudi Arabia and Yemen or inflaming tensions with Iran.

U.S. military leaders say the U.S. can adapt and get forces where they need to be. But that can require longer fighter jet flights from distant bases, requiring refueling capabilities and presenting other hurdles.

Extending the Eisenhower's deployment again is an option — but for many, it's the least desirable.

Navy leaders worry about the sailors, who actually have been able to see incoming Houthi-launched missiles seconds before they are destroyed by the ship's defensive strikes. And officials in the Pentagon are talking about how to care for the sailors when they return home, including counseling and treatment for possible post-traumatic stress.

Miguez also notes the strain on the ships themselves.

"We are constantly reminding the Department of Defense that we're going to need to take a respite and a break, to try and get back to maintenance," he said. "These ships are floating around in seawater. They're steel, and they require a lot of maintenance. And when you run them past red lines, when you run them past scheduled maintenance activities, you have to pay those off somewhere down the line."

A third option would be sending other ships — perhaps another carrier — to take the Eisenhower's place. But the massive ships are relatively rare. The U.S. operates 11, which is about 40% of the total number worldwide. Other countries have only one or two.

The U.S. could turn to France or the United Kingdom, which each have one, for at least a temporary stint in the Red Sea. U.S. officials have insisted that protecting the sea lanes is a multinational effort and having an ally take a turn could reinforce that message. It could give the U.S. enough breathing room to get another American carrier there, perhaps late this year.

Of the 11 U.S. carriers, four are deployed, three are in training and preparing to deploy, and four are in routine maintenance and repair, which usually lasts about a year or more.

The USS John C. Stennis, however, is undergoing its major, mid-life overhaul, which can last about four years and calls for the replacement and upgrading of the ship's nuclear propulsion system and other critical radar, communications, electronics and combat components. A carrier's lifespan is about 50 years.

One carrier is always based in Japan and does regional patrols and exercises, and another is generally deployed to the Asia-Pacific. That focus on Asia reflects the long-stated belief that China is America's top strategic challenge, and 60% of U.S. naval forces are based in the Pacific. The rest are Atlantic-based.

A third carrier is off South America's west coast, heading toward Japan, leaving the Eisenhower as the only one in the Middle East or Europe.

Lacking a carrier, another option would be to deploy the USS Wasp, a large amphibious assault ship now in Europe that carries F-35 fighter jets. Those jets do short takeoffs and vertical landings, so they can do strike missions off smaller ships.

The Latest | A second ship sinks as Yemeni rebels step up Red Sea attacks over the Israel-Hamas war

By The Associated Press undefined

A bulk carrier has sunk in the Red Sea after being attacked by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels off Yemen as part of their campaign targeting shipping through the vital maritime corridor over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, authorities said Wednesday.

With the Israeli offensive now in its ninth month, international criticism has grown steadily over the U.S. support for Israel's air and ground campaign in Gaza, and the top United Nations court has concluded there is a "plausible risk of genocide" in Gaza — a charge Israel strongly denies. Israel blames civilian deaths on Hamas, saying militants operate among the population.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed Tuesday that the United States was withholding weapons needed for the war in Gaza. President Joe Biden has delayed delivering certain heavy bombs to Israel since May over concerns about killing civilians in Gaza. However, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday that those 2,000-pound bombs are the only weapons under review. He told reporters that "Everything else is moving as it normally would."

Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza has killed more than 37,100 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count. The war has largely cut off the flow of food, medicine and other supplies to Palestinians who are facing widespread hunger.

Israel launched the war after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250.

Currently:

- For a second time, a ship attacked by Yemen's Houthi rebels sinks in the Red Sea.
 - Muslim pilgrims wrap up the Hajj with final symbolic stoning of the devil and circling of the Kaaba.
 - Israel's Netanyahu blames Biden for withholding weapons, but U.S. officials say that's not the whole story.
 - Sudan accuses the United Arab Emirates of fueling war with weapons to paramilitary rivals.
- Follow AP's coverage of the war in Gaza at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

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Here's the latest:

Hezbollah says at least 3 fighters were killed in Israeli strikes BEIRUT -- The Hezbollah militant group says at least three of its fighters were killed in Israeli strikes on Wednesday as a U.S. envoy works to quell tensions.

Lebanese state media reported multiple Israeli strikes along the border and in an area north of the coastal city of Tyre, about 30 kilometers (20 miles) from the frontier. The Israeli military said two Hezbollah launches damaged several vehicles in northern Israel.

The fighting came as Amos Hochstein, a senior adviser to U.S. President Joe Biden, returned to Israel after meeting with officials in Lebanon on Tuesday. There has been no word on whether he has made progress in his efforts to avoid a devastating regional war.

Hezbollah began attacking Israel almost immediately after the Israel-Hamas war erupted on Oct. 7. There have been near daily exchanges of fire, though most of the strikes are confined to an area within a few mostly confined to the area around the border.

But the fighting has escalated in recent weeks, raising fears that the clashes could boil over into a full-blown war. Israel's army announced late Tuesday that it has "approved and validated" plans for an offensive in Lebanon.

Israeli strikes already have killed more than 400 people in Lebanon, most of them Hezbollah fighters, but at least 80 of the fatalities were civilians. In northern Israel, 16 soldiers and 11 civilians have been killed.

Israeli drone strikes kill a Syrian army officer, state media says DAMASCUS, Syria — A Syrian army officer was killed in an Israeli airstrike Wednesday morning, Syrian state media said.

State news agency SANA reported that Israeli drone strikes hit military sites in the areas of Quneitra and Daraa in southern Syria, killing an officer and resulting in "material damages."

The United Kingdom-based war monitor Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the strikes came after members of factions affiliated with the Lebanese militia Hezbollah transported the wreckage of an Israeli reconnaissance plane to one of the targeted sites to dismantle it.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli army on the strikes. Israel frequently launches strikes on Iran-linked targets in Syria but rarely acknowledges them. The strikes have intensified since October against the backdrop of the war in Gaza.

For a second time, a bulk carrier attacked by Yemen's Houthi rebels sinks in the Red Sea DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A bulk carrier sank days after an attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels believed to have killed one mariner on board, authorities said early Wednesday, the second ship sunk in the rebels' campaign.

The sinking of the Tutor in the Red Sea marks what appears to be a new escalation by the Iranian-backed Houthis in their campaign targeting shipping through the vital maritime corridor over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

The attack comes despite a monthslong U.S.-led campaign in the region that has seen the Navy face its most intense maritime fighting since World War II, with near-daily attacks targeting commercial vessels and warship.

The Liberian-flagged, Greek-owned-and-operated Tutor sank in the Red Sea, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said in a warning to sailors in the region. The Houthis, quoting foreign reports in media outlets they control, acknowledged the sinking. The U.S. military did not acknowledge the sinking, nor did it respond to requests for comment.

United Nations human rights office spotlights 6 Israeli attacks on Gaza as possible crimes against humanity GENEVA — The United Nations human rights office has spotlighted six deadly bombing attacks by Israeli defense forces in Gaza during the first nine weeks of the war, saying they could amount to crimes against humanity.

The rights office says that more than eight months into the conflict, and despite commitments from Israel to look into such attacks, authorities have not produced transparent or credible investigations. Volker Turk, the U.N. human rights chief, said the requirement under international law that combatants avoid or minimize harm to civilians "appears to have been consistently violated" in Israel's bombing campaign.

The comments came along with the release of a new report Wednesday that seeks to highlight the

dangers posed to civilians of the use of powerful weapons, including 2,000-pound GBU-31 bombs. It said a Dec. 2 attack on Shujaiya neighborhoods of Gaza City destroyed 15 buildings and damaged 14 others. Three of the strikes, it said, came with no advance warning.

Israeli authorities responded by defending their respect for proportionality and principle of distinction under international law. They also accused the rights office of bias and said it didn't have full information about the circumstances of the military operations.

The report, while mainly focusing on Israel, also said Palestinian armed groups have fired discriminately into Israel, possibly violating international law.

The office said part of the reason why the six attacks were spotlighted among thousands carried out was because it had extensive information about them.

Strict asylum rules and poor treatment of migrants are pushing people north to the UK

By RENATA BRITO Associated Press

AMBLETEUSE, France (AP) — The rising tide crept above their waists, soaking the babies they hugged tight. Around a dozen Kurds refused to leave the cold waters of the English Channel in a futile attempt to delay the inevitable: French police had just foiled their latest attempt to reach the United Kingdom by boat.

The men, women and children were trapped again on the last frontier of their journey from Iraq and Iran. They hoped that a rubber dinghy would get them to better lives with housing, schooling and work. Now it disappeared on the horizon, only a few of its passengers aboard.

On the beach of the quiet northern French town of Ambleteuse, police pleaded for the migrants to leave the 10-degree-Celsius (50-degree-Fahrenheit) water, so cold it can kill within minutes. Do it for the children's sake, they argued.

"The boat is go!" an increasingly irritated officer shouted in French-accented English. "It's over! It's over!"

The asylum-seekers finally emerged from the sea defeated, but there was no doubt that they would try to reach the U.K. again. They would not find the haven they needed in France, or elsewhere in the European Union.

Europe's increasingly strict asylum rules, growing xenophobia and hostile treatment of migrants were pushing them north. While the U.K. government has been hostile, too, many migrants have family or friends in the U.K. and a perception they will have more opportunities there.

This story, supported by the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, is part of an Associated Press series covering threats to democracy in Europe.

EU rules stipulate that a person must apply for asylum in the first member state they land in. This has overwhelmed countries on the edge of the 27-nation bloc such as Italy, Greece and Spain.

Some migrants don't even try for new lives in the EU anymore. They are flying to France from as far away as Vietnam to attempt the Channel crossing after failing to get permission to enter the U.K., which has stricter visa requirements.

"No happy here," said Adam, an Iraqi father of six who was among those caught on the beach in a recent May morning. He refused to provide his last name due to his uncertain legal status in France. He had failed to find schooling and housing for his children in France and had grown frustrated with the asylum office's lack of answers about his case. He thought things would be better in the U.K., he said.

While the number of people entering the EU without permission is nowhere near as high as during a 2015-2016 refugee crisis, far-right parties across Europe, including in France, have exploited migration to the continent and made big electoral wins in the most recent European Parliamentary elections. Their rhetoric, and the treatment already faced by many people on the French coast and elsewhere in the bloc, clash with the stated principles of solidarity, openness and respect for human dignity that underpin the

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democratic EU, human rights advocates note.

In recent months, the normally quiet beaches around Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne-Sur-Mer have become the stage of cat-and-mouse games — even violent clashes — between police and smugglers. Police have fired tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets. Smugglers have hurled stones.

While boat crossings across the Channel represent only a tiny fraction of migration to the U.K., France agreed last year to hold migrants back in exchange for hundreds of millions of euros. It's an agreement akin to deals made between the European Union and North African nations in recent years. And while many people have been stopped by police, they are not offered alternative solutions and are bound to try crossing again.

More than 12,000 people have reached England in small boats in the first five months of the year, 18% more than during the same period last year, according to data published by the U.K.'s Home Office. The Home Office said 882 people arrived in the U.K. in 15 boats on Tuesday, the highest daily total of the year.

The heightened border surveillance is increasing risks and ultimately leading to more deaths, closer to shore, said Salomé Bahri, a coordinator with the nongovernmental organization Utopia 56, which helps migrants stranded in France. At least 20 people have died so far this year trying to reach the U.K., according to Utopia 56. That's nearly as many as died in all of last year, according to statistics published by the International Organization of Migration.

People are rushing to avoid being caught by authorities and there are more fatalities, Bahri said. In late April, five people died, including a 7-year-old girl who was crushed inside a rubber boat after more than 110 people boarded it frantically trying to escape police.

Authorities in the north of France denied AP's request for an interview but have previously defended the "life-saving" work of police and blamed violence on smugglers who have also attacked officers.

A spot on a flimsy rubber dinghy can cost between 1,000 to 2,000 euros (around \$1,100-\$2,200) making it a lucrative business for the smuggling networks led primarily by Iraqi Kurdish groups. They can earn up to \$1 million a month (approximately 920,000 euros) according to a report published earlier this year by The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

Sitting around a fire in an abandoned warehouse-turned-migrant camp in Calais, Mohammed Osman contemplated his limited options. The 25-year-old Sudanese man was studying medicine in Moscow when the civil war broke out in his home country a year ago. He suspended his dream of becoming a doctor. Forced to flee the fighting, his family could no longer afford to pay for his university fees and Osman was forced to leave Russia, where his visa only allowed him to study, not work. He crossed to Belarus and then to Poland where he says he was pushed back and beaten by Polish guards several times.

Eventually, he made it across the border and reached Germany where he tried to apply for asylum but was ordered to return to Poland, as per EU rules. All he wants now is to finish his medical studies in the U.K., a country whose language he, like many other Sudanese people, already speaks. The issue, as always, is how to get there. Talks of potential deportation to Rwanda have only added more stress and frustration.

"So where is the legal way for me?" he asked. "I am a good person. I know that I can be a good doctor. ... So what is the problem?"

In another makeshift camp near Dunkirk that police routinely attempt to clear, more dreams were held in suspense. Farzaneh, 28, left Iran to follow her passion: becoming a professional bodybuilder. Back home she was banned from taking part in competitions and persecuted for her sport.

"I was even threatened with my family, that's why I left my country," she said, refusing to provide her last name out of fear for her and her loved ones' safety.

Together with her husband, they managed to get a visa for France with a fake invitation letter. But even on EU soil they fear they could be deported back to Iran and believe only the U.K. to be safe. They have tried — and failed — to board boats to the U.K. "seven or eight times" but have vowed to keep trying until they make it.

"Us and other Iranians like me, we have one thing in common," explained Farzaneh's husband Mohammad. "When you ask them they will tell you: 'free life or death.'"

A few days after this interview, Mohammad and his wife Farzaneh made it safely to the U.K.

Ship attacked by Yemen's Houthi rebels in fatal assault sinks in Red Sea in their second sinking

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A bulk carrier sank days after an attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels believed to have killed one mariner on board, authorities said early Wednesday, the second ship sunk in the rebels' campaign.

The sinking of the Tutor in the Red Sea marks what appears to be a new escalation by the Iranian-backed Houthis in their campaign targeting shipping through the vital maritime corridor over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

The attack comes despite a monthslong U.S.-led campaign in the region that has seen the Navy face its most-intense maritime fighting since World War II, with near-daily attacks targeting commercial vessels and warship.

The Liberian-flagged, Greek-owned-and-operated Tutor sank in the Red Sea, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said in a warning to sailors in the region.

"Military authorities report maritime debris and oil sighted in the last reported location," the UKMTO said. "The vessel is believed to have sunk."

The Houthis, quoting foreign reports in media outlets they control, acknowledged the sinking. The U.S. military did not acknowledge the sinking, nor did it respond to requests for comment.

The Tutor came under attack about a week ago by a bomb-carrying Houthi drone boat in the Red Sea. John Kirby, a White House national security spokesman, said Monday that the attack killed "a crew member who hailed from the Philippines." The Philippines has yet to acknowledge the death, but the man who had been aboard the Tutor has been missing for over a week in the Red Sea, which faces intense summertime heat.

The use of a boat loaded with explosives raised the specter of the attack in 2000 on the USS Cole, a suicide assault by al-Qaida when the warship was at port in the Yemeni city of Aden, killing 17 on board. The Cole is now part of a U.S. Navy operation in the Red Sea led by the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower to try and halt the Houthi attacks, though the rebels continue their assaults.

The Houthis have launched more than 60 attacks targeting specific vessels and fired off other missiles and drones in their campaign that has killed a total of four sailors. They've seized one vessel and sunk two since November. A U.S.-led airstrike campaign has targeted the Houthis since January, with a series of strikes May 30 killing at least 16 people and wounding 42 others, the rebels say.

In March, the Belize-flagged Rubymar carried a load of fertilizer sank in the Red Sea after taking on water for days following a rebel attack.

The Houthis have maintained their attacks target ships linked to Israel, the U.S. or the U.K. However, many of the ships they've attacked have little or no connection to the ongoing Israel-Hamas war.

The war in Gaza has killed more than 37,000 Palestinians there, while hundreds of others have been killed in Israeli operations in the West Bank. It began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking around 250 hostage.

A recent report by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency acknowledged container shipping through Red Sea has declined by 90% since December over the attacks. As much as 15% of the world's maritime traffic flows through that corridor.

Meanwhile Wednesday, the Houthis said U.S.-led airstrikes targeted Raymah, a province in Yemen under rebel control. The Houthi-controlled SABA news agency described a local radio station's building as being "totally destroyed" in the strikes. About a week earlier, the Houthis said similar strikes killed two people and wounded nine others, without saying if those hurt were fighters or civilians.

The U.S. military's Central Command said in an earlier statement it destroyed eight Houthi drones in Yemen, while also destroying a Houthi drone in flight over the Gulf of Aden over the last day.

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Willie Mays, Giants' electrifying 'Say Hey Kid,' has died at 93

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

Willie Mays, the electrifying "Say Hey Kid" whose singular combination of talent, drive and exuberance made him one of baseball's greatest and most beloved players, has died. He was 93.

Mays' family and the San Francisco Giants jointly announced Tuesday night he had died earlier in the afternoon in the Bay Area.

"My father has passed away peacefully and among loved ones," son Michael Mays said in a statement released by the club. "I want to thank you all from the bottom of my broken heart for the unwavering love you have shown him over the years. You have been his life's blood."

The center fielder, who began his professional career in the Negro Leagues in 1948, was baseball's oldest living Hall of Famer. He was voted into the Hall in 1979, his first year of eligibility, and in 1999 followed only Babe Ruth on The Sporting News' list of the game's top stars. The Giants retired his uniform number, 24, and set their AT&T Park in San Francisco on Willie Mays Plaza.

Mays died two days before a game between the Giants and St. Louis Cardinals to honor the Negro Leagues at Rickwood Field in Birmingham, Alabama.

"All of Major League Baseball is in mourning today as we are gathered at the very ballpark where a career and a legacy like no other began," Commissioner Rob Manfred said. "Willie Mays took his all-around brilliance from the Birmingham Black Barons of the Negro American League to the historic Giants franchise. From coast to coast ... Willie inspired generations of players and fans as the game grew and truly earned its place as our National Pastime."

Few were so blessed with each of the five essential qualities for a superstar -- hitting for average, hitting for power, speed, fielding and throwing. Fewer so joyously exerted those qualities -- whether launching home runs; dashing around the bases, loose-fitting cap flying off his head; or chasing down fly balls in center field and finishing the job with his trademark basket catch.

Over 23 major league seasons, virtually all with the New York/San Francisco Giants but also including one in the Negro Leagues, Mays batted .301, hit 660 home runs, totaled 3,293 hits, scored more than 2,000 runs and won 12 Gold Gloves. He was Rookie of the Year in 1951, twice was named the Most Valuable Player and finished in the top 10 for the MVP 10 other times. His lightning sprint and over-the-shoulder grab of an apparent extra base hit in the 1954 World Series remains the most celebrated defensive play in baseball history.

"When I played ball, I tried to make sure everybody enjoyed what I was doing," Mays told NPR in 2010. "I made the clubhouse guy fit me a cap that when I ran, the wind gets up in the bottom and it flies right off. People love that kind of stuff."

For millions in the 1950s and '60s and after, the smiling ball player with the friendly, high-pitched voice was a signature athlete and showman during an era when baseball was still the signature pastime. Awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama in 2015, Mays left his fans with countless memories. But a single feat served to capture his magic -- one so untoppable it was simply called "The Catch."

In Game 1 of the 1954 World Series, the then-New York Giants hosted the Cleveland Indians, who had won 111 games in the regular season and were strong favorites in the postseason. The score was 2-2 in the top of the eighth inning. Cleveland's Vic Wertz faced reliever Don Liddle with none out, Larry Doby on second and Al Rosen on first.

With the count 1-2, Wertz smashed a fastball to deep center field. In an average park, with an average center fielder, Wertz would have homered, or at least had an easy triple. But the center field wall in the eccentrically shaped Polo Grounds was more than 450 feet away. And there was nothing close to average about the skills of Willie Mays.

Decades of taped replays have not diminished the astonishment of watching Mays race toward the wall, his back to home plate; reach out his glove and haul in the drive. What followed was also extraordinary: Mays managed to turn around while still moving forward, heave the ball to the infield and prevent Doby from scoring even as Mays spun to the ground. Mays himself would proudly point out that "the throw"

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was as important as “the catch.”

“Soon as it got hit, I knew I’d catch the ball,” Mays told biographer James S. Hirsch, whose book came out in 2010.

“All the time I’m running back, I’m thinking, ‘Willie, you’ve got to get this ball back to the infield.’”

“The Catch” was seen and heard by millions through radio and the then-emerging medium of television, and Mays became one of the first Black athletes with mass media appeal. He was a guest star on “The Donna Reed Show,” “Bewitched” and other sitcoms. He inspired a handful of songs and was named first in Terry Cashman’s 1980s novelty hit, “Talkin’ Baseball (Willie, Mickey & The Duke),” a tribute in part to the brief era when New York had three future Hall of Famers in center: Mays, Mantle of the Yankees and Snider of the Brooklyn Dodgers.

The Giants went on to sweep the Indians, with many citing Mays’ play as the turning point. The impact was so powerful that 63 years later, in 2017, baseball named the World Series Most Valuable Player after him even though it was his only moment of postseason greatness. He appeared in three other World Series, in 1951 and 1962 for the Giants and 1973 for the Mets, batting just .239 with no home runs in the four series. (His one postseason homer was in the 1971 National League playoffs, when the Giants lost to the Pittsburgh Pirates).

But “The Catch” and his achievements during the regular season were greatness enough. Yankees and Dodgers fans may have fiercely challenged Mays’ eminence, but Mantle and Snider did not. At a 1995 baseball writers dinner in Manhattan, with all three at the dais, Mantle raised the eternal question: Which of the three was better?

“We don’t mind being second, do we, Duke?” he added.

Between 1954 and 1966, Mays drove in 100 or more runs 10 times, scored 100 or more 12 times, hit 40 or more homers six times, more than 50 homers twice and led the league in stolen bases four times. His numbers might have been bigger. He missed most of 1952 and all of 1953 because of military service, quite possibly costing him the chance to overtake Ruth’s career home run record of 714, an honor that first went to Henry Aaron; then Mays’ godson, Barry Bonds. He likely would have won more Gold Gloves if the award had been established before 1956. He insisted he would have led the league in steals more often had he tried.

“I am beyond devastated and overcome with emotion. I have no words to describe what you mean to me,” Bonds wrote on Instagram.

Mays was fortunate in escaping serious injury and avoiding major scandal, but he endured personal and professional troubles. His first marriage, to Margherite Wendell, ended in divorce. He was often short of money in the pre-free agent era, and he received less for endorsements than Mantle and other white athletes. He was subject to racist insults and his insistence that he was an entertainer, not a spokesman, led to his being chastised by Jackie Robinson and others for not contributing more to the civil rights movement. He didn’t care for some of his managers and didn’t always appreciate a fellow idol, notably Aaron, his greatest contemporary.

“When Henry began to soar up the home-run chart, Willie was loathe to give even a partial nod to Henry’s ability, choosing instead to blame his own performance on his home turf, (San Francisco’s) Candlestick Park, saying it was a lousy park in which to hit homers and this was the reason for Henry’s onrush,” Aaron biographer Howard Bryant wrote in 2010.

Admirers of Aaron, who died in 2021, would contend that only his quiet demeanor and geographical distance from major media centers — Aaron played in Atlanta and Milwaukee — kept him from being ranked the same as, or even better than Mays. But much of the baseball world placed Mays above all. He was the game’s highest-paid player for 11 seasons (according to the Society for American Baseball Research) and often batted first in All-Star Games, because he was Willie Mays. From center field, he called pitches and positioned other fielders. He boasted that he relied on his own instincts, not those of any coach, when deciding whether to try for an extra base.

Sports writer Barney Kremenko has often been credited with nicknaming him “The Say Hey Kid,” referring to Mays’ spirited way of greeting his teammates. Moments on and off the field sealed the public’s

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affection. In 1965, Mays defused a horrifying brawl after teammate Juan Marichal clubbed Los Angeles Dodgers catcher John Roseboro with a bat. Mays led a bloodied Roseboro away and sat with him on the clubhouse bench of the Dodgers, the Giants' hated rivals.

Years earlier, when living in Manhattan, he endeared himself to young fans by playing in neighborhood stickball games.

"I used to have maybe 10 kids come to my window," he said in 2011 while visiting the area of the old Polo Grounds. "Every morning, they'd come at 9 o'clock. They'd knock on my window, get me up. And I had to be out at 9:30. So they'd give me a chance to go shower. They'd give me a chance to eat breakfast. But I had to be out there at 9:30, because that's when they wanted to play. So I played with them for about maybe an hour."

He was born in Westfield, Alabama, in 1931, the son of a Negro League player who wanted Willie to do the same, playing catch with him and letting him sit in the dugout. Young Mays was so gifted an athlete that childhood friends swore that basketball, not baseball, was his best sport.

By high school he was playing for the Birmingham Black Barons, and late in life would receive an additional 10 hits to his career total, 3,293, when Negro League statistics were recognized in 2024 by Major League Baseball. With Robinson breaking the major league's color barrier in 1947, Mays' ascension became inevitable. The Giants signed him after he graduated from high school (he had to skip his senior prom) and sent him to their minor league affiliate in Trenton, New Jersey. He began the 1951 season with Minneapolis, a Triple-A club. After 35 games, he was batting a head-turning .477 and was labeled by one scout as "the best prospect in America." Giants Manager Leo Durocher saw no reason to wait and demanded that Mays, barely 20 at the time, join his team's starting lineup.

Durocher managed Mays from 1951-55 and became a father figure — the surly but astute leader who nurtured and sometimes pampered the young phenom. As Durocher liked to tell it, and Mays never disputed, Mays struggled in his first few games and was ready to go back to the minors.

"In the minors I'm hitting .477, killing everybody. And I came to the majors, I couldn't hit. I was playing the outfield very, very well, throwing out everybody, but I just couldn't get a hit," Mays told the Academy of Achievement, a Washington-based leadership center, in 1996. "And I started crying, and Leo came to me and he says, 'You're my center fielder; it doesn't make any difference what you do. You just go home, come back and play tomorrow.' I think that really, really turned me around."

Mays finished 1951 batting .272 with 20 home runs, good enough to be named the league's top rookie. He might have been a legend that first season. The Giants were 13 games behind Brooklyn on Aug. 11, but rallied and tied the Dodgers, then won a best-of-3 playoff series with one of baseball's most storied homers: Bobby Thomson's shot in the bottom of the ninth off Ralph Branca.

Mays was the on-deck batter.

"I was concentrating on Branca, what he was throwing, what he might throw me," Mays told The New York Times in 2010. "When he hit the home run, I didn't even move."

"I remember all the guys running by me, running to home plate, and I'm saying, 'What's going on here?' I was thinking, 'I got to hit!'"

His military service the next two years stalled his career, but not his development. Mays was assigned as a batting instructor for his unit's baseball team and, at the suggestion of one pupil, began catching fly balls by holding out his glove face up, around his belly, like a basket. Mays adopted the new approach in part because it enabled him to throw more quickly.

He returned full time in 1954, hit 41 homers and a league-leading .345. He was only 34 when he hit his 500th career homer, in 1965, but managed just 160 over the next eight years. Early in the 1972 season, with Mays struggling and the Giants looking to cut costs, the team stunned Mays and others by trading its marquee player to the New York Mets, returning him to the city where he had started out in the majors.

Mays' debut with his new team could not have been better scripted: He hit a go-ahead home run in the fifth inning against the visiting Giants, and helped the Mets win 5-4. But he deteriorated badly over the next two seasons, even falling down on occasion in the field. Many cited him as example of a star who stayed too long.

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In retirement, he mentored Bonds and defended him against allegations of using steroids. Mays himself was in trouble when Commissioner Bowie Kuhn banned him from the game, in 1979, for doing promotional work at the Bally's Park Place Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City, New Jersey. (Kuhn's successor, Peter Ueberroth, reinstated Mays and fellow casino promoter Mantle in 1985).

But tributes were more common and they came from everywhere -- show business, sports, the White House. In the 1979 movie "Manhattan," Woody Allen's character cites Mays as among his reasons for living. When Obama learned he was a distant cousin of political rival and former Vice President Dick Cheney, he lamented that he wasn't related to someone "cool," like Mays.

"Willie Mays wasn't just a singular athlete, blessed with an unmatched combination of grace, skill and power," Obama said Tuesday on X. "He was also a wonderfully warm and generous person — and an inspiration to an entire generation."

Asked about career highlights, Mays inevitably mentioned "The Catch," but also cherished hitting four home runs in a game against the Braves; falling over a canvas fence to make a catch in the minors; and running into a fence in Brooklyn's Ebbets Field while chasing a bases-loaded drive, knocking himself out, but still holding on to the ball.

Most of the time, he was happy just being on the field, especially when the sun went down.

"I mean, you had the lights out there and all you do is go out there, and you're out there by yourself in center field," he told the achievement academy. "And, I just felt that it was such a beautiful game that I just wanted to play it forever, you know."

How did North Korean soldiers wander across the world's most heavily guarded border?

By FOSTER KLUG and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Don't believe the name: The Demilitarized Zone between the two rival Koreas might be the most heavily armed place on earth. Two million mines, barbed wire fences, tank traps and tens of thousands of troops from both countries patrol a divided swath of land 248 kilometers (154 miles) long and 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) wide.

So how, on the eve of Russian President Vladimir Putin's summit Wednesday with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, did as many as 30 North Korean soldiers wander over the line separating North from South, causing South Korea to fire warning shots before the North Koreans withdrew?

The short answer appears to be shrubbery: Because of an overgrowth of foliage, the North Koreans may not have seen the signs marking the thin military demarcation line that divides the DMZ into northern and southern sides.

But, more deeply, it can also be understood in light of the long, often violent history of the unique border set up after the 1950-53 Korean War. It ended with an armistice, instead of a peace treaty, leaving the Korean Peninsula divided, and technically still in a state of war.

Here's a look at the events surrounding the incursion:

What happened? On Tuesday, South Korean troops broadcast warnings and fired warning shots to turn back North Korean soldiers — somewhere between 20 to 30 — who briefly crossed the demarcation line in the DMZ.

The North Koreans, who had been doing construction work in the area, immediately retreated, and the South's military didn't spot any suspicious activity after that, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Seoul said.

It was the second such incident in two weeks.

Neither incursion was an invasion, or even a maneuver meant to test the South's defenses, Seoul says, but more likely an accident.

When North Korean soldiers briefly crossed a different part of the line on June 11, the same scenario played out: Warning shots from the South; a North Korean withdrawal.

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What does the demarcation line look like? The demarcation line, in many parts of the DMZ, is simply a sign mounted on a stick or a slice of concrete.

People have stepped across it before, under very special circumstances, and usually at the border village of Panmunjom. Former U.S. President Donald Trump walked across with Kim Jong Un. Last year an American soldier facing possible military discipline dashed over the line to the North.

Outside of Panmunjom, much of the DMZ is wilderness, but it is heavily monitored on both sides. And while the demarcation line may be easily crossed, it is very difficult to do so without being spotted immediately.

The southern side of the land border is protected not only by thousands of soldiers, guns and mines, but also by a dense network of cameras, motion sensors and other high-tech surveillance equipment. Breaches are very rare and are usually detected quickly. Defections from the North are also unusual along the North-South land border, though they have happened with frequency along the porous China-North Korea border and occasionally in the Yellow Sea.

The North's accidental intrusions this month may have been caused by a sudden jump in North Korean troops fortifying their side of the border.

Because overgrown trees and plants may have been obscuring the signs marking the demarcation line, Seoul says, the North Korean troops may have stepped over the line without knowing it.

Why are so many North Koreans working in the DMZ? Relations between the rival Koreas are worse now than in many years.

Recent weeks have seen a tit-for-tat standoff that has resulted in Cold War-style psychological warfare. Both sides have said they are no longer bound by their landmark military agreement in 2018 to reduce tensions.

The North Koreans along the border, Seoul says, have been installing what appear to be anti-tank barriers, reinforcing roads and planting land mines, even as mine explosions have killed or wounded an unspecified number of North Korean soldiers.

The construction started around April and may be an attempt to curb North Koreans trying to defect to the South, according to Seoul's military.

Could it happen again? Possibly, especially if the North Korean construction continues along the demarcation line.

But both sides appear intent on containing their animosities to the psychological warfare they're engaging in.

Still, there are worries that the hostilities are pushing them closer to a direct military clash. The Koreas have had no meaningful talks for years and could find it difficult to set up dialogue as tensions rise over the North's development of nuclear-capable weapons.

Some analysts say the Koreas' poorly marked western sea boundary — site of skirmishes and attacks in past years — is more likely to be a crisis point than the land border.

Kim, during a fiery speech in January, reiterated that his country does not recognize the Northern Limit Line in the Yellow Sea, which was drawn up by the U.S.-led U.N. Command at the end of the war. North Korea insists on a boundary that encroaches deeply into South Korea-controlled waters.

While the huge military presence on both sides of the DMZ means that years sometimes pass without incident, violence can quickly erupt. Two American Army officers were axed to death in 1976 by North Korean soldiers, for instance.

US soldier convicted of theft in Russia and sentenced to nearly 4 years in prison

MOSCOW (AP) — A court in Russia's far eastern city of Vladivostok on Wednesday convicted a visiting American soldier of stealing and making threats of murder, and it sentenced him to three years and nine months in prison.

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Staff Sgt. Gordon Black, 34, flew to the Pacific port city to see his girlfriend and was arrested last month after she accused him of stealing from her, according to U.S. officials and Russian authorities.

Russia's state news agencies Tass and RIA Novosti reported that the judge in Pervomaisky District Court in Vladivostok also ordered Black to pay 10,000 rubles (\$115) in damages. Prosecutors had asked for a sentence of four years and eight months in prison.

Black's case occurs amid tensions over Russia's arrests of American journalists and other U.S. nationals as the fighting in Ukraine continues.

Russia has jailed a number of Americans, including corporate security executive Paul Whelan and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich. The U.S. government has designated both men as wrongfully detained and has been trying to negotiate their release.

Others detained include Travis Leake, a musician who has been living in Russia for years and was arrested last year on drug-related charges; Marc Fogel, a teacher in Moscow who was sentenced to 14 years in prison, also on drug charges; and dual nationals Alsu Kurmasheva and Ksenia Khavana.

The U.S. State Department strongly advises American citizens not to go to Russia.

Black was on leave and in the process of returning to his home base at Fort Cavazos, Texas, from South Korea, where he had been stationed at Camp Humphreys with the Eighth Army.

Cynthia Smith, an Army spokesperson, said Black signed out for his move back home and, "instead of returning to the continental United States, Black flew from Incheon, Republic of Korea, through China to Vladivostok, Russia, for personal reasons."

Under Pentagon policy, service members must get clearance for any international travel from a security manager or commander.

The U.S. Army said last month that Black hadn't sought such travel clearance and it wasn't authorized by the Defense Department. Given the hostilities in Ukraine and threats to the U.S. and its military, it is extremely unlikely he would have been granted approval.

Black's girlfriend, Alexandra Vashchuk, told reporters earlier this month that "it was a simple domestic dispute," during which Black "became aggressive and attacked" her.

"He then stole money from my wallet and I didn't give him permission to do it," Vashchuk said.

On Wednesday, she told Russian news outlet Gazeta.ru that she considers the sentence "quite humane" and described Black as "violent and unable to control himself."

U.S. officials have said that Black, who is married, met Vashchuk in South Korea.

According to U.S. officials, she had lived in South Korea, and last fall she and Black got into some type of domestic dispute or altercation. After that, she left South Korea. It isn't clear if she was forced to leave or what, if any, role South Korean authorities had in the matter.

Caitlin Clark and the WNBA are getting a lot of attention.

It's about far more than basketball

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Oh, you thought going to a WNBA basketball game might be an escape from the arguments and polarization that are so common in American life these days? Ha, good one.

Some of the atmosphere in the public and media that has swirled around the professional women's league since the season started last month has been less fun time and more culture war, with rookie Caitlin Clark as the unwilling eye of the storm.

The white, 22-year-old University of Iowa college standout and No. 1 draft pick has become a canvas for all sorts of projections in her debut season with the Indiana Fever. She, and the predominantly Black and brown women playing in the league alongside her, seem to have become the latest proxies for long-standing American issues from race, gender and sexual orientation to who gets to take (or is thrust into) the spotlight and who gets ignored.

That shouldn't really surprise anyone, says Sarah Fields, professor of communication at the University of Colorado Denver, who studies the intersection of sports and American culture. "Sport," she says, "is a

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microcosm (that) reflects and refracts society.”

What makes Clark distinctive also makes her a lightning rod That Clark merits attention for her basketball prowess is not in doubt.

— She holds the record for most points by a Division I college basketball player, was known for her three-point shots along with a strong passing ability, and led her team to two straight national championship games. (They did end up losing both, to LSU and the University of South Carolina.)

— She was the unquestioned top choice for the 2024 WNBA draft in a strong class that also included Angel Reese of LSU, Kamilla Cardoso of South Carolina and Cameron Brink of Stanford University.

— Clark has also had the fortune of entering the scene at a time when women’s sports, at both the collegiate and professional levels, are seeing increasing interest and engagement from the public. The sponsorship money started coming for her in college, thanks to name, image and likeness opportunities, and she just recently signed a signature sneaker deal with Nike.

But this is America, where people who may have been flying under the radar or are known only to a smaller community can garner widespread public attention and celebrity almost overnight, and all of a sudden everyone’s got thoughts and opinions to offer.

In some corners of the internet and among some of the (predominantly male) sports punditocracy, Clark is being talked about as if she is THE reason the almost-30-year-old WNBA is FINALLY interesting enough to watch, and that the other players should keep that in mind and basically be “nice” to her, as if she needs to be protected.

That a young white woman is being put in the central role, with Black and brown women relegated to supporting characters, is about as old and familiar a trope as exists in a country with as troubled a racial history as the United States, says Frederick Gooding, Jr., an associate professor of African American studies at Texas Christian University.

“It’s not so much about the visibility of Clark,” he says. “It also speaks to the invisibility of Black females and how difficult it is for Black females to obtain that same type” of attention.

Bypassing Clark for the US Olympic team caused a backlash There’s been chatter that the veterans of the league are merely jealous of her spotlight, that she’s unfairly bearing the brunt of overly physical play like when Chennedy Carter of the Chicago Sky knocked her down, which was later deemed a flagrant foul. Rough plays against other players, like when Reese was clotheslined by Alyssa Thomas of the Connecticut Sun, doesn’t get nearly the same attention.

When Clark wasn’t picked last week for the U.S. women’s Olympic basketball team as a rookie, the outrage was vocal from some, who chastised the move as being short-sighted for not seeing the marketing opportunity.

“How dare you make this decision?” sports commentator Stephen A. Smith asked on ESPN’s “First Take.” “It’s stupid.”

Some of the commentary, especially online, was overtly racial, taking the stance that Clark was being discriminated against in the WNBA and in the Olympics selection because she is white and many of the other players are Black. (There are white players on the Olympics roster, a veteran squad in search of its eighth straight Olympic gold against tough international competition.)

On the flip side, there are critiques that the focus on Clark is in part BECAUSE she’s white — that in a country as riven by racial tensions as the United States, it’s another example of how Black women are ignored or stereotyped, even though they built the sports league in which she is now among the most recognized names.

That WNBA teams are now using chartered flights instead of commercial ones comes after years of advocacy from players, but the timing of the league’s announcement this season was taken by some as a reflection on Clark’s presence.

“It’s like, OK, can we talk about the decades that Black women in the sport have been advocating for these and not just say that it’s about this one white woman in this one moment now? Because it’s not,” says Letisha Engracia Cardoso Brown, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Cincinnati.

"Especially in a sport that's dominated by women of color, by LGBTQ+ individuals as well, to kind of center our attention on this straight white woman is just — I mean, it's par for the course."

Clark just wants to talk basketball. To be clear, none of this was started or even encouraged by Clark, who has tried to keep her public commentary to the game itself. Asked about it last week, she initially said: "People can talk about what they want to talk about, create conversations about whatever it is. But for myself, I am just here to play basketball."

But without referring to her by name, WNBA player DiJonai Carrington of the Connecticut Sun, who is Black, then questioned in a social media post how it could be acceptable to not speak out about it.

"How one can not be bothered by their name being used to justify racism, bigotry, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia & the intersectionalities of them all is nuts," she said, adding: "We all have a platform. We all have a voice & they all hold weight. Silence is a luxury."

Clark gave a stronger response later that same day, saying it was "disappointing" and "not acceptable" that people would be using her to promote their own agendas involving racism and sexism.

"This league is the league I grew up admiring and wanting to be a part of. Some of the women in this league were my biggest idols and role models growing up," she said. "Treating every single woman in this league with the same amount of respect is a basic human thing that everybody should do."

As a fan of women's basketball, Naomi Oberman-Breindel, 36, of Manhattan, wants to see that become the case.

"There are a lot of incredible basketball players with really interesting and compelling stories — as players and as people," she wrote in an email. "What is happening right now feels like a forced monoculture with a singular focus on one person."

Immigrant families rejoice over Biden's expansive move toward citizenship, while some are left out

By VALERIE GONZALEZ and JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of immigrants had reason to rejoice when President Joe Biden unveiled a highly expansive plan to extend legal status to spouses of U.S. citizens but, inevitably, some were left out.

Claudia Zúniga, 35, married in 2017, or 10 years after her husband came to the United States. He moved to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, after they wed, knowing that, by law, he had to live outside the country for years to gain legal status. "Our lives took a 180-degree turn," she said.

Biden announced Tuesday that his administration will, in coming months, allow U.S. citizens' spouses without legal status to apply for permanent residency and eventually citizenship without having to first depart the country for up to 10 years. About 500,000 immigrants may benefit, according to senior administration officials.

To qualify, an immigrant must have lived in the United States for 10 years and be married to a U.S. citizen, both as of Monday. Zúniga's husband is ineligible because he wasn't in the United States.

"Imagine, it would be a dream come true," said Zúniga, who works part-time in her father's transportation business in Houston. "My husband could be with us. We could focus on the well-being of our children."

Every immigration benefit — even those as sweeping as Biden's election-year offer — have cutoff dates and other eligibility requirements. In September, the Democratic president expanded temporary status for nearly 500,000 Venezuelans who were living in the United States on July 31, 2023. Those who had arrived a day later were out of luck.

The Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which has shielded hundreds of thousands of people from deportation who came to the United States as young children and is popularly known as DACA, required applicants be in the United States on June 15, 2012 and have been in the country continuously for the previous five years.

About 1.1 million spouses in the country illegally are married to U.S. citizens, according to advocacy group FWD.us., meaning hundreds of thousands won't qualify because they were in the United States

less than 10 years.

Immigration advocates were generally thrilled with the scope of Tuesday's announcement, just as Biden's critics called it a horribly misguided giveaway.

Angelica Martinez, 36, wiped away tears as she sat next to her children, ages 14 and 6 — watched Biden's announcement at the Houston office of FIEL, an immigrant advocacy group. A U.S. citizen since 2013, she described a flood of emotions, including regret for when her husband couldn't travel to Mexico for his mother's death five years ago.

"Sadness, joy all at the same time," said Martinez, whose husband came to Houston 18 years ago.

Brenda Valle of Los Angeles, whose husband has been a U.S. citizen since 2001 and, like her, was born in Mexico, has renewed her DACA permit every two years. "We can start planning more long-term, for the future, instead of what we can do for the next two years," she said.

Magdalena Gutiérrez of Chicago, who has been married 22 years to a U.S. citizen and has three daughters who are U.S. citizens, said she had "a little more hope" after Biden's announcement. Gutiérrez, 43, is eager to travel more across the United States without fearing an encounter with law enforcement that could lead to her being deported.

Allyson Batista, a retired Philadelphia teacher and U.S. citizen, married her Mexican husband 20 years ago, recalled being told by lawyer that he could leave the country for 10 years or "remain in the shadows and wait for a change in the law."

"Initially, when we got married, I was naive and thought, 'OK, but I'm American. This isn't going to be a problem. We're going to fix this,'" Batista said. "I learned very early on that we were facing a pretty dire circumstance and that there would be no way for us to move forward in an immigration process successfully."

The couple raised three children who are pursuing higher education. Batista is waiting for the details of how her husband can apply for a green card.

"I'm hopeful," Batista said. "The next 60 days will really tell. But, obviously more than thrilled because every step forward is a step towards a final resolution for all kinds of immigrant families."

About 50,000 noncitizen children with parents who are married to U.S. citizen could also potentially qualify, according to senior administration officials who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity. Biden also announced new regulations that will allow some DACA beneficiaries and other young immigrants to more easily qualify for long-established work visas.

Cooler temps and rain could help corral blazes that forced thousands to flee New Mexico village

By MORGAN LEE and ANDRÉS LEIGHTON Associated Press

ROSWELL, N.M. (AP) — Cooler weather — and the chance of rain — could bring some relief this week to firefighters battling blazes in southern New Mexico that killed one person, damaged hundreds of structures and forced thousands to evacuate.

Strong wind pushed the larger of two wildfires into the mountain village of Ruidoso, forcing residents to flee immediately with little notice. Weather patterns are expected to shift by Wednesday morning with moisture from a tropical wave in the Gulf of Mexico, said Joshua Schroeder of the National Weather Service in Albuquerque.

"Today was really our last dry day," he said late Tuesday. "Rains will then peak into Thursday and diminish by the weekend."

On the downside, he said, some shifts in wind were possible later Wednesday, and rain could lead to flash flooding in newly burned areas.

Ruidoso and much of the Southwest has been exceedingly dry and hot this spring. Those conditions, along with strong wind, whipped flames out of control Monday and Tuesday, rapidly advancing the South Fork Fire into the village. Along with homes and businesses, a regional medical center and the Ruidoso Downs horse track were evacuated.

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Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's office confirmed one fatality as a result of the fire but said it had no further details.

More than 500 structures have been destroyed or damaged, but it's unclear how many were homes. A flyover to provide more accurate mapping and a better assessment of damage was planned overnight Tuesday, Lujan Grisham said.

Ardis Holder left Ruidoso with her two young daughters, her gas tank nearly on empty and praying that they'd make it out safe. She was sure the house she rented in the village she grew up in is gone, based on the maps she's seen so far.

"We were already seeing where all the fire hit, it's everywhere," she said late Tuesday from a shelter in nearby Roswell. "If there's something standing, that's awesome. But, if not, we were prepared for the worst."

Lujan Grisham declared a county-wide state of emergency that extended to the neighboring Mescalero Apache Reservation where both fires started and deployed National Guard troops. The declaration unlocks additional funding and resources to manage the crisis.

Nationwide, wildfires have scorched more than 3,280 square miles (8,495 square kilometers) this year — a figure higher than the 10-year averages, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. About 20 wildfires currently burning are considered large and uncontained, including blazes in California and Washington state.

Lujan Grisham said the two southern New Mexico wildfires together have consumed more than 31 square miles (80 square kilometers). The exact causes of the blazes hasn't been determined, but the Southwest Coordination Center listed them as human-caused.

"We are deploying every available resource to control these fires," she said.

While many older residents call Ruidoso home year-round, the population of around 7,000 people expands to about 25,000 during the warmer months, when New Mexicans and Texans from hotter climates seek the cool of the leafy aspen trees, hiking trails and a chance to go fishing.

Nestled within the Lincoln National Forest, Ruidoso boasts nearby amenities including a casino, golf course and ski resort operated by the Mescalero Apache Tribe. Horse races at the Ruidoso Downs also draw crowds as home to one of the sport's richest quarter-horse competitions.

Ruidoso residents fled Monday through traffic-clogged downtown streets some described as apocalyptic, with smoke darkening the evening sky, embers raining down and 100-foot (30-meter) flames in the distance climbing over a ridgeline.

The evacuation order came so quickly that she Christy Hood and her husband Richard only had time to grab their two children and two dogs. Heavy traffic on the way out turned what should have been a 15-minute drive into a harrowing two-hour ordeal.

"As we were leaving, there were flames in front of me and to the side of me," said Hood, a real estate agent in Ruidoso. "And all the animals were just running — charging — trying to get out."

On social media posts, Ruidoso officials didn't mince words: "GO NOW: Do not attempt to gather belongings or protect your home. Evacuate immediately."

As Jacquie and Ernie Escajeda left church Monday in Ruidoso, they saw smoke rise above a mountain behind their house.

They kept a close eye on their cellphones and turned on the radio for updates. There was no "get ready," nor "get set" — it was just "go," Ernie Escajeda said. They grabbed legal documents and other belongings and left.

On Tuesday, the couple got a call from friends who are on vacation in Utah but have a home in Ruidoso that they've been told was destroyed, Jacquie Escajeda said.

"They lost their home," she said. "There's only one home standing in their whole little division that they live in, so there are a lot of structures lost. We have no idea if we're going to have a home to go to."

Public Service Company of New Mexico shut off power to part of the village due to the fire.

Lujan Grisham said cellphone service had been affected in some communities near the fire, and mobile cell towers were being set up to restore communications.

Amid highway closures, many evacuees had little choice but to flee eastward and to the city of Roswell, 75 miles (121 kilometers) away, where hotels and shelters quickly filled. A rural gas station along the evacuation route was overrun with people and cars.

Early blast of heat and humidity leaves millions sweltering across the US

By JOHN SEEWER and PATRICK ORSAGOS Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — A blast of heat and humidity in the Midwest and Northeast days before the official start of summer put a wet blanket on outdoor activities from festivals to sports camps as officials urged people to take precautions.

Cities that opened cooling centers this week advised that Wednesday's Juneteenth holiday means some public libraries, senior centers and pools where residents could beat the heat will be closed.

The dangerous temperatures were expected to peak in the eastern Great Lakes and New England on Wednesday and Thursday, and in the Ohio Valley and Mid-Atlantic on Friday and Saturday, the National Weather Service said. Heat index readings were expected to reach 100 to 105 degrees (37.7 C to 40.5 C) in many locations.

People and even zoo animals were forced to find ways to thwart the muggy weather.

An organization that provides produce to areas with limited access to fresh food in Columbus, Ohio, prepared frozen towels and packed cold water for their workers.

"Hydration is the key," said Monique McCoy, market manager for the Local Matters Veggie Van.

In Toledo, Ohio, the city canceled a weekly fitness event and a neighboring suburb called off a street fair as temperatures reached the mid-90s (about 35 C). A food bank in upstate New York canceled deliveries for Wednesday out of concern for staff and volunteers.

Schools in New York canceled field trips Tuesday to the Rosamond Gifford Zoo in Syracuse, where workers turned on water misters for visitors and the animals. Elephants and other animals were getting chunks of ice in their pools, said Ted Fox, the zoo's executive director.

"Even the tigers love to lick the ice and put their heads on them when it's this warm," Fox said.

The blast of extreme temperatures came a little too early for many.

"This is hot for just moving in to summer, so I'm hoping that we're going to see the downward trend in the temperature here soon because this is a warm one," said Krista Voltolini, who was selling produce at a farmer's market in Columbus.

A recent study found that climate change is making heat waves move more slowly and affect more people for a longer time. Last year, the U.S. saw the most heat waves — abnormally hot weather lasting more than two days — since 1936.

Chicago broke a 1957 temperature record Monday with a high of 97 degrees (36.1 C). Wednesday will be another hot day, but a cold front will bring relief to areas near Lake Michigan on Thursday and Friday, the National Weather Service in Chicago said.

That relief won't come in time for the closure of all but one cooling center in Chicago on the Juneteenth holiday.

"It's extremely alarming that we are shrinking our cooling centers in the middle of a heat wave," state Rep. Lindsey LaPointe told The Chicago Sun-Times. LaPointe represents Chicago's Northwest Side and advocates for people who do not have permanent shelter and other vulnerable populations.

Officials have urged people to limit outdoor activities when possible and to check in with family members and neighbors who may be vulnerable to the heat.

In New York, Gov. Kathy Hochul activated the National Guard to assist in any heat emergencies that develop over the next several days. She also said admission and parking fees at state parks, pools and beaches would be waived on Wednesday and Thursday.

"This is a time of significant risk, and we're doing our best to make sure that all lives are protected," Hochul said Tuesday.

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In California, wildfires erupted east of San Francisco in the state's historic Gold Country region and in the mountains of northern Los Angeles County after what had been a quiet start to fire season. Wildfires in southern New Mexico damaged 500 buildings Tuesday in a mountain village of 7,000 people that had been evacuated with little time to spare.

Meanwhile, a fresh batch of tropical moisture was bringing an increasing threat of heavy rain and flash flooding to the central Gulf Coast. Hurricane season this year is forecast to be among the most active in recent memory.

Panthers see another chance at Cup slip away, fall to Oilers 5-3 in Game 5

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Sports Writer

SUNRISE, Fla. (AP) — Matthew Tkachuk took off at full speed from basically center ice, chasing a puck that had sailed over his head and was heading directly toward an empty net.

He dove. He outstretched his stick. He swatted and barely, just barely, knocked the puck away to keep the Florida Panthers' hope of forcing overtime alive. Problem was, the next person who got to the puck was Connor McDavid — who scored to put the game away.

Such was how Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final went for the Panthers. Even when they were good, it wasn't good enough. And another long flight to Alberta awaits, with this title series suddenly looking very tight.

The Panthers gave up two power-play goals and a short-handed score, got into a 3-0 hole before trying to rally and wound up falling 5-3 to the Edmonton Oilers in Game 5 of the title series on Tuesday night. It was the second consecutive time Florida was thwarted in a chance to win the Cup, after an 8-1 embarrassment in Edmonton over the weekend.

Game 6 is there on Friday night.

"I'm not pumping tires. I'm not rubbing backs. I don't think we need that at all," Panthers coach Paul Maurice said. "Everybody feels probably exactly the way I do right now. I'm not feeling deflated. Neither's the hockey team. They're not feeling deflated. Little grumpy."

Maybe a lot grumpy.

"We're going to turn the page," forward Evan Rodrigues said. "We're going to learn from this one."

Rodrigues and Tkachuk each had a goal and an assist for Florida, and Oliver Ekman-Larsson also scored for the Panthers. Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 19 shots for Florida, which will see its 30-years-and-counting wait for the franchise's first Stanley Cup title last at least three more days.

"We get another crack at it on Friday," Tkachuk said.

McDavid had two goals and two assists to become the first player in NHL history to have back-to-back four-point games in the Stanley Cup Final, and Evan Bouchard added three assists for Edmonton. Connor Brown, Zach Hyman and Corey Perry also had goals for the Oilers while Stuart Skinner stopped 29 shots.

McDavid said it was a total team effort. It was, but it was also another superhuman effort from McDavid, the game's best player who is doing things never before done in the title series.

The four points gave McDavid 42 in these playoffs, the fourth-most in a single postseason in NHL history. The only players ahead of him are the ones everyone would expect: Wayne Gretzky had 47 points in 1985, Mario Lemieux had 44 in 1991 and Gretzky had 43 in 1988.

McDavid will have at least one — and, he hopes, two — games to add to that total. If there is a Game 7, it'll be in Sunrise on Monday night.

"Anytime you're in the same realm as those two, it's always a good thing," McDavid said.

It was the first time in Panthers history that they played a home game with a chance to win the Cup. Another sellout crowd came, some of the paying more than \$1,000 apiece for tickets on the secondary market — the crowd pushing Florida's total attendance for the season over 1 million for the first time.

They came to see the trophy.

The Oilers just wouldn't let it happen. And when it was over, Tkachuk was asked if the Panthers feel

the pressure.

"No. No. No," Tkachuk said. "It's not an elimination game for us. We're going up there, we have a 3-2 series lead, just got to take care of business like we did in Game 3."

Edmonton came into the night having scored 10 of the series' last 11 goals — a 2-0 third period in its Game 3 loss, then the 8-1 romp in Game 4.

And the Oilers picked up right where they left off, with an absolute clinic of special-teams hockey.

Game 5 started just as Game 4 did, with Edmonton getting a short-handed goal. Brown assisted it on Saturday night; he scored it unassisted in this one, and the Oilers were on their way. Florida took a penalty — interference by Niko Mikkola — as time expired in the first and it proved costly.

Hyman made it 2-0 with two seconds left in the second-period-opening power play, and McDavid pushed Edmonton's lead to 3-0 from a ridiculously tough angle that he made look easy three minutes later.

The three-goal lead has been infallible in the Stanley Cup Final for almost two decades; no team had lost after leading by three in a title-series game since Edmonton against Carolina in 2006. Every team since then, 39-0 in such games.

Make it 40-0. But the Panthers made it interesting.

It was 4-2 by the end of the second, Tkachuk and Rodrigues sandwiching goals around Perry's first of the playoffs — set up by a brilliant pass from McDavid. Ekman-Larsson scored early in the third, but the equalizer never came.

"Never want to put yourself behind the 8-ball," Rodrigues said. "We've got to win one game. Simple as that. Go up there, got to win one game. That's our mindset. That's what we're going to go do."

At least 1 dead in New Mexico wildfire that forced thousands to flee, governor's office says

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Thousands of southern New Mexico residents fled a mountainous village as a wind-whipped wildfire tore through homes and other buildings, and killed at least one person. Officials warned the danger isn't over.

New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham declared a state of emergency that covers Ruidoso and neighboring tribal lands and deployed National Guard troops to the area. A top-level fire management team is expected to take over Wednesday, and winds will continue to challenge crews, officials said.

The governor's office confirmed the fatality but said it had no other details.

Christy Hood, a real estate agent in Ruidoso, said the evacuation order Monday came so quickly that she and her husband Richard, only had time to grab their two children and two dogs.

"As we were leaving, there were flames in front of me and to the side of me," she said. "And all the animals were just running — charging — trying to get out."

The family headed out of Ruidoso, but heavy traffic turned what should have been a 15-minute drive to leave town into a harrowing two-hour ordeal.

"It looked like the sky was on fire. It was bright orange," she said. "Honestly, it looked like the apocalypse. It was terrifying and sparks were falling on us."

More than 500 structures have been destroyed or damaged, but it's unclear how many were homes. A flyover to provide more accurate mapping and a better assessment of damage was planned Tuesday night, Lujan Grisham said.

"It will really allow us to see inside the fire in a way that we cannot do now because it is too dangerous to be in the heart of the fire," she said.

The emergency declaration frees up funding and resources to manage the crisis in Lincoln County and the Mescalero Apache Reservation. Lujan Grisham said two fires have together consumed more than 31 square miles (80 square kilometers).

Other than the one fatality, no one has been seriously injured, she said.

Nationwide, wildfires have scorched more than 3,280 square miles (8,495 square kilometers) this year

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— a figure higher than the 10-year averages, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. About 20 wildfires currently burning are considered large and uncontained, including blazes in California and Washington state.

On Tuesday, two wildfires menaced Ruidoso, a high-altitude vacation getaway nestled within the Lincoln National Forest with a casino, golf course and ski resort operated by the Mescalero Apache Tribe nearby. What caused the blazes hasn't been determined, but the Southwest Coordination Center listed them as human-caused.

New Mexico has grappled in recent years with a devastating series of wildfires, including a 2022 blaze caused by a pair of prescribed fires set by the U.S. Forest Service that merged during drought conditions to become the largest wildfire in the state's recorded history. That year, a separate fire consumed 200 homes in Ruidoso and resulted in two deaths.

This week, Ruidoso officials didn't mince words as smoke darkened the evening sky Monday and 100-foot (30-meter) flames climbed a ridgeline: "GO NOW: Do not attempt to gather belongings or protect your home. Evacuate immediately."

Jacquie and Ernie Escajeda were at church Monday in Ruidoso, located about 130 miles (210 kilometers) southeast of Albuquerque, when they heard about a fire about 20 miles (30 kilometers) away. By mid-morning, smoke was rising above a mountain behind their house and the smell filled the air.

The couple started watching their cellphones and turned on the radio for updates. There was no "get ready," nor "get set" — it was just "go," Ernie Escajeda said. They grabbed legal documents and other belongings and headed out.

"Within an hour, the police department, the fire department, everybody's there blocking, barricading the roads to our area and telling everybody to leave," he said. "Thank God we were ready."

Earlier Tuesday, they learned the home of their best friends didn't survive the fire, Jacquie Escajeda said.

"There's only one home standing in their whole little division that they live in, so there are a lot of structures lost," she said. "We have no idea if we're going to have a home to go to."

Public Service Company of New Mexico shut off power to part of the village due to wildfire. The Ruidoso Downs that hosts horse races and the Lincoln Medical Center were evacuated later Tuesday.

Amid highway closures, many evacuees had little choice but to flee eastward and into the city of Roswell, 75 miles (121 kilometers) away, where hotels and shelters were set up. A rural gas station along the evacuation route was overrun with people and cars.

"The Walmart parking lot is packed with people in RVs," said Enrique Moreno, director of Roswell Community Disaster Relief. "Every single hotel in Roswell is filled to capacity right now. ... We go to the gas stations and we see just a bunch of people hanging around their cars."

Animals and livestock were moved to the state fairgrounds in Roswell, including five horses that arrived Monday night, as well as four llamas, according to Leslie Robertson, the office manager. Robertson said 30 more horses were headed her way Tuesday evening.

Both the South Fork Fire and the smaller Salt Fire started on the Mescalero Apache Reservation where the tribe's president declared a state of emergency.

With pardons in Maryland, 2.5 million Americans will have marijuana convictions cleared or forgiven

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Maryland this week became the latest state to announce mass pardons for people convicted of marijuana-related crimes as the nation wrestles with how to make amends for the lives disrupted in the decadeslong war on drugs.

Under Gov. Wes Moore's plan, more than 175,000 convictions for possession of cannabis or drug paraphernalia will be pardoned, but not permanently erased from people's criminal records.

Here's a look at where the U.S. stands in addressing old marijuana convictions.

A fraction of cannabis convictions have been expunged or pardoned. NORML, a group that advocates for

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legalized marijuana, has tallied about 2.5 million expungements and pardons for cannabis convictions in recent years.

"It's also a drop in the bucket when you consider the reality that over the last 50 years or so, over 30 million Americans have been arrested at the state or local level for marijuana," Paul Armentano, NORML's deputy director, said in an interview.

Pardons forgive people for their crimes. A pardon can restore civil liberties, such as voting, serving on juries and gun ownership. Expungements go further, hiding the record of convictions entirely; that can clear the way for receiving federal college tuition assistance, qualifying for public housing and allowing parents to participate in their children's school activities, among other benefits.

Executive branch officials such as mayors, governors and the president can offer pardons on their own, and relatively few executives have done sweeping ones like Maryland's. They've done so in Massachusetts, Nevada, Oregon, Birmingham, Alabama; and Kansas City, Missouri.

President Joe Biden has ordered multiple rounds of pardons for those convicted of possession on federal lands or in the District of Columbia. It's not clear exactly how many people are covered. For proof they've been pardoned, people have to apply for a certificate; as of this month, only a little over 200 covered by Biden's pardon had done so.

It takes a court — often at the direction of a law — to order expungements, though Oregon provides those along with pardons, and the Maryland approach makes it easier to obtain an expungement.

Clearing crimes is rooted in legalizing marijuana. Marijuana laws have changed vastly since the late 1990s when states began allowing medical marijuana, something most states have since done. Twenty-four states have legalized recreational use for adults, 26 have decriminalized it and the U.S. Justice Department this year moved to reclassify it as a less dangerous drug, a move that gives hope to advocates in the remaining 12 states that it could be legalized there, too.

When Colorado and Washington became the first states to legalize marijuana in 2012, it raised an issue: Is it OK for people convicted in the past of something that's legal now to continue to suffer consequences?

Increasingly, voters and lawmakers have been saying no. Most states that have legalized the drug recently have had as part of that policy a way to clear convictions for past use. An expungement-by-application provision was included when Maryland's voters approved legalizing marijuana in a 2022 ballot measure.

But often those provisions require people with convictions to petition to have their records expunged, a process that can take time and require the help of a lawyer.

Policies like Maryland's can address racial disparities. Advocates say that granting pardons or expungements in one swoop, as Maryland did, is a way to address long-standing racial disparities.

A major toll of the nation's drug policies is that Black people have suffered more direct consequences than white people, even though studies have found they use marijuana at similar rates.

An ACLU analysis of federal crime data found that Black people were more than three times as likely as white people to be charged with marijuana possession in 2018. There were disparities in every state.

Automatic pardons and expungements cover everyone who qualifies and don't introduce more chances for disparities.

A 2020 study by University of Michigan Law School professors found that less than 7% of the people eligible for expungement there were granted it. Most didn't apply.

"Under the old petition model, you needed a lot of resources to get an expungement," said Adrian Rocha, policy manager at Last Prisoner Project, which, like other advocacy groups, is pushing for large-scale pardon and expungement policies.

"The blanket pardons for whole categories of activities that were previously criminalized — they do help Black and brown communities and help address the impacts that all communities have faced," said Cat Packer, director of drug markets and legal regulation at Drug Policy Alliance.

Russia President Vladimir Putin makes a rare visit to North Korea, an old ally

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in North Korea early on Wednesday, after saying the two countries want to cooperate closely to overcome U.S.-led sanctions in the face of intensifying confrontations with Washington.

Putin was met at Pyongyang's airport by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. They shook hands and embraced, and Kim later joined Putin in his car to personally guide him to Pyongyang's Kumsusan State Guest House, North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said. The agency described their meeting as a historic event that demonstrates the "invincibility and durability" of the two nations' friendship and unity.

Putin, making his first trip to North Korea in 24 years, said in comments that appeared in its state media hours before he landed that he appreciates the country's firm support of his military actions in Ukraine. The Kremlin launched a full-scale invasion of the neighboring country in 2022.

He said the countries would continue to "resolutely oppose" what he described as Western ambitions "to hinder the establishment of a multipolar world order based on justice, mutual respect for sovereignty, considering each other's interests."

Putin's visit comes amid growing concerns about an arms arrangement in which Pyongyang provides Moscow with badly needed munitions to fuel Russia's war in Ukraine in exchange for economic assistance and technology transfers that would enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear weapons and missile program.

In the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, the streets were decorated with portraits of Putin and Russian flags. A banner on a building said: "We warmly welcome the President of the Russian Federation."

Putin also said in his published remarks that Russia and North Korea will develop trade and payment systems "that are not controlled by the West" and jointly oppose sanctions against the countries, which he described as "illegal, unilateral restrictions."

North Korea is under heavy U.N. Security Council economic sanctions over its nuclear weapons and missile programs, while Russia is also grappling with sanctions by the United States and its Western partners over its aggression in Ukraine.

Putin said the countries will also expand cooperation in tourism, culture and education.

Before heading to North Korea, Putin traveled to Yakutsk, a city in eastern Russia, where he met regional Gov. Aisen Nikolayev, and received briefings on technology and defense-related projects. He also met with young professionals working in Russia's Far East.

Putin is being accompanied by several top officials, including Deputy Prime Minister Denis Mantrurov, Defense Minister Andrei Belousov and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, according to his foreign policy adviser, Yuri Ushakov. He said a number of documents will be signed during the visit, possibly including an agreement on a comprehensive strategic partnership.

U.S. and South Korean officials say military, economic and other exchanges between North Korea and Russia have sharply increased since Kim met Putin in September in the Russian Far East, their first since 2019.

U.S. and South Korean officials accuse the North of providing Russia with artillery, missiles and other military equipment for use in Ukraine, possibly in return for key military technologies and aid. Both Pyongyang and Moscow deny accusations about North Korean weapons transfers, which would violate multiple U.N. Security Council sanctions that Russia previously endorsed.

Along with China, Russia has provided political cover for Kim's continuing efforts to advance his nuclear arsenal, repeatedly blocking U.S.-led efforts to impose fresh U.N. sanctions on the North over its weapons tests.

In March, a Russian veto at the United Nations ended monitoring of U.N. sanctions against North Korea over its nuclear program, prompting Western accusations that Moscow is seeking to avoid scrutiny as it buys weapons from Pyongyang for use in Ukraine. U.S. and South Korean officials have said they are discussing options for a new mechanism for monitoring the North.

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Earlier this year, Putin sent Kim a high-end Aurus Senat limousine, which he had shown to the North Korean leader when they met in September. Observers said the shipment violated a U.N. resolution banning the supply of luxury items to North Korea.

In Washington, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Putin's visit to North Korea illustrates how Russia tries, "in desperation, to develop and to strengthen relations with countries that can provide it with what it needs to continue the war of aggression that it started against Ukraine."

"North Korea is providing significant munitions to Russia ... and other weapons for use in Ukraine. Iran has been providing weaponry, including drones, that have been used against civilians and civilian infrastructure," Blinken told reporters following a meeting with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg on Tuesday.

Stoltenberg reiterated concerns about the "potential support that Russia provides to North Korea when it comes to supporting their missile and nuclear programs."

Lim Soosuk, spokesperson of South Korea's Foreign Ministry, said Seoul has been stressing to Moscow that any cooperation between Russia and North Korea must not "proceed in a direction that violates U.N. Security Council resolutions or undermines peace and stability in the region."

Tensions on the Korean Peninsulas are at their highest point in years, with the pace of both Kim's weapons tests and combined military exercises involving the United States, South Korea and Japan intensifying in a tit-for-tat cycle. The Koreans also have engaged in Cold War-style psychological warfare that involved North Korea dropping tons of trash on the South with balloons, and the South broadcasting anti-North Korean propaganda with its loudspeakers.

South Korea's military said soldiers fired warning shots to repel North Korean soldiers who temporarily crossed the land border Tuesday, apparently in error, for the second time this month.

Putin has continuously sought to rebuild ties with Pyongyang as part of efforts to restore his country's clout and its Soviet-era alliances. Moscow's ties with North Korea weakened after the 1991 Soviet collapse. Kim Jong Un first met with Putin in 2019 in Russia's eastern port of Vladivostok.

After North Korea, the Kremlin said Putin will also visit Vietnam for talks that are expected to be focused on trade. The United States, which has spent years strengthening ties and accelerating trade with Vietnam, criticized Putin's planned visit.

"As Russia continues to seek international support to sustain its illegal and brutal war against Ukraine, we reiterate that no country should give Putin a platform to promote his war of aggression and otherwise allow him to normalize his atrocities," a U.S. Embassy spokesperson in Vietnam said in a statement.

Willie Mays, Giants' electrifying 'Say Hey Kid,' has died at 93

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Willie Mays, the electrifying "Say Hey Kid" whose singular combination of talent, drive and exuberance made him one of baseball's greatest and most beloved players, has died. He was 93.

Mays' family and the San Francisco Giants jointly announced Tuesday night he had died earlier in the afternoon in the Bay Area.

"My father has passed away peacefully and among loved ones," son Michael Mays said in a statement released by the club. "I want to thank you all from the bottom of my broken heart for the unwavering love you have shown him over the years. You have been his life's blood."

The center fielder was baseball's oldest living Hall of Famer. He was voted into the Hall of Fame in 1979, his first year of eligibility, and in 1999 followed only Babe Ruth on The Sporting News' list of the game's top stars. The Giants retired his uniform number, 24, and set their AT&T Park in San Francisco on Willie Mays Plaza.

Mays died two days before a game between the Giants and St. Louis Cardinals to honor the Negro Leagues at Rickwood Field in Birmingham, Alabama.

"All of Major League Baseball is in mourning today as we are gathered at the very ballpark where a career and a legacy like no other began," Commissioner Rob Manfred said. "Willie Mays took his all-around brilliance from the Birmingham Black Barons of the Negro American League to the historic Giants franchise.

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From coast to coast in New York and San Francisco, Willie inspired generations of players and fans as the game grew and truly earned its place as our National Pastime. ... We will never forget this true Giant on and off the field."

Few were so blessed with each of the five essential qualities for a superstar -- hitting for average, hitting for power, speed, fielding and throwing. Fewer so joyously exerted those qualities -- whether launching home runs; dashing around the bases, loose-fitting cap flying off his head; or chasing down fly balls in center field and finishing the job with his trademark basket catch.

"When I played ball, I tried to make sure everybody enjoyed what I was doing," Mays told NPR in 2010. "I made the clubhouse guy fit me a cap that when I ran, the wind gets up in the bottom and it flies right off. People love that kind of stuff."

Over 23 major league seasons, virtually all with the New York/San Francisco Giants but also including one in the Negro Leagues, Mays batted .301, hit 660 home runs, totaled 3,293 hits, scored more than 2,000 runs and won 12 Gold Glove. He was Rookie of the Year in 1951, twice was named the Most Valuable Player and finished in the top 10 for the MVP 10 other times. His lightning sprint and over-the-shoulder grab of an apparent extra base hit in the 1954 World Series remains the most celebrated defensive play in baseball history.

Between 1954 and 1966, Mays drove in 100 or more runs 10 times, scored 100 or more 12 times, hit 40 or more homers six times, more than 50 homers twice and led the league in stolen bases four times. His numbers might have been bigger. He missed most of 1952 and all of 1953 because of military service, quite possibly costing him the chance to overtake Ruth's career home run record of 714, an honor that first went to Henry Aaron; then Mays' godson, Barry Bonds. He likely would have won more Gold Gloves if the award had been established before 1956. He insisted he would have led the league in steals more often had he tried.

Sports writer Barney Kremenko has often been credited with nicknaming him "The Say Hey Kid," referring to Mays' spirited way of greeting his teammates. Moments on and off the field sealed the public's affection. In 1965, Mays defused a horrifying brawl after teammate Juan Marichal clubbed Los Angeles Dodgers catcher John Roseboro with a bat. Mays led a bloodied Roseboro away and sat with him on the clubhouse bench of the Dodgers, the Giants' hated rivals.

Years earlier, when living in Manhattan, he endeared himself to young fans by playing in neighborhood stickball games.

"I used to have maybe 10 kids come to my window," he said in 2011 while visiting the area of the old Polo Grounds. "Every morning, they'd come at 9 o'clock. They'd knock on my window, get me up. And I had to be out at 9:30. So they'd give me a chance to go shower. They'd give me a chance to eat breakfast. But I had to be out there at 9:30, because that's when they wanted to play. So I played with them for about maybe an hour."

He was born in Westfield, Alabama, in 1931, the son of a Negro League player who wanted Willie to do the same, playing catch with him and letting him sit in the dugout. Young Mays was so gifted an athlete that childhood friends swore that basketball, not baseball, was his best sport.

By high school he was playing for the Birmingham Black Barons, and late in life would receive an additional 10 hits to his career total, 3,293, when Negro League statistics were recognized in 2024 by Major League Baseball. With Robinson breaking the major league's color barrier in 1947, Mays' ascension became inevitable. The Giants signed him after he graduated from high school (he had to skip his senior prom) and sent him to its minor league affiliate in Trenton, New Jersey. He began the 1951 season with Minneapolis, a Triple-A club. After 35 games, he was batting a head-turning .477 and was labeled by one scout as "the best prospect in America." Giants Manager Leo Durocher saw no reason to wait and demanded that Mays, barely 20 at the time, join his team's starting lineup.

Durocher managed Mays from 1951-55 and became a father figure -- the surly but astute leader who nurtured and sometimes pampered the young phenom. As Durocher liked to tell it, and Mays never disputed, Mays struggled in his first few games and was ready to go back to the minors.

"In the minors I'm hitting .477, killing everybody. And I came to the majors, I couldn't hit. I was playing

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the outfield very, very well, throwing out everybody, but I just couldn't get a hit," Mays told the Academy of Achievement, a Washington-based leadership center, in 1996. "And I started crying, and Leo came to me and he says, 'You're my center fielder; it doesn't make any difference what you do. You just go home, come back and play tomorrow.' I think that really, really turned me around."

Asked about career highlights, Mays inevitably mentioned "The Catch," but also cherished hitting four home runs in a game against the Braves; falling over a canvas fence to make a catch in the minors; and running into a fence in Brooklyn's Ebbets Field while chasing a bases-loaded drive, knocking himself out, but still holding on to the ball.

Most of the time, he was happy just being on the field, especially when the sun went down.

"I mean, you had the lights out there and all you do is go out there, and you're out there by yourself in center field," he told the achievement academy. "And, I just felt that it was such a beautiful game that I just wanted to play it forever, you know."

Timeline of Willie Mays' career

By The Associated Press undefined

A timeline of Willie Mays' career:

- 1931 (May 6) — Born in Westfield, Alabama.
- 1948 — Joins Birmingham Black Barons of Negro leagues.
- 1950 — Signs with New York Giants for \$4,000.
- 1951 (May 25) — Major league debut.
- 1951 (May 28) — First major league hit after 0-for-12 start — a home run off Milwaukee's Warren Spahn.
- 1951 (Oct. 3) — In on-deck circle when Bobby Thomson hits Shot Heard 'Round the World.
- 1951 — National League Rookie of the Year.
- 1952-53 — Serves in U.S. Army.
- 1954 (Sept. 29) — Famed over-the-shoulder catch in Game 1 of World Series.
- 1954 — National League MVP.
- 1961 (April 30) — Hits four home runs against Milwaukee.
- 1963 (Feb. 20) — Signs record contract of \$105,000 for season.
- 1963 (July 2) — Hits 16th-inning home run off Spahn in Giants' 1-0 victory over Braves.
- 1965 (Sept. 13) — 500th homer, off Houston's Don Nottebart.
- 1965 — National League MVP.
- 1969 (Sept. 22) — 600th homer, off San Diego's Mike Corkins.
- 1970 (July 18) — 3,000th hit, off Montreal's Mike Wegener.
- 1972 (May 11) — Traded to New York Mets for minor league pitcher Charlie Williams and cash.
- 1973 (July 24) — 24th and last All-Star Game.
- 1973 (Aug. 17) — 660th and last home run, off Cincinnati's Don Gullett.
- 1973 (Sept. 20) — Says he will retire after season.
- 1973 (Oct. 14) — Final hit, off Oakland's Rollie Fingers, Game 2 of World Series.
- 1979 — Elected to Baseball Hall of Fame in first year of eligibility.
- 1979 — Banned from game by Commissioner Bowie Kuhn for holding casino job while still involved in baseball.
- 1985 — Reinstated by Commissioner Peter Ueberroth.
- 2015 — Presented Presidential Medal of Freedom.
- 2024 (June 18) — Dies at age 93.

Half a million immigrants could eventually get US citizenship under a sweeping new plan from Biden

By SEUNG MIN KIM and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden ordered expansive election-year action Tuesday to offer potential citizenship to hundreds of thousands of immigrants without legal status in the U.S., aiming to balance his recent aggressive crackdown on the southern border that enraged advocates and many Democratic lawmakers.

The president announced that his administration will, in the coming months, allow certain U.S. citizens' spouses without legal status to apply for permanent residency and eventually citizenship without having to first depart the country. The action by Biden, a Democrat, could affect upwards of half a million immigrants, according to senior administration officials.

"The Statue of Liberty is not some relic of American history. It still stands for who we are," Biden said from a crowded East Room at the White House, filled with advocates, congressional Democrats and immigrants who would be eligible for the program. "But I also refuse to believe that for us to continue to be America that embraces immigration, we have to give up securing our border. They're false choices."

Biden's action, which amounts to the most expansive federal protection for immigrants in over a decade, sets up a significant political contrast with presumptive GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump, whose hardline stance on immigration includes a push for mass deportations and rhetoric casting migrants as dangerous criminals "poisoning the blood" of America.

On Tuesday, Biden accused "my predecessor" of preying on fears about immigrants as he chastised Trump administration moves, such as a zero-tolerance policy at the southern border that led to the separation of families. But Trump has leaned into his own policies as Biden has faced disapproval of his handling of immigration throughout his presidency. At a rally in Racine, Wisconsin, on Tuesday, Trump proclaimed, "When I'm reelected, Joe Biden's illegal amnesty plan will be ripped up and thrown out on the very first day that we're back in office."

Because the shadow of a second Trump administration looms over Biden's new policy, Tuesday's actions will set off a months-long sprint by Latino organizations to get as many people to apply for the program as possible before next January.

To qualify for Biden's actions, an immigrant must have lived in the United States for 10 years and be married to a U.S. citizen, both as of Monday. If a qualifying immigrant's application is approved, he or she would have three years to apply for a green card and receive a temporary work permit and be shielded from deportation in the meantime.

About 50,000 noncitizen children with parents who are married to U.S. citizen could also potentially qualify for the process, according to senior administration officials who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity. There is no requirement on how long the couple must have been married, but no one becomes eligible after Monday. That means immigrants who reach that 10-year mark after Monday will not qualify for the program, according to the officials.

Senior administration officials said they anticipate the process will be open for applications by the end of the summer. Fees to apply have yet to be determined.

Biden formally unveiled his plans at a Tuesday event at the White House, which also marked the 12th anniversary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, a popular Obama-era directive that offered deportation protections and temporary work permits for young immigrants who lack legal status.

The announcement was welcome news to families with mixed immigration status, such as Antonio and Brenda Valle in Los Angeles. They have been married for nearly 12 years and have two sons who are U.S. citizens, but they have lived with the worry every two years that Brenda Valle's status as a DACA recipient will not be renewed.

"We can start planning more long-term, for the future, instead of what we can do for the next two years," she said.

Foday Turay was among those invited to the White House Tuesday for the announcement. He came to

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the U.S. when he was 10 years old from Sierra Leone, and is now a father to a young son and married to a third-generation U.S. citizen. Although he's enrolled in DACA and working as an assistant district attorney in Philadelphia, his status doesn't provide relief from the constant worry of deportation.

"My wife is tremendously impacted by this," Turay said Tuesday before the ceremony. "You know, every day she talks to me about what's going to happen. What if I get deported? You know, how are we going to raise our son? What country are we going to raise him?"

Republicans were making their own sharp contrasts with Biden's plan. In a likely preview of GOP campaign ads, Rep. Richard Hudson, chair of House Republicans' campaign arm, called the Biden policy a "mass amnesty plan." Other Republicans, such as Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, anticipated that this latest directive would be struck down by the courts.

Sen. Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican who is under consideration to be Trump's pick for vice president, forcefully advocated for legislation in 2012 that would have offered legal status to young immigrants, but on Tuesday he said "the world is different" now because immigration numbers have risen.

Tuesday's announcement came two weeks after Biden unveiled a sweeping crackdown at the U.S.-Mexico border that effectively halted asylum claims for those arriving between officially designated ports of entry. Immigrant-rights groups have sued the Biden administration over that directive, which a senior administration official said Monday had led to fewer border encounters between ports.

Biden's allies believe that the approach he is taking with his twin actions on immigration this month will resonate with voters.

"The only party that is being serious about border security is the Democrats. The only party that's being thoughtful and compassionate about what to do with people who are living in the shadows are the Democrats," said Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat who helped author a bipartisan border bill earlier this year. "The Republican Party has decided to take a walk on border security."

Among advocates, Gustavo Torres, the executive director of CASA, said Biden's announcement would energize Latino communities to get out and support him.

"This is what our communities have needed to rally behind President Biden for reelection," he said.

Biden also announced new regulations that will allow certain DACA beneficiaries and other young immigrants to more easily qualify for long-established work visas. That would allow qualifying immigrants to have protection that is sturdier than the work permits offered by DACA, which is currently facing legal challenges and is no longer taking new applications.

The power that Biden is invoking with his Tuesday announcement for spouses is not a novel one. The policy would expand on authority used by Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama to allow "parole in place" for family members of military members, said Andrea Flores, a former policy adviser in the Obama and Biden administrations who is now a vice president at FWD.us, an immigration advocacy organization.

The parole-in-place process allows qualifying immigrants to get on the path to U.S. permanent residency without leaving the country, removing a common barrier for those without legal status but married to Americans. Flores called it "the biggest win for the immigrant rights movement since the announcement of DACA 12 years ago."

The same progressives who were infuriated with Biden's asylum order praised the president on Tuesday. Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., who leads the Congressional Progressive Caucus, commended Biden and said the actions would help keep American families together.

"Many Americans would be shocked to hear that when a U.S. citizen marries an undocumented person, their spouse is not automatically eligible for citizenship," she said. "Imagine loving someone, marrying them, and then still continuing to fear you would be separated from them."

Biden again calls Trump a 'convicted felon' at a fundraiser pushing his 5-day total to around \$40M

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

McLEAN, Va. (AP) — President Joe Biden again taunted Donald Trump as a “convicted felon” during a high-dollar fundraiser Tuesday, saying his likely opponent in November’s election is waging an “all-out assault” on the U.S. legal system.

Tuesday’s event with former President Bill Clinton raised \$8 million for Biden’s reelection campaign. That’s part of a roughly \$40 million sum raised by Biden and his top surrogates over the last five days, according to the campaign. The vast majority came from Saturday’s glitzy fundraiser with movie stars and former President Barack Obama in Los Angeles that raised more than \$30 million. First lady Jill Biden also has been on her own personal fundraising swing that has brought in \$1.5 million.

Biden and Clinton, who appeared together with Obama at a March fundraiser at Radio City Music Hall in New York, headlined Tuesday’s event, held at the home of former Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe, a longtime Clinton adviser. Author John Grisham, Jill Biden and former first lady Hillary Clinton also attended the event in McLean, Virginia, a tony Washington suburb.

Biden told a backyard crowd of about 450 that Trump was desperate and “the threat Trump poses in a second term will be greater than his first,” while referencing the former president’s 34 felony convictions in a New York hush money case.

“For the first time in American history, a former president is a convicted felon,” Biden said, adding, “But, as disturbing as that is, more damning is the all-out assault Trump is making on our system of justice.”

Biden has for weeks personally decried the former president for claiming that the case against him was politically motivated, saying “it’s reckless, it’s dangerous, it’s irresponsible for anyone to say this was rigged just because they don’t like the verdict.” But Biden’s campaign has launched a \$50 million ad buy through the end of June that includes its first television ad highlighting Trump’s conviction, signaling they see the case as an issue of political strength heading into Election Day.

Before Biden took the stage, McAuliffe joked that the gathering he helped organize competed with the Hollywood big bucks.

“We don’t need all those movie stars and jugglers and singers and farm animals, whatever they got,” McAuliffe said of the Los Angeles event.

He also laughed when declaring to Biden: “When you win again, I am offering myself right now. ... I will mow the lawn at the White House.”

Hillary Clinton compared herself in 2016 to Cassandra in Greek mythology, who could see the future but wasn’t believed, saying, “That’s how I felt in 2016, when I was raising the alarm about Donald Trump.”

Now, though, she said: “We can all understand how dangerous it would be ever to entrust him and his allies and his enablers to lead our country. He did such tremendous damage.”

Clinton said it was hard to understand why people who lived through the COVID-19 pandemic and Trump’s presidency could still support the Republican, but “sadly, there are many of our fellow Americans who seem willing to take that risk.” She also called Trump a “clear and present danger.”

Bill Clinton thanked donors for their money and said of the Biden campaign, “They will do a good job spending it.” He said of Biden, “I’ve watched him do this job with standards and values and with great impact.”

Biden reelection campaign spokesman Kevin Munoz said: “Our supporters understand the stakes. The cash we raised since Friday means more ads, more organizers, and more direct contacts with the voters who will decide this close election in November — meanwhile Trump continues to scramble after having zero resources or presence in battleground states for months.”

Last weekend’s Los Angeles event — which also featured actors George Clooney and Julia Roberts in addition to Biden and Obama — was the largest single fundraiser in Democratic Party history.

Biden has ramped up his fundraising sprint as Trump shows signs that he is gaining ground in the money game. For instance, Trump raised \$50.5 million at an April gathering of major donors at the Florida home

of billionaire investor John Paulson.

The Trump campaign and the Republican National Committee say they've raised \$141 million in May, padded by tens of millions of dollars in contributions that flowed in after Trump's guilty verdict in his criminal hush money trial. The Biden campaign has yet to release its May fundraising figures.

The shooter who killed 5 at a Colorado LGBTQ+ club pleads guilty to 50 federal hate crimes

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The shooter who killed five people and injured 19 others at an LGBTQ+ club that was a refuge in the conservative city of Colorado Springs pleaded guilty to federal hate crimes and was sentenced to 55 life terms in prison on Tuesday, but once again declined to apologize or say anything to the victims' families.

Prosecutors nevertheless highlighted the importance of Anderson Lee Aldrich being forced to take responsibility for the hatred toward LGBTQ+ people that they say motivated the mass shooting. As part of a plea agreement, Aldrich repeatedly admitted on Tuesday to evidence of hate.

"The admission that these were hate crimes is important to the government, and it's important to the community of Club Q," said prosecutor Alison Connaughty.

Aldrich attacked a place that was much more than a bar, according to Connaughty, who described Club Q as a safe space for people in the LGBTQ+ community.

"We met people who said 'this venue saved my life and I was able to feel normal again,'" she said. The sentence against Aldrich "sends a message that acts of hate will be met with severe consequences."

Aldrich, 24, is already serving life in prison after pleading guilty to state charges last year. Federal prosecutors focused on proving that the Nov. 19, 2022, attack at the haven for LGBTQ+ people was premeditated and fueled by bias.

U.S. District Judge Charlotte Sweeney, the first openly gay federal judge in Colorado, heard heart-wrenching testimony from victims before accepting the agreement, which also includes a total of 190 years on gun-related charges.

Several of the survivors said they wanted the death penalty. However, Sweeney, explained that capital punishment had not been sought by prosecutors and would need to have been imposed by a jury. Instead, Sweeney said the life sentences will mean no drawn-out appeals and no more hearings where a hate crime defendant might become a symbol. Recalling the perspective of the father of Matthew Shepard, the gay college student killed in Wyoming in 1998 for whom the federal hate crime law is partly named, she said Aldrich will never get out of prison and will face "a miserable future, with a miserable end."

"Do not let this individual take any more from you," she said.

The survivors delivered harrowing accounts of the shooting and the fear and anguish they've lived with since. Several called for Aldrich's execution. The father of one victim said Aldrich deserved to be "killed like a dog."

Adriana Vance, whose son Raymond Green Vance was killed, said she wakes up screaming, not knowing how else to release what she is feeling.

"All I have left of his now is the urn that I speak to every night," she said. Aldrich "knows nothing but hate" and deserves death, she said.

One survivor -- who had been celebrating a birthday and performing as a drag queen that night -- expressed forgiveness for Aldrich, and focused on the community's capacity to find joy despite the pain.

"I've had to look at my partner in a casket, attend funerals of my friends and deal with unspeakable trauma," said Wyatt Kent, whose partner, Daniel Aston, was killed while working behind the bar.

"I see this person as a hurt person, created by failures of systems around them designed to help. I forgive you. We, the queer community, we are the resilient ones."

Aldrich, appearing in an orange prison uniform with head shaved and wrists handcuffed, faced the victims as they spoke but declined to make their own statement when given the chance. Defense attorney David

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Kraut made no explicit mention of hate or bias in his comments.

Kraut said there was no singular explanation for what motivated the mass shooting, but mentioned childhood trauma, an abusive mother, online extremism, drug use and access to guns as factors that increased the risk his client would engage in extreme violence.

Defense attorneys in the state case had pushed back against hate charges, arguing Aldrich was drugged with cocaine and medication. In phone calls from jail with The Associated Press last year, Aldrich didn't answer directly when asked whether the attack was motivated by hate, saying only, that's "completely off base." Aldrich previously pleaded no contest to state hate crime charges without admitting guilt.

Connaughty said evidence of Aldrich's hate for the LGBTQ+ community included two websites created by Aldrich to post hate-related content, a target found inside the defendant's house with a rainbow ring that had bullets in it and the defendant's sharing of recordings of 911 calls from the 2016 killing of 49 people at the gay-friendly Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

Aldrich also studied other mass shootings, accumulated weapons, shared an online manifesto from a mass shooter who referred to being transgender as a "disease," and coordinated a spam email campaign against a former work supervisor who is gay, the prosecutor said.

Prosecutors said Aldrich spent over \$9,000 on weapons-related purchases from dozens of vendors between September 2020 and the attack. A hand drawn map of Club Q with an entry and exit point marked was found inside Aldrich's apartment, along with a black binder of training material entitled "How to handle an active shooter."

Defense attorneys in the state case said Aldrich is nonbinary, and uses they/them pronouns and the federal plea agreement Aldrich signed also said that. However, a state prosecutor and some victims called that an effort to avoid responsibility for hate crimes.

Aldrich visited the club at least eight times before returning in a tactical vest and carrying an AR-15 style rifle, first killing a person in the entryway and then shooting at bartenders and customers before targeting people on the dance floor.

"The defendant was prepared to inflict the maximum amount of damage in the minimum amount of time," Connaughty said, adding that Aldrich fired 60 rounds in less than a minute.

A Navy service member, Thomas James, grabbed the rifle barrel, burning his hand, and an Army veteran, Richard Fiero, helped subdue Aldrich. Aldrich then shot James in the torso with a handgun and a third person, identified in state court as Drea Norman, stepped in to help keep Aldrich on the ground, according to the plea agreement.

There had been a chance to prevent such violence: Aldrich was arrested in June 2021, accused of threatening their grandparents and vowing to become "the next mass killer" while stockpiling weapons, body armor and bomb-making materials. But Aldrich's mother and grandparents refused to cooperate, and prosecutors failed to serve subpoenas to family members that could have kept the case alive, so the charges were eventually dismissed.

Aldrich was sentenced Tuesday under the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which expanded federal law in 2009 to include crimes motivated by sexual orientation, gender identity or disability.

"I'm sure the shooter thinks he took our spirit that night," said Ed Sanders, who was shot in the back and leg. "You cannot destroy our community by killing individuals. You can't kill our love and spirit."

US acknowledges Northwest dams have devastated the region's Native tribes

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — The U.S. government on Tuesday acknowledged, for the first time, the harmful role it has played over the past century in building and operating dams in the Pacific Northwest — dams that devastated Native American tribes by inundating their villages and decimating salmon runs while bringing electricity, irrigation and jobs to nearby communities.

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In a new report, the Biden administration said those cultural, spiritual and economic detriments continue to pain the tribes, which consider salmon part of their cultural and spiritual identity, as well as a crucial food source.

The government downplayed or accepted the well-known risk to the fish in its drive for industrial development, converting the wealth of the tribes into the wealth of non-Native people, according to the report.

"The government afforded little, if any, consideration to the devastation the dams would bring to Tribal communities, including to their cultures, sacred sites, economies, and homes," the report said.

It added: "Despite decades of efforts and an enormous amount of funding attempting to mitigate these impacts, salmon stocks remain threatened or endangered and continued operation of the dams perpetuates the myriad adverse effects."

The Interior Department's report comes amid a \$1 billion effort announced earlier this year to restore the region's salmon runs before more become extinct — and to better partner with the tribes on the actions necessary to make that happen.

That includes increasing the production and storage of renewable energy to replace hydropower generation that would be lost if four dams on the lower Snake River are ever breached. Tribes, conservationists and even federal scientists say that would be the best hope for recovering the salmon, providing the fish with access to hundreds of miles of pristine habitat and spawning grounds in Idaho.

"President Biden recognizes that to confront injustice, we must be honest about history — even when doing so is difficult," said a statement from White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Brenda Mallory and Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, the first Native American cabinet secretary. "In the Pacific Northwest, an open and candid conversation about the history and legacy of the federal government's management of the Columbia River is long overdue."

Northwest Republicans in Congress and some business and utility groups oppose breaching the dams, saying it would jeopardize an important shipping route for farmers and throw off clean-energy goals. GOP Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, who represents eastern Washington, called Tuesday's report a "sham."

"This bad faith report is just the latest in a long list of examples that prove the Biden administration's goal has always been dam breaching," she said in a written statement.

The document was a requirement of an agreement last year to halt decades of legal fights over the operation of the dams. It lays out how government and private interests in the early 20th century began walling off the tributaries of the Columbia River, the largest in the Northwest, to provide water for irrigation or flood control, compounding the damage that was already being caused to water quality and salmon runs by mining, logging and rapacious non-tribal salmon cannery operations.

The report was accompanied by the announcement of a new task force to coordinate salmon-recovery efforts across federal agencies.

Tribal representatives said they were gratified with the administration's formal, if long-belated, acknowledgement of how the U.S. government ignored their treaty-based fishing rights and their concerns about how the dams would affect their people.

"The salmon themselves have been suffering the consequences since the dams first were put in," said Shannon Wheeler, chairman of the Nez Perce Tribe. "The lack of salmon eventually starts affecting us, but they're the ones who have been suffering the longest. ... It feels like there's an opportunity to end the suffering."

Salmon are born in rivers and migrate far downstream to the ocean, where they spend their adult lives before returning to their natal rivers to spawn and die. Dams can disrupt that by cutting off access to upstream habitat and by slowing and warming water to the point that fish die.

The Columbia River Basin, an area roughly the size of Texas, was once the world's greatest salmon-producing river system, with as many as 16 million salmon and steelhead returning every year to spawn.

Now, scientists say, about 2 million salmon and steelhead return to the Columbia and its tributaries each year, about two-thirds of them hatchery raised. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe in southeastern Idaho said it once harvested enough salmon for each tribal member to have 700 pounds of fish in a year. Today, the average harvest yields barely 1 pound per tribal member.

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Of the 16 stocks of salmon and steelhead that once populated the river system, four are extinct and seven are listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Another iconic but endangered Northwest species, a population of killer whales, also depend on the salmon.

There has been growing recognition across the U.S. that the harms some dams cause to fish outweigh their usefulness. Dams on the Elwha River in Washington state and the Klamath River along the Oregon-California border have been or are being removed.

The construction of the first dams on the main Columbia River, including the Grand Coulee and Bonneville dams in the 1930s, provided jobs to a country grappling with the Great Depression, as well as hydropower and navigation.

As early as the late 1930s, tribes were warning that the salmon runs could disappear, with the fish no longer able to access spawning grounds upstream. The tribes — the Yakama Nation, Spokane Tribe, confederated tribes of the Colville and Umatilla reservations, Nez Perce, and others — continued to fight the construction and operation of the dams for generations.

Tom Iverson, regional coordinator for Yakama Nation Fisheries, said that while the report was gratifying, it remains “hopes and promises” until funding for salmon restoration and renewable power projects comes through Congress.

“With these agreements, there is hope,” Iverson said. “We feel like this is a moment in time. If it doesn’t happen now, it will be too late.”

Boeing CEO defends his safety record, spars with senators and apologizes to crash victims’ relatives

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

Boeing CEO David Calhoun defended the company’s safety record during a contentious Senate hearing Tuesday, while lawmakers accused him of placing profits over safety, failing to protect whistleblowers, and even getting paid too much.

Relatives of people who died in two crashes of Boeing 737 Max jetliners were in the room, some holding photos of their loved ones, to remind the CEO of the stakes. Calhoun began his remarks by standing, turning to face the families, and apologizing “for the grief that we have caused,” and vowing to focus on safety.

Calhoun’s appearance was the first before Congress by any high-ranking Boeing official since a panel blew out of a 737 Max during an Alaska Airlines flight in January. No one was seriously injured in the incident, but it raised fresh concerns about the company’s best-selling commercial aircraft.

The tone of the hearing before the Senate investigations subcommittee was set hours earlier, when the panel released a 204-page report with new allegations from a whistleblower who said he worries that defective parts could be going into 737s. The whistleblower is the latest in a string of current and former Boeing employees to raise concerns about the company’s manufacturing processes, which federal officials are investigating.

“This hearing is a moment of reckoning,” the subcommittee chairman, Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said. “It’s about a company, a once iconic company, that somehow lost its way.”

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., placed the blame squarely on Calhoun, saying that the man who became CEO in January 2020 had been too focused on the bottom line.

“You are cutting corners, you are eliminating safety procedures, you are sticking it to your employees, you are cutting back jobs because you are trying to squeeze every piece of profit you can out of this company,” Hawley said, his voice rising. “You are strip-mining Boeing.”

Hawley repeatedly mentioned Calhoun’s compensation for last year, valued at \$32.8 million, and asked the CEO why he hasn’t resigned.

“Senator, I’m sticking this through. I’m proud of having taken this job. I’m proud of our safety record, and I’m proud of our Boeing people,” replied Calhoun, who has announced that he will step down by year end.

Hawley interrupted. “You’re proud of the safety record?” he asked with incredulity.

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"I am proud of every action we have taken," Calhoun responded.

Senators pressed Calhoun about accusations that Boeing managers retaliated against employees who reported safety concerns. They asked the CEO if he ever spoke with any whistleblowers. He replied that he had not, but agreed it would be a good idea.

The latest whistleblower, Sam Mohawk, a quality assurance investigator at Boeing's 737 assembly plant near Seattle, told the subcommittee that "nonconforming" parts — ones that could be defective or aren't properly documented — could be winding up in 737 Max jets.

Potentially more troubling for the company, Mohawk charged that Boeing hid evidence after the Federal Aviation Administration told the company it planned to inspect the plant in June 2023.

"Once Boeing received such a notice, it ordered the majority of the (nonconforming) parts that were being stored outside to be moved to another location," Mohawk said, according to the report. "Approximately 80% of the parts were moved to avoid the watchful eyes of the FAA inspectors."

The parts were later moved back or lost, Mohawk said. They included rudders, wing flaps and other parts that are crucial in controlling a plane.

A Boeing spokesperson said the company got the subcommittee report late Monday night and was reviewing the claims.

The FAA said it would "thoroughly investigate" the allegations. A spokesperson said the agency has received more reports of safety concerns from Boeing employees since the Jan. 5 blowout on the Alaska Airlines Max.

The 737 Max has a troubled history. After Max jets crashed in 2018 in Indonesia and 2019 in Ethiopia, killing 346 people, the FAA and other regulators grounded the aircraft worldwide for more than a year and a half. The Justice Department is considering whether to prosecute Boeing for violating terms of a settlement it reached with the company in 2021 over allegations that it misled regulators who approved the plane.

Mohawk told the Senate subcommittee that the number of unacceptable parts has exploded since production of the Max resumed following the crashes. He said the increase led supervisors to tell him and other workers to "cancel" records that indicated the parts were not suitable to be installed on planes.

The FAA briefly grounded some Max planes again after January's mid-air blowout of a plug covering an emergency exit on the Alaska Airlines plane. The agency and the National Transportation Safety Board opened separate investigations of Boeing that are continuing.

Calhoun said Boeing has responded to the Alaska accident by slowing production, encouraging employees to report safety concerns, stopping assembly lines for a day to let workers talk about safety, and appointing a retired Navy admiral to lead a quality review. Late last month, Boeing delivered an improvement plan ordered by the FAA.

Calhoun defended the company's safety culture while acknowledging that it "is far from perfect."

The drumbeat of bad news for Boeing has continued in the past week. The FAA said it was investigating how falsely documented titanium parts got into Boeing's supply chain, the company disclosed that fasteners were incorrectly installed on the fuselages of some jets, and federal officials examined "substantial" damage to a Southwest Airlines 737 Max after an unusual mid-flight control issue.

Howard McKenzie, Boeing's chief engineer, said during the hearing that the issue affecting the Southwest plane — which he did not describe in detail — was limited to that plane.

Blumenthal first asked Calhoun to appear before the Senate subcommittee after another whistleblower, a Boeing quality engineer, claimed that manufacturing mistakes were raising safety risks on two of the biggest Boeing planes, the 787 Dreamliner and the 777. He said the company needed to explain why the public should be confident about Boeing's work.

Boeing pushed back against the whistleblower's claims, saying that extensive testing and inspections showed none of the problems that the engineer had predicted.

The Justice Department determined last month that Boeing violated a 2021 settlement that shielded the company from prosecution for fraud for allegedly misleading regulators who approved the 737 Max. A top department official said Boeing failed to make changes to detect and prevent future violations of

anti-fraud laws.

Prosecutors have until July 7 to decide what to do next. Blumenthal said there is "mounting evidence" that the company should be prosecuted.

Families of the victims of the Max crashes have pushed the Justice Department repeatedly to charge the company and individual executives. They want a federal judge in Texas to throw out the 2021 deferred-prosecution agreement or DPA — essentially a plea deal — that allowed Boeing to avoid being tried for fraud in connection with the Max.

"They had gotten away with murder because they had that DPA and they had three years to progress ... to improve their safety process, and actually they did nothing," Catherine Berthet, whose daughter Camille died in the second crash, said outside the Capitol on Tuesday. "Now they have to be made accountable."

Biden is offering some migrants a pathway to citizenship. Here's how the plan will work

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new Biden administration policy announced Tuesday will give roughly half a million immigrants who are married to American citizens but lack legal status in the United States a pathway to citizenship for them and their children.

It is one of President Joe Biden's most sweeping immigration policies and one that migrant advocates had been heavily lobbying the administration to undertake.

A look at the new policy, who might benefit and how:

How did things work before? Under U.S. immigration law, if an American marries someone who is not a citizen but is living in the United States, it can be a straightforward process for the spouse to apply for long-term permanent residence — called a green card.

But if the spouse has been living in the United States illegally for a long time, that process gets much more complicated.

They often have to leave and apply from their home country. Depending on how long the person has lived in the U.S. without authorization, they could have to stay abroad for three to 10 years before applying to come back. They can seek a waiver to avoid waiting that long abroad, but getting a waiver also is averaging about three and a half years.

They have to go abroad, apply at a consulate — where waits can be extensive — and be permitted back into the U.S.

"There is the risk of prolonged separation especially if things go wrong," said Elizabeth Taufa, policy attorney and strategist for the Immigrant Legal Resource Center.

Facing the prospect of leaving their families in America for a lengthy process that might not work, many decide to stay and live in the shadows.

How is Biden changing immigration policy? Under the new policy, many spouses without legal status can now apply for lawful permanent residence without leaving the U.S. and eventually get a path to citizenship. But it's not a blanket approval.

To be eligible, people have to have lived in the U.S. for at least 10 years, not pose a security threat and have been married by June 17, 2024. They would have to apply to the Department of Homeland Security, which considers the applications on a case-by-case basis, the department wrote in a fact sheet describing the new policy. Immigrant spouses cannot have already been admitted or paroled into the country previously.

Applicants will be vetted for previous immigration history, criminal history and more, including potential fraud, Biden's announcement said.

Once Homeland Security approves an application, the White House said, the person would then have three years to apply for permanent residency and could get work authorization for up to three years.

About 1.1 million immigrants without legal status are married to American citizens in the United States, according to immigration advocacy organization FWD.us. The administration thinks that ultimately about

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half that number — about 500,000 — could be eligible for this program, plus about 50,000 of their children.

On average, the spouses have lived in the United States for a little over two decades, the White House said. A senior administration official said during a call to brief reporters that they expect the majority of people benefitting from the program will be from Mexico.

How does this fit in with Biden's other immigration policies? The Biden administration has pursued a two-pronged strategy on immigration and border security over the past year and a half.

On one hand, Biden has made it much more difficult to qualify for asylum at the southern border and intensified removals of those who don't qualify to stay. Immigration advocates vilified Biden's decision this month to cut off asylum processing after arrivals on the southern border hit a certain number per day.

On the other hand, the administration has taken a number of steps to admit people into the country.

In the biggest example, the administration created a program last year allowing people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela to come to the U.S. if they have a financial sponsor, pass a background check and fly into a U.S. airport. As of the end of April, 434,800 people have arrived through that program from those four countries.

Many advocates have pushed the administration to do more for immigrants who have lived in the U.S. illegally for decades.

What's changing in the program for 'Dreamers'? Separate from the policy for migrant spouses, the administration also announced changes designed to help those in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program qualify more easily for long-established work visas.

The Obama administration in 2012 offered people who were brought illegally to the U.S. by their parents as children deportation protections and temporary work permits. Many of them, often known as "Dreamers," are now parents themselves.

Many companies who employ DACA recipients can apply for them to get a work visa, which is more stable and provides a pathway to permanent residence, said Dan Berger, an immigration fellow at Cornell Law School who co-founded Path2Papers, an organization that helps dreamers pursue work visas and other ways to get legal permanent residency.

But to get the work visa, the DACA recipient must travel abroad, apply and get a waiver to reenter the U.S. Berger said that waiver process is very slow and offers little guidance, so employers and DACA recipients aren't eager to try it.

"Having clear guidance and clear expectation is really helpful," he said.

What's next? The Department of Homeland Security has to produce guidance on how the spousal program will work. The program will go into effect by the end of summer, President Joe Biden said during a ceremony Tuesday.

It will fall to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, an agency within the Department of Homeland Security, to process all the applications. That agency has historically struggled with funding as it works to reduce backlogs and wait times.

Republicans and immigration opponents have intensely criticized the proposal, and opponents are almost certain to sue in an attempt to stop it.

Republicans block bill to outlaw bump stocks for rifles after Supreme Court lifts Trump-era ban

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republicans blocked bipartisan legislation Tuesday that would have outlawed bump stocks after the Supreme Court struck down a ban on the rapid-fire gun accessory used in the deadliest shooting in modern U.S. history.

Democrats tried to force a voice vote on the bill to ban bump stocks, a tactic often used by both parties when they know that they don't have the votes to pass legislation but want to bring an issue to the Senate floor. The bill, sponsored by Sens. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., and Susan Collins, R-Maine, would ban the sale of the devices, similar to the rule issued by President Donald Trump's administration after a gunman in Las

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Vegas attacked a country music festival in 2017 with semiautomatic rifles equipped with the accessories. The gunman killed 58 people and wounded more than 850 among the crowd of 22,000, firing more than 1,000 rounds into the crowd in 11 minutes.

"I refuse to stand idly by and wait for the next mass shooting," Heinrich said as he called for a vote on the Senate floor. "Bump stocks serve no legitimate purpose."

Nebraska Sen. Pete Ricketts objected for Republicans, blocking an immediate vote on the bill. He called the legislation a "gun grabbing overreach" that could be interpreted to include other gun accessories beyond bump stocks.

"This bill will not pass," Ricketts said. "It won't pass because enough people in this building still believe in the Constitution, and the Constitution affords Americans the right to own a firearm."

The 6-3 majority opinion written by Justice Clarence Thomas found the Justice Department was wrong to declare that bump stocks transformed semiautomatic rifles into illegal machine guns because, he wrote, each trigger depression in rapid succession still only releases one shot.

The effort to force the legislation is part of a larger election-year push by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer to hold votes on issues that are priorities for Democrats and where they believe they have a political advantage, even if they know the bills won't pass. Republicans have blocked legislation to protect access to contraception and in vitro fertility treatments in recent weeks, arguing that the Democrats are only bringing up the issues for political reasons. And Schumer announced this week that the Senate will vote in July on legislation that would restore the nationwide right to have an abortion after the Supreme Court overturned it almost two years ago.

The votes have put Republicans in a tricky position. In the case of bump stocks, many Republicans supported the ban when Trump issued it. But several said this week that they would oppose the legislation to reinstate it, arguing that the vote is another election-year stunt by Democrats, not a serious attempt to pass bipartisan legislation.

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis, a Republican who worked with Democrats on bipartisan gun legislation two years ago, said that if Schumer were serious about banning bump stocks, "he'd be calling people into a room who have worked on bipartisan bills," but instead "it's a political exercise, which is a shame."

South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Republican, criticized Schumer for a "summer of show votes" and for bringing up bills that are "clearly designed to fail."

Schumer countered on the floor that "it's not enough for Republicans to roll their eyes and dismiss this bump stock vote as a 'show vote.' Tell that to the families who lost loved ones."

The messaging votes come as the Senate's other business has come to a halt, with bipartisan negotiations on legislation such as rail safety, farm programs, taxes and prescription drugs stalled during a contentious election year.

Schumer has said he may continue to bring up the bills for repeat votes, along with a separate bipartisan immigration compromise that Republicans voted down earlier this year.

"Republicans don't want to talk about it, but they are going to have to vote on it," Schumer said.

California governor wants to restrict smartphone usage in schools

By SOPHIE AUSTIN Associated Press/Report for America

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced Tuesday that he wants to restrict students' usage of smartphones during the school day, citing the mental health risks of social media.

The announcement, which was first reported by Politico, comes a day after U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy called on Congress to require warning labels on social media platforms and their effects on young people. Newsom said he plans to build on a law he signed in 2019 that authorized school districts to limit or ban the use of smartphones by students while at school or under the supervision of a school employee.

"As the Surgeon General affirmed, social media is harming the mental health of our youth," the Democratic governor said in a statement. "I look forward to working with the Legislature to restrict the use of smartphones during the school day. When children and teens are in school, they should be focused on

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their studies — not their screens.”

Newsom’s office did not provide further details on the proposal. But the California School Boards Association said any regulations over student smartphone use should be left up to school districts, not the state.

“We support legislation which empowers school leaders to make policy decisions at a local level that reflect their community’s concerns and what’s necessary to support their students,” spokesperson Troy Flint said.

Newsom’s announcement comes amid growing debate across the country over how to address the impacts of social media and smartphone usage, particularly on young people. Some teens have pledged to stay off social media to improve their mental health and to help them focus on schoolwork and extracurricular activities.

In Florida, Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis earlier this year signed one of the most restrictive bans in the nation on children’s use of social media. The New York state Legislature passed a bill earlier this month that would allow parents to block their kids from getting social media posts suggested to them by the platform’s algorithm.

In California, a proposal to fine social media platforms for addicting children has failed to become law in recent years. But a bill by state Sen. Nancy Skinner, a Democrat representing Berkeley, that would ban online platforms from providing addictive feeds to minors passed the state Senate in May and is set for a committee hearing in the Assembly next month.

The Los Angeles Unified School District board voted Tuesday for the district to develop policies banning students’ use of cell phones throughout the school day, with some exceptions. Board Member Nick Melvoin, who was a teacher and visits school campuses regularly, said he’s been “struck” by how “students are glued to their cell phones, not unlike adults.”

“When I talk to teachers and students and parents and principals, I also hear the same, which is that more and more time is being spent on policing student phone use,” he said at the meeting. “There’s not coherent enforcement, and they’re looking for some support from the board and from the district.”

State Sen. Henry Stern, a Democrat representing part of the Los Angeles area, introduced a bill this year to expand school districts’ authority to limit students’ social media usage at schools. Stern said he’d be willing to pull his bill, which already passed the Senate, if lawmakers and Newsom can come up with a better solution. Stern said he texted Newsom to thank him after the governor’s announcement.

“It’s just too hard for every teacher, every school, or every parent to have to figure this out on their own,” Stern said. “There’s some times where government just has to step in and make some bigger rules of the road.”

The beginner’s guide to celebrating Juneteenth

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

For more than one-and-a-half centuries, the Juneteenth holiday has been sacred to many Black communities.

It marks the day in 1865 enslaved people in Galveston, Texas found out they had been freed — after the end of the Civil War, and two years after President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation.

Since it was designated a federal holiday in 2021, Juneteenth has become more universally recognized beyond Black America. Many people get the day off work or school, and there are a plethora of street festivals, fairs, concerts and other events.

People who never gave the June 19 holiday more than a passing thought may be asking themselves, is there a “right” way to celebrate Juneteenth?

For beginners and those brushing up on history, here are some answers:

Is Juneteenth a solemn day of remembrance or more of a party? It just depends on what you want. Juneteenth festivities are rooted in cookouts and barbecues. In the beginnings of the holiday celebrated as Black Americans’ true Independence Day, the outdoors allowed for large, raucous reunions among formerly enslaved family, many of whom had been separated. The gatherings were especially revolutionary because

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they were free of restrictive measures, known as "Black Codes," enforced in Confederate states, controlling whether liberated slaves could vote, buy property, gather for worship and other aspects of daily life.

Last week, the White House kicked things off early with a concert on the South Lawn for Juneteenth and Black Music Month. Singers Gladys Knight and Patti LaBelle were among the the lineup of well-known artists from gospel, rap, jazz and other genres. The atmosphere was primarily festive with Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black vice president, dancing on stage with gospel singer Kirk Franklin.

"Today as we celebrate Juneteenth, together we are reminded of the promise of America," Harris said in opening remarks. "A promise of freedom, liberty and opportunity, not for some but for all. In many ways the story of Juneteenth and of our nation is a story of our ongoing fight to realize that promise."

Others may choose to treat Juneteenth as a day of rest and remembrance. That can mean doing community service, attending an education panel or taking time off.

The important thing is to make people feel they have options on how to observe the occasion, said Dr. David Anderson, a Black pastor and CEO of Gracism Global, a consulting firm helping leaders navigate conversations bridging divides across race and culture.

"Just like the Martin Luther King holiday, we say it's a day of service and a lot of people will do things. There are a lot of other people who are just 'I appreciate Dr. King, I'll watch what's on the television, and I'm gonna rest,'" Anderson said. "I don't want to make people feel guilty about that. What I want to do is give everyday people a choice."

What if you've never celebrated Juneteenth? Anderson never did anything on Juneteenth in his youth. He didn't learn about it until his 30s.

"I think many folks haven't known about it — who are even my color as an African American male. Even if you heard about it and knew about it, you didn't celebrate it," Anderson said. "It was like just a part of history. It wasn't a celebration of history."

For many African Americans, the farther away from Texas that they grew up increased the likelihood they didn't have big Juneteenth celebrations regularly. In the South, the day can vary based on when word of Emancipation reached each state.

What kind of public Juneteenth events are going on around the country? Search online and you will find a smorgasbord of gatherings in major cities and suburbs all varying in scope and tone. Some are more carnival-esque festivals with food trucks, arts and crafts and parades. Within those festivals, you'll likely find access to professionals in health care, finance and community resources. There also are concerts and fashion shows to highlight Black excellence and creativity. For those who want to look back, plenty of organizations and universities host panels to remind people of Juneteenth's history.

For the first time since Juneteenth was federally recognized, the National Park Service is making entry into all sites free on the holiday. Several parks will be hosting Juneteenth commemorations this week.

Are there special foods served on Juneteenth? Aside from barbecue, the color red has been a through line for Juneteenth food for generations. Red symbolizes the bloodshed and sacrifice of enslaved ancestors. A Juneteenth menu might incorporate items like barbecued ribs or other red meat, watermelon and red velvet cake. Drinks like fruit punch and red Kool-Aid may make an appearance at the table.

Does how you celebrate Juneteenth matter if you aren't Black? Dr. Karida Brown, a sociology professor at Emory University whose research focuses on race, said there's no reason to feel awkward about wanting to recognize Juneteenth just because you have no personal ties or you're not Black. In fact, embrace it.

"I would reframe that and challenge my non-Black folks who want to lean into Juneteenth and celebrate," Brown said. "It absolutely is your history. It absolutely is a part of your experience. ... Isn't this all of our history? The good, the bad, the ugly, the story of emancipation and freedom for your Black brothers and sisters under the Constitution of the law."

If you want to bring some authenticity to your recognition of Juneteenth, educate yourself. Attending a street festival or patronizing a Black-owned business is a good start but it also would be good to "make your mind better," Anderson said.

"That goes longer than a celebration," Anderson said. "I think Black people need to do it too because

it's new for us as well, in America. But for non-Black people, if they could read on this topic and read on Black history beyond Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, that would show me that you're really serious about growing in this area."

If you're struggling with how to "ethically" mark the day, Brown also suggested expanding your knowledge of why the holiday matters so much. That can be through reading, attending an event or going to an African American history museum if there's one nearby.

"Have that full human experience of seeing yourself in and through the eyes of others, even if that's not your own lived experience," she said. "That is a radical human act that is awesome and should be encouraged and celebrated."

What are other names used to refer to Juneteenth? Over the decades, Juneteenth has also been called Freedom Day, Emancipation Day, Black Fourth of July and second Independence Day among others.

"Because 1776, Fourth of July, where we're celebrating freedom and liberty and all of that, that did not include my descendants," Brown said. "Black people in America were still enslaved. So that that holiday always comes with a bittersweet tinge to it."

Is there a proper Juneteenth greeting? It's typical to wish people a "Happy Juneteenth" or "Happy Teenth," according to Alan Freeman, a comedian organizing a Juneteenth comedy festival in Galveston, Texas for the second straight year.

"You know how at Christmas people will say 'Merry Christmas' to each other and not even know each other?" Freeman said. "You can get a 'Merry Christmas' from everybody. This is the same way."

Israel's Netanyahu blames Biden for withholding weapons. US officials say that's not the whole story

By JULIA FRANKEL and DREW CALLISTER Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday claimed the United States is withholding weapons and implied this was slowing Israel's offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where fighting has exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation for Palestinians.

President Joe Biden has delayed delivering certain heavy bombs since May over concerns about Israel's killing of civilians in Gaza. Yet the administration has gone to lengths to avoid any suggestion that Israeli forces have crossed a red line in the deepening Rafah invasion, which would trigger a more sweeping ban on arms transfers.

Netanyahu, in a short video, spoke directly to the camera in English as he lobbed sharp criticisms at Biden over "bottlenecks" in arms transfers.

"It's inconceivable that in the past few months, the administration has been withholding weapons and ammunitions to Israel," Netanyahu said, adding, "Give us the tools and we'll finish the job a lot faster."

Netanyahu also claimed U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in a recent visit to Israel, said he was working around the clock to end the delays.

However, Blinken said Tuesday the only pause was related to those heavy bombs from May.

"We, as you know, are continuing to review one shipment that President Biden has talked about with regard to 2,000-pound bombs because of our concerns about their use in a densely populated area like Rafah," Blinken said during a State Department news conference. "That remains under review. But everything else is moving as it normally would."

Netanyahu didn't elaborate on what weapons were being held back, and the Israeli military declined to respond to a request for comment. Ophir Falk, a foreign policy adviser to Netanyahu, deferred questions on details to the U.S. government.

Responding to Netanyahu's claim Tuesday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said, "We generally do not know what he's talking about. We just don't."

She added that the U.S. is having "constructive discussions" with Israel about the paused shipment of heavy bombs and that it's the only transfer being delayed.

Two top Democrats in Congress cleared the way this week for a \$15 billion U.S. sale of F-15s to Israel to move forward, after a delay while one lawmaker sought answers from the Biden administration on Israel's current use of U.S. weapons in the war in Gaza.

With Israel's war against Hamas now in its ninth month, international criticism is growing over U.S. military and diplomatic support for the Israel's campaign of systematic destruction in Gaza, at a huge cost in civilian lives.

The top United Nations court has concluded there is a "plausible risk of genocide" in Gaza — a charge Israel strongly denies. Israel blames civilian deaths on Hamas, saying militants operate among the population.

Both Netanyahu and Biden are balancing their own domestic political problems against the explosive Mideast situation, and the embattled Israeli leader has grown increasingly resistant to Biden's public charm offensives and private pleading.

Experts say Netanyahu's message — delivered only in English — is likely meant to shore up U.S. arms support and doesn't appear to indicate on-the-ground shortages.

"I'm not worried," said Itamar Yaar, a former deputy head of Israel's National Security Council who leads of a group of former senior security officials. He thinks Netanyahu wants "to make it difficult for the Biden administration to delay arms supply in the future."

Aviv Bushinsky, a former Netanyahu adviser, suggested the prime minister's office is working to set the agenda for Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's meetings in the U.S. next week while allowing Netanyahu — rather than Gallant — to claim credit for releasing the shipment of bombs. The video also sets up a speech Netanyahu is set to deliver to Congress in about a week, he said.

"It's a very belligerent style of diplomacy, but he's in a win-win situation," Bushinsky said. "He has nothing to lose at the moment — this serves him in all dimensions, internally, publicly."

Netanyahu disbanded his war Cabinet on Monday, a move that consolidates his influence over the war and likely diminishes the odds of a cease-fire anytime soon. Critics accuse him of delaying an end to the war because it would mean an investigation into the government's failures on Oct. 7 and raise the likelihood of new elections when the prime minister's popularity is low. Netanyahu denies the allegations and says he is committed to destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities — no matter how long that may take.

Months of cease-fire talks have failed to find common ground between Hamas and Israeli leaders. Both Israel and Hamas have been reluctant to fully endorse a U.S.-backed plan that would return hostages, clear the way for an end to the war, and begin rebuilding the decimated territory.

Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza has killed more than 37,100 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count. The war has largely cut off the flow of food, medicine and other supplies to Palestinians who are facing widespread hunger.

Israel launched the war after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250.

Here's where courts are slowing Republican efforts for a state role in enforcing immigration law

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The federal government has long had sole authority over immigration policy in the United States, but several Republican-led states have continued to push for a role in enforcing regulations out of frustration with current policy and as a way to criticize Democratic U.S. President Joe Biden.

With polling showing Americans are increasingly worried about illegal immigration, the concern has become a top issue in the presidential campaign between Biden and Republican Donald Trump. Republican officials in several states say they owe it to their citizens to be more proactive in charging and deporting people who don't have legal status to be in the U.S.

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Iowa is among states that have approved laws granting state law enforcement and courts the right to file criminal charges against people based on their immigration status, but this week a federal judge blocked the state's new regulations that were set to take effect July 1.

What happened in Iowa? A federal judge on Monday issued a preliminary injunction that blocks a law approved by Republican lawmakers and GOP Gov. Kim Reynolds that gave state authorities some power that has been left to federal officials. The Iowa law would allow prosecutors to file criminal charges against people who have outstanding deportation orders or who previously have been removed from or denied admission to the U.S.

After being arrested, migrants would have a choice of agreeing to a judge's order to leave the country or being prosecuted, potentially facing time in prison before deportation.

The U.S. Department of Justice and a coalition of civil rights groups filed a lawsuit that argued Iowa's new rules would lead to confusion and chaos. In his ruling, U.S. District Court Judge Stephen Locher temporarily blocked the law, saying the DOJ and civil rights groups would likely succeed in their argument that federal immigration law preempted the new Iowa law.

Locher said the law might be "defensible" as a matter of politics but "as a matter of constitutional law, it is not."

Iowa's Republican Attorney General, Brenna Bird, criticized the Biden administration for seeking to block the state's law and promised to appeal.

What other states are passing immigration laws? Texas has taken the lead in seeking a state role in immigration law enforcement, passing a law under which migrants who are in custody on illegal entry charges can abide by a judge's order to leave the country or face prosecution. The law was in effect for only a few hours in March before a three-judge federal appeals court put it on hold.

The DOJ has sued Oklahoma to block a similar law, arguing it violates the U.S. Constitution.

In Georgia, a new law requires jail officials to check with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to determine whether prisoners are known to be in the country illegally. The law makes it a misdemeanor to knowingly fail to check immigration status and denies state funding to local governments that don't cooperate.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee has signed into law a bill that requires law enforcement agencies to communicate to federal authorities if they know of people in the country illegally and to help authorities identify, detain and deport them.

New Hampshire lawmakers also approved a proposal aimed at people suspected of entering the country illegally that would make it a crime to cross certain properties that have been preserved as open space unless engaging in permitted activities such as hunting, fishing or hiking. The change to the state's trespassing law is awaiting the governor's signature.

Are Democrats passing immigration legislation? States led by Democrats have largely left immigration enforcement to the Biden administration, but some have sought to expand immigrant rights.

In Maryland, lawmakers approved a bill seeking a federal waiver to let people buy health insurance through the state's health care exchange, regardless of immigration status.

Arizona Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs vetoed a bill in March similar to the Texas law, prompting legislators to narrowly approve a measure asking voters to make it a state crime for noncitizens to enter the state at any location other than a point of entry. The measure will go on the Nov. 5 ballot.

Why are politicians focusing on this issue? Polling shows that more than half of U.S. adults think Biden's immigration policies have hurt the country.

Trump and other Republicans have sought to benefit from that vulnerability by highlighting asylum-seekers and other migrants seeking to illegally enter the U.S.

Biden and some other Democrats have responded by noting the president proposed strict immigration restrictions but were blocked by Republicans, with the president arguing that Trump wanted to keep the conflict alive as a campaign issue.

Dollar Tree left lead-tainted applesauce pouches on store shelves for weeks after recall, FDA says

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

Dollar Tree failed to effectively recall lead-tainted applesauce pouches linked to reports of illness in more than 500 children, leaving the products on some stores shelves for two months, the Food and Drug Administration said Tuesday.

The FDA sent a warning letter to Dollar Tree this month and placed Negasmart, the Ecuadorian distributor of WanaBana apple cinnamon pouches, under import alerts following the October 2023 recall of the products found to be contaminated with "extremely high" levels of lead and chromium.

Children in 44 states had probable or confirmed cases of elevated blood lead levels after eating the applesauce pouches marketed for toddlers, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The outbreak was declared over in April.

FDA officials sent a warning letter to Dollar Tree Inc. last week saying the WanaBana apple puree products remained on store shelves in several states through late December, two months after the firm was told about the recall. Officials at the Chesapeake, Virginia-based company had said they disallowed sales of the products at registers, but the FDA said that was "not an effective measure" because at least one child in Washington state ate a recalled fruit pouch in a store before an attempted purchase.

Dollar Tree officials said in an email Tuesday that the company is operating under new management and is taking steps to bolster its process "for quickly and effectively executing product recalls." The company operates more than 16,000 discount stores in 48 states.

Negasmart was placed under multiple import alerts this month, even though FDA officials said they had no indication that the firm is attempting to import products into the U.S. The action is to ensure that any attempt by the firm to import products would be "flagged" by FDA reviewers and prevented from reaching consumers. Tests showed that cinnamon tested from the plant had lead levels more than 2,000 times higher than a maximum level proposed by the FDA.

Anyone who consumed the recalled pouches should consult with a health care provider, the CDC said. There is no safe level of lead consumption, which can cause serious learning and behavior problems, the agency emphasized.

The pouches include those sold under the WanaBana brand at Dollar Tree stores and online and under the Schnucks and Weis brands in stores. Because they have a long shelf life, they may still be in consumers' homes. Consumers should not eat or serve the pouches and should discard them.

Who will have the 2024 song of the summer? We offer some predictions

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Since the beginning of time or, at least, pop music, only a few have earned the designation of "song of the summer."

These are the earworms that lodge deep into the brain, pushing past genre preferences and reminding listeners: A hit is a hit. With so much variety, though, it's getting harder to crown a single song of the summer. So The Associated Press is offering 2024 predictions across categories — with past winners for reference.

Find your song of the summer and then listen to our Spotify playlist, [here](#).

Song of the summer for the caffeinated: "Espresso," Sabrina Carpenter We're a few decades removed from the Y2K era of off-kilter pop songs with nonsensical lyrics atop sunny productions. But no one told Sabrina Carpenter, whose hit "Espresso" is a shot of wake-up juice, equal parts clever and totally unserious. "Espresso" makes a one-woman argument for disco-informed radio pop's endurance.

Past champion: "Wide Awake," Katy Perry (2012)

Country crossover song of the summer: "I Had Some Help," Post Malone feat. Morgan Wallen Before it

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even released, it seemed likely a Post Malone team-up with Morgan Wallen would result in a No. 1 record. "I Had Some Help" introduced Post Malone's foray into country and, with some help indeed from the biggest name in contemporary country music, was an instant success. There's no denying that honkytonk hook, Malone's autotuned vibrato or the singalong chorus.

Past champion: "You're Still the One," Shania Twain (1998)

Diss song of the summer: "Not Like Us," Kendrick Lamar Drake and Kendrick Lamar reignited a once-dormant feud earlier this year, launching diss track after diss track. None hit quite like Lamar's ferocious "Not Like Us," which became Lamar's fourth No. 1 on Billboard's Hot 100. The messaging — all West Coast fire in an "us vs. them" anthem — really works.

Past champion: "Obsessed," Mariah Carey (2009)

Viral hit of the summer: "A Bar Song (Topsy)," Shaboozey In an ideal world, every country station would play Shaboozey's "A Bar Song (Topsy)" once an hour, on the hour. Until then, its social media virality will have to do the trick. With its inspired interpolation of J-Kwon's "Topsy," the song has all the makings of a modern classic, with an easy-to-rally-around narrative following a hardworking protagonist easing his troubles on a bar stool.

Past champion: "Trap Queen," Fetty Wap (2015)

Song of the summer for the yearners: "Lunch," Billie Eilish "Lunch," from Billie Eilish's new album, "Hit Me Hard and Soft," is a PG-13 ode to same-sex infatuation. The once-in-a-generation performer has come a long way from the macabre humor, off-kilter beats and Invisalign slurps that made her a star. Instead, "Lunch" is a delicious, sapphic anthem.

Past champion: "Nineteen," Tegan and Sara (2007)

Club song of the summer: "Get It Sexyy," Sexy Red It's in the title. Sexy Red, with her distinctive flow and quotable bars not exactly safe for work, has taken over. "Get It Sexyy" is a theme song for her dominance and a confident mantra for everyone planning to hit the dance floor.

Past champion: "Lose Control," Missy Elliott feat. Ciara & Fat Man Scoop (2005)

Song for singles ready to mingle this summer: "Bellakeo," Peso Pluma feat. Anitta Take one of the biggest names in regional Mexican music, Peso Pluma, bring in one of the biggest Brazilian pop-funk stars, Anitta, and you've got yourself a sweaty reggaeton banger. "Bellakeo" is a song for both the club and corner store, oozing with flirtation.

Past champion: "Where the Party At," Jagged Edge and Nelly (2001)

Song of the summer from your favorite artist's favorite artist: "Good Luck, Babe!," Chappell Roan Chappell Roan has long had a knack for candor in her theatrical, cheeky songwriting, emphasized by sometimes-yodeling vocals. But she's only recently started receiving mainstream attention for her full-throated, big-hearted queer love anthems. "Good Luck, Babe!" is a kiss-off-and-a-half — perfect for screaming along to while driving down an empty street in Roan's native Midwest or getting ready with the girls for the drag club.

Past champion: "Signed, Sealed, Delivered I'm Yours," Stevie Wonder (1970)

Song of the summer for people seriously considering buying a harmonica: "Pink Skies," Zach Bryan Every song of the summer list requires a real tearjerker. Within the first few seconds of Zach Bryan's "Pink Skies," the acoustic guitar, harmonica, and raspy narrative will have you breaking out the tissues. "The kids are in town for a funeral," he sings. "So pack the car and dry your eyes." He's an expert at writing a novel in few words, a song so good it charts without traditional support.

Past champion: "Run-Around," Blues Traveler (1995)

Song of the summer that shares a title with a film: "Million Dollar Baby," Tommy Richman "Million Dollar Baby" feels like it came out of nowhere — as so many TikTok smashes do — but its continued endurance since April is notable. Plus, it shares a title with a very famous film, and that's always fun.

Past champion: "Breakfast at Tiffany's," Deep Blue Something (1995)

Song of the summer that inexplicably came out in January: "Beautiful Things," Benson Boone If Zach Bryan's "Pink Skies" is a little too raw for you, Benson Boone's "Beautiful Things" offers a glossy alternative. There isn't a hint of edge in his soft pop-rock, but there is a lot of love.

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Past champion: "Boy's a Liar PT. 2," PinkPantheress, Ice Spice (2023)

Swifties' song of the summer: "Fortnight," Taylor Swift and Post MaloneEvery summer, Taylor Swift's fans anoint their own pick. This time around, it has to be "Fortnight" from "The Tortured Poets Department." Enter "I love you / It's ruining my life," into the pantheon of Swiftisms that would make for an amazing AOL away message (R.I.P.).

Past champion: "Karma," Taylor Swift (2023)

Song of the summer revolutionizing genre: "Texas Hold 'Em," BeyoncéBeyoncé released "Act II: Cowboy Carter" with the declaration: "This ain't a Country album. This is a 'Beyoncé' album." But she certainly wove the genre in, reclaiming country music as a Black woman. The first taste came in the form of "Texas Hold 'Em" — ideal listening, whether you're headed to the beach or rodeo.

Past champion: "What's Love Got to Do With It," Tina Turner (1984)

The post-ironic, TikTok-heavy, too online, micro-hit song of the summer: "The Spark," Kabin Crew & Lisdoonvarna CrewThere's always one song that's part joke, full hit. Enter "The Spark," an Irish collaboration between some remarkably talented kids from Cork and Lisdoonvarna, written for Cruinniú na nÓg, a day meant to celebrate children's creativity. These kids have produced an empowering electro-club banger for all ages.

Past champion: "The Margarita Song," That Chick Angel, Casa Di & Steve Terrell (2023)

Song of the summer for Swedish pop lovers: "We Can't Be Friends (Wait For Your Love)," Ariana GrandeOf all the songs on Ariana Grande's "eternal sunshine," "We Can't Be Friends (Wait For Your Love)" is the Europop exemplar. It explodes into a string crescendo, electronic sounds effortlessly blending into organic ones, lyrically highlighting a relationship on the outs. It's a gorgeous and devastating listen in the tradition of another queen of summertime sadness bangers, Robyn.

Past champion: "Call Your Girlfriend," Robyn (2010)

Song of the summer for it girls: "360," Charli XCXCharli XCX's latest album, "Brat," oscillates between hedonism and anxiety. "360" is a hot girl club classic squarely in the first category — all sexy showboating and futuristic production.

Past champion: "Stars Are Blind," Paris Hilton (2006)

This law is a lifeline for pregnant workers even as an abortion dispute complicates its enforcement

By ALEXANDRA OLSON and CLAIRE SAVAGE AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Victoria Cornejo Barrera thought the legal helpline for workers sounded too good to be true.

A month earlier, Cornejo Barrera had been forced to take leave from her job as head custodian at a South Carolina high school after she turned in a doctor's note asking to be exempt from tasks like climbing ladders and lifting more than 20 pounds because she was pregnant.

She spent a month crying and blaming herself for thinking she could keep her job while pregnant. She used up all her accumulated paid time off because she couldn't afford to go without a paycheck. Then she got a notice from human resources saying she would have to start paying \$600 a month to stay on health insurance while on unpaid leave.

"I was feeling so guilty. I was feeling like my pregnancy was the problem," Cornejo Barrera said.

Searching for help online, she came across the website run by the legal advocacy organization A Better Balance, explaining about a federal law called the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act that entitled her to the types of accommodations she had been seeking. It had gone into effect in June 2023, a month before she was pushed out of her job.

Was the law really on her side? Cornejo Barrera called the helpline.

A new law's complicated first yearNearly 500 workers in similar circumstances have contacted the helpline in the year since the implementation of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, which strengthens the rights

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of workers to seek accommodations for pregnancy-related needs. The experiences of those workers tell a complicated story about the impact of a new law that is still unfamiliar to many employers, according to a report released Tuesday by A Better Balance, the organization that spearheaded a decade-long campaign for the law, which Congress finally passed in December 2022.

Most of those workers swiftly obtained accommodation after learning about their rights and invoking them with their employers, said Dina Bakst, co-founder and co-president of A Better Balance. But many women confronted employers who didn't know about the law, misunderstood its scope or simply refused to comply, according to the report.

A bitter legal battle over whether the law covers abortion is further complicating its enforcement.

The dispute centers on Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations that took effect Tuesday detailing how employers should comply with the law, and which included abortion among the pregnancy-related conditions that entitle workers to time off and other accommodations.

On Monday, a federal judge in Louisiana temporarily prohibited the EEOC from enforcing the abortion provision of its rules against employers located in Louisiana and Mississippi, or against the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and three other religious groups that filed a consolidated lawsuit against the EEOC, arguing that the abortion provision is an illegal interpretation of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act.

Another judge in Arkansas last week dismissed a similar lawsuit filed by Republican attorneys general from 17 states, but Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin, who is leading the case, said he is considering legal options to continue pursuing the challenge.

That lawsuit had asked the judge to suspend the EEOC rules in their entirety, a prospect that the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Women's Law Center, along with more than 20 labor and women's advocacy groups, warned in amicus briefs could thwart the successful implementation of law. The EEOC's rules, for example, make clear that employers cannot delay requests by asking pregnant workers for onerous paperwork to back claims of common pregnancy-related limitations such as morning sickness or back pain.

Although the pregnant workers law would remain in place even without the EEOC rules, advocates say it's a badly needed tool for settling disputes and training employers on compliance. According to A Better Balance, one out of seven workers who contacted its helpline since the law took effect said their employers had ordered them to take leave rather than grant them reasonable accommodations.

Cornejo Barrera was among them, but her employer reversed the decision after she sent her human resources department a letter invoking her rights. Within two days, she shared language from the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act with her supervisor, who then told her she could return to work immediately.

Raquel Robinson, a telecommunication specialist in Ohio, also ultimately prevailed in a similar confrontation with her company. After her daughter was born in October 2022, Robinson was diagnosed with postpartum depression.

"Mentally, I just was not in a good place where I felt like I was good enough to be my daughter's mom," she said.

After Robinson's disability leave ended in July 2023, her therapist told her she was entitled to work from home under the new law. But her company resisted her request for more than a month.

Robinson reached out to A Better Balance for help and the company relented.

Other workers are still fighting to be protected under the law. The EEOC says it has received 1,869 charges so far citing violations of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and has resolved more than 450, though it has not provided details on the cases.

The abortion issue complicates the law. The law's passage in 2022 came after years of campaigning by advocacy groups and women in low-wage jobs who shared stories of being denied even basic accommodations. But Republican lawmakers and conservative religious leaders who had overwhelmingly supported the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act were furious when the EEOC rules explicitly included abortion.

Citing numerous court rulings, the EEOC in its regulations said it was conforming to decades of legal precedent establishing that pregnancy-related discrimination laws include abortion.

Mylissa Farmer, the woman at the center of a federal investigation of two hospitals who refused to provide her with an emergency abortion, said her ordeal shows why the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act must

include abortion.

Farmer sought emergency treatment after her water broke early at 17 weeks of pregnancy in August 2022. Doctors at hospitals in Missouri and Kansas told Farmer her fetus would not survive, that her amniotic fluid had emptied and that she was at risk for serious infection or losing her uterus but they refused to provide an abortion. She and her husband traveled for hours while she was in labor before a clinic in Illinois provided her with an abortion.

Farmer, who was working a low-wage job as a sales representative, said her supervisor repeatedly contacted her during her ordeal to pressure her to return to work. She said her doctor recommended she take two weeks off to recover but she returned to work after two days because she was afraid of getting fired. But she ended up facing discipline after absences to cope with the physical and mental trauma of losing her pregnancy.

"I was just not able to get the care that I needed at the time and it made it really difficult to even deal with the emotional loss of what we were going through," said Farmer, who is being represented by the National Women's Law Center in a complaint to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Undersea explorers mark a tragic day.

Things to know about the Titan disaster anniversary

By PATRICK WHITTLE and HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — A year after an experimental submersible imploded en route to the Titanic, unanswered questions linger — with no immediate answers.

Tuesday marks one year since the Titan vanished on its way to the historic wreckage site. After a five-day search that captured the world's attention, officials said the craft had been destroyed and all five people on board killed.

The U.S. Coast Guard quickly convened a high-level investigation into what happened. Concerns leading up to the investigation included the Titan's unconventional design and its creator's decision to forgo standard independent checks.

A look at the one-year anniversary of the Titan tragedy:

The investigation is taking longer than expected Coast Guard officials said in a statement last week that they would not be ready to release the results of their investigation by the anniversary. A public hearing to discuss the findings won't happen for at least two more months, they said.

Investigators "are working closely with our domestic and international partners to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the incident," Marine Board of Investigation Chair Jason Neubauer said, describing the inquiry as a "complex and ongoing effort."

The Titan was owned by a company called OceanGate, which suspended its operations last July, not long after the tragedy. OceanGate said in a Tuesday statement that it "has ceased all operations and is continuing to cooperate with authorities, including the U.S. Coast Guard, in their investigations." The company also said in its statement that it expresses "our deepest condolences to their families and loved ones, as well as everyone impacted by this tragedy."

The Titan made its last dive on June 18, 2023, a Sunday morning, and lost contact with its support vessel about two hours later. When it was reported overdue that afternoon, rescuers rushed ships, planes and other equipment to the area, about 435 miles (700 kilometers) south of St. John's, Newfoundland. The Transportation Safety Board of Canada said Monday that there are other submersibles operating within Canadian waters, some of which are not registered with any country.

In addition to OceanGate co-founder Stockton Rush, the implosion killed two members of a prominent Pakistani family, Shahzada Dawood and his son Suleman Dawood; British adventurer Hamish Harding; and Titanic expert Paul-Henri Nargeolet.

Remembering those who died David Concannon, a former adviser to OceanGate, said he will mark the anniversary privately with a group of people who were involved with the company or the submersible's expeditions over the years, including scientists, volunteers and mission specialists.

Harding and Nargeolet were members of The Explorers Club, a professional society dedicated to research, exploration and resource conservation.

"Then, as now, it hit us on a personal level very deeply," the group's president, Richard Garriott, said in an interview last week.

Garriott said there will be a remembrance celebration for the Titan victims this week in Portugal at the annual Global Exploration Summit.

The tragedy won't stop deep-sea exploration. The Georgia-based company that owns the salvage rights to the Titanic plans to visit the sunken ocean liner in July using remotely operated vehicles, and a real estate billionaire from Ohio has said he plans a voyage to the shipwreck in a two-person submersible in 2026.

Several deep-sea explorers told The Associated Press that the Titan disaster shook the worldwide community of explorers, but it remains committed to continuing its missions to expand scientific understanding of the ocean.

Garriott believes the world is in a new golden age of undersea exploration, thanks to technological advances that have opened frontiers and provided new tools to more thoroughly study already visited places. The Titan tragedy hasn't tarnished that, he said.

"Progress continues," he said. "I actually feel very comfortable and confident that we will now be able to proceed."

Veteran deep-sea explorer Katy Croff Bell said the Titan implosion reinforced the importance of following industry standards and performing rigorous testing. But in the industry as a whole, "the safety track record for this has been very good for several decades," said Bell, president of Ocean Discovery League, a nonprofit organization.

Thailand's Senate overwhelmingly approves a landmark bill to legalize same-sex marriages

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand's Senate voted overwhelmingly on Tuesday to approve a bill that would legalize same-sex marriage, clearing the last legislative hurdle for the country to become the first in Southeast Asia to enact such a law.

Thailand has a reputation for acceptance and inclusivity but has struggled for decades to pass a marriage equality law. Thai society largely holds conservative values, and members of the LGBTQ+ community say they face discrimination in everyday life.

The government and state agencies are also historically conservative, and advocates for gender equality have had a hard time pushing lawmakers and civil servants to accept change.

Thailand will become the third place in Asia, after Taiwan and Nepal, to allow same-sex marriage. The marriage equality bill, which grants full legal, financial and medical rights for marriage partners of any gender, sailed through the House of Representatives right before the previous parliamentary session concluded in April with the approval of 400 of the 415 members who were present.

It passed its final reading in the Senate on Tuesday with the approval of 130 of the 152 members in attendance, with 4 voting against it and 18 abstaining.

The bill now needs the pro forma endorsement of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, followed by its publication in the Government Gazette, which will set a date within 120 days when it becomes effective.

The timing of the Senate's vote on Tuesday, the first day of the current parliamentary session, suggests the urgency in getting the bill passed. The legislation will amend the country's Civil and Commercial Code to replace gender-specific words such as "men and women" with gender-neutral words such as "individual."

But it was not approved without a hitch. One member of the Senate, retired army Gen. Worapong Sangnang, argued that the gender-specific terms should still be included in the law along with the gender-neutral terms. He said excluding them would be a severe "subversion of the institution of family" in Thailand.

After the vote, Plaifah Kyoka Shodladd, an 18-year-old who identifies as non-binary, took the floor and

thanked everyone who supported the legislation, calling it a "force of hope" that will help Thailand become more accepting of diversity.

"Today, love trumps prejudice," Plaifah said.

The government, confident of the bill's passage, announced several days ago it would host a celebration of the occasion later Tuesday at Government House. The ground in front of the main building was decorated with rainbow carpets, flags and a giant balloon in the shape of two hands making a heart sign. The party was joined by politicians, celebrities, diplomats and activists from the LGBTQ+ community and their supporters who rode in a colorful parade of floats from Parliament after the vote.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, who could not join the event because he recently tested positive for COVID-19, wrote his congratulations on social media platform X.

"I am proud of the collective effort of all stakeholders which reiterates the power of 'unity in diversity' of the Thai society. We will continue our fight for social rights for all people regardless of their status," he wrote.

Passing the law is a "triumph for justice and human rights," said Mookdapa Yangyuenpradorn of the human rights organization Fortify Rights.

"The Thai government must now focus on ensuring swift and effective implementation of this law to safeguard LGBTI+ rights," she said. "Marriage equality is fundamental to human dignity, and it is essential that Thailand protects these rights without delay or discrimination."

The government led by the Pheu Thai party, which took office last year, has made marriage equality one of its main goals. It made a major effort to identify itself with the annual Bangkok Pride parade earlier this month, in which thousands of people celebrated in one of Bangkok's busiest commercial districts.

Celtics win 18th NBA championship with 106-88 Game 5 victory over Dallas Mavericks

By KYLE HIGHTOWER AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Jayson Tatum put his hands behind his head, with TD Garden fans standing on their feet cheering around him, and took it all in.

Walking to the bench, he wrapped both arms around Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla.

The journey was complete.

The Boston Celtics again stand alone among NBA champions.

Tatum had 31 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds, and the Celtics topped the Dallas Mavericks 106-88 on Monday night to win the franchise's 18th championship, breaking a tie with the Los Angeles Lakers for the most in league history.

Boston earned its latest title on the 16th anniversary of hoisting its last Larry O'Brien Trophy in 2008. It marks the 13th championship won this century by one of the city's Big 4 professional sports franchises.

"It means the world," Tatum said on stage after the team received the trophy from NBA Commissioner Adam Silver. "It's been a long time. And damn I'm grateful."

Jaylen Brown added 21 points, eight rebounds and six assists, and was voted the NBA Finals MVP.

"I share this with my brothers and my partner in crime Jayson Tatum," Brown said after the 107th career playoff game he and Tatum have played together — the most for any duo before winning a title.

Jrue Holiday finished with 15 points and 11 rebounds. Center Kristaps Porzingis also provided an emotional lift, returning from a two-game absence because of a dislocated tendon in his left ankle to chip in five points in 17 minutes.

They helped the Celtics cap a postseason that saw them go 16-3 and finish with an 80-21 overall record. That .792 winning percentage ranks second in team history behind only the Celtics' 1985-86 championship team that finished 82-18 (.820).

Mazzulla, in his second season, at age 35 also became the youngest coach since Bill Russell in 1969 to lead a team to a championship.

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"You have very few chances in life to be great," Mazzulla said.

Luka Doncic finished with 28 points and 12 rebounds for Dallas, which failed to extend the series after avoiding a sweep with a 38-point win in Game 4. The Mavericks had been 3-0 in Game 5s this postseason, with Doncic scoring at least 31 points in each of them. He said the chest, right knee and left ankle injuries he played through during the finals weren't an excuse for Dallas struggling throughout the series.

"It doesn't matter if I was hurt, how much was I hurt. I was out there," he said. "I tried to play, but I didn't do enough."

Kyrie Irving finished with just 15 points on 5-of-16 shooting and has lost 13 of the last 14 meetings against the Celtics team he left in the summer of 2019 to join the Brooklyn Nets.

Irving thinks better things are ahead for the Mavs.

"I see an opportunity for us to really build our future in a positive manner, where this is almost like a regular thing for us and we're competing for championships," he said.

NBA teams are now 0-157 in postseason series after falling into a 3-0 deficit.

Mavs coach Jason Kidd believes Doncic and his team will grow from this NBA Finals experience.

"I think the first step is just to be in it. I think that's a big thing," he said. "Yes, we lost 4-1, but I thought the group fought against the Celtics and just, unfortunately, we just couldn't make shots when we had to, or we turned the ball over and they took full advantage of that."

Boston never trailed and led by as many as 26, feeding off the energy of the Garden crowd.

Dallas was within 16-15 early before the Celtics closed the first quarter on a 12-3 run that included eight combined points by Tatum and Brown.

The Celtics did it again in the second quarter when the Mavericks trimmed what had been a 15-point deficit to nine. Boston ended the period with a 19-7 spurt that was capped by a half-court buzzer beater by Payton Pritchard – his second such shot of the series – to give Boston a 67-46 halftime lead.

Over the last two minutes of the first and second quarters, the Celtics outscored the Mavericks 22-4.

The Celtics never looked back.

Russell's widow, Jeannine Russell, and his daughter Karen Russell were in TD Garden to salute the newest generation of Celtics champions.

They watched current Celtics stars Tatum and Brown earn their first rings. It was the trade that sent 2008 champions Kevin Garnett and Paul Pierce to Brooklyn in 2013 that netted Boston the draft picks it eventually used to select Brown and Tatum third overall in back-to-back drafts in 2016 and 2017.

The All-Stars came into their own this season, leading a Celtics team that was built around taking and making a high number of 3-pointers, and a defense that rated as the league's best during the regular season.

The duo made it to at least the Eastern Conference finals as teammates four previous times.

They finally reached the finish line in their fifth deep playoff run together.

After both struggling at times offensively in the series, Tatum and Brown hit a groove in Game 5, combining for 31 points and 11 assists in the first half.

It helped bring out all the attributes that made Boston the NBA's most formidable team this postseason – spreading teams out, sharing the ball, and causing havoc on defense. And even chipping a tooth, like Derrick White did after he was landed on by Dereck Lively II.

"I'll lose all my teeth for a championship," White said.

And it put a championship bow on a dizzying stretch for the Celtics, that saw them lose in the finals to the Golden State Warriors in 2022 and then fail to return last season after a Game 7 home loss to the Miami Heat in the conference finals.

Tatum vowed that night to erase the sting of those disappointments.

Standing in a sea of confetti Monday night he was reminded by his 6-year-old son, Deuce, of what he'd accomplished.

"He told me that I was the best in the world," Tatum said. "I said, 'You're damn right I am.'"

Majority of Americans favor forgiving medical debt, AP-NORC poll finds

By CORA LEWIS and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Janille Williams wants to buy a house someday — but first, he has to pay down tens of thousands of dollars in medical debt.

"I was hospitalized for a blood infection for three months more than ten years ago, and the bill was for more than \$300,000," said Williams, 38, a Fairbanks, Alaska, resident who works as a retail sales manager for AT&T. "I was in the middle of changing jobs, the only time in my life I haven't had health insurance."

When the bill went to collections, the debt was eventually lowered to about \$50,000, he said, an amount that was still not feasible for him to pay.

Medical debt forgiveness, a priority for some lawmakers and advocates, would make a substantial difference to Williams' credit report and stop the calls from collections agencies.

"They don't give you a choice in the hospital. 'If you leave, you'll die,' they told me. I didn't feel like dying," Williams said. "I don't think anyone should have to go into financial ruin to live."

Many Americans agree, according to a new poll from the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. According to the survey, about half of Americans say it's extremely or very important for the U.S. government to provide debt relief for those who have yet to pay off medical treatments.

Especially since the pandemic, an increasing number of cities and states — including Connecticut, New York City, New Orleans and Chicago — are implementing their own versions of medical debt forgiveness. The Biden administration recently announced a proposed rule that would wipe consumer medical debt off most credit reports.

The poll found that support for medical debt forgiveness is particularly high in cases where a patient experienced health care fraud. About two-thirds of U.S. adults support medical debt forgiveness if the individual has, for example, been wrongfully billed for services. But majorities of Americans favor relief in other situations, too, such as when the patient has made on-time payments toward an existing loan for 20 years, has large amounts of medical debt compared to their income, or is experiencing financial hardship.

About 6 in 10 people with debt from medical bills favor medical debt forgiveness if the person has large amounts of debt compared to their income, compared to about half of people without medical debt.

Denise Early, 65, an Independent in Omaha, Nebraska, who favors medical debt forgiveness, said she experienced an injury on the job that eventually led to several surgeries she believes should have been covered by workers' compensation claims, but were not. The costs eventually pushed her to declare bankruptcy.

Early worked as a custodian at a post office, she said, when she suffered an accident. After initial hospital visits and treatments were ineffective, Early eventually received knee and ankle surgeries to address ongoing difficulties.

"I still get bills every day," Early said. "Forgiveness would help clear a lot of my debts."

Early said she also currently has more than \$100,000 in unpaid student loan debt.

Although reducing student loan debt has been a focus for President Joe Biden, the poll found that Americans are more likely to say medical debt relief should be a government priority. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults said that it's extremely or very important for the U.S. government to provide student debt relief.

Lesley Turner, an associate professor of public policy at the University of Chicago, who helped craft the poll, said the survey captures a divide regarding who deserves debt relief.

"If you need to go to the emergency room because of a major health issue, that is much less of an active choice than the decision to go to college," she said. "Even though, given today's economy, going to college is in many ways a very important if not essential route to economic mobility and stability."

Overall, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents are all similarly likely to support clearing medical debt if the person experienced fraud, the AP-NORC poll found, though Democrats are more supportive

than Republicans in cases where the person is experiencing financial hardship or if the person has large amounts of medical debt compared to their income.

Ed Kane, a 71-year-old Republican from Chicopee, Massachusetts, believes medical debt forgiveness should not be an option. He's survived multiple medical emergencies — including heart attacks and cancer — and credits his employer health insurance for providing good coverage that kept him out of debt.

"We are starting to become a nation that gives away everything. And I'm tired of it," Kane said. "I've worked hard all my life. I worked two jobs. I had great medical insurance because of it. Everybody can do it; there's no reason that people can't reach a higher level than they do."

Medical debt forgiveness is also a higher priority for Democrats. According to the poll, about two-thirds of Democrats say it's extremely or very important for the U.S. government to provide medical debt relief, compared to about 3 in 10 Republicans.

Matt Haskell, 24, of Englewood, Florida, a Republican who said he supports debt forgiveness, also has firsthand experience with high medical bills for an unexpected emergency.

Haskell said he was working on cars, some of which were rusty, at the time of his accident. One afternoon, what seemed like a piece of dust got into his eye.

"It turned out it was a metal flake embedded in my cornea," Haskell said. "I didn't know for five days. I went to the ER when I could no longer open my eyes."

From the visit, Haskell said he incurred more than \$4,500 in debt.

"I generally think it's never anybody's fault when they have a medical condition," he said. "If they get cancer or a tumor or have an episode from undiagnosed diabetes — it's not someone's fault if they develop something and now they're thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt."

Today in History: June 19 Senate approves Civil Rights Act of 1964

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, June 19, the 171st day of 2024. There are 195 days left in the year. This is Juneteenth.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 19, 1964, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was approved by the U.S. Senate, 73-27, after surviving a lengthy filibuster.

On this date:

In 1775, George Washington was commissioned by the Continental Congress as commander in chief of the Continental Army.

In 1865, Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, with news that the Civil War was over, and that all remaining slaves in Texas were free — an event celebrated to this day as "Juneteenth."

In 1910, the first-ever Father's Day was celebrated in Spokane, Washington. (The idea for the observance is credited to Sonora Louise Smart Dodd.)

In 1911, Pennsylvania became the first state to establish a motion picture censorship board.

In 1917, during World War I, King George V ordered the British royal family to dispense with German titles and surnames; the family took the name "Windsor."

In 1934, the Federal Communications Commission was created; it replaced the Federal Radio Commission.

In 1944, during World War II, the two-day Battle of the Philippine Sea began, resulting in a decisive victory for the Americans over the Japanese.

In 1953, Julius Rosenberg, 35, and his wife, Ethel, 37, convicted of conspiring to pass U.S. atomic secrets to the Soviet Union, were executed at Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, New York.

In 1975, former Chicago organized crime boss Sam Giancana was shot to death in the basement of his home in Oak Park, Illinois; the killing has never been solved.

In 1986, University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias, the first draft pick of the Boston Celtics, suffered a fatal cocaine-induced seizure.

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In 1987, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Louisiana law requiring any public school teaching the theory of evolution to teach creation science as well.

In 2013, actor James Gandolfini died while vacationing in Rome at age 51, and country singer Slim Whitman died in Orange Park, Florida at age 90.

In 2014, Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California won election as House majority leader as Republicans shuffled their leadership in the wake of Rep. Eric Cantor's primary defeat in Virginia.

In 2018, Koko, a western lowland gorilla who was taught sign language at an early age as a scientific test subject and eventually learned more than 1,000 words, died at the Gorilla Foundation's preserve in California's Santa Cruz mountains at the age of 46.

In 2023, a submersible known as the Titan imploded in the Atlantic near the wreckage of the Titanic, killing all five people on board.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Gena (JEH'-nuh) Rowlands is 94. Hall of Fame race car driver Shirley Muldowney is 84. Singer Elaine "Spanky" McFarlane (Spanky and Our Gang) is 82. Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi (soo chee) is 79. Author Sir Salman Rushdie is 77. Actor Phylicia Rashad is 76. Rock singer Ann Wilson (Heart) is 74. Musician Larry Dunn is 71. Actor Kathleen Turner is 70. Country singer Doug Stone is 68. Singer Mark "Marty" DeBarge is 65. Singer-dancer-choreographer Paula Abdul is 62. Actor Andy Lauer is 61. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is 60. Rock singer-musician Brian Vander Ark (Verve Pipe) is 60. Actor Samuel West is 58. Actor Mia Sara is 57. TV personality Lara Spencer is 55. Rock musician Brian "Head" Welch (Korn) is 54. Actor Jean Dujardin is 52. Actor Robin Tunney is 52. Actor Bumper Robinson is 50. Actor Poppy Montgomery is 49. Alt-country singer-musician Scott Avett (The Avett Brothers) is 48. Actor Ryan Hurst is 48. Actor Zoe Saldana is 46. Former NBA star Dirk Nowitzki is 46. Actor Neil Brown Jr. is 44. Actor Lauren Lee Smith is 44. Rapper Macklemore (Macklemore and Ryan Lewis) is 42. Actor Paul Dano is 40. Texas Rangers pitcher Jacob DeGrom is 36. Actor Giacomo Gianniotti is 35. Actor Chuku Modu (TV: "The Good Doctor") is 34. Actor Atticus Shaffer is 26.