

Groton Daily Independent

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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.

Saturday, June 22

Junior Legion at Clark Tournament

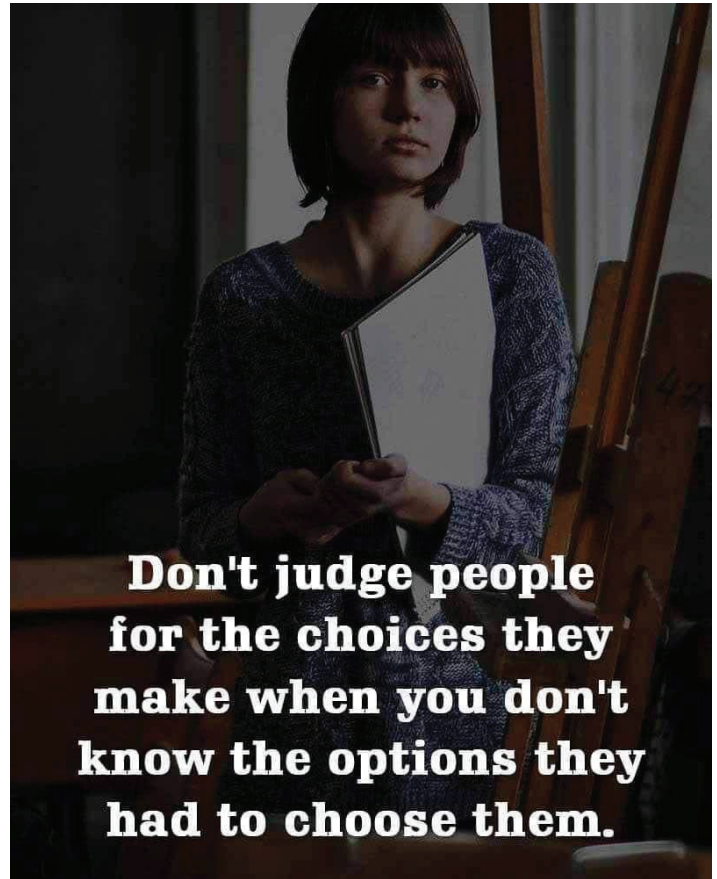
Legion at Northville Tournament

U8 R/B - Groton Tourney

Groton Triathlon, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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

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



**Don't judge people
for the choices they
make when you don't
know the options they
had to choose them.**

Sunday, June 23

Junior Legion at Clark Tournament

Legion at Northville Tournament

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at 9 a.m.

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

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

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m. (Julia (Grenz) and Jordan Kroll will be the guest speakers)

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m., and at Zion, 11 a.m.

**Groton Daily Independent
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Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**

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1440

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TikTok's Court Case

TikTok filed its first legal briefs yesterday kicking off the court case over the law forcing a sale or ban of the company from China-based parent company, ByteDance.

The briefs—filed with the support of eight US-based TikTok creators—argue the law violates Americans' right to freedom of expression. TikTok dismissed a sale as impractical and said it would lead to a two-tier system of content whereby Americans would be cut off

from content produced outside of the US. TikTok also revealed private negotiations, including an offer to provide US officials with a kill switch if the government believes the app remains a national security threat.

The Justice Department is set to respond next month with oral arguments scheduled for September. TikTok boasts more than 170 million monthly active users in the US and over 5 million US-based businesses.

Queen Are the Champions

Sony Music is reportedly finalizing a deal to purchase the music catalog of the rock band Queen for \$1.2B, according to reports yesterday. The 10-figure deal would be the most expensive yet in the accelerating race to scoop up the rights to popular music acts.

The four-man British band, founded in the late 1960s, produced an iconic body of work, from the six-minute symphonic hit "Bohemian Rhapsody" to stadium favorites "We Will Rock You" and "We Are the Champions." The deal includes recording and publishing rights as well as ownership of the band's name, image, and likeness, opening up potential for Broadway shows, films, advertisements, and more.

In recent years, many artists have opted to sell catalog rights to cash in on their current perceived value. For investors, music royalties are a stable, economically resilient income stream, and a catalog's current revenue, expected future earnings, and more are weighed when determining a valuation.

Earliest Deep-Sea Shipwreck

The oldest shipwreck ever found in the deep sea has been discovered on the Mediterranean Sea floor, shedding light on trade during the late Bronze Age. The 39- to 46-foot-long ship was found roughly 56 miles off the northern coast of Israel at a depth of nearly 6,000 feet during a seafloor survey by a natural gas exploration company.

The wreck contained hundreds of intact Canaanite amphorae—clay jars used to store goods—suggesting it sank between 1400 BCE and 1300 BCE. The deep-sea discovery challenges assumptions that Bronze Age trade occurred only close to shorelines and suggests mariners may have used celestial navigation. While the exact cause of the sinking remains unknown, the ship settled without capsizing, and experts speculate a storm or pirate attack could have been responsible.

The world's oldest found shipwreck is over 4,200 years old and is located in waters 50 feet deep off the coast of the Greek island Dokos.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The Florida Panthers look to win their first Stanley Cup tonight (8 pm ET, ABC) with a 3-2 lead in the best-of-seven series against the Edmonton Oilers.

Los Angeles Lakers reportedly hire NBA veteran JJ Redick as next head coach.

Donald Sutherland, Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning actor known for roles in "M*A*S*H" and "Hunger Games," dies at 88.

Rapper Travis Scott arrested in Miami for trespassing and public intoxication.

2024 Copa América kicks off; see previews for all 16 teams in the soccer tournament.

Team USA track and field Olympic trials begin today from Eugene, Oregon.

Science & Technology

AI startup Anthropic releases Claude 3.5 Sonnet, three months after releasing its previous version; model is meant to compete with OpenAI's GPT-4o and Google's Gemini.

Paleontologists discover potential new triceratops-like dinosaur species, dubbed Lokiceratops; 78-million-year-old fossil suggests the dinosaur family saw region-specific evolution in horn and skull shape.

James Webb Space Telescope captures aligned streams emanating from newborn star clusters; first direct observation of the phenomenon confirms current theory of star formation.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.3%, Dow +0.8%, Nasdaq -0.8%); S&P 500 closes lower after briefly surpassing the 5,500 level for the first time.

Bank of England keeps interest rates at 16-year high of 5.25% despite inflation slowing to 2% annual rate in May.

Construction of new US homes in May drops to slowest pace in four years, falling 5.5% month-over-month to seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.28 million per year.

US Supreme Court rejects challenge to one-time tax on certain offshore business income; the 2017 tax law provision is expected to generate \$340B.

Politics & World Affairs

At least four people killed after Tropical Storm Alberto makes landfall in eastern Mexico, bringing flooding and heavy rainfall to Mexico and Texas.

US heat wave breaks records across Midwest and East Coast due to a high-pressure system known as a heat dome.

The US reallocates air defense missiles originally intended for other countries to Ukraine; initial deliveries to arrive in Ukraine by end of summer, with deliveries for other allies delayed by at least 16 months.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. fails to qualify for CNN's June 27 presidential debate with President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump; Kennedy, an independent presidential candidate, is on five state ballots.

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Queen of Hearts

Week 16 of the Queen of Hearts drawing was held Thursday with the jackpot of \$24,157. Ticket sales for the were \$1,725. The name drawn was Diane Schelle with chose card number 51, it was the King of Diamonds. She won the consolation prize of \$172.

Groton City May 2023 Financial Report

May 2023

Dacotah Bank Checking Acct	\$ 3,987,114.17
General Cash	\$ 300.00
SD FIT Acct	\$ 1,602,969.40
Dacotah Bank Water CD	\$ 85,849.13
Cemetery Perp Care CD	\$ 32,876.69
Total	\$ 5,709,109.39

Invested In		
Cash	\$ 300.00	0.01%
Dacotah Bank	\$ 4,105,839.99	71.92%
SD Fit	\$ 1,602,969.40	28.08%
Total	\$ 5,709,109.39	100.00%

	Beginning	Revenue	Expenses	Transfers	Ending
	Cash Balance				Cash Balance
General	\$ 1,378,412.62	\$ 264,129.42	\$ 172,191.39		\$ 1,470,350.65
Bed, Board, Booze Tax	\$ 161,345.22	\$ 2,502.40			\$ 163,847.62
Baseball Uniforms	\$ 1,710.20	\$ 5,271.55			\$ 6,981.75
Airport	\$ 33,295.57		\$ 9,658.94		\$ 23,636.63
**Debt Service	\$ (233,538.71)				\$ (233,538.71)
Cemetery Perpetual Care	\$ 34,756.69				\$ 34,756.69
Water	\$ 547,181.14	\$ 44,400.73	\$ 41,295.27		\$ 550,286.60
Electric	\$ 2,978,831.70	\$ 142,582.77	\$ 93,644.48		\$ 3,027,769.99
Wastewater	\$ 378,932.34	\$ 17,359.15	\$ 262.74		\$ 396,028.75
Solid Waste	\$ 61,511.05	\$ 14,904.43	\$ 10,458.20		\$ 65,957.28
Family Crisis	\$ 14,411.63	\$ 747.87	\$ 795.00		\$ 14,364.50
Sales Tax	\$ 11,384.22	\$ 11,524.73	\$ 10,352.54		\$ 12,556.41
Employment	\$ 4,046.34		\$ 233.62		\$ 4,279.96
Utility Prepayments	\$ 74,413.31	\$ 470.37	\$ 47.34		\$ 74,836.34
Utility Deposits	\$ 94,651.32	\$ 750.00	\$ 1,000.00		\$ 94,401.32
Other	\$ 2,893.61		\$ 300.00		\$ 2,593.61
Totals	\$ 5,544,238.25	\$ 504,643.42	\$ 340,239.52	\$ -	\$ 5,709,109.39

**Debt to be Paid	
**2015 Refinance	\$ 1,808,831.24 by 12/1/2035
Total Debt	\$ 1,808,831.24

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Back Row: Angel McGregor and Suzie Easthouse
Front Row: Joan Bosanko, Tami Zimney, Denise Raap
Not Pictured: Collette Quam (Courtesy Photo Alexa Schuring)

Ladies Invitational Golf Tournament

Olive Grove Golf Course

June 17, 2024

Championship Flight

1st – Collette Quam and Joan Bosanko - 73
2nd – Cindy Kraft and Carmen Meyer – 76
Carissa Drackley and Brooke Bierman – 76
Haley Ellingson and Ashley Foster – 78
Laura Stoebner and Toni Gisi – 80
Terri Holmes and Ellen Renner – 80

First Flight

1st - Suzie Easthouse and Angel McGregor – 78
2nd - Sharon Zastrow and Cyndy Larson – 80
Becky Johnson and Jen Thomas – 81
Susie Sousa and Elaine Scherbenske – 84
Clara Nolz and Mary Kessler – 87
Brenda Waage and Sue Stanley – 87

Second Flight

1st – Tami Zimney and Denise Raap – 89
2nd – Ranae Ball and Betty Dunker – 89
Deb Fredrickson and Michelle Johnson – 91
Sharon Sombke and Mavis Rossow – 95
Brenda Madsen and Dar Larson – 97
Katelyn Giedt and Janene Harry – 103
Edith Bertsch and Patty Hearnen – 106

Pin Prizes

Closest to the Pin Hole #4 – Joan Bosanko
Longest Drive Hole #2 – Carissa Drackley
Longest Putt Hole #9 – Laura Stoebner



SDSU Champions!
Larry Birchem, Brevin Fliehs, Cole Simon, Carter Simon

(Courtesy Photo Alexa Schuring)

SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament **Olive Grove Golf Course** **June 14, 2024**

Championship Flight

1st - Larry Birchem, Brevin Fliehs, Cole Simon, Carter Simon – 61
2nd - Al Bahe, Ned Gavlick, Eric Ray – 61
Lorin Fliehs, Sherm Cutler, Jan Gilchrist, Terry Gilchrist – 62
Carter Jondahl, Treyton Diegel, Joe Groeblichhoff, Brandyn Anderson – 63
Tony Waage, Jackson Waage, Jay Waage, Tyson Ronne – 64

First Flight

1st - Graig Pugsley, Junior Schmidt, Mark Briley, Tim Danforth – 63
2nd - Bob Walter, Randy Stanley, Brad Larson, Brad Waage – 64
Kyle Spencer, Dave Blackmun, Jason Yeske, Kelly Pray – 64
Scott Simons, Roger Thorstenson, Jerry Stiegelmeier, Bill Sawinsky – 64
Al Heer, Lofton Heer, Jeff Amacher, Drew Amacher – 65
Scott Kettering, John Hilton, Aaron Scholl, John Peterson – 69
Gavin Voss, Andy Bertsch, Brandon Bertsch, Matt Haas – 70

Second Flight

1st - Karl Alberts, Rick Mettler, Austin Vaughn, Corey Gaulrapp – 66
2nd - Eric Moody, Mitch Locke, Ian Rose, Mackenzie Johnson – 66
Steve Dunker, Betty Dunker, Loren Schaller, Peggy Schaller, Ron Russell, Joan Russell – 68
Brittany Hubbard, Ken Hubbard, Dean Christensen, Shirlyn Christensen – 72
Russ Wright, Brady Wieker, Mike Traxinger, Tim Donovan – 72
Bob Wegner, Rob Wanous, Chip Hanson, George Wegner – 72
Austin Schuelke, Deb Schuelke, TJ Harder, Marcy Harder – 74

Travel South Dakota Awards Tourism Grants 19 event-based entities received funds from TAP Grant

PIERRE, S.D. – Travel South Dakota’s Tourism Advertising Promotion (TAP) Grant program has awarded a total of \$163,110 to assist South Dakota’s tourism industry and increase visitation to tourism-related events.

“From local events to large celebrations, South Dakota events of all kinds will be able to use these funds to celebrate the unique parts of our state,” said James Hagen, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Tourism. “We are so excited to provide assistance to these amazing South Dakota events.”

The purpose of the TAP Grant program is to provide marketing funds to tourism-related events such as festivals, concerts, rodeos, and powwows. This grant program is focused on providing funding to events in smaller towns, cities, and rural areas of the state, but entities and events of all sizes were encouraged to apply. The grants range from \$1,000 to \$10,000.

Award recipients include: Arlington Days (Arlington), Rally Event in Belle Fourche (Belle Fourche), Deadwood Mardi Gras (Deadwood), Eurekafest (Eureka), South Dakota Chislic Festival (Freeman), Jesse James Days (Garretson), Geddes 125th Anniversary/Geddes Fur Trader Days (Geddes), Sunflower Festival (Highmore), 1880 Train Holiday Express (Hill City), Irene Rodeo (Irene), The Haunting of Keystone (Keystone), Neutrino Day (Lead), Sitting Bull Stampede (Mobridge), Back Forty Beef and Adventure Farm (Pierpont), Oahe Winter Festival (Pierre/Fort Pierre), Chinook Days (Spearfish), Sturgis Art Festival & Legendary Sturgis Battle of the Bands (Sturgis), Pumpkin Fest (Webster), and Mazing Acres’ Fall Festival (Yankton).

Names Released in 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: Aaron Marvin Sibilsky, 47-year-old male from Pulaski, WI, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2020 Tracker XTR1000 UTV

Seatbelt/Helmet Use: No

Passenger 1: Nichole Marie Behrent, 46-year-old female from Appleton, WI, 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 UTV crash six miles northeast of Piedmont, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Aaron M. Sibilsky, 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. Sibilsky died from his injuries at the scene. The passenger, Nichole M. Behrent, 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.

Creating a place for arts connections

By Jim Speirs, Executive Director, Arts South Dakota

The biennial State Arts Conference earlier this month in Sioux Falls brought together champions of the arts from across South Dakota for two days of meaningful workshops, dynamic speakers and the exchange of creative ideas. But the most important aspect of the conference was creating a place where person-to-person arts connections could happen.

This year's conference had a strong focus on advocacy, reminding participants that they are the frontline activists for the arts and creativity in South Dakota—and that advocacy can be as simple as sharing the message that the arts matter! Representatives of the state's Community Arts Councils flocked to Sioux Falls, as 30 leaders from 19 communities traveled a combined total of 8,000 miles to share their stories of success and their passion for our cultural environment. They joined over 100 other conference attendees. The local integration of creative programming into the everyday lives of South Dakota residents was another powerful theme of the conference, shared by city leaders from Yankton to Hill City. For a more comprehensive review of this year's State Arts Conference, just check out the postings at ArtsSouthDakota.org.

We were reminded that the arts drive our local and state economies with jobs, ticket sales and tax revenues. People came away from the conference energized to share their advocacy, re-educated on the sheer power of cultural connections and convinced that ours is a culture rich in history, potential, legacy and creativity. Most of all, those of us who attended were linked in the knowledge that all of us—and everyone who shares our belief in the arts as vital to modern life—are the future of cultural growth in South Dakota.

To learn more about the 2024 State Arts Conference and discover ways in which you can be an advocate for the arts, visit ArtsSouthDakota.org.



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We the People

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



By David Adler

D-Day Reminder: Constitutional Principles Went to War Abroad to Preserve Them at Home

The 80th anniversary of D-Day, justly commemorated as history's greatest military invasion, reminds us of the fact that World War II was waged to defeat the forces of authoritarianism abroad so our constitutional democracy and all that comes with it -- freedom, justice and the rule of law -- could be preserved at home.

When American soldiers stormed the beaches at Normandy on June 6, 1944, they fought for the cherished principles embodied in the Constitution and those trumpeted by the Bill of Rights: limited governmental powers confined by the Constitution, freedom of speech, press and religion, equal protection of the law, due process of law and popular sovereignty. If allied forces had not prevailed, those constitutional principles and democratic values might have been lost forever.

War abroad to preserve democracy at home cannot by itself succeed if America's governmental institutions, including the Supreme Court, fail to defend fundamental constitutional principles.

Fully informed and influenced by the existential threats that authoritarianism posed to our constitutional democracy in World War II, the Court, in *West Virginia Bd. of Education v. Barnette* -- delivered on June 14, 1943 (Flag Day) -- a 6-3 decision that enjoys its lofty status in the pantheon of landmark cases extolling the virtues of freedom of speech, religion and constitutionally limited government.

The state of West Virginia had enacted a law that required teachers and students to salute the flag and recite the Pledge of Allegiance each day. The Supreme Court, just three years before, in *Minersville v. Gobitis* (1940), had upheld in an 8-1 decision, a similar Pennsylvania statute, challenged by Jehovah's Witnesses, who contended that the mandate violated their First Amendment right of freedom of religion because it coerced them to engage in idolatry. The Court upheld the statute on grounds that it promoted the goals of citizenship and patriotism and served the interests of national unity and security.

Legal scholars, as well as organizations as patriotic as the American Legion, had roundly criticized the compulsory statute, believing the question of saluting the flag should be voluntary. Now, the *Barnette* Court, in full view of the fact that Germans, in the iron grip of Hitler's totalitarianism, were required by law to salute the Fuhrer, recoiled at the prospect of imposing on Americans a requirement that they, too, assume a mandated physical position to salute the flag.

The Court, in a remarkable 6-3 ruling, overturned *Gobitis* and upheld a challenge to the law brought by Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that it violated their First Amendment rights of free speech and religion. Three Justices -- William O. Douglas, Hugo Black and Frank Murphy -- who had voted with the *Gobitis* majority, reversed course in *Barnette* and recanted their position in *Gobitis*.

In what represented Justice Robert H. Jackson's most memorable and eloquent opinion, he wrote for the Court, "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."

West Virginia was promoting patriotism, but its means could not justify its use of coercive power.

"The Bill of Rights," Justice Jackson said, "denies those in power any legal opportunity to coerce" allegiance. "Authority here is to be controlled by public opinion, not public opinion controlled by authority."

Jackson's stark contrast of the essential difference between totalitarianism, as manifested in Hitler's Germany, a closed society without freedom, and the constitutional democracy of the United States, founded on the indispensable conditions of a free and open society, brought into sharp focus what allied forces

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were fighting for in World War II.

In America, as in all republics grounded on the consent of the people, national unity must be obtained through persuasion and example, not by coercion.

Justice Jackson, drawing on history, and the current practice in Germany, perceived the paths and results of state coercion of beliefs, thoughts, religion and speech. "Those who begin coercive elimination of dissent soon find themselves exterminating dissenters. Compulsory unification of opinion achieves only the unanimity of the graveyard."

Justice Jackson's opinion was applauded by the legal fraternity and the nation. The eloquence of his judicial defense of individual liberty and democracy has not been matched since.

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

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Rural and reservation health providers face high hurdles

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

HURON, S.D. – The patchwork nature of the rural and reservation health care system in South Dakota sometimes requires innovation, compassion and a healthy dose of teamwork to keep people healthy.

While the existing health care network contains numerous barriers to access to care and troubling negative health outcomes, occasionally an "it takes a village" approach is employed to help heal those in great need.

That played out recently in Huron when an immigrant family on a work visa arrived in this east-central South Dakota city without money, insurance or English skills but full intentions of working at a local turkey processing plant. The family from Myanmar also brought their 2-year-old son who was suffering from leukemia.

They were introduced to Leonard Wonnenberg, a physician assistant who provides primary care to patients of all incomes and backgrounds at the James Valley Community Health Center operated by Horizon Health.

Like most clinics in small cities and towns across the state, the Horizon clinic does not have specialists to provide high-level medical treatment, so outside help was a must. Furthermore, the family spoke only a Karenic language, so Wonnenberg enlisted an interpreter from a local church to help communicate, then found a volunteer willing to drive the family and their sick son two hours to Sanford Children's Specialty Clinic in Sioux Falls.

Once there, the boy received treatment and medications that have put his cancer in remission for the past couple years and allowed him to attend school as a healthy youngster.

"Now, he's doing well. He's thriving. He's just like any other ordinary kid," Wonnenberg said. "He's really cute and he talks a lot."

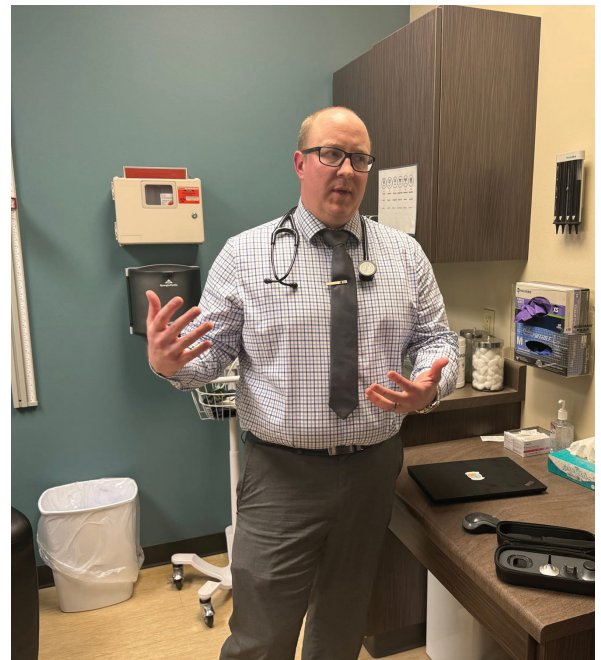
Tribal health mentor knows the ropes

Sara DeCoteau is seen as a health care hero to many people in Sisseton and within the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate (SWO) tribe on the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation in northeastern South Dakota. Several medical workers News Watch spoke to during a recent visit to Sisseton called DeCoteau their mentor.

With 50 years of tribal and public health employment on her resume and a deep knowledge of how things work — or sometimes don't — in tribal and rural health care, it's easy to understand why so many look up to her.

These days, DeCoteau, 70, runs the health program for the SWO tribe, and works from an office in the Indian Health Services (IHS) hospital on the east end of Sisseton.

In discussing the current state of medical care on the reservation, DeCoteau said tribal residents have



Leonard Wonnenberg, shown on April 26, 2024, is a physician assistant at the James Valley Community Health Center in Huron, S.D. He uses all resources possible to help provide quality patient care. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South

Dakota News Watch)

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Sara DeCoteau, shown in her office on April 29, 2024, in Sisseton, S.D., has spent 50 years as a leader in administration of tribal and public health in northeastern South Dakota.

(Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

ready access to a strong medical network, with a local public hospital and combined offerings of the SWO tribe and IHS. Compared to other reservations in South Dakota, including on Rosebud and Pine Ridge, DeCoteau said SWO tribal members are well served, despite a handful of chronic challenges facing indigenous health care systems.

Like almost every rural or reservation provider in South Dakota and the U.S., DeCoteau pointed to staff recruitment and retention as a major issue for SWO and IHS. She said transportation challenges, a lack of health literacy and limited service hours all create barriers to obtaining proper health care for tribal residents.

Funding shortfall a chronic issue

But no local issue can top the challenges created by the chronic underfunding of IHS and other government tribal health programs. In a July 2022 report from the Office of Health Policy within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the initial bullet point in the report confirms this.

"There are long standing and persistent health and health care disparities among American Indians and Alaska Natives, which are a result of centuries of structural discrimination, forced relocation, reduced economic opportunities, and chronic underfunding of health care for this population," the report states.

DeCoteau said tribal residents of South Dakota, thanks to treaties signed with the federal government generations ago, are generally able to access medical care without insurance or a payment if they use IHS or tribal facilities. But for services not offered, tribal members can obtain treatment outside the reservation through a "purchase-referred care" payment system, in which the federal government pays non-tribal providers for services.

While that system is working well now in Sisseton, DeCoteau said, there have been times where the referral funding has run out near the end of the fiscal year each summer.

"For years, and years, we used to say, 'Don't get sick after June,' because funding would evaporate by then, and only the highest priority cases would be considered for care," she said. "It is so aggravating, so unfair to the American Indian people to be treated like that."

Creative ways to fill the gaps

DeCoteau and other members of her team at SWO are willing to go the extra mile, and be extremely patient and diligent, to find new ways to serve the local population.

In late 2023, after a two-year effort, the tribe was finally able to launch its Asniyapi Field Health Clinic program, in which a nurse practitioner travels the region in a mobile clinic to provide a wide range of medical, behavioral health, addiction, education and pharmacy services to people in their communities and neighborhoods.

To develop the mobile clinic program, DeCoteau and others combined a U.S. Department of Agriculture rural development grant with funding from IHS and money from the federal American Rescue Plan Act to buy a large van and equip it with technology, diagnostics and a nurse practitioner.

In recent weeks, the mobile clinic has helped diabetes patients manage their weight and wounds, it offered Suboxone treatment for opioid addicts and provided physicals to children who need one to qualify for Head Start programming.

"Now, we're able to provide medicine without walls and take health care to the people in our communities," she said.

Personal experiences reveal gaps

DeCoteau has her own telling experiences navigating the rural health care system in South Dakota. A friend recently drove 160 miles to an appointment in Sioux Falls but had to turn right around because her provider was unable to keep the appointment.

A while back, DeCoteau needed cataract surgery on both eyes, so her sister traveled from Minnesota to drive Decoteau two hours to Sioux Falls for the two-day procedure, costing money for gas and a hotel stay. When complications arose months later, DeCoteau had to arrange for transpiration to Sioux Falls again, but a blizzard required her to travel a day early and pay for more fuel and several nights in a hotel.

"That's rural health care," she said. "You're at the mercy of the system and the weather, too."

Wahleah Watson, who works in tribal health education in Sisseton, said she decided to drive an hour to Watertown to give birth last year due to concerns that birthing services at the local public hospital were inadequate.

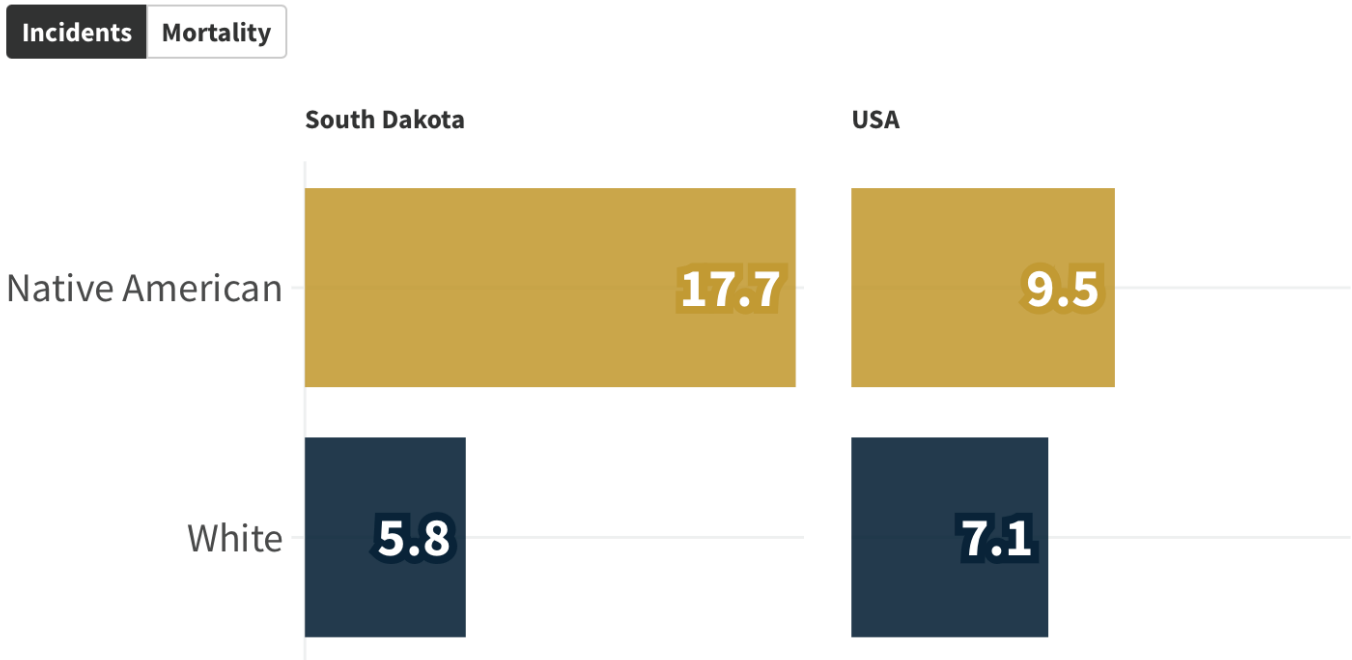
"I heard from relatives that they had a bad experience, and I didn't want to go through that," she said.

Watson said she received prenatal services through IHS and then made the drive to Watertown, hoping she had planned well and did not undergo any last-minute complications. When the Coteau des Prairies Health Care System in Sisseton ended its child delivery program on March 1, Watson said all pregnant women in the area will now be forced to make that drive for a hospital delivery.

"That's a huge barrier to our young mothers, and in general, it's scary to get pregnant because we don't have that medical facility here to give that care and deliver babies here," she said.

Natives in SD have high cervical cancer rate

Data from 2020 and is per 100,000 people. Click or tap on tabs for different data.



Source [South Dakota Department of Health](#) • Note: Mortality rate data not available for the United States.

Graphic: Michael Klinski / South Dakota News Watch

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Counseling services not meeting the need

People who need behavioral health or substance abuse treatment and counseling have options to get help in rural areas, but access is limited or can be difficult to obtain for some.

The American Psychiatric Association recently labeled South Dakota as one of the worst "mental health care deserts" in the country, with nearly half of all counties not having a single behavioral health provider.

The expansion of telehealth services during and after the COVID-19 pandemic has helped open doors to behavioral health for more people. But poverty and geographic isolation prevent some people, especially those on reservations, from having computers or access to the internet.

Richard Bird, director of the Dakotah Pride Center operated by the SWO tribe, said the facility offers both inpatient and outpatient treatment services to tribal and non-tribal patients, but it's limited in its ability to accept new clients due to space and funding limitations.

The inpatient facility has 12 beds but could easily fill double that number at any time with people who need services, Bird said. And the program's sober living halfway house that accepts former prison inmates and others in transition is insufficient to meet the need, he said.

"We could always use more bed space, and our halfway house could be expanded to meet the need," Bird said.

Bird said the program makes accommodations to help people get to the facility, including sending transport buses as far as Sioux Falls to pick up patients who qualify. But like many other health programs in reservation areas, the facility suffers from stagnant financing from the Indian Health Services, which contracts for services with the Pride Center.

"Costs have gone up, but the funding remains the same," he said. "We do what we can, because it's a difficult population to work with, but we're making some progress."

Rural hospital 'does what it can' within limits

Craig Kantos has spent decades in health care administration, often in small towns or rural areas, so he is well positioned to manage the many challenges that come with being CEO of the Coteau des Prairies health system.

The small hospital has a medical staff of eight, with a general surgeon, three physicians and four mid-level providers handling family medicine, emergency care and respiratory and physical therapy treatment. It has a lab, X-ray, MRI and CT machines, telehealth stations and a helipad for emergency transports.

Kantos said the hospital continually struggles to hire new medical staff when openings arise. The hospital could accommodate three more family physicians and five or six additional nurses if it was able to recruit them. But finding quality, affordable local housing is a big barrier for potential new hires, he added.



Medical patients who need help on nights, weekends or holidays in rural and reservation areas often have to rely on ambulance services to get them to a hospital, including by the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe ambulance service in Lower Brule, S.D., photographed on March 23, 2024. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

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Wahleah Watson is a health education coordinator for the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate tribe. Watson, shown April 29, 2024, in her Sisseton, S.D., office, drove an hour to Watertown, S.D., to give birth last year. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota

News Watch)

have to figure out how to get you out of here quickly.”

Like providers across rural South Dakota, Kantos said Coteau des Prairies offers primary and preventative care options but is aware that some people are unwilling or unable to take advantage of services offered.

“You can get access to preventive care here, and you can for sure get it if you want it,” he said. “And that’s the clinker of it. It’s not that we don’t provide it, it’s that the patients don’t think they need it, or they don’t necessarily come for one reason or another.”

'If we aren't here ... conditions can worsen'

With a caring demeanor, a commitment to helping others and a family history of living and working with minority populations, Wonnenburg might be the perfect person to work in family medicine in a place like Huron. He comes from a family of health care workers and educators who have spent much of their careers working on American Indian reservations in the state.

Huron is a small city in east-central South Dakota with a population of 14,000 that includes people from a wide diversity of backgrounds. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Huron, which is home to a huge turkey processing plant and a strong manufacturing base, has 2,600 Hispanics, 2,000 Asians and 1,300 other non-white residents, and many speak no English or English as a second language. The median house-

Even with current staffing, Coteau des Prairies is able to stabilize patients in emergency situations and can then transport or refer patients with conditions in more serious categories of cardiology, orthopedics, major fractures and now OB/GYN conditions to hospitals in Sioux Falls, Watertown or Fargo, North Dakota.

Kantos said the hospital system faces regular challenges in balancing revenues and costs, especially since 70% of gross revenues come from sources, including Medicaid, Medicare and IHS, that do not cover the full cost of treatment.

Still, Kantos is confident that his staff and facility are well-equipped to provide quality primary care and handle most health care emergencies that arise. The hospital was recently named a Top 20 quality critical access hospital in the nation by the National Rural Healthcare Association.

“You do the best with what you have. But the staff here, they will bust their butts to save a life,” he said.

Kantos said he and hospital leadership meet regularly with other health providers in the area, including the leadership of the local IHS and tribal medical facilities to maintain cooperation and share critical information about the local health care landscape.

Since March 1, when the hospital stopped delivering babies, Kantos said his remaining medical staff has undergone regular training in order to make an emergency delivery if needed.

“If we cannot safely transfer you, we have to deliver you,” he said. “But that being said, if you have a baby that’s not in the correct position, we

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hold income in 2022 was \$57,700, about \$12,000 less than the state average.

In the lobby of the Horizon Health clinic where he works, a sign greets patients with the word "welcome" translated into more than a dozen other languages. In his time in Huron, Wonnenberg has become adept at using resources within and outside the clinic to provide health care to people from other cultures and ethnicities, those without insurance or money, patients who have no access to transportation and those whose cases require more care than is available at the Horizon clinic.

"Some of these folks, they would rather spend their last \$10 on groceries for their families rather than \$10 on medicine for their health, for treating something as simple as strep throat," Wonnenberg said. "But you know, a strep throat if left untreated, it can lead to things like rheumatic fever, which can be very devastating."

A sense of compassion on the part of medical workers in rural settings, he said, can go a long way to breaking down patient barriers to health care, especially for a diverse patient population in Huron where some people may come from a place of distrust.

"One of the things that drives people here is the amount of compassion that we have for our patients, and they really see the helping hand in our care," he said. "Then they tell other people about it, and word of mouth goes a long way."

Wonnenberg worries that systemic barriers to getting health care in rural areas that surround Huron will prevent some people from being healthy and may lead to increased mortality.

"These are people that have moms, these are people that have dads, these are people who have kids, and so we want them to be successful in their communities," he said. "So we need to treat these people like human beings."

'Figure out that jigsaw puzzle'

The nursing shortage and lack of desire of health workers to move to rural areas are tops among his concerns, and he hopes incentive programs can be created to lure more providers to small towns and reservations.

Wonnenberg would like to see higher reimbursement rates to providers from Medicaid and Medicare to help offset rising costs and supports expansion of Medicaid in South Dakota, which he said has allowed more low-income people obtain preventative medical care. He believes pharmacists can play a larger role in providing not just medicines but working more closely with local practitioners to create a holistic approach to patient care.

And he sees an even larger role for telehealth to connect rural patients with specialists in larger cities. He recalled one recent case where a patient on a work visa had kidney disease that caused 30 pounds of excess fluid to form on his body. The man had very little money and no insurance and was referred to Wonnenberg through a local church that also helped with interpretation.



The Indian Health Service hospital in Eagle Butte, S.D., on April 30, 2024, is one of the few medical facilities in northwestern South Dakota with 24/7 emergency care. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

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Craig Kantos, CEO of the Coteau des Prairies Health Care System is shown on April 29, 2024, in Sisseton, S.D. Kantos said his small facility has a major positive impact on the health of rural and reservation residents in northeastern South Dakota. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

Wonnenberg used telehealth services to connect the patient with specialists who helped stabilize him and later, an insurance navigator helped the man obtain government insurance.

"You've got to figure out that jigsaw puzzle to get people treated," he said.

But new challenges still pop up regularly to providing health care in small towns and rural areas, Wonnenberg said.

For instance, a state program that helped pay for community health workers is ending, which could reduce contacts and home visits between patients and providers. Some of those patients are likely to forgo preventive care that would prevent conditions from worsening and could force some patients without insurance into medical bankruptcy, he said.

Wonnenberg, who soon will leave the James Valley clinic to pursue a speciality in orthopedics, said his time working in Huron has solidified his belief in the critical role rural clinics and health care workers provide across South Dakota.

"It's a safety net because if we aren't here, conditions can worsen and get out of control and it can end badly for patients," he said. "We're always trying to bridge barriers, to bridge gaps, to ensure the best outcomes for patients and their families — and their communities."

This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch as a project for the USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism's 2023 Impact Fund for Reporting on Health Equity and Health Systems. News Watch, a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization, is online at sdnewswatch.org, where readers can sign up for an email every few days to get stories as soon as they're published. Contact Bart Pfankuch at bart.pfankuch@sdnewswatch.org.

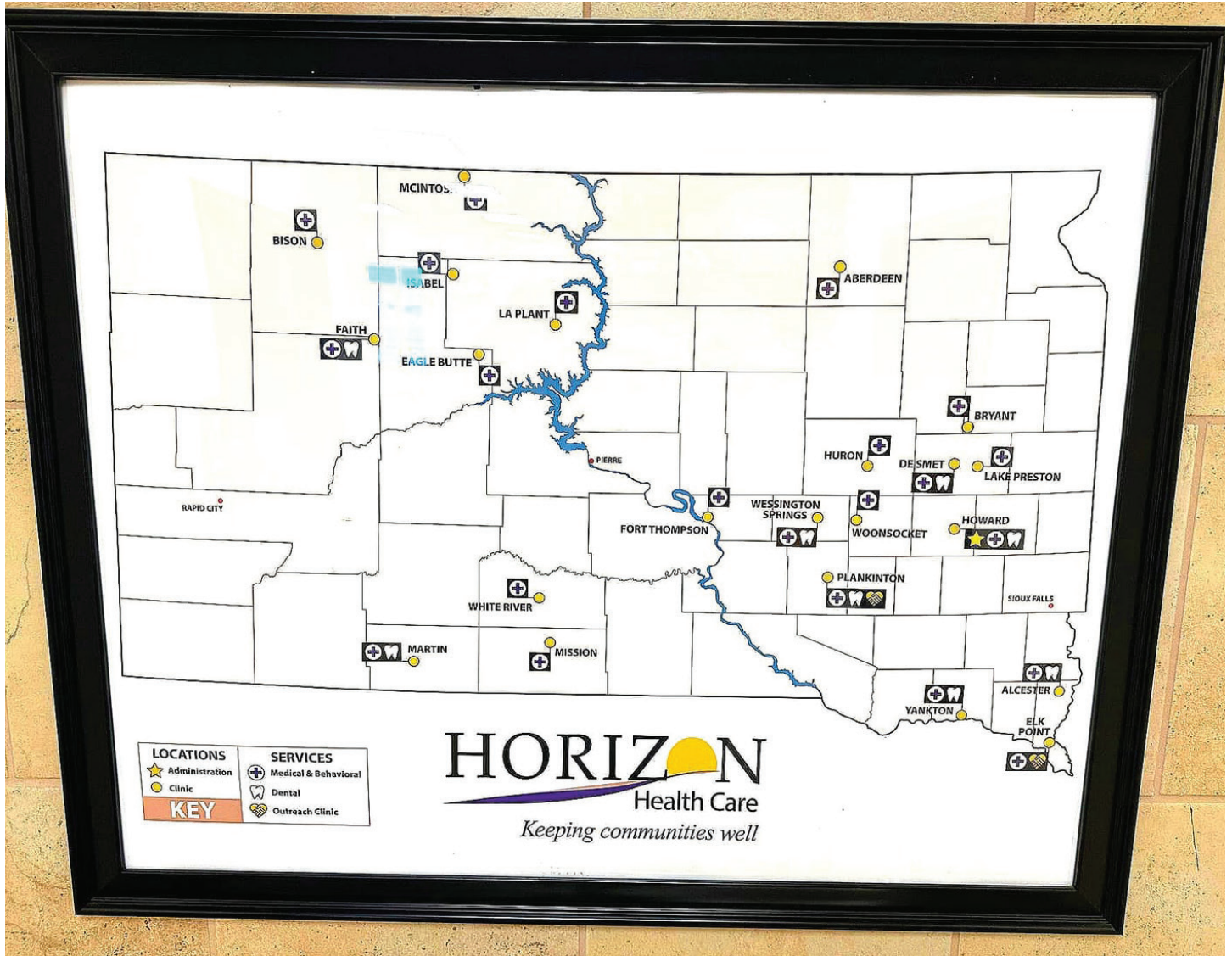
The staff at Decoteau des Prairies hospital in Sisseton, S.D., shown here on April 29, 2024, has won awards for providing high-quality rural health care.

(Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)



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The Horizon Health footprint of clinics in South Dakota, shown April 26, 2024, at its Huron, S.D., clinic, reveals why the system is a key player in providing rural health to underserved areas of the state. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Company says it self-financed Noem documentary

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JUNE 20, 2024 4:18 PM

A company that produced a new documentary about South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem did not receive any financial support from Noem or state government, according to the company and Noem's office.

"No taxpayer money was used," said Ian Fury, Noem's spokesman. "To my knowledge, it was funded entirely by the entity that produced the documentary."

That entity is Transition Studios, of Ohio.

"We self-finance all of our projects, including this one," said Shawn Rech, director of the film. "We approached the governor over a year ago wanting to do this project. She agreed to cooperate."

The company said in a news release that the documentary, "America's Governor: The Kristi Noem Story," would be published on X (formerly Twitter) at 5 p.m. Central, 4 p.m. Mountain on Thursday.

"The documentary explores the challenges she has faced along the way and the unwavering spirit that has propelled her forward," said the news release. "It serves as an inspiration to men and women everywhere, showcasing the boundless possibilities that can be achieved through hard work and steadfast belief in one's principles."

The news release said the documentary includes stories from Noem's books, "Not My First Rodeo" and "No Going Back."

The most recent book, "No Going Back," infamously included a story about Noem killing her 14-month-old dog and a goat. The book also included a claim, later retracted, that Noem met with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un.

Since the book's release, Noem's name has fallen off lists of potential running mates for presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.



Gov. Kristi Noem speaks during a bill-signing ceremony March 6, 2024, at the Capitol in Pierre. (David Bordewyk/South

Dakota NewsMedia Association)

Forest Service gives green light to exploratory gold drilling west of Custer

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JUNE 20, 2024 3:15 PM

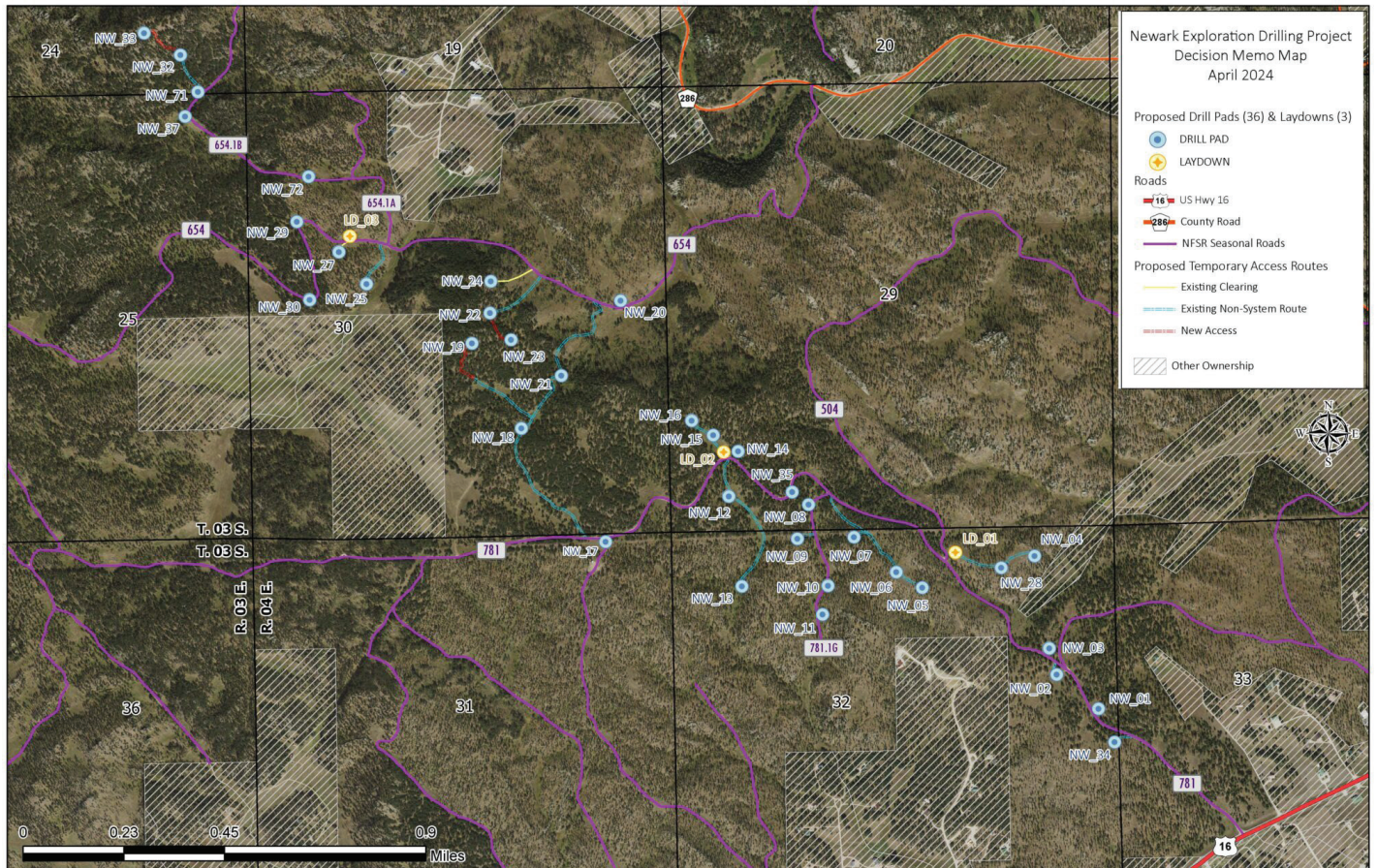
The U.S. Forest Service has given the go-ahead for a Minnesota company to drill holes in search of gold near Custer.

Minneapolis-based F3 Gold received approval for its Newark Exploration Drilling Project in the Black Hills National Forest. The 36 drilling sites are scattered across national forest land about 4 miles west of Custer. The exploration would take up to one year.

The project will use a diamond-tipped drill to obtain core samples from depths reaching 3,000 feet. All drill holes are required to be plugged afterward.

The project has sparked significant public opposition. Many residents voiced their concerns at a 2023 public meeting in Custer, and the Forest Service received 485 written comments. Residents and environmental groups wanted the Forest Service to complete an environmental impact study (EIS), according to the agency's summary of public comments and its responses.

"Commenters are concerned that the proposed project will have significant effects on water quality, water use, recreation and tourism, wildlife, and cultural sites," the summary says. "Commenters also assert that an EIS will allow for greater tribal consultation and public involvement in the decision-making process."



A map showing the locations just west of Custer where F3 Gold plans to conduct exploratory drilling. (Courtesy of U.S. Forest Service)

But the Forest Service determined that “no extraordinary circumstances exist” that “would warrant further analysis” in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. The project would not interfere with any known historical sites, and no adverse effects to local hydrologic features or water supplies are expected, the Forest Service said in its decision memo.

The agency also emphasized its obligation under the General Mining Law of 1872 to permit mineral exploration on federal lands that haven’t been closed to exploration or mining.

The decision requires F3 Gold to restore the drilling sites to a natural-looking condition after drilling is complete. The company plans to start drilling later this year.

The project is one of several mineral exploration initiatives in the Black Hills, an area with a history of mining dating to the 19th century. There is currently one active, large-scale gold mine in the Black Hills — the Wharf Mine near Lead.

Meanwhile, F3 Gold’s additional plan to drill in the Pactola Reservoir area remains in limbo. The Forest Service is considering a ban on new mining activities, including exploratory drilling, in a 32-square-mile area around the Pactola Reservoir and its upstream public lands, to protect the watershed and its status as a water source for Rapid City.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

COMMENTARY

With marijuana on the ballot, it’s not just about good times. It’s also about money.

by DANA HESS

To the casual observer, it might look like South Dakotans are addicted to voting on recreational marijuana. Legalizing grass was on the ballot in 2020, 2022 and will be again in 2024.

For the backers of legalized marijuana, the high point came in 2020 when voters here approved a constitutional amendment with 54% of the vote. Just about everything that had to do with marijuana was in that initiative. It was overturned by the South Dakota Supreme Court, citing a violation of the state’s one-topic rule for constitutional amendments. That killed the recreational portion of the measure, even as state government went ahead with implementation of a medical marijuana program.

In 2022, an initiated measure to legalize recreational marijuana failed with 47% of the vote. Backers of that initiated measure offered voters a scaled back version of the constitutional amendment that was approved in 2020. Pro-marijuana advocates said the Supreme Court took so long to rule on the legality of the amendment that they didn’t have time to take direction from the court’s ruling.

The initiated measure in front of voters in 2024, IM 29, allows people 21 and older to possess, grow, sell, ingest and distribute marijuana. They may possess up to 2 ounces of marijuana and have up to six marijuana plants with a limit of 12 plants per household.

Limits would be imposed on locations where marijuana can be used, and employers could restrict employee use. Property owners could decide whether or not they want it used on their property.

Unlike the constitutional amendment voters approved back in 2020, IM 29 makes no mention of the licensing of retail establishments or growing operations. There are also no provisions for a 15% excise tax on marijuana. Amendment backers also talked about a construction boom for growing operations and new retail outlets. Those considerations were a big part of the push for legalization in 2020.

A fiscal note on the 2020 amendment said that by 2024, legalized marijuana would have raised \$60

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million for South Dakota with half of the money earmarked for schools and half for the state budget's general fund.

Those who fought against the amendment said that the revenue projections were too rosy. There would also be administrative costs to set up the program and they predicted an increase in the need for social services. While backers of the amendment said legalizing pot would free up police and courts to deal with more serious crimes, those fighting against the amendment foresaw greater law enforcement costs.

With no licensing or taxation provisions in this year's measure, it would be up to the Legislature to set the licensing and taxation rates. Perhaps a voter's decision about IM 29 should consider the financial aspects of marijuana legalization. It's looking more and more like South Dakota could use the money. Consider this:

In 2023, flush with federal pandemic cash and predicting continuing sales tax growth, the Legislature cut the state sales tax from 4.5% to 4.2%. This change was



An employee collects money while holding packages of marijuana at Top Shelf Cannabis, a retail marijuana store, on July 8, 2014, in Bellingham, Washington. Top Shelf Cannabis was the first retail marijuana store to open in Washington state, nearly a year and a half after the state's voters chose to legalize marijuana. (David

Ryder/Getty Images)

predicted to cut state sales tax revenue by an estimated \$104 million.

In 2024 lawmakers debated, but didn't do much about, the fact that South Dakota teachers are once again among the lowest paid in the nation. At some point, that bill will come due.

When voters consider legalizing marijuana, they'll also consider another measure on the ballot that calls for eliminating the state sales tax on groceries. A new South Dakota News Watch poll showed 66% of voters favor doing away with the state sales tax on groceries. That could result in an estimated \$120 million loss in state revenue.

A recent South Dakota Searchlight story noted a meeting of the Governor's Council of Economic Advisors where they learned that sales tax revenues from July through April were down \$32 million. The state was still able to have a good year, relying on increases in the unclaimed property fund, state investments and the contractor's excise tax. None of those are traditionally predictable sources of revenue.

Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana, and in November, South Dakota voters will need to decide if they want to join them. There are many factors to consider in this decision: if a continuing prohibition is the right way to approach marijuana, if public safety would be threatened, if legalization will make marijuana more readily available to young people, and if it's worth the effort to set up new marijuana usage rules for employees and tenants.

The kind of financial windfall the state would receive should also be a factor in that decision. Some voters might not look forward to the day when the pungent aroma of marijuana is common in South Dakota. Perhaps they should consider that it just might be the smell of money.

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

'Extremely low pay' cited at U.S. Senate hearing as prime reason for teacher shortage

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JUNE 20, 2024 4:03 PM

WASHINGTON — The only reason John Arthur is able to be a public school teacher is because his wife makes much more money than he does.

Arthur — the 2021 Utah Teacher of the Year — testified on Thursday at a hearing in the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on the challenges facing public school teachers.

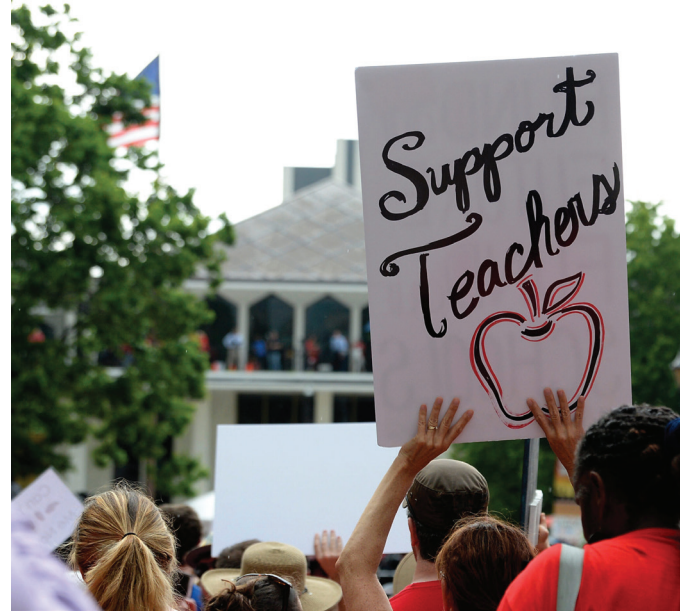
Arthur, who is also a member of the National Education Association and holds National Board Certification, pointed to pay as the main reason for both teachers leaving the profession and parents not wanting their children to become teachers.

"The No. 1 solution to addressing the issues we face must be increasing teachers' salaries," said Arthur, who teaches at Meadowlark Elementary School in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Gemayel Keyes, a teacher at Gilbert Spruance Elementary School in Philadelphia, told the committee that even as an educator, he still has an additional part-time job.

The special education teacher spent most of his career in education as a paraprofessional. At the time he moved into that role, the starting annual salary was \$16,000 and the maximum was \$30,000.

"It's still pretty much the same," he said.



Crowds gather during the Rally for Respect outside the North Carolina Legislative Building on May 16, 2018, in Raleigh, North Carolina. (Sara D. Davis/Getty Images)

Minimum teacher salary

Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent, introduced a bill in March 2023 that would set an annual base salary of \$60,000 for public elementary and secondary school teachers.

"We understand that the children, young people of this country, are our future and there is, in fact ... nothing more important that we can do to provide a quality education to all of our young people, and yet, for decades, public school teachers have been overworked, underpaid, understaffed, and maybe most importantly, underappreciated," Sanders said in his opening remarks.

"Compared to many other occupations, our public school teachers are more likely to experience high levels of anxiety, stress and burnout, which was only exacerbated by the pandemic," he said.

Sanders said 44% of public school teachers are quitting their profession within five years, citing "the extremely low pay teachers receive" as one of the primary reasons for a massive U.S. teacher shortage.

For the 2023-24 school year, a whopping 86% of K-12 public schools in the country documented challenges in hiring teachers, according to an October report from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Maryland sets \$60,000 minimum

But a minimum annual teacher salary of \$60,000 is not far off for every state.

In Maryland, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future raises the starting salary for teachers to \$60,000 a year by July 2026.

William E. Kirwan, vice chair of Maryland's Accountability and Implementation Board, said the multi-year comprehensive plan, passed in 2021 in the Maryland General Assembly, "addresses all aspects of children's

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education from birth to high school completion, including most especially, the recruitment, retention and compensation of high quality teachers."

Kirwan said the "Blueprint's principle for teacher compensation is that, as professionals, teachers should be compensated at the same level as other professionals requiring similar levels of education, such as architects and CPAs."

An "allocation issue"

Sen. Bill Cassidy, ranking member of the committee, dubbed Democrats' solution of creating a federal minimum salary for teachers as a "laudable goal."

But he noted that "the federal government dictating how states spend their money does not address the root cause of why teachers are struggling to teach in the classroom."

"More mandates and funding cannot be the only answer we come up with. We must examine broken policies that got us here and find solutions to improve," the Louisiana Republican said.

Nicole Neily, president and founder of Parents Defending Education, a parents' rights group, argued that "schools don't have a resource issue" but rather an "allocation issue."

"There's a saying: 'Don't tell me where your priorities are, show me where you spend your money, and I'll tell you what they are.' Education leaders routinely choose to spend money on programs and personnel that don't directly benefit students," said Neily.

Neily pointed to a 2021 report from the Heritage Foundation, which found that "standardized test results show that achievement gaps are growing wider over time in districts with (chief diversity officers)." Such staff members commonly encourage efforts at diversity, equity and inclusion in schools.

Robert Pondiscio, a senior fellow at the conservative-leaning American Enterprise Institute, said "higher pay does not ease the burden we place on teachers or add hours to their day."

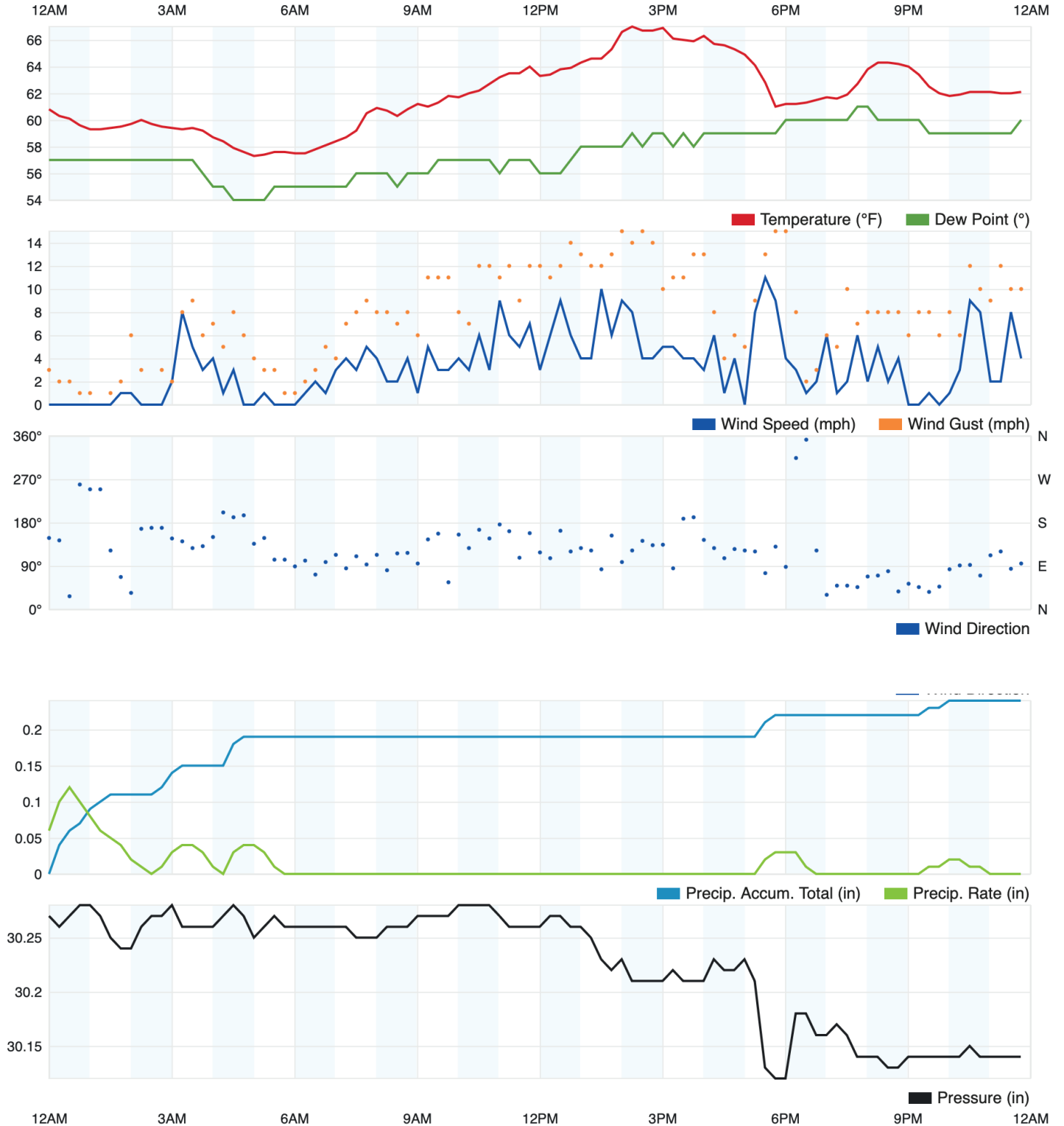
"By all means, raise teacher pay, but do not assume that it will solve teacher shortages or keep good teachers in the classroom. Poor training, deteriorating classroom conditions, shoddy curriculum and spiraling demands have made an already challenging job nearly impossible to do well and sustainably," he added.

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
High: 74 °F	Low: 62 °F	High: 80 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 85 °F
Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms then Partly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny



Severe Weather Threat Overview

June 21, 2024
4:22 AM

Friday Afternoon & Evening

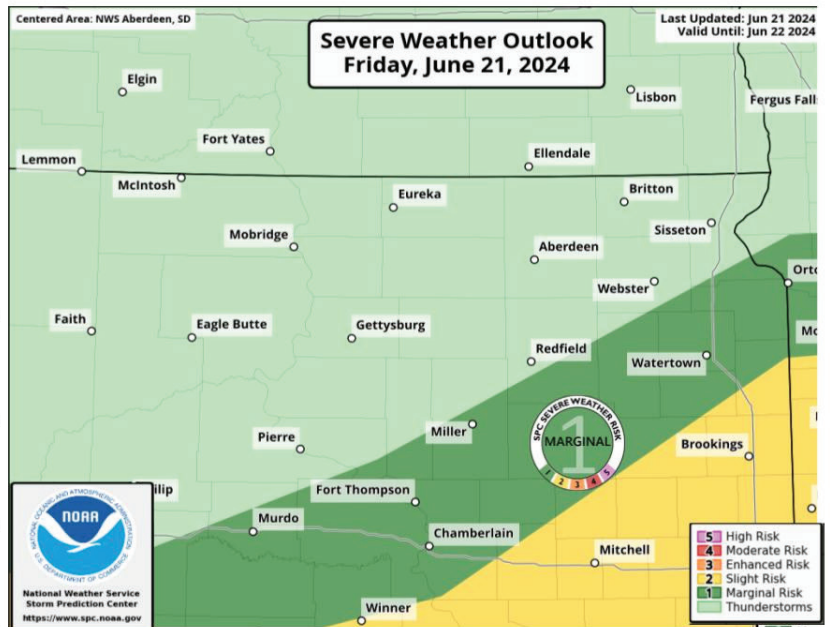
Timing/Location

Isolated storms may drift up from southern & eastern SD this afternoon/evening.

Primary Threats Severe storm potential for the **Dark-Green** & **Yellow** areas. Localized risk of flooding for portions of central/northeast SD*

Tornado Potential

Very Low	Low	Medium	High
Max Hail Size			
Dimes	Quarters	Golfball	Baseball
Max Wind Speed			
< 60 mph	60-70 mph	70-80 mph	> 80mph
Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential			
Very Low	Low*	Medium	High



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Latest forecast is for another round of moisture later today, though not quite as organized across our area with low clouds and cool air expected to persist for most areas. The main threat is for stronger storms to move up from southern and eastern SD. The severe weather threat includes hail, strong winds and the potential for additional flooding before storms weaken. Additional showers and weak thunderstorms can be expected elsewhere today/tonight.

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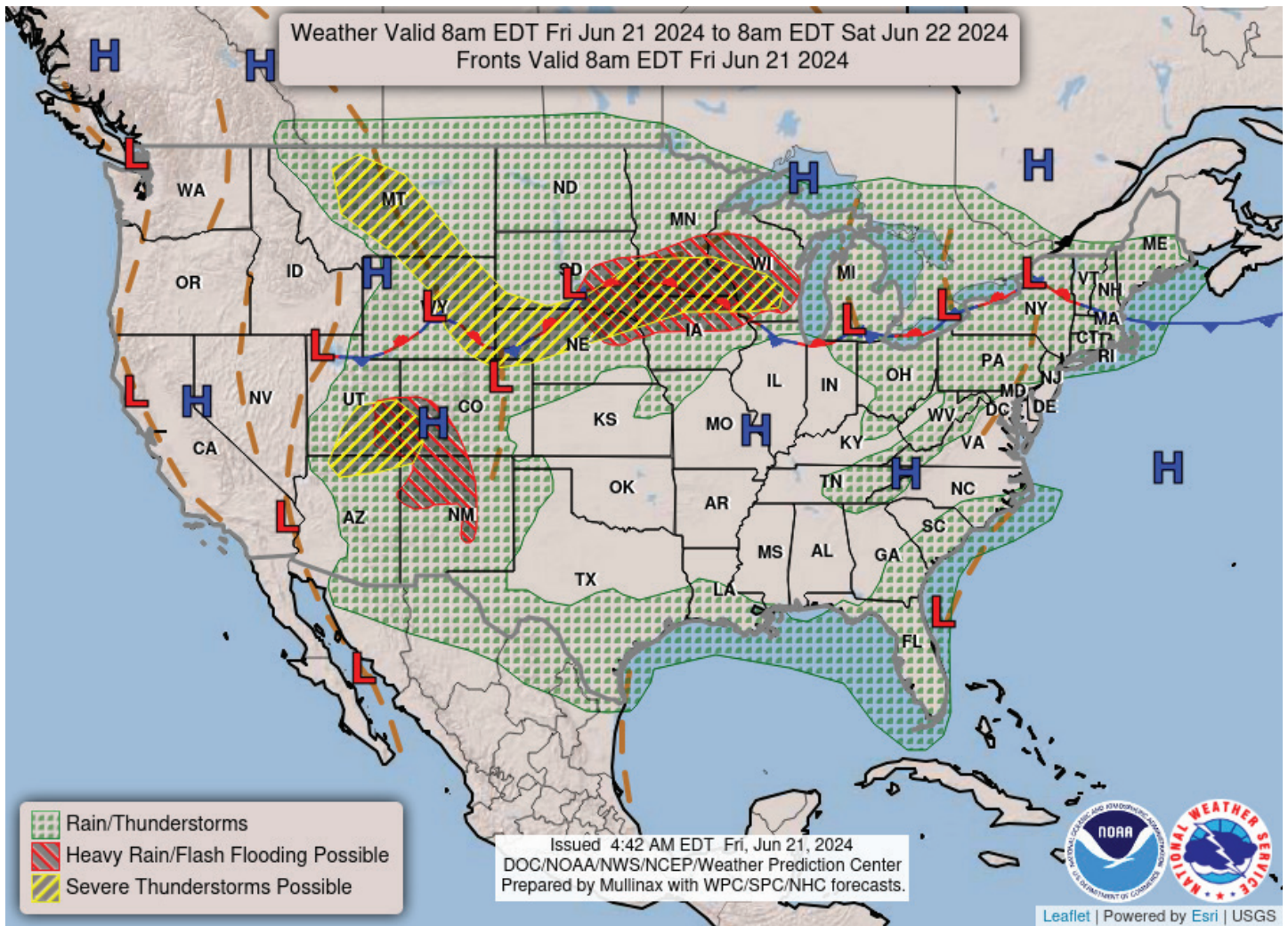
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 67 °F at 2:24 PM
Low Temp: 57 °F at 4:53 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 5:37 PM
Precip: : .24

Day length: 15 hours, 44 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 108 in 1988
Record Low: 31 in 1902
Average High: 82
Average Low: 57
Average Precip in June.: 2.56
Precip to date in June: 2.55
Average Precip to date: 9.81
Precip Year to Date: 9.62
Sunset Tonight: 9:26:18 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:42:15 am



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Today in Weather History

June 21, 1902: Light to heavy frost occurred over most of the state with low temperatures ranging from the mid-20s to the lower 30s. Some record low temperatures include; 27 degrees in Ipswich and Leola, 29 in Kennebec, 30 in Mellette, 31 in Aberdeen, Clark, and Watertown, 32 in Faulkton and Gann Valley, 36 in Sisseton, and 40 degrees in Milbank.

June 21, 1961: One or more tornadoes moved southeast along a distance from east of Aberdeen to the southeastern edge of Sioux Falls. A funnel cloud was first seen between Aberdeen and Groton and later on near Raymond. A tornado hit about 4 pm a few miles southwest of Clark with about 20 farm buildings demolished. One house was destroyed, killing an elderly lady and injuring one person. A boy was reportedly lifted high in the air, and another woman carried 100 yards by winds. Both were injured. Between 4:30 and 5:00 pm, areas northeast of Willow Lake and in northern Kingsbury were hit with a total of 13 farm buildings destroyed or twisted off the foundations. Five buildings on one farm were destroyed, and a house was unroofed near Oldham. The house roof was found several miles away. The tornado was of F3 strength.

June 21, 1983: An F3 tornado touched down in a resort area two miles west of Pollock. Eleven people fled from the southwesternmost cabin and crawled under a nearby cabin. The southwest cabin was destroyed and the cabin the group crawled under was moved five feet from its concrete block foundation. Four people were treated for injuries. A van, boat, and trailer were demolished, and a small car was heavily damaged. The tornado turned east and reformed four miles east of Pollock, where it touched down briefly and dissipated. Another F3 tornado touched down in open prairie three miles northeast of Glad Valley and moved northeast, creating a path of destruction as it progressed. On one farm, nine buildings were wiped out and scattered up to two miles away. Trees and poles were uprooted and scattered a half mile away. This tornado was estimated to be on the ground for six miles with a path width of 300 yards. A third tornado, rated F2, touched down seven miles south of Pollock. This tornado damaged several cabin roofs, a restaurant, and downed several trees. Boats were tossed into a lake, and picnic tables were hurled against cars.

June 21, 2013: A long-lived severe thunderstorm developed over the southern Black Hills and moved eastward across the South Dakota plains during the morning hours. The storm produced large hail to softball size from eastern Custer to northern Jackson Counties. The softball size fell 12 miles east-southeast of Fairburn in Custer County, damaging property. This storm intensified along a strong warm front with volatile air and strong, deep layer winds into several supercell thunderstorms and a damaging line of thunderstorms/bow echo across parts of central and northeast South Dakota through the afternoon hours. Damaging winds up to 90 mph uprooted large trees and caused considerable structural and crop damage and loss of power to those along the path. The worst wind damage was located at Lake Poinsett, Watertown, and Milbank. A woman was killed, and her husband had been severely injured on Lake Poinsett when their lake house was destroyed. Numerous trees were downed along with many structures damaged or destroyed. Many trees had fallen onto homes, cabins, and trailers. The bowling alley in Clear Lake lost its roof along with numerous pole barns being destroyed along the path of the storm. Thousands of people were also left without power. Four tornado touchdowns occurred along with hail up to the size of softballs. Isolated flash flooding also occurred. Codington, Hamlin, Grant, and Deuel counties were all declared in a Federal Disaster Declaration. Total damage estimates were around 1,100,000 dollars.

1987: A tornado destroyed 57 mobile homes at the Chateau Estates trailer park northwest of Detroit, Michigan killing one person and injuring six others. Thunderstorms over Lower Michigan also drenched the Saginaw Valley with up to 4.5 inches of rain in less than six hours.

1988: The first full day of summer was a hot one, with afternoon highs of 100 degrees or above reported from the Northern and Central Plains to the Ohio Valley. Sixty-nine cities in the north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The high of 110 degrees at Sioux Falls, SD was an all-time record for that location.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

RUINED BUT RECLAIMED

One of the most magnificent statues in the world is David. It is considered by many to be the masterpiece of Michelangelo. The story of its completion, however, is far different from that of its beginning.

The block of marble from which he fashioned it was once marred and discarded by another artist. It had been so mutilated that it was cast aside as worthless.

When Michelangelo looked at the piece of marble, he saw possibilities and promises - not something that had been rejected because someone thought it was ruined. And from what others trashed, he brought forth a true treasure.

It is like those of us who become Christians. We "become new persons...(We) are not the same anymore for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!"

It is difficult to grasp the reality of that verse of Scripture. Perhaps it is because our size does not change and our shape remains the same, and the moment we are born again, the Holy Spirit gives us a new life, and we are changed on the inside. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to live differently and act differently because "a new life has begun."

Once our lives were in shambles, shaped and scarred by sin. But the God of all creation recreated us.

Prayer: Thank You, Heavenly Father, that You took us, recreated us and gave us a new life. Your grace has transformed us into Your likeness. Thank you! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 2 Corinthians 5:17



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: 17 Hrs 32 Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.19.24

19 21 24 44 51 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$3,500,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 47 Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.20.24

22 24 25 28 35 4

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 2 Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.19.24

14 17 18 20 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 2 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.19.24

16 23 35 50 59 21

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 31 Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.19.24

4 27 44 50 64 7

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$72,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 31 Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Biden administration old-growth forest proposal doesn't ban logging, but still angers industry

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — The Biden administration is advancing its plan to restrict logging within old-growth forests that are increasingly threatened by climate change, with exceptions that include cutting trees to make forests less susceptible to wildfires, according to a U.S. government analysis obtained by The Associated Press.

The analysis, which is expected to be published Friday, shows that officials intend to reject a blanket prohibition on old-growth logging that's long been sought by some environmentalists. Officials concluded that such a sweeping ban would make it harder to thin forests to better protect communities against wildfires that have grown more severe as the planet has warmed.

"To ensure the longevity of old-growth forests, we're going to have to take proactive management to protect against wildfire and insects and disease," Forest Service Deputy Chief Chris French told the AP. Without some thinning allowed on these forests, he said there is a risk of losing more trees.

The exceptions under which logging would be allowed are unlikely to placate the timber industry and Republicans in Congress, who have pushed back against any new restrictions. French asserted that the impacts on timber companies would be minimal.

"There's so little timber sales that occur right now in old-growth ... that the overall effects are very small," French said.

The U.S. timber industry employs about 860,000 people, which is about 30% fewer than in 2001, according to government data. Much of their work shifted in recent years to timber from private and state lands, after harvests from national forests dropped sharply beginning in the 1990s due to new policies, changing lumber markets and other factors.

The proposed changes on old-growth mark a shift for an agency that has historically promoted logging. They're expected to be finalized before Democratic President Joe Biden's term ends in January, and they come after he issued a 2022 executive order that directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture to identify old-growth forests across the nation and devise ways to conserve them.

That order touched off a flurry of disagreement over what fits under the definition of old-growth and how those trees should be managed.

Old-growth forests, such as the storied giant sequoia stands of Northern California, have layer upon layer of undisturbed trees and vegetation. There's wide consensus on the importance of preserving them — both symbolically as marvels of nature, and more practically because their trunks and branches store large amounts of carbon that can be released when forests burn, adding to climate change.

Underlining the urgency of the issue are wildfires that killed thousands of giant sequoias in recent years.

Most old-growth forests across the U.S. were lost to logging as the nation developed over the past few centuries. Yet pockets of ancient trees remain, scattered across the U.S. including in California, the Pacific Northwest and areas of the Rocky Mountains. Larger expanses of old growth survive in Alaska, such as within the Tongass National Forest.

Old-growth timber harvests in the Tongass were limited in 2021 to small commercial sales. Those would no longer occur under the administration's proposal.

The new analysis follows a separate report on threats to old-growth forests that was finalized last week. It concluded that wildfires, insects and disease have been the main killers of old-growth trees since 2000, accounting for almost 1,400 square miles (3,600 square kilometers) of losses.

By contrast, logging on federal lands cut down about 14 square miles (36 square kilometers) of old-growth forests. That figure has been seized on by timber industry representatives who argue that further restrictions aren't needed.

"A binding restriction on timber harvest is not where their priority ought to be," said Bill Imbergamo, of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition, an industry group. He added that exceptions by federal officials to allow some logging could be challenged in court, which could tie up even small logging projects that are focused on reducing wildfire risks.

Environmentalists have urged the administration to go even further as they seek to stop logging projects on federal lands in Oregon, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho and other states.

Jamie Williams, president of The Wilderness Society, said the proposal was "a step in the right direction."

"But it must go further to protect and restore resilient old-growth forests in a way that meets the challenges of the changing climate," he added.

Government inventories have identified about 50,000 square miles (130,000 square kilometers) of old-growth forests in federal lands across the U.S. and 125,000 square miles (320,000 square kilometers) of mature forests that haven't yet reached old-growth status. That includes land overseen by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, which in April adopted a rule intended to put conservation on equal footing with extractive industries such as logging and energy development.

Environmentalists lobbied unsuccessfully for the Forest Service to extend its old-growth logging restrictions to mature forests. That means those forests remain exposed to potential commercial logging, said Blaine Miller McFeeley, of the environmental group EarthJustice.

"If you don't have protections for mature trees, there will never be a new cohort of old-growth," he said.

Under former President Donald Trump, federal officials sought to open up huge areas of West Coast forests to potential logging. Federal wildlife officials reversed the move in 2021 after determining that political appointees under Trump relied on faulty science to justify drastically shrinking areas of forest that are considered crucial habitats for the imperiled northern spotted owl.

Russia-North Korea pact could dent China's influence, but Beijing still holds sway over both

By DIDI TANG and KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China appears to be keeping its distance as Russia and North Korea move closer to each other with a new defense pact that could tilt the balance of power among the three authoritarian states.

Experts say China's leaders are likely fretting over potential loss of influence over North Korea after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the deal this week, and how that could increase instability on the Korean Peninsula. But Beijing may be struggling to come up with a response to because of its conflicting goals: keeping peace in the Koreas while countering the U.S. and its Western allies on the global stage.

Beijing so far has not commented on the deal — which requires both countries to provide defense assistance if the other is attacked — and only reiterated boilerplate statements that it seeks to uphold peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and advance a political settlement of the North-South divide.

The Chinese response has been "very weak," said Victor Cha, senior vice president for Asia and Korea chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, adding that it could be a sign that Beijing doesn't yet know what to do.

"Every option is a bad option," he said. "You're either unable to make a decision because of very strongly held competing views or ... you're just incapable of making a decision because you just don't know how to evaluate the situation."

Some in Beijing may welcome the Russia-North Korea partnership as a way of pushing back at America's dominance in world affairs, but Cha said that "there is also a great deal of discomfort" in China, which doesn't want to lose its sway over its neighbor to Russia, doesn't want to see a destabilizing nuclear power on its doorstep, and doesn't want to bring the conflict in Europe to Asia.

But China isn't raising these concerns publicly. "They don't want to push Kim Jong Un further into the arms of Vladimir Putin," Cha said, referring to the leaders of the two countries.

Lin Jian, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, declined to comment on the new agreement.

"The cooperation between Russia and the DPRK is a matter between two sovereign states. We do not have information on the relevant matter," he said, referring to North Korea by the initials for its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

John Kirby, the White House national security spokesman, told reporters that the pact between Russia and North Korea "should be of concern to any country that believes that the U.N. Security Council resolutions ought to be abided by." The Security Council has imposed sanctions on North Korea to try to stop its development of nuclear weapons.

Kirby also said the agreement "should be of concern to anybody who thinks that supporting the people of Ukraine is an important thing to do. And we would think that that concern would be shared by the People's Republic of China."

One area that China could be concerned about is whether Russia will help North Korea's weapons program by sharing advanced technology, said Alexander Gabuev, director of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center.

"If China is indeed concerned, it has leverage in both Russia and North Korea and it could probably try to put some limitations to that relationship," he said.

The meeting between Putin and Kim this week was the latest chapter in decades of complicated political and military relationships in East Asia, where the Chinese Communist Party, once an underdog, has emerged as a leading power that wields influence over both North Korea and Russia.

That and other developments have raised alarms in the U.S. that Beijing, now the world's second-largest economy, could challenge the U.S.-led world order by aligning itself with countries such as Russia, North Korea and Iran. Beijing has rejected that allegation.

Sun Yun, director of the China program at the Stimson Center, said Beijing doesn't want to form a three-way alliance with North Korea and Russia, because it "needs to keep its options open."

Such a coalition could mean a new Cold War, something Beijing says it is determined to avoid, and locking itself to Pyongyang and Moscow would be contrary to China's goals of maintaining relationships with Europe and improving ties with Japan and South Korea, she said.

Sun added that the rapprochement between North Korea and Moscow "opens up possibilities and potentials of uncertainty, but based on what has happened so far, I don't think that China's national interests have been undercut by this."

Closer ties between Putin and Kim could weaken Beijing's sway and leave it as the "biggest loser," said Danny Russel, who was the top U.S. diplomat for Asia in the Obama administration.

"Apart from irritation over Putin's intrusion into what most Chinese consider their sphere of influence, the real cost to China is that Russia's embrace gives North Korea greater impunity and room to maneuver without consideration to Beijing's interests," he said.

Russel, now vice president for international security and diplomacy at the Asia Society Policy Institute, said that Kim is eager to reduce his country's dependence on China.

"The dilution of Chinese leverage means Kim Jong Un can disregard Beijing's calls for restraint," he said, "and that is much more likely to create chaos at a time when (Chinese leader) Xi Jinping desperately wants stability."

South Korea summons Russian ambassador as tensions rise with North Korea

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea summoned the Russian ambassador to protest the country's new defense pact with North Korea on Friday, as border tensions continued to rise with vague threats and brief, seemingly accidental incursions by North Korean troops.

Earlier Friday, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un issued a vague threat of retaliation after South Korean activists flew balloons carrying anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets across the border, and South Korea's military said it had fired warning shots the previous day to repel North Korean soldiers who briefly crossed the rivals' land border for the third time this month.

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That came two days after Moscow and Pyongyang reached a pact vowing mutual defense assistance if either is attacked, and a day after Seoul responded by saying it would consider providing arms to Ukraine to fight Russia's invasion.

South Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Hong Kyun summoned Russian Ambassador Georgy Zinoviev to protest the deal between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un and called for Moscow to immediately halt its alleged military cooperation with Pyongyang.

Kim, the South Korean diplomat, stressed that any cooperation that directly or indirectly helps the North build up its military capabilities would violate U.N. Security Council resolutions and pose a threat to the South's security, and warned of consequences for Seoul's relations with Moscow.

Zinoviev told Korean officials that any attempts to "threaten or blackmail" Russia were unacceptable and that his country's agreement with North Korea wasn't aimed at specific third countries, Russia's embassy wrote on its X account. The South Korean ministry said Zinoviev promised to convey Seoul's concerns to his superiors in Moscow.

Leafletting campaigns by South Korean civilian activists in recent weeks have prompted a resumption of Cold War-style psychological warfare along the inter-Korean border.

The South Korean civilian activists, led by North Korean defector Park Sang-hak, said it sent 20 balloons carrying 300,000 propaganda leaflets, 5,000 USB sticks with South Korean pop songs and TV dramas, and 3,000 U.S. dollar bills from the South Korean border town of Paju on Thursday night.

Pyongyang resents such material and fears it could demoralize front-line troops and residents and eventually weaken Kim Jong Un's grip on power, analysts say.

In a statement carried by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency, Kim Yo Jong, one of her brother's top foreign policy officials, called the activists "defector scum" and issued what appeared to be a threat of retaliation.

"When you do something you were clearly warned not to do, it's only natural that you will find yourself dealing with something you didn't have to," she said, without specifying what the North would do.

After previous leafletting by South Korean activists, North Korea launched more than 1,000 balloons that dropped tons of trash in South Korea, smashing roof tiles and windows and causing other property damage. Kim Yo Jong previously hinted that balloons could become the North's standard response to leafletting, saying that the North would respond by "scattering dozens of times more rubbish than is being scattered on us."

In response, South Korea resumed anti-North Korea propaganda broadcasts with military loudspeakers installed at the border for the first time in years, to which Kim Yo Jong, in another state media statement, warned that Seoul was "creating a prelude to a very dangerous situation."

Tensions between the Koreas are at their highest in years as Kim Jong Un accelerates his nuclear weapons and missile development and attempts to strengthen his regional footing by aligning with Russian President Vladimir Putin in a standoff against the U.S.-led West.

South Korea, a growing arms exporter with a well-equipped military backed by the United States, says it is considering upping support for Ukraine in response. Seoul has already provided humanitarian aid and other support while joining U.S.-led economic sanctions against Moscow. But it has not directly provided arms, citing a long-standing policy of not supplying weapons to countries actively engaged in conflict.

Putin told reporters in Hanoi, Vietnam, on Thursday that supplying weapons to Ukraine would be "a very big mistake," and said South Korea "shouldn't worry" about the agreement if it isn't planning aggression against Pyongyang.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said Minister Cho Tae-yul on Friday held separate phone calls with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa to discuss the new pact. The diplomats agreed that the agreement poses a serious threat to peace and stability in the region and vowed to strengthen trilateral coordination to deal with the challenges posed by the alignment between Moscow and Pyongyang, Cho's ministry said in a statement.

North Korea is extremely sensitive to criticism of Kim's authoritarian rule and efforts to reach its people

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with foreign news and other media.

In 2015, when South Korea restarted loudspeaker broadcasts for the first time in 11 years, North Korea fired artillery rounds across the border, prompting South Korea to return fire, according to South Korean officials. No casualties were reported.

South Korea's military said there are signs that North Korea was installing its own speakers at the border, although they weren't yet working.

In the latest border incident, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said several North Korean soldiers engaged in unspecified construction work briefly crossed the military demarcation line that divides the two countries at around 11 a.m. Thursday.

The South Korean military broadcast a warning and fired warning shots, after which the North Korean soldiers retreated. The joint chiefs didn't immediately release more details, including why it was releasing the information a day late.

South Korea's military says believes recent border intrusions were not intentional, as the North Korean soldiers have not returned fire and retreated after the warning shots.

The South's military has observed the North deploying large numbers of soldiers in frontline areas to build suspected anti-tank barriers, reinforce roads and plant mines in an apparent attempt to fortify their side of the border. Seoul believes the efforts are likely aimed at preventing North Korean civilians and soldiers from escaping to the South.

As millions sweat out the heat wave, blocks of lake ice keep these campers cool

By NICK PERRY, HOLLY RAMER and ROBERT F. BUKATY Associated Press

SQUAM LAKE, N.H. (AP) — As New England baked in a heat wave Thursday, guests at one campground were keeping their food and beer cold with blocks of ice harvested months earlier from a frozen lake.

And while some relief is expected in the eastern Great Lakes region and New England starting Friday, the National Weather Service said scorching temperatures will linger across the Ohio Valley and Mid-Atlantic region, and even rise in places, including California and Arizona, where they could eclipse 100 degrees (nearly 38 degrees Celsius).

On Squam Lake in central New Hampshire, ice blocks about the size of microwaves that had been packed in sawdust since winter were lifted from an insulated storage hut. It's been a tradition at the rustic Rocky-wold Deephaven Camps for more than a century, keeping fresh ice available throughout the summer and into the fall.

Angela Wilcox, who has vacationed at the camp for 16 years, took her children and nephews boating Thursday in search of the lake's coldest swimming spot.

"This is the hottest it's ever been, especially in June," Wilcox said. "We're kind of shocked."

Heat index readings combining temperature and humidity were expected to surpass 100 degrees (37.7 C) in many locations across the country, possibly setting some all-time records, the weather service said, and because record overnight temperatures could prevent natural cooling, heat danger could build up indoors.

"Those without access to reliable air conditioning are urged to find a way to cool down," the service said in its forecast.

In a study published Thursday, a group of scientists said human-caused climate change has drastically increased the odds of experiencing the killer heat baking the Southwestern United States, Mexico and Central America this month. Last year, the U.S. recorded its most heat waves — abnormally hot weather lasting more than two days — since 1936.

Ocean waters are warmer as well, particularly in the Gulf of Mexico, where the season's first named storm, Alberto, was dumping heavy rain and causing flash flooding along a stretch of the coast from Mexico to Louisiana. This year's hurricane season is forecast to be among the most active in recent memory.

It's made for an unusually early start to summer extremes in the northeastern U.S.

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It was already nearing 90 degrees (32.2 C) in New Hampshire as John Dupont opened his kettle corn stand at Concord's 50th annual Market Days Festival. He and his daughter set up two fans and were prepared to drape icy towels around their necks.

"This year is a little challenging because of all the heat. Our kettle gets up to 150,000 BTUs," he said.

At Johnson's Dairy Bar in Northwood, Camryn Hildredth tried to offer customers an empty dish for that heartbreaking moment when a scoop of rapidly melting ice cream topples out of the cone, but not all would listen.

"Everybody asks if we have AC. We do not," she said. "It's very hot and we get long lines, so it can get very rough sometimes."

In Burlington, Vermont, Jack Hurlbut said he's never been so hot in his life. "I live in Vermont for a reason, you know what I mean?" the 28-year-old said.

Hurlbut, who is homeless, joined others in a shady spot on a lawn outside the public library, which was serving as a cooling center.

New York's state parks had free admission Thursday, and select state-run pools and beaches opened early for swimming, Gov. Kathy Hochul said. New York City's beaches were available, and although its public pools don't open until next week, the city keeps a list of hundreds of free air-conditioned sites.

"The humidity is pretty insane," said Anne-Laure Bonhomme, a health coach who was sightseeing in New York with her family.

Many school districts in New Jersey switched to early dismissals as the school year winds down, and at least two rescheduled their high school graduation ceremonies due to concerns about excessive heat and humidity.

With much of Indiana sweltering, highway crews are starting shifts at 6 a.m., two hours earlier than in cooler seasons, and taking more frequent breaks in air-conditioned trucks in between filling potholes and other roadwork, said Kyleigh Cramer, a spokesperson for the Indiana Department of Transportation.

"They're able to get in those trucks and cool off right then and there because being out on the road is a little bit different than being in an office," Cramer said.

Some relief is coming: A cold front is moving into areas near Lake Michigan later Thursday and on Friday, the weather service said. Chicago broke a 1957 record for June 17 on Monday, with a high of 97 degrees (36.1 C).

Bather, beware: British beaches and rivers have a sewage problem. It has seeped into election talk

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

HENLEY-ON-THAMES, England (AP) — Endurance swimmer Joan Fennelly is undaunted by frigid water and long distances, swimming year-round in the wild. But she takes extra precautions in her own backyard. The River Thames is one of Britain's many waterways contaminated with sewage and agricultural pollution.

"If it looks right, if it smells right, I'll go in," Fennelly said.

Britain has become notorious as a place where a casual swim could lead to an extended visit to the toilet, if not the hospital. A torrent of news on dirty water has spilled into next month's election to determine which party controls government for the next four or five years.

While not a top campaign issue, it stinks of a larger problem: Britain's aging infrastructure — from aging schools, hospitals and prisons to pothole-riddled streets.

Bad water is decades in the making, tied to the privatization of waterworks under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1989 and to fiscal austerity after the 2008 financial crisis that slashed budgets for watchdogs and others.

The British public discovered the extent of the mess during the COVID-19 pandemic as outdoor recreation such as canoeing and wild swimming took off. The sight and smell of feces, toilet paper and other waste in streams and on beaches led to an outcry, along with clean water campaigns by some London newspapers.

"We are suffering with shockingly poor infrastructure as a consequence of long-term underinvestment

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by water utilities who appeared more interested in paying shareholder dividends,” said Nick Kirsop-Taylor, an environmental policy lecturer at the University of Exeter. “There’s far more to it than just that, though ... it’s the culture of poor regulation.”

Britain had such an anti-regulatory culture on the environment that it was known as the “the dirty man of Europe” in the 1970s and 1980s, Kirsop-Taylor said. That changed when it joined the European Union, but he said there has been backsliding since its vote in 2016 to leave the EU.

While private companies have run regional monopolies providing combined water and sewage service, the population has swelled and industrial demand on the system has increased. Plumbing — dating to the Victorian era in many places — has not been updated to meet needs.

On top of that, climate change has brought heavier rainfall to overburdened sewers.

“The water companies have a choice: they either allow sewage to back up into people’s homes or they open the pipes and it flows out into nature,” said Charles Watson, founder and chair of River Action, founded in 2021. “That is why our rivers are full of human excrement.”

The number of untreated sewage discharges increased by more than 50% last year from the previous one to a record 464,000 spills. The cumulative duration of the spills doubled to 3.6 million hours, according to the Environment Agency, one of the two water regulators.

The increase was largely due to a wetter year and because monitors have now been installed on most sewage outflow pipes, according to Water UK, a trade group for water companies. But there’s no similar monitoring for farm runoff like manure, an even bigger problem than sewage.

While sewage releases are legal during periods of rain, their frequency has drawn scrutiny and led to criticism that the industry’s financial regulator, Ofwat, has not done enough to ensure infrastructure is updated.

Water companies accuse Ofwat of not allowing them raise rates enough to finance improvements. Ofwat would not comment on specific criticism because of the pending election but noted that companies had underspent their budgets for improvements by 25% since 2020.

Water companies have felt the pressure. Water UK apologized last year for sewage releases, with CEO David Henderson saying the industry should have woken up sooner.

“We recognize the current levels of sewage spills are unacceptable and have a plan to sort it out,” Water UK said in a statement to The Associated Press. “Companies want to invest more than 10 billion pounds (\$12.7 billion) to reduce spills by 40% by the end of this decade. We now need Ofwat to give us the green light so we can get on with it.”

Activists accuse the companies of paying dividends to shareholders while running up large debts. Watson with River Action said the industry paid 11 million pounds (\$14 million) last year for environmental violations such as dumping sewage while paying more than 100 times that in dividends — 1.4 billion pounds (\$1.8 billion).

“That is not a deterrent,” Watson said. “That is an incentive to pollute.”

A bipartisan committee in the House of Lords last year found the two regulators needed to go further in fining and prosecuting polluters and needed more government funding. The Environment Agency’s number of prosecutions has declined significantly over the years, from 787 cases in 2007-2008 to 17 in 2020-2021.

The Industry and Regulators Committee also said Ofwat had prioritized lower water bills for customers over infrastructure improvements.

Political parties are capitalizing on the crisis with tough talk. Labour leader Keir Starmer has accused the Conservative government of “turning Britain’s waterways into an open sewer.”

But neither Conservatives nor left-of-center Labour has offered much of a detailed plan. Like most other parties, they have not promised to increase regulator funding.

The leader of the centrist Liberal Democrats, Ed Davey, has made the biggest campaign splash, plunging into water for the cameras.

“The Conservatives have allowed the water companies to pump their filthy sewage into our rivers, into our lakes, onto our beaches and into our sea,” Davey said as he announced a detailed plan that includes

replacing Ofwat with a tougher new regulator.

The Green Party, which struggles in a political system that makes it hard for small parties to win seats in Parliament, has even suggested that water services be nationalized again.

Some communities agree. The town council in Henley-on-Thames, in a Conservative bastion west of London, this month cast votes of no confidence in Thames Water, which is on the brink of insolvency, and called for its water provider to be nationalized.

The town is the site of the Henley Royal Regatta that draws 50,000 people a day for rowing races in July. But dirty water has tarnished its image. The center of town is downstream from a Thames Water sewage treatment plant, which the company says it plans to upgrade by the end of 2026.

"I wouldn't swim that stretch for love nor money," said endurance swimmer Fennelly, who suspects she got a nasty E. coli infection once there.

She and other members of the Henley Mermaids, a group of wild swimmers, now consult the Thames Water phone app that shows sewage releases. They also do the sniff test before jumping in.

On a recent morning, Fennelly and Jo Robb walked across a pasture, tied floating devices around their waists and climbed down to the Thames. The current was strong from rain the night before.

Robb screamed as she hit the river, not because it was dirty, but because of the chill. It was refreshing — the way water should be.

Navigating through darkness: Ukraine's emergency blackouts return after Russia pounds infrastructure

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — During daytime, entire districts of Ukraine's capital are disconnected from the power grid to save energy. Traffic lights stop, choking traffic, accompanied by the constant rumble of generators installed outside cafes and shops.

Ukraine, including Kyiv, is struggling to cope with a new wave of rolling blackouts after relentless Russian attacks took out half the country's power generation capacity.

Residents and businesses of Kyiv are adapting to the absence of electricity using generators, power banks, and flashlights and even recalculating their bathroom visits. Heavy damage inflicted to the country's power system has left millions feeling uncertain about Ukraine's ability to meet the national electricity demand after the warm weather months are over and the weather turns cold.

"I light my apartment as our grandparents used to — with candles and small flashlights," said Rudoy, a 40-year-old insurance agent from Israel who relocated from Tel Aviv to Kyiv in 2023 after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022.

He said that he wanted a new life despite the war — to live side-by-side with old friends and reside in a milder climate — but he hadn't foreseen the inconveniences of living without power. Rudoy bought an apartment on the seventh floor of a newly built 25-story high rise with no gas system or water supply that's wholly dependent on electricity.

"I have to adjust my life to the blackout schedules, otherwise it is impossible to live normally — not even to use a toilet at times," Rudoy told The Associated Press.

A friend in a nearby district typically has power when he doesn't, which makes his life easier. Work often gets done at a cafe that has a generator, but there's a catch.

"Even if you find a free table at a cafe nearby, working generators are very noisy and spread diesel fumes," he said. "That's why not many cafes that operate during blackouts are actually good to work in."

Ukraine is struggling to meet electricity demand as systematic attacks on its power infrastructure have intensified since March, forcing utilities to ration household supplies over the last three months. The country's top officials repeatedly called on allied countries to provide more air defense systems to protect its power plants from Russian missiles and drones, but tangible damage had already been inflicted.

The blackouts in Kyiv are the worse since the early months of the war when Russian strikes on the country's power grid led to major winter-time blackouts that led to authorities setting up communal heating areas

and hundreds of emergency points where residents could drink tea, recharge their phones and get help.

"As of today, due to missile and drone attacks, we have lost 9.2 gigawatt of electricity (generating capabilities)," Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said in early June. Despite having the capacity to import 2.2 gigawatts of electricity from European countries, Ukraine is importing 1.7 gigawatts, Shmyhal said.

Apart from direct imports, Ukraine is working to attract foreign investment to its private energy sector. At a summit in Berlin this month, Ukraine presented investment projects that could enable additional capacity of 1 gigawatt, said Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, the head of power utility Ukrenergo.

But in the short-term, Ukraine's readiness before next winter looks highly uncertain considering the damages to its energy system, the feasible outlook for reconstruction, and electricity demand.

Constant blackouts bring disruption to many city residents' daily rituals. Official power outage schedules published regularly by Ukrainian energy operators make it easier to plan the day. But energy companies often resort to unscheduled emergency blackouts when the city overconsumes electricity at the peak hours.

The circumstances force businesses and households to rely on alternative sources of electricity and light to get through a day as the summer heat makes more and more people use air conditioners. And many are worried the situation could get even worse.

Small businesses don't always keep up, with the energy situation rapidly changing every week.

Oleksandr Solovei, the 25-year-old owner of Informatyka coffee shop in Kyiv, just plans to buy a generator, which typically costs around \$1,000, to keep his business open during blackouts.

In the meantime, he must improvise. "We prepare hot water in advance, to cook matcha and teas. Cooking coffee at times like this is impossible. The coffee machine consumes too much energy," Solovei told the AP.

A fiber-optic internet cable and a power bank that keeps the router on attract patrons to Informatyka, where they can work on their laptops. Still, customers have thinned out since the blackouts began.

"We think the situation will get worse (by winter)," Solovei said. "We already plan to buy a generator, powerful enough to brew coffee, light the space, and charge the devices of our visitors. We are preparing for a hard winter."

Should young kids have smartphones? These parents in Europe linked arms and said no

By JOSEPH WILSON and LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Try saying "no" when a child asks for a smartphone. What comes after, parents everywhere can attest, begins with some variation of: "Everyone has one. Why can't I?"

But what if no pre-teen in sight has one — and what if having a smartphone was weird? That's the endgame of an increasing number of parents across Europe who are concerned by evidence that smartphone use among young kids jeopardizes their safety and mental health — and share the conviction that there's strength in numbers.

From Spain to Britain and Ireland, parents are flooding WhatsApp and Telegram groups with plans not just to keep smartphones out of schools, but to link arms and refuse to buy young kids the devices before — or even into — their teenage years.

After being inspired by a conversation in a Barcelona park with other moms, Elisabet García Permanyer started a chat group last fall to share information on the perils of Internet access for children with families at her kids' school.

The group, called "Adolescence Free of Mobile Phones," quickly expanded to other schools and then across the entire country to now include over 10,000 members. The most engaged parents have formed pairs of activists in schools across Spain and are pushing for fellow parents to agree not to get their kids smartphones until they are 16. After organizing online, they facilitate real-world talks among concerned parents to further their crusade.

"When I started this, I just hoped I would find four other families who thought like me, but it took off

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and kept growing, growing and growing," García Permanyer says. "My goal was to try to join forces with other parents so we could push back the point when smartphones arrive. I said, 'I am going to try so that my kids are not the only ones who don't have one.'"

A push, with the help of Spain's government. It isn't just parents.

Police and public health experts were sounding the alarm about a spike of violent and pornographic videos being witnessed by children via handheld devices. Spain's government took note of the momentum and banned smartphones entirely from elementary schools in January. Now they can only be turned on in high school, which starts at age 12, if a teacher deems it necessary for an educational activity.

"If we adults are addicted to smartphones, how can we give one to a 12-year-old who doesn't have the ability to handle it?" García Permanyer asks. "This has gotten away from us. If the Internet were a safe space for children, then it would be fine. But it isn't."

The movement in Britain gained steam this year after the mother of 16-year-old Brianna Ghey, who was killed by two teenagers last year, began demanding that kids under 16 be blocked from accessing social media on smartphones.

"It feels like we all know (buying smartphones) is a bad decision for our kids, but that the social norm has not yet caught up," Daisy Greenwell, a Suffolk, England-area mother of three kids under age 10, posted to her Instagram earlier this year. "What if we could switch the social norm so that in our school, our town, our country, it was an odd choice to make to give your child a smartphone at 11? What if we could hold off until they're 14, or 16?"

She and a friend, Clare Reynolds, set up a WhatsApp group called Parents United for a Smartphone-Free Childhood, with three people on it. She posted an invitation on her Instagram page. Within four days, 2,000 people had joined the group, requiring Greenwell and Reynolds to split off dozens of groups by locality. Three weeks after the original post, there was a chat group for every British county, one of the organizers said on WhatsApp.

It's an uphill climb. Parents rallying to ban smartphones from young children have a long way to go to change what's considered "normal."

By the time they're 12, most children have smartphones, statistics from all three countries show. Look a little closer, and the numbers get starker: In Spain, a quarter of children have a cellphone by age 10, and almost half by 11. At 12, this share rises to 75%. British media regulator Ofcom said 55% of kids in the UK owned a smartphone between ages 8 and 11, with the figure rising to 97% at age 12.

Ofcom added another statistic to their report last year: One in five toddlers, ages 3 or 4, owns a smartphone.

Parents and schools that have succeeded in flipping the paradigm in their communities told The Associated Press the change became possible the moment they understood that they were not alone. What started as a tool to keep in touch with buddies has morphed into something more worrisome to keep away from kids — akin, these parents assert, to things like cigarettes and alcohol.

In Greystones, Ireland, that moment came after all eight primary school principals in town signed and posted a letter last May that discouraged parents from buying their students smartphones. Then the parents themselves voluntarily signed written pledges, promising to refrain from letting their kids have the devices.

"The discussion went away almost overnight," says Christina Capatina, 38, a Greystones parent of two preteen daughters who signed the pledge and says there are almost no smartphones in schools this academic year. "If (kids) even ask now, you tell them: We're just following the rules. That's how we live."

For Mònica Marquès of Barcelona, no signed pledge was necessary to get the same result. She polled the parents of her daughters' grade two years ago and she was surprised to see that "99% of them were as terrified or more so than I was."

She shared the results of her questionnaire, and says that this year, when her daughter started high school, not one student in her grade had a smartphone.

And as for that other excuse that kids supposedly need a smartphone so parents can keep tabs on them, Marquès says an old-school cell phone without Internet access like the one her daughter carries is a perfect substitute.

An increasing scrutinySomething like a consensus has built for years among institutions, governments, parents and others that smartphone use by children is linked to bullying, suicidal ideation, anxiety and loss of concentration necessary for learning. China moved last year to limit children's use of smartphones, while France has in place a ban on smartphones in schools for kids aged six to 15.

The push to control smartphones in Spain comes amid a surge in notorious cases of children viewing online pornography, sharing videos of sexual violence, or even participating in creating "deep fake" pornographic images of female classmates using generative artificial intelligence tools. Spain's government says that 25% of kids 12 and under and 50% of kids 15 and under have already been exposed to online pornography. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said Spain is facing an "authentic epidemic" of pornography targeted at minors.

The threats include adults taking advantage of minors they meet online, such as the recent arrest of two "influencers" in Madrid for having allegedly sexually assaulted underage girls who followed them on TikTok.

The dangers have produced school bans on smartphones and online safety laws. But those don't address what kids do in off hours.

"What I try to emphasize to other principals is the importance of joining up with the school next door to you," says Rachel Harper, principal of St. Patrick's National School, one of the eight in Greystones to encourage parents to refrain from smartphones for their kids. "There's a bit more strength that way, in that all the parents in the area are talking about it."

The parents' concerns are diverse. Some fear the day when their young kids ask to get a phone like their friends. Others have young teens with phones and regret they followed the herd during what they consider a naïve phase when screens were just a way to let kids have fun and chat with their friends. Parents speak of having emerged from a state of blissful ignorance about the internet.

The home isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic offered a firsthand glimpse of their kids staring at screens and getting clever about hiding what they were seeing there — and what was finding them.

"The screens were seen as a escape valve that let adults work and kept kids occupied, whatever that meant," says Macu Cristófol, who started a group of concerned parents in Malaga, in southern Spain, after she heard of the ballooning parents group in Barcelona. "That was when I thought, where are we going? We have become hostages of screens."

Capatina says she saw her 11-year-old daughter change the day she came home from a playground and shared that a girl there had recorded video of the scene on a smartphone.

"Panic, panic, panic," Capatina recalls of her daughter's reaction. "Nothing really major happened," Capatina says, "but I saw the pressure and anxiety levels increasing where they hadn't before. And I thought, that's not healthy. Children shouldn't have to worry about things like that."

But if the kids can't have smartphones, are the parents cutting back their own online time? That's tough, multiple parents say, because they're managing families and work online. Capatina, an interior designer, says she shows her kids what she's been doing online — work, for example, or schedules — "to hold myself accountable."

Laura Borne, a Greystones mom of kids ages 5 and 6 who have never known smartphones, says she is aware of the need to model online behavior — and that she should probably cut back.

"I'm trying my best," she says. But just as with the children she parents, the pressures are there. And they're not going away.

Takeaways from AP's report on access to gene therapies for rare diseases

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

The promise of gene therapy looms large for families dealing with rare, genetic disorders. Such treatments offer the possibility of one-time cures.

But families and researchers worry such therapies will remain out of reach.

Collectively, about 350 million people worldwide suffer from rare diseases, most of which are genetic. But each of the 7,000 individual disorders affects perhaps a few in a million people or less. So there's little

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commercial incentive to develop or bring to market these one-time therapies to fix faulty genes or replace them with healthy ones.

The Associated Press examined what this means for families, scientists and the nascent field of gene therapy.

Here are key takeaways from AP's report.

Families are frustrated, and some try to raise their own funds. Camden Alderman was diagnosed as a baby with a rare disease called Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome, which is caused by a mutated gene on the X chromosome. It primarily affects boys – up to 10 out of every million — and can cause frequent infections, eczema and excessive bleeding.

When he was a toddler, doctors removed his spleen because of uncontrolled bleeding. As a young boy, he wound up in the hospital many times and was told he couldn't play baseball.

His mother Robin Alderman recalls one doctor saying: "Basically, your son's only chance at a cure is going to be gene therapy."

He also told her researchers weren't then accepting U.S. residents into a clinical trial for the treatment, which "just kind of broke my heart," she said. There's still no clinical trial he can join, and London-based Orchard Therapeutics stopped investing in an experimental treatment for the condition in 2022.

Lacey Henderson's daughter, 5-year-old Estella, has alternating hemiplegia of childhood, a neurological condition that affects 300 people in the U.S. Estella is cognitively delayed, has limited use of her hands and suffers episodes that temporarily paralyze part or all of her body, Henderson said. Medications can curb symptoms, but there's no cure.

Her Iowa family raises money through a GoFundMe and a website to develop a gene therapy. They've brought in around \$200,000.

"We have three different projects with various researchers," Henderson said. "But the problem is everything is underfunded."

Financial disincentives can plague the process. The amount of work it takes to get from a lab to human testing and through the drug approval process is "incredibly expensive," said Dr. Donald Kohn, professor of microbiology, immunology and molecular genetics at the University of California, Los Angeles.

In the last couple of years, he said, investment in gene therapy has largely dried up.

"If you have to spend \$20 million or \$30 million to get approval and you have five or 10 patients a year, it's hard to get a return on investment," Kohn said. "So we have successful, safe therapies, but it's more the financial, economic elements that are limiting them from becoming approved drugs."

Ultimately, most biotechnology companies become public and must focus on shareholder profit, said Francois Vigneault, CEO of the Seattle biotech Shape Therapeutics.

"The board is the thing that gets in the way; they're trying to maximize gain," said Vigneault, whose company is privately held. "That's just greed. That's just incentive misaligned between corporate company structure and what we should do that's good for the world."

Scientists, nonprofits and patient groups are working toward solutions. In the U.S., for example, The Bespoke Gene Therapy Consortium was organized by the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health and includes the FDA, various NIH institutes and several drug companies and nonprofits. Its goals include supporting a handful of clinical trials and streamlining regulatory processes.

Researchers are trying to address the problem scientifically. Dr. Anna Greka said the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard has launched an effort to look at the commonalities behind various conditions — or nodes, which can be likened to branches meeting at a tree trunk. Fixing the nodes with gene therapies or other treatments, rather than particular "misspellings" in DNA responsible for one disorder, could potentially address multiple diseases simultaneously.

"What this does is it increases the number of patients who can benefit from the therapy," said Greka, a Broad member.

Still, scientists say these efforts don't negate the larger financial quandary surrounding therapies for rare diseases, and it may be a while before such gene therapies are available to patients worldwide.

"This is a massive challenge, and I'm not entirely sure we're going to be able to overcome it," said Claire

Booth of University College London. "But we have to give it a go because we've spent decades and millions making these transformative treatments. And if we don't try, then it feels like the end of an era."

Gene therapy may cure rare diseases. But drugmakers have few incentives, leaving families desperate

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Robin Alderman faces an agonizing reality: Gene therapy might cure her son Camden's rare, inherited immune deficiency. But it's not available to him.

In 2022, London-based Orchard Therapeutics stopped investing in an experimental treatment for the condition, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome. And there are no gene therapy studies he can join.

"We feel like we are the forgotten," said Alderman, who's advocated for her 21-year-old son since he was a baby.

Collectively, about 350 million people worldwide suffer from rare diseases, most of which are genetic. But each of the 7,000 individual disorders affects perhaps a few in a million people or less. There's little commercial incentive to develop or bring to market these one-time therapies to fix faulty genes or replace them with healthy ones. This leaves families like the Aldermans scrambling for help and some trying to raise money themselves for cures that may never come.

"These kids have been unfortunate twice: A, because they got a genetic disease, and B, because the disease is so rare that nobody cares," said Dr. Giulio Cossu, a professor of regenerative medicine at the University of Manchester in England. "Companies want to make a profit."

Scientists say this dynamic threatens to thwart progress in the nascent gene therapy field, erasing the potential of a new type of medicine just as a steady stream of research points toward promising treatments for various disorders. Researchers are seeking solutions, often turning to charitable organizations, patient groups and governments.

A major Italian charity announced in February that it's taking over the Wiskott-Aldrich treatment Orchard had been pursuing. And an arm of the charitable Foundation Fighting Blindness helped launch a company, Opus Genetics, to advance gene therapy work by University of Pennsylvania researcher Dr. Jean Bennett and a colleague.

In many ways, that effort was inspired by patients' families.

"Some of them have bake sales. One family mortgaged their house to give some money for a study for their rare disease," Bennett said. "I just feel responsible to help them."

Families' painThe Aldermans have faced years of pain and frustration.

Camden Alderman was diagnosed as a baby with Wiskott-Aldrich, caused by a mutated gene on the X chromosome. It primarily affects boys – up to 10 out of every million — and can cause frequent infections, eczema and excessive bleeding.

When he was a toddler, doctors removed his spleen because of uncontrolled bleeding. As a young boy, he wound up in the hospital many times and was told he couldn't play baseball.

One treatment is a bone marrow transplant. But he is Black and has Korean heritage, making it difficult to find a donor — people are most likely to match with someone of similar ancestral or ethnic backgrounds. Robin Alderman recalls one doctor saying: "Basically, your son's only chance at a cure is going to be gene therapy."

He also told her researchers weren't then accepting U.S. residents into a clinical trial, which "just kind of broke my heart," she said.

Today, Camden Alderman is a rising senior at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. He takes penicillin daily and gives himself weekly immunoglobulin infusions under his skin, which help fight infection. Still, he's landed in the hospital a few times in recent years and has developed a kidney problem.

While he doesn't view gene therapy as a cure-all, he said, "it would just help me kind of lead an easier life."

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That's proved true for patients who underwent the experimental therapy, such as Dr. Priya Stephen's 14-year-old son, who participated in a clinical trial in Italy that accepted Americans at the time.

While Stephen is grateful, she said, she can't help feeling guilty that her family got an opportunity others don't: "It's ethically just not acceptable to have a treatment that we know works, that we know is safe, that people all of a sudden can't access."

For a while, it seemed gene therapy for Wiskott-Aldrich was on track for wider availability. Genethon, a French nonprofit research organization, sponsored promising clinical trials but didn't have funding to continue development, CEO Frédéric Revah said.

Drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline transferred another therapy to Orchard, which announced in 2019 that it had secured a designation from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration meant to speed up development and review. But Orchard discontinued investment in this and two other rare-disease treatments a couple of years ago, with CEO Dr. Bobby Gaspar saying the company sympathized with affected families and would look for other ways to advance the therapies.

"There's a huge number of diseases out there that could benefit from gene therapy but for which there is no profitability model because the investment for research is high, the cost of production is high and the number of patients is very low," Revah said.

Most genetic conditions are rare — each affecting fewer than 200,000 people in the U.S. at any given time. Research hasn't made it past early stages for many of them.

Lacey Henderson's daughter, 5-year-old Estella, has alternating hemiplegia of childhood, a neurological condition that affects 300 people in the U.S. Estella is cognitively delayed, has limited use of her hands and becomes temporarily paralyzed in part or all of her body, Henderson said. Medications can curb symptoms, but there's no cure.

Her Iowa family fundraises through a GoFundMe and a website to develop a gene therapy. They've brought in around \$200,000.

"We have three different projects with various researchers," Henderson said. "But the problem is everything is underfunded."

'Misaligned' incentives Financial disincentives plague the process, from drug discovery to development, scientists say.

The amount of work to get from a lab to human testing and through the drug-approval process is "incredibly expensive," said Dr. Donald Kohn, professor of microbiology, immunology and molecular genetics at the University of California, Los Angeles.

In the last couple of years, he said, gene-therapy investment has largely dried up.

"If you have to spend \$20 million or \$30 million to get approval and you have five or 10 patients a year, it's hard to get a return on investment," Kohn said. "So we have successful, safe therapies, but it's more the financial, economic elements that are limiting them from becoming approved drugs."

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"The board is the thing that gets in the way; they're trying to maximize gain," said Vigneault, whose company is privately held. "That's just greed. That's just incentive misaligned between corporate company structure and what we should do that's good for the world."

Even when treatments make it to market, they might not stay there. The same year Orchard stopped investing in the Wiskott-Aldrich treatment, it also stopped distributing a drug called Strimvelis, approved in Europe to treat the rare disease ADA-SCID, or "bubble boy syndrome."

'Massive challenge' Claire Booth, professor of gene therapy and pediatric immunology at University College London, is among those working for change. She co-founded Access to Gene Therapies for Rare Disease, which brings together people across Europe representing academic groups, patient advocates, regulators, funders and drugmakers. They hope to create an independent nonprofit that can support market authorization and access to therapies that aren't commercially sustainable.

A related effort in the U.S., The Bespoke Gene Therapy Consortium, was organized by the Foundation

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for the National Institutes of Health and includes the FDA, various NIH institutes, and several drug companies and nonprofits. The group's goals include supporting a handful of clinical trials and exploring ways to streamline regulatory processes.

Some researchers are trying to address the problem scientifically. Dr. Anna Greka said the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard has launched an effort to look at commonalities behind various conditions — or nodes, which can be likened to branches meeting at a tree trunk. Fixing the nodes with gene therapies or other treatments, rather than particular “misspellings” in DNA responsible for one disorder, could address multiple diseases simultaneously.

“What this does is it increases the number of patients who can benefit from the therapy,” said Greka, a Broad member. “It also makes it infinitely easier or more attractive to anyone, like a biopharmaceutical company, to take the project forward and try to bring it toward the clinic, because they're going to have a bigger market.”

Meanwhile, affected families are partnering with each other and scientists to help move the needle. Genethon was created by an association of patients and their relatives to develop treatments for several rare diseases. And a leader of the foundation involved in Opus Genetics has a child with a rare genetic retinal disease.

There's also new hope for families dealing with Wiskott-Aldrich and bubble boy disease. Last year, the Telethon Foundation in Italy took on responsibility of producing and distributing Strimvelis. This year, the charity announced it was selected for a pilot program of the European Medicines Agency that could help guide its Wiskott-Aldrich gene therapy through the regulatory process there.

Still, scientists say these efforts don't negate the larger financial quandary surrounding therapies for rare diseases, and it may be a while before such genetic treatments are available to patients worldwide.

“This is a massive challenge, and I'm not entirely sure we're going to be able to overcome it,” Booth said. “But we have to give it a go because we've spent decades and millions making these transformative treatments. And if we don't try, then it feels like the end of an era.”

Here's the landscape 2 years after the Supreme Court overturned a national right to abortion

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Judges, state lawmakers and voters are deciding the future of abortion in the U.S. two years after the Supreme Court jolted the legal status quo with a ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

The June 24, 2022, ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* sparked legislative action, protest and numerous lawsuits — placing the issue at the center of politics across the country.

Abortion is now banned at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions, in 14 Republican-controlled states. In three other states, it's barred after about the first six weeks, which is before many know they are pregnant. Most Democratic-led states have taken actions to protect abortion rights, and become sanctuaries for out-of-state patients seeking care.

That's changed the landscape of abortion access, making it more of a logistical and financial ordeal for many in conservative states. But it has not reduced the overall number of procedures done each month across the U.S.

Here's what to know about the state of abortion rights in the U.S. now.

Limited abortion access prompts more out-of-state travel. Bans in Republican-led states have prompted many people seeking abortions to travel to get care.

That translates into higher costs for gas or plane tickets, hotels and meals; more logistics to figure out, including child care; and more days off work.

A new study by the Guttmacher Institute, which advocates for abortion access, found that out of just over a million abortions provided in clinics, hospitals and doctors' offices, more than 161,000 — or 16% — were for people who crossed state lines to get them.

More than two-thirds of abortions done in Kansas and New Mexico were for out-of-staters, particularly

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Texans.

Since Florida's six-week abortion ban kicked in in May, many people had to travel farther than before, since throughout the Southeast, most states have bans.

Low-income patients and those lacking legal permission to be in the country are more likely to be unable to travel. There can be lasting costs for those who do.

In Alabama, the Yellowhammer Fund, which previously helped residents pay for the procedure has paused doing so since facing threats of litigation from the state.

Jenice Fountain, Yellowhammer's executive director, said she met a woman recently who traveled from Alabama to neighboring Georgia for an abortion but found she couldn't get one there because she was slightly too far into her pregnancy. So she then went to Virginia. The journey wiped out her rent money and she needed help to remain housed.

"We're having people use every dime that they have to get out of state, or use every dime they have to have another child," Fountain said.

It's usually provided with pills rather than procedures. Nearly two-thirds of known abortions last year were provided with pills rather than procedures.

One report found that pills are prescribed via telehealth and mailed to about 6,000 people a month who live in states with abortion bans. They're sent by medical providers in states with laws intended to protect them from prosecution for those prescriptions. The laws in Colorado, Massachusetts, New York, Vermont and Washington specifically protect medical providers who prescribe the pills to patients in states with bans.

The growing prominence of pills, which were used in about half of all abortions just before the Dobbs ruling, is a frontier in the latest chapter of the legal fight.

The U.S. Supreme Court this month unanimously rejected an effort by abortion opponents who were seeking to overturn or roll back the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval of mifepristone, one of two drugs usually used together for medication abortions. The issue is likely to return.

Abortion is on the 2024 ballot. In this presidential election year, abortion is a key issue.

Protecting access has emerged as a key theme in the campaigns of Democrats, including President Joe Biden in his reelection bid. Former President Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee, has said states should decide whether to restrict abortions. He also suggested states could limit contraception use but changed his tune on that.

"We recognize this could be the last Dobbs anniversary we celebrate," Kelsey Pritchard, a spokesperson for Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America said in an interview, noting that if Democrats win the presidency and regain control of both chambers of Congress, a right to abortion could be enshrined in the law.

The issue will also be put directly before voters in at least four states. Colorado, Florida, Maryland and South Dakota have ballot measures this year asking voters to approve state constitutional amendments that would protect or expand access to abortion. There are attempts to put questions about abortion access on the ballots this year in Arkansas, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska and Nevada, plus a legal challenge of a court ruling that knocked a New York measure off the ballot.

There's also a push for a ballot measure in Arizona, where the state Supreme Court this year ruled that an 1864 abortion ban could be enforced. With the help of some Republicans — Democrats in the Legislature were able to repeal that law.

Generally, abortion rights expand when voters are deciding. In the seven statewide abortion policy-related votes since 2022, voters have sided with abortion rights advocates in every case.

It's still up to the courts — including the Supreme Court. The Dobbs ruling and its aftermath gave rise to a bevy of legal questions and lawsuits challenging nearly every ban and restriction.

Many of those questions deal with how exceptions — which come into play far more often when abortion is barred earlier in pregnancy — should apply. The issue is often raised by those who wanted to be pregnant but who experienced life-threatening complications.

A group of women who had serious pregnancy complications but were denied abortions in Texas sued, claiming the state's ban is vague about which exceptions are allowed. The all-Republican Texas Supreme Court disagreed in a May ruling.

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The Supreme Court also heard arguments in April on the federal government's lawsuit against Idaho, which says its ban on abortions at all stages of pregnancy can extend to women in medical emergencies. The Biden administration says that violates federal law. A ruling on that case could be issued at any time. Meanwhile, bans have been put on hold by judges in Iowa, Montana, Utah and Wyoming.

Ten Commandments law is Louisiana governor's latest effort to move the state farther to the right

By SARA CLINE Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Louisiana has long been reliably red. The Bayou State has voted for the Republican candidate in every presidential election since 2000, with residents overwhelmingly supporting Donald Trump during the past two, and the GOP has held a majority in the statehouse for years.

But policies in the state have veered even further right under the leadership of Republican Gov. Jeff Landry, who has carried out a sweeping conservative agenda in just six months on the job. This week he signed the nation's first law requiring that the Ten Commandments be posted in every public classroom. He enacted a new law classifying abortion pills as dangerous controlled substances. He has voiced support for a bill on his desk calling for a Texas-style immigration crackdown that could allow law enforcement to arrest and jail migrants who enter the U.S. illegally.

And lawmakers who have appreciated Landry's tough law-and-order stance on issues such as new death penalty methods await his action on a first-of-its-kind bill allowing judges to order the surgical castration of rapists who prey on children.

The moves have made global headlines and firmly embedded Louisiana in the conservative movement on practically every issue animating the Republican base in 2024. Democrats are appalled at the message Landry is sending but some conservatives in Louisiana see the moves as a bold and powerful step as he raises his national profile.

"From about 500 miles away, it certainly appears that he has been effective very quickly," said Matt Mackowiak, a Texas-based GOP strategist who has worked for two Congress members and a governor. "He has hit the ground running and the potential is really high."

'Pent-up Republican policy preferences'When Landry entered office in January, he did so with Republicans having secured every statewide elected position for the first time in nearly a decade.

With the help of the Legislature, he also upheld one of the country's strictest abortion bans and pushed anti-LGBTQ+ policies, including Louisiana's version of a "Don't Say Gay" bill.

While Landry hasn't indicated whether he will sign the Democrat-authored castration bill into law, many Republicans and several Democrats supported it.

GOP lawmakers, in turn, have often praised the former state attorney general and one-time congressman.

"It certainly gives you hope that your efforts are going to be productive when you've got a governor who you know where he stands on things and also know that there's a good chance he will sign them," said speaker pro tempore state Rep. Michael T. Johnson.

Johnson, who was elected to the House in 2019, described Landry as easy to work with, transparent and a leader who he believes will "move the state forward." He added that the session was "more productive" because there were "clear and organized goals we were trying to accomplish."

"I think what you saw in this latest legislative session is pent-up Republican policy preferences," said Robert Hogan, a professor and chair of Louisiana State University's political science department. "They opened up the floodgates and it started pouring out, with a lot of them very successful."

Across the aisle, Democrats frequently decried Landry's efforts and the pace at which bills were passing, sometimes with little feedback from the public.

The LGBTQ+ community, which for eight years prior had an ally in the governor's mansion, has become one of Landry's harshest critics.

"It is definitely a different climate here in the Legislature, especially with Gov. Landry prioritizing these very harmful bills, pushing them through very fast and making it very difficult and uncomfortable to be

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here," said SarahJane Guidry, executive director of the LGBTQ+ rights group Forum for Equality, said in an interview during the session.

Louisiana's recent political shift was at times fended off by former Gov. John Bel Edwards, who couldn't immediately run again because of term limits.

Edwards, the only Democratic governor in the Deep South during his two terms, sought over eight years to steer the state toward more Democratic avenues by expanding Medicaid coverage, joining climate change initiatives and vetoing some of the measures that Landry has since signed into law.

Many voters seemed ready for the change Landry has brought, though. He won the election outright with 52% of the vote, obliterating the Democratic runner-up's 26%.

While not everyone wanted Landry for the job, many agree he has followed through on campaign promises — whether they support the policies or not.

"I'm not surprised one iota, this is completely what I expected when he became governor," said Chris Dier, a high school teacher in New Orleans who has opposed a lot of Landry's initiatives. "I think a lot of the conversations before he even became governor were how do we respond to certain pieces of legislation when they pass."

Eyeing a bigger stage? In a time of Trump-era conservatives, some believe Landry could follow in the footsteps of other high-profile governors — becoming a national figure or running for higher office. His eagerness to put into place first-of-its-kind legislation, willingness to pick and enter national fights and tendency to court media coverage echo tactics employed by other politicians who rise to the national stage.

Pearson Cross, a political science professor at the University of Louisiana, points to Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis as examples of where Landry could go.

"I think Jeff Landry is very comfortable with that kind of profile. I think he feels like he is standing up for the state and representing his constituents who are generally conservative — and perhaps pushing back against federal government overreach," Cross said.

Like Abbott, Landry was a state attorney general for years before he became governor. He also, like DeSantis, spent time in the U.S. House of Representatives, though with a much shorter tenure.

But Landry, whose office declined an interview request from The Associated Press, has given little indication of where his future aspirations lie.

He recently joined Abbott and other Republican governors at Eagle Pass, a Texas town that has become the center of a turf war over immigration enforcement, to discuss the border crisis. He also headlined the Tennessee Republican Party's annual fundraising dinner in Nashville last weekend.

He also signed a bill that hides from public records details about his schedule and/or those of his spouse or children on grounds of safety concerns. While not unusual, opponents argue the law will be used to hide who Landry meets with and where he travels to.

Chatter at the state Capitol is meanwhile swirling about whether Landry might be offered a cabinet position if Trump wins the presidential election in the fall. Steven Cheung, a spokesperson for Trump's campaign team, said there haven't been any discussions about who would serve in the administration. But, that hasn't stopped people from speculating.

"I think he has that (national recognition) and as it helps our state I certainly am glad, but I don't want it to result in him leaving for a cabinet position," Johnson said. "However, I think Louisiana has so much to offer, and if he can be an ambassador on a national level then I think absolutely that is positive."

Trump is proposing to make tips tax-free.

What would that mean for workers?

By KEVIN FREKING and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump's new proposal to exclude tips from federal taxes is getting strong reviews from some Republican lawmakers, though major questions remain about the impact of the policy and how it would work.

What's certain is that a change in the taxation of tips would affect millions. The U.S. Bureau of Labor

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Statistics estimates there are 2.24 million waiters and waitresses across the country, with tips making up a large percentage of their income.

A look at what Trump's proposing and the possible political and economic ramifications:

TRUMP'S ELECTION-YEAR PITCH IN NEVADA Trump announced his tax-free-tips plan at a June 9 rally in Nevada, a key battleground state with six electoral votes in the race for the White House. President Joe Biden won the state in 2020, but the Trump campaign hopes to put the state in play this fall.

Nevada has the highest concentration of tipped workers in the country, with about 25.8 waiters and waitresses per 1,000 jobs, followed by Hawaii and Florida.

"To those hotel workers and people who get tips, you are going to be very happy, because when I get to office we are going to not charge taxes on tips, people making tips," Trump said at the rally. "... We're going to do that right away, first thing in office."

The pitch sets up a sharp political contrast between Democrats and Republicans. While Trump assumes that a tax cut would help workers, Democrats have generally endorsed efforts to increase hourly wages — and it's an open question which approach resonates more with voters.

The Culinary Union, which represents 60,000 workers in Las Vegas and Reno and is backing Biden, dismissed Trump's plan as a stunt.

"Relief is definitely needed for tip earners, but Nevada workers are smart enough to know the difference between real solutions and wild campaign promises from a convicted felon." Culinary Union Secretary-Treasurer Ted Pappageorge said in a statement.

Lael Brainard, director of the White House National Economic Council, declined to speak to the idea floated by Trump because, as a federal employee, she's not supposed to talk campaign politics.

"What I can say is that President Biden has fought for real solutions that actually address workers' legitimate need for fair wages, we think, much more effectively," she said, adding that tipped workers in Nevada would get a \$6,000 income boost from a higher minimum wage and the elimination of the tipped minimum wage.

HOW WOULD THE TAX EXEMPTION WORK? Trump has not specified whether he wants to exempt tips from just income taxes or from the payroll tax as well. The payroll tax funds Medicare and Social Security.

For workers, a blanket exemption would mean more take-home pay. And for the federal government, it could mean larger budget deficits.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonpartisan fiscal watchdog group, has estimated that exempting tips from both income and payroll taxes would reduce federal revenues by \$150 billion to \$250 billion over the next decade.

The committee said exempting tips from taxation would also lead employers and workers to reclassify wages as tips where possible. The more that happens, the more that federal deficits would increase. A 10% increase in tips, for example, would bump up the committee's projection for lost federal revenue to a range of \$165 billion to \$275 billion over the next decade.

Congress undoubtedly would examine Trump's proposal on tips as it considers which portions of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act are allowed to expire after next year, including the lower individual tax rates. Lawmakers are already prepping for the task, though Trump's proposal is something that many had not thought about until recently.

Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Fla., a senior House Ways and Means Committee member, said lawmakers will have to consider the overall cost of the tips proposal and how to pay for it.

"I want to be sensitive because they work hard, you can't find enough waiters, and obviously a big part of their earnings is tips," Buchanan said. "All these programs sound good. Everybody would like to pay less taxes, but we've got to pay the bills."

"I know he's trying to make sure the people at that income level have relief as much as possible. We might be able to do the same thing in making his tax cuts more permanent and more likely to address lower-income people," said Rep. Kevin Hern, R-Okla., who also serves on the Ways and Means Committee, which has jurisdiction over tax policy.

TRADE-OFFS OF NOT TAXING TIPS Like many tax proposals, Trump's push to exempt tips could have

unintended consequences.

Howard Gleckman, a senior fellow at the Tax Policy Center, a joint venture of the Urban Institute and Brookings Institution, argues that Trump's proposal could actually backfire for many tipped workers.

For example, some customers may respond to tax-free tips by reducing their gratuity. Secondly, it could take the steam out of efforts in some states to gradually increase the minimum wage for tipped workers so that their base pay is in line with the minimum wage for other workers.

"The lure of tax-free income could turn many workers against the shift from tips to wages," Gleckman wrote in a blog post.

Gleckman also questioned why a service worker should avoid paying taxes on tips as opposed to a warehouse worker earning the same amount. He noted that while Trump promised to repeal the tax on tips right away, only Congress can repeal federal taxes, and "for reasons of efficiency, fairness, and sound tax administration, let's hope it doesn't."

LOOKING AHEAD Democrats have largely dismissed Trump's proposal as a gimmick to win over voters.

Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a senior member of the Senate Finance Committee, noted she was a waitress in college, calling it "really hard work." She prefers increasing the minimum wage for tipped workers to match the minimum wage for other workers.

"From my perspective, I don't think (Trump's) proposal is serious and I don't think it does enough to address low-wage working people," Stabenow said.

Sen. Ron Wyden, the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, said Trump was "throwing out lots of ideas as he goes," but his record as president reflects an emphasis on tax breaks for the wealthy and corporations.

"All these things he throws out every day, I'll believe it when I see it," Wyden said.

But Trump's enthusiasm for the idea seems to be growing. The tax promise has since become a staple of Trump's rallies and meetings, and he raised his proposal while meeting with GOP lawmakers and business leaders in Washington last week.

"I think it's actually a very smart idea. The men and women who rely on tips for their earnings, they are working their tails off," said Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis. "That's very good, targeted tax reform right there."

Some lawmakers and allies have begun tweeting photos of their restaurant bills with handwritten messages designed to spread the word about Trump's promise. Rep. Derrick Van Orden, R-Wis., wrote "Vote Trump!" and "No Tax on tips!" on his bill from a Milwaukee restaurant.

The musician Kid Rock, a prominent Trump supporter, shared a photo on X.

"A vote for Trump is a vote for no tax on tips!!" he wrote on his receipt. He tipped \$400 on a \$1,143 bill at a pricey steakhouse, according to the photo.

How Biden and Trump are taking very different approaches to preparing for next week's debate

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — President Joe Biden begins an intense period of private preparations Friday at Camp David for what may be the most consequential presidential debate in decades.

The 81-year-old Democrat's team is aware that he cannot afford an underwhelming performance when he faces Republican rival Donald Trump for 90 minutes on live television Thursday night. Biden's team is expecting aggressive attacks on his physical and mental strength, his record on the economy and immigration and even his family.

Trump, 78 and ever confident, will stay on the campaign trail before going to his Florida estate next week for two days of private meetings as part of an informal prep process.

The former president's allies are pushing him to stay focused on his governing plans, but they're expecting him to be tested by pointed questions about his unrelenting focus on election fraud, his role in the erosion of abortion rights and his unprecedented legal baggage.

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Thursday's debate on CNN will be full of firsts, with the potential to reshape the presidential race. Never before in the modern era have two presumptive nominees met on the debate stage so early in the general election season. Never before have two White House contenders faced off at such advanced ages, with widespread questions about their readiness.

And never before has a general election debate participant been saddled with a felony conviction. The debate-stage meeting comes just two weeks before Trump is scheduled to be sentenced on 34 felony counts in his New York hush money trial.

"You can argue this will be the most important debate, at least in my lifetime," said Democratic strategist Jim Messina, 54, who managed former President Barack Obama's 2012 campaign.

PRESSURE ON BIDENThe ground rules for Thursday's debate, the first of two scheduled meetings, are unusual.

The candidates agreed to meet at a CNN studio in Atlanta with no audience. Each candidate's microphone will be muted, except when it's his turn to speak. No props or prewritten notes will be allowed onstage. The candidates will be given only a pen, a pad of paper and a bottle of water.

There will be no opening statements. A coin flip determined that Biden would stand at the podium to the viewer's right, while Trump would deliver the final closing statement.

The next debate won't be until September. Any stumbles Thursday will be hard to erase or replace quickly.

Biden arrived at Camp David on Thursday night and is expected to hunker down with senior campaign aides until next Thursday's debate. While traveling to the mountainside retreat, he gave a thumbs up to reporters when asked how debate prep was going.

The president's aides have been reluctant to share details about his specific preparations, run by former chief of staff Ron Klain. But they have signaled that he is preparing to be aggressive and would not shy away from using the term "convicted felon" to describe his opponent onstage.

One adviser not authorized to speak publicly about debate strategy noted that Biden has been increasingly punchier in recent remarks about Trump and plans to carry that theme through to the debate. That's still while trying to project himself as "the wise and steady leader" in contrast to Trump, the adviser said.

Among some political operatives, there is the sense that Biden may have the most to lose given his struggle to generate momentum amid signs of weakness within his political coalition. Trump and his allies have set an extraordinarily low bar, however, by suggesting for months that Biden is contending with serious physical limitations that make it difficult for him to stand for 90 minutes or even string together two sentences.

"It's like the mirror test. Put a mirror under Biden's nose, and if it fogs it up, he wins, right? That's about what the threshold is for Biden," Republican strategist and Trump ally David Urban said with a laugh. "Can Biden demonstrate that he's mentally nimble? That's the big question."

Yet Trump himself sought to shift expectations in a Thursday interview with the "The All-In Podcast" in which he veered sharply away from his typical Biden taunts. He said Biden "destroyed" vice presidential nominee Paul Ryan in their 2012 debate.

"I assume he's going to be somebody that will be a worthy debater," Trump said of Biden. "I don't want to underestimate him."

Biden's aides have dismissed concerns about his age and mental readiness. They are fighting back against what they allege is deceptive editing of video clips to suggest he is confused.

But while some Democrats are projecting confidence, Biden's allies also say the president has spent much of the last two weeks traveling — in Europe and on the West Coast — which has limited his ability to prepare. Others note that incumbent presidents typically struggle in the season's opening general election debate.

Messina made both points even as he sought to play up the political stakes for Trump. He suggested Trump was taking an unnecessary political risk by debating Biden at all, given Trump's early advantage in many polls.

"I wouldn't have done the debate if I was him," Messina said of Trump. "If you're tied or a little bit ahead

of the incumbent, why would you want to give him this air? He decided he wanted to do this to knock him out, and if he doesn't, then I think he's in real trouble."

TRUMP PROJECTING CONFIDENCE Trump's team sees Thursday's faceoff as an opportunity to demonstrate a clear contrast with Biden's leadership ability and governing record.

And while they're downplaying his preparations, Trump aides have a pattern of insisting that he doesn't prepare for debates when, in fact, he does — in his own way. Instead of mock debates with lecterns and stand-ins or hours spent poring over policy books, the former president is expected to rely on a series of conversations about policy and strategy with aides and political allies.

Trump will also make a series of public appearances over the coming days.

On Saturday, he's set to host a rally in Philadelphia and deliver a keynote address to a conference of Christian conservatives in Washington. He also has a fundraiser in New Orleans on Monday before going to his Florida estate for meetings.

"Biden needs rehearsals with handlers to find some way to explain this mess he's made of our nation," Trump spokesman Brian Hughes said. "President Trump is always prepared to present to Americans his record of success and Biden's weakness and failures."

Biden's camp is also aware that Trump will likely focus on his son Hunter, as the then-president did on the debate stage four years ago. Hunter Biden was recently convicted on three felony charges related to the purchase of a gun while allegedly being addicted to drugs. Republicans have also criticized Hunter Biden's foreign business dealings when Joe Biden was vice president.

Biden's allies are also concerned, however, that their famously combative rival might be on good behavior.

"For both campaigns, the goal here is reaching an audience of moderate, independent, swing voters in swing states who will, in many ways, be the deciding factor in this election," said former Biden administration official Bill Russo.

"Trump has kind of a golden opportunity here. If he can pretend that he's a reasonable human being for 90 minutes while he's in the spotlight, he's got a lot to gain," Russo added. "The real key here is which Trump shows up."

Motion after motion puts Trump Florida case in slow motion as 3-day hearing begins

By ERIC TUCKER and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

FORT PIERCE, Fla. (AP) — The federal judge presiding over the classified documents case against former President Donald Trump is hearing arguments Friday on a long-shot defense effort to get the indictment thrown out based on the claim that the prosecutor who brought the charges was illegally appointed.

The arguments over the legality of special counsel Jack Smith's appointment kick off a three-day hearing that is set to continue next week and bring further delays to a criminal case that had been scheduled for trial last month but has been snarled by a pileup of unresolved legal disputes. The motion questioning Smith's selection and funding by the Justice Department is one of multiple challenges to the indictment the defense has raised, so far unsuccessfully, in the year since the charges were brought.

Even as Smith's team looks to press forward on a prosecution seen by many legal experts as the most straightforward and clear-cut of the four prosecutions against Trump, Friday's arguments before U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon won't involve discussion of the allegations against the former president. They'll center instead on decades-old regulations governing the appointment of Justice Department special counsels like Smith, reflecting the judge's continued willingness to entertain defense arguments that prosecutors say are meritless, contributing to the indefinite cancellation of a trial date.

Cannon, a Trump appointee, had exasperated prosecutors even before the June 2023 indictment by granting a Trump request to have an independent arbiter review the classified documents taken from Mar-a-Lago — an order that was overturned by a unanimous federal appeals panel.

Since then, she has been intensely scrutinized over her handling of the case, including for taking months to issue rulings and for scheduling hearings on legally specious claims — all of which have combined to

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make a trial before the November presidential election a virtual impossibility. She was rebuked in March by prosecutors after she asked both sides to formulate jury instructions and to respond to a premise of the case that Smith's team called "fundamentally flawed."

The New York Times, citing two anonymous sources, reported Thursday that two judges — including the chief federal judge in the southern district of Florida — urged Cannon to step aside from the case after she was assigned to it.

The hearing is unfolding just weeks after Trump was convicted in a separate state case in New York of falsifying business records to cover up a hush money payment to a porn actor who has said she had sex with him. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court is set to issue a landmark opinion on whether Trump is immune from prosecution for acts he took in office or he can be prosecuted by Smith's team on charges that he schemed to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

At issue in Friday's hearing is a Trump team claim that Smith was illegally appointed in November 2022 by Attorney General Merrick Garland because he was not first approved by Congress and because the special counsel office that he was assigned to lead was not also created by Congress.

Smith's team has said Garland was fully empowered as the head of the Justice Department to make the appointment and to delegate prosecutorial decisions to him. Prosecutors also note that courts have upheld prior appointments of special counsels, including Robert Mueller by Trump's Justice Department.

On the agenda for next week are arguments over a limited gag order that prosecutors have requested to bar Trump from comments they fear could endanger the safety of FBI agents and other law enforcement officials involved in the case.

The restrictions were sought after Trump falsely claimed the agents who searched his Mar-a-Lago estate for classified documents in August 2022 were prepared to kill him even though he was citing boilerplate language from standard FBI policy about use of force during the execution of search warrants. The FBI had intentionally selected a day for the search when it knew Trump and his family would be out of town.

Trump's lawyers have said any speech restrictions would infringe on his free speech rights. Cannon initially rejected the request on technical grounds, saying prosecutors had not sufficiently conferred with defense lawyers before seeking the gag restrictions. But prosecutors subsequently renewed the request.

Another issue set to be discussed next week is a defense request to exclude from the case evidence seized by the FBI during the Mar-a-Lago search, and to dismiss the indictment because of evidence it includes that came from former members of Trump's defense team.

Though attorney-client privilege protects defense lawyers from being forced to testify about their confidential conversations with clients, prosecutors can get around that shield if they can establish that the lawyer's legal services are being used to further a crime.

That's what happened last year in the classified documents investigation, with prosecutors in their indictment repeatedly citing details of conversations Trump had with M. Evan Corcoran, an attorney who represented the former president during the investigation and who was forced by a judge to appear before the grand jury investigating Trump .

Donald Sutherland, the towering actor whose career spanned 'M.A.S.H.' to 'Hunger Games,' dies at 88

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Sutherland, the Canadian actor whose wry, arrestingly off-kilter screen presence spanned more than half a century of films from "M.A.S.H." to "The Hunger Games," has died. He was 88.

Sutherland died Thursday in Miami after a long illness, according to a statement from Creative Artists Agency, which represented him.

Kiefer Sutherland said on X he believed his father was one of the most important actors in the history of film: "Never daunted by a role, good, bad or ugly. He loved what he did and did what he loved, and one can never ask for more than that."

The tall and gaunt Sutherland, who flashed a grin that could be sweet or diabolical, was known for off-

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beat characters like Hawkeye Pierce in Robert Altman's "M.A.S.H.," the hippie tank commander in "Kelly's Heroes" and the stoned professor in "Animal House."

"Donald was a giant, not only physically but as a talent," Sutherland's "M.A.S.H." co-star Elliott Gould said in a statement to The Associated Press as many paid tribute. "He was also enormously kind and generous."

Before transitioning into a long career as a respected character actor, Sutherland epitomized the unpredictable, antiestablishment cinema of the 1970s. He never stopped working, appearing in nearly 200 films and series.

Over the decades, Sutherland showed his range in more buttoned-down — but still eccentric — roles in Robert Redford's "Ordinary People" and Oliver Stone's "JFK." More, recently, he starred in the "Hunger Games" films.

A memoir, "Made Up, But Still True," is due out in November.

"I love to work. I passionately love to work," Sutherland told Charlie Rose in 1998. "I love to feel my hand fit into the glove of some other character. I feel a huge freedom — time stops for me. I'm not as crazy as I used to be, but I'm still a little crazy."

Born in St. John, New Brunswick, Donald McNichol Sutherland was the son of a salesman and a mathematics teacher. Raised in Nova Scotia, he was a disc jockey with his own radio station at age 14.

"When I was 13 or 14, I really thought everything I felt was wrong and dangerous, and that God was going to kill me for it," Sutherland told The New York Times in 1981. "My father always said, 'Keep your mouth shut, Donnie, and maybe people will think you have character.'"

Sutherland began as an engineering student at the University of Toronto but switched to English and started acting in school theatrical productions. While studying, he met Lois Hardwick, an aspiring actress. They married in 1959 but divorced seven years later.

After graduating in 1956, Sutherland attended the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art to study acting. He began appearing in West End plays and British television. After a move to Los Angeles, a series of war films changed his trajectory.

His breakthrough was "The Dirty Dozen" (1967), in which he played Vernon Pinkley, the officer-impersonating psychopath. 1970 saw the release of the World War II yarn "Kelly's Heroes" and "M.A.S.H.," a smash hit that catapulted Sutherland to stardom.

"There is more challenge in character roles," Sutherland told The Washington Post in 1970. "There's longevity. A good character actor can show a different face in every film and not bore the public."

If Sutherland had had his way, Altman would have been fired from "M.A.S.H." He was unhappy with the director's unorthodox, improvisational style. But the film caught on beyond anyone's expectations.

Sutherland identified with its anti-war message. Outspoken against the Vietnam War, he along with actress Jane Fonda and others founded the Free Theater Associates in 1971. Banned by the Army because of their political views, they performed in venues near military bases in Southeast Asia in 1973.

"I thought I was going to be part of a revolution that was going to change movies and its influence on people," Sutherland told the Los Angeles Times.

His career as a leading man peaked in the 1970s, when he starred in films by the era's top directors — even if they didn't always do their best work with him. Sutherland, who frequently said he considered himself at the service of a director's vision, worked with Federico Fellini (1976's "Fellini's Casanova"), Bernardo Bertolucci (1976's "1900"), Claude Chabrol (1978's "Blood Relatives") and John Schlesinger (1975's "The Day of the Locust").

One of his finest performances came as a detective in Alan Pakula's "Klute" (1971). During filming he met Fonda, with whom he had a three-year relationship that began at the end of his second marriage to actor Shirley Douglas. He and Douglas divorced in 1971 after having twins: Rachel and Kiefer, who was named after Warren Kiefer, the writer of Sutherland's first film, "Castle of the Living Dead."

Nicolas Roeg's psychological horror film "Don't Look Now" (1973) was another high point. Sutherland starred with Julie Christie as a grieving couple who move to Venice after their daughter's death. The film included a famous, explicit sex scene, artfully edited.

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"Nic and I thought that maybe I would die in the process of it, so much were we committed," Sutherland once said. His admiration for the film and Roeg was such that he and his next wife, actress Francine Racette, named their first-born child Roeg.

Sutherland married Racette in 1972 and remained with her. She survives him. They had two other children: Rossif, named after the director Frederic Rossif; and Angus Redford, named after Redford.

Robert Redford's "Ordinary People" (1980) also dealt with the loss of a child. His directorial debut, starring Sutherland as the father of a family destroyed by tragedy, won four Oscars, including best picture.

Sutherland was never nominated for an Academy Award but received an honorary Oscar in 2017. He did win an Emmy in 1995 for the TV film "Citizen X" and won two Golden Globes for "Citizen X" and the 2003 TV film "Path to War."

Sutherland's New York stage debut in 1981, though, went terribly. He played Humbert Humbert in Edward Albee's adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's "Lolita," and the reviews were merciless; it closed after a dozen performances. A down period in the '80s followed, with failures like the 1981 satire "Gas" and the 1984 comedy "Crackers."

But Sutherland continued to work steadily and increasingly worked in television, most memorably in HBO's "Path to War," in which he played President Lyndon Johnson's defense secretary, Clark Clifford.

After son Kiefer emerged as a star, Sutherland appeared in numerous films with him, including the 1996 thriller "A Time to Kill" and 2015's "Forsaken." But he turned down the chance to play the father on the hit series "24."

To a younger generation, Sutherland was most familiar as President Snow in "The Hunger Games" franchise beginning with the 2012 original. Sutherland sought out the part.

"The role of the president had maybe a line in the script. Maybe two. Didn't make any difference," Sutherland told GQ. "I thought it was an incredibly important film, and I wanted to be a part of it."

In his final years, the nonstop actor mused about dying onscreen, for real.

"I'm really hoping that in some movie I'm doing, I die — but I die, me, Donald — and they're able to use my funeral and the coffin," Sutherland told the AP. "That would be absolutely ideal. I would love that."

Rain helps 1,000 firefighters slow big New Mexico blazes as Biden approves disaster relief

By MORGAN LEE and SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — More than 1,000 firefighters in New Mexico took advantage of a break in the weather on Thursday to get the upper hand — for now — on a pair of wildfires that have killed two people, destroyed hundreds of homes and forced thousands to flee.

President Joe Biden issued a disaster declaration for parts of southern New Mexico, freeing up funding and more resources as crews worked to keep the flames from spreading. Their efforts have gotten a boost from a storm system that brought with it rain, hail and cooler temperatures to the mountain village of Ruidoso and other parts of the state.

"The fire has lost momentum," Arthur Gonzales, the fire behavior analyst for the federal attack team, told residents at a community meeting in Alamogordo on Thursday night. "We still have a lot of work to do, but it's really changed that fire behavior," he said, noting that very little growth is expected over the next few days.

But firefighters know it's a brief respite given the dry tinderbox conditions that helped fuel the fires in the first place. Within days, the fires have consumed an area half the size of Washington, D.C.

"What we're really focusing on now at this point, is when might we see this return to active fire spread?" Gonzales said. "Is there potential for this to start picking up and moving again?"

Federal and local officials said evacuation orders likely would remain in place for days in some places as crews snuff out hot spots around Ruidoso and law officers patrol streets to keep potential looters away.

Despite some reports that the fires were "human caused," federal incident commander Dave Gessar said the causes are under investigation and remain "undetermined."

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The federal disaster declaration will help with recovery efforts, including temporary housing, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property and other emergency work in Lincoln County and on lands belonging to the Mescalero Apache Tribe.

Residents fled the larger of the two fires with little notice as it swept into neighborhoods on Monday. More areas were evacuated on Tuesday as the fire ballooned, consuming homes nestled among the ponderosa pines that dominate the hillsides.

An estimated 1,400 structures have been destroyed or damaged, and Ruidoso Mayor Lynn Crawford has estimated about half were homes. Whole portions of some communities were lost, he said.

"These are things that are burnt to the foundations and all the trees around it," he said. "It's devastating."

Authorities say a 60-year-old man who died was found near the popular Swiss Chalet Inn in Ruidoso. His family said he had arranged for a ride from friends but they were unable to get to him Monday since the roads were blocked. It appeared he was overcome after he tried to set out on foot.

On Wednesday, officers discovered the skeletal remains of an unidentified second person in the driver's seat of a burned vehicle.

A couple of residents have been driving around Ruidoso and neighboring Alto, providing reports via social media of what they are seeing. There are neighborhoods where the ground was turned to ash, the trees were blackened and homes were reduced to their foundations, with only fireplaces remaining.

"I am speechless. I'm so sorry everyone," said Logan Fle, as he drove down one road.

Much of the Southwest has been exceedingly dry and hot in recent months. Those conditions, along with strong wind, whipped the flames out of control, rapidly advancing the South Fork Fire into Ruidoso in a matter of hours. Evacuations extended to hundreds of homes, businesses, a regional medical center and the Ruidoso Downs horse track.

Nationwide, wildfires have scorched more than 3,344 square miles (8,660 square kilometers) this year — a figure higher than the 10-year average, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. Nearly 20 wildfires burning in California, Arizona, Colorado and Washington state and elsewhere are considered large and uncontained.

Celebrations honor Willie Mays and Negro League players ahead of MLB game at Rickwood Field

By ALANIS THAMES AP Sports Writer

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — As Ajay Stone strolled around historic Rickwood Field and gazed at tributes displayed in honor of Willie Mays and other Negro Leaguers, he clutched a cherished memory under his arm.

It was a picture from 2004 of Mays holding Stone's then-10-month-old daughter Haley, who was wearing San Francisco Giants gear. In Mays' hand was a chunk of a chocolate chip cookie, which he was handing over for Haley to eat.

"Willie gave her that cookie. She had no teeth," Stone remembered. "But we took the cookie and we kept it in her stroller for a year and a half. The great Willie Mays gave it to her, so it was special to us."

Stone and his wife Christina traveled from Charlotte, North Carolina, to be in Birmingham, Alabama, on Thursday for a moment they deemed just as special.

It was hours before Rickwood Field hosted its first Major League Baseball game, as the St. Louis Cardinals beat the Giants 6-5. The game, which MLB called "A Tribute to the Negro Leagues," was meant to honor the legacy of Mays and other Black baseball greats who left an enduring mark on the sport.

MLB planned a week of activities around Mays and the Negro Leagues, including an unveiling ceremony on Wednesday of a Willie Mays mural in downtown Birmingham. Those tributes took on a more significant meaning Tuesday afternoon when Mays died at 93. As news of his death spread throughout Birmingham, celebrations of his life ramped up.

You could hear the celebration at Rickwood Field on Thursday even before arriving at the ballpark with the rapid thumping of a drum echoing from inside the ballpark, excited murmurs from fans skipping toward the music and frequent bursts of laughter.

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Inside, there were reminders of history all around.

There were photos and artifacts of baseball Hall of Famers who played at the 114-year-old ballpark, including Jackie Robinson, Josh Gibson and Satchel Paige. The original clubhouse of the Birmingham Black Barons of the Negro Leagues, where Mays got his pro start in 1948, was open. A memorial of Mays was at the front, with bobbleheads, a signed glove and his Black Barons and San Francisco Giants jerseys on display.

Outside, fans stood in line to hold a baseball bat used by Mays in 1959. They took photos sitting inside an original bus from 1947 that was typically used during barnstorming tours by Negro Leagues teams. They danced to live music and ate food from concession stands featuring menu boards designed to reflect the look and feel of the 1940s.

Eddie Torres and his son Junior wore matching Giants jerseys as they took pictures inside the ballpark. They're lifelong Giants fans who came from California for the game.

"I never even got to see Willie Mays play, but as a Giants fan, you knew what he meant to the game of baseball," Torres said. "My son, he's only 11. Willie Mays had such an effect on the game that even he knew who Willie Mays was."

Musical artist Jon Batiste strummed a guitar while dancing on a wooden stage near home plate just before the first pitch. Fans stood as former Negro Leaguers were helped to the field for a pregame ceremony.

Shouts of "Willie! Willie!" broke out after a brief moment of silence.

For Michael Jackson, sitting in the stands at Rickwood Field reminded him of the past.

The 71-year-old Jackson played baseball in the 1970s and 80s with the East Thomas Eagles of the Birmingham Industrial League, which was a semi-professional league made up of iron and steel workers that was an integral form of entertainment in Birmingham in the 20th century.

Jackson's baseball journey took him to Rickwood Field many times. After all these years, he was just excited that it's still standing.

"It's nice seeing them re-do all of this," he said, "instead of tearing it down. We played in the same ballpark they named after Willie Mays out in Fairfield (Alabama). And then I had my times out here playing at this ballpark. It's all very exciting."

Appeals court panel refuses to delay Trump ally Steve Bannon's 4-month contempt prison sentence

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court panel on Thursday rejected longtime Donald Trump ally Steve Bannon's bid to stay out of prison while he fights his conviction for defying a subpoena from the House committee that investigated the U.S. Capitol attack.

Bannon is supposed to report to prison by July 1 to begin serving his four-month sentence for contempt of Congress.

U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols, who was nominated to the bench by Trump, earlier this month granted prosecutors' request to send Bannon to prison after a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit upheld his conviction.

Bannon's lawyers asked the appeals court to allow him to remain free while he continues to fight the conviction all the way up to the Supreme Court, if necessary. But in a 2-1 vote, the D.C. Circuit panel said Bannon's case "does not warrant a departure from the general rule" that defendants begin serving their sentence after conviction.

Judges Cornelia Pillard, who was nominated by former President Barack Obama, and Bradley Garcia, a nominee of President Joe Biden, voted to send Bannon to prison. Judge Justin Walker, who was nominated by Trump, dissented, writing that he should not have to serve time before the Supreme Court decides whether to take up his case.

Bannon is expected to ask the Supreme Court to stave off his prison sentence. His attorneys didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment Thursday.

He was convicted nearly two years ago of two counts of contempt of Congress: one for refusing to sit for a deposition with the Jan. 6 House Committee and the other for refusing to provide documents related to his involvement in efforts by Trump, a Republican, to overturn his 2020 presidential election loss to Joe Biden, a Democrat.

Bannon's lawyer at trial argued that the former Trump adviser didn't ignore the subpoena but was still engaged in good-faith negotiations with the congressional committee when he was charged. The defense has said Bannon had been relying on the advice of his attorney, who believed that Bannon couldn't testify or produce documents because Trump had invoked executive privilege.

Lawyers for Bannon say the case raises serious legal questions that will likely need to be resolved by the Supreme Court but he will have already finished his prison sentence by the time the case gets there.

In court papers, Bannon's lawyers also argued that there is a "strong public interest" in allowing him to remain free in the run-up to the 2024 election because Bannon is a top adviser to Trump's campaign.

Bannon's lawyers said the Justice Department, in trying to imprison him now, is "giving an appearance that the government is trying to prevent Mr. Bannon from fully assisting with the campaign and speaking out on important issues, and also ensuring the government exacts its pound of flesh before the possible end of the Biden Administration."

Prosecutors said in court papers that Bannon's "role in political discourse" is irrelevant.

"Bannon also cannot reconcile his claim for special treatment with the bedrock principle of equal justice under the law," prosecutors wrote. "Even-handed application of the bail statute requires Bannon's continued detention."

A second Trump aide, trade adviser Peter Navarro, is already serving his four-month prison sentence for contempt of Congress. Navarro, too, has said he couldn't cooperate with the committee because Trump had invoked executive privilege. The judge barred him from making that argument at trial, however, finding that he didn't show Trump had actually invoked it.

The House Jan. 6 committee's final report asserted that Trump criminally engaged in a "multi-part conspiracy" to overturn the lawful results of the 2020 election and failed to act to stop his supporters from attacking the Capitol, concluding an extraordinary 18-month investigation into the former president and the violent insurrection.

Trump dwarfs Biden in latest fundraising numbers in show of political force after felony convictions

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's campaign outraised President Joe Biden by more than \$60 million last month, according to federal filings made public Thursday that detailed the Republican fundraising explosion sparked by Trump's felony convictions.

Biden's campaign and the Democratic National Committee together raised a robust \$85 million in May and reported \$212 million in the bank at the end of the month. The strong showing does not include roughly \$40 million raised by Biden and his top surrogates in recent days — or a separate \$20 million donation from former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to pro-Biden groups.

Still, Trump's fundraising for, for one month at least, seemed to dwarf Biden's.

The Trump campaign and the Republican National Committee said it raised a jaw-dropping \$141 million in May, including tens of millions donated immediately after Trump was convicted of 34 felonies in the New York hush money case. At the same time, billionaire Timothy Mellon donated a stunning \$50 million to a pro-Trump super PAC the day after Trump's guilty verdict, according to the filings.

Trump's campaign declined to report how much money it had in the bank at the end of May, prompting Biden's campaign to question whether the groups were still spending heavily to cover Trump's legal fees.

"Our strong and consistent fundraising program grew by millions of people in May, a clear sign of strong and growing enthusiasm for the president and vice president every single month," said Biden campaign manager Julie Chavez Rodriguez. "The money we continue to raise matters, and it's helping the campaign

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build out an operation that invests in reaching and winning the voters who will decide this election — a stark contrast to Trump’s PR stunts and photo-ops that he’s pretending is a campaign.”

Taken together, the numbers detailed in the campaigns’ latest Federal Election Commission filings suggest Democrats may still maintain a cash advantage in the 2024 presidential contest. But almost four months before Election Day, Trump’s side is closing the gap — if it isn’t closed already.

The new fundraising figures also underscore the extent to which the rules of presidential politics are being rewritten in the Trump era.

At almost any other time in U.S. history, a presidential candidate would have been forced to leave an election after being convicted of dozens of felonies. But in 2024, Trump’s guilty verdict has instead fueled a massive fundraising surge that puts his team in a position to ramp up advertising and swing- state infrastructure just as voters begin paying closer attention to the election.

Backed by Mellon’s massive donation, the pro-Trump super PAC known as MAGA Inc. on Thursday reserved \$3.5 million in television advertising set to begin July 3 across Georgia and Pennsylvania, according to the media tracking firm AdImpact. Overall, the group reported a \$68.8 million haul for May, ending the month with \$93.7 million in the bank.

Mellon has been among the biggest donors to Trump and independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr., although his support for Kennedy may be fading.

Kennedy raised \$2.6 million last month and finished May with \$6.4 million in the bank. The vast majority of his fundraising total came from running mate Nicole Shanahan, a wealthy Silicon Valley lawyer. The Kennedy campaign spent more than it raised for the month.

The numbers reported Thursday did not include anything raised in June, including roughly \$40 million raised by Biden and his top surrogates in recent days. The vast majority came from a glitzy fundraiser last Saturday 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.

Meanwhile, Biden also got a big boost from Bloomberg.

The billionaire philanthropist, who briefly ran for president as a Democrat in 2020, sent \$19 million to the pro-Biden group Future Forward in addition to sending the legal maximum of \$929,600 to the Biden Victory Fund, according to a person familiar with the transfers.

Bloomberg also formally endorsed Biden on Thursday. “I stood with Joe Biden in 2020, and I am proud to do so again,” Bloomberg said in a statement.

The Biden campaign said the vast majority of its latest fundraising came from grassroots donors such as nurses, teachers and retirees. Overall, the Biden campaign and Democratic National Committee attracted more than 3 million new donors last month, according to a statement from the campaign.

“While Trump is leeching off his billionaire sycophants, our campaign represents the voices of America, and we’re honored to have their support as we race toward November,” Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison said.

Israel’s pledge to guard an aid route into Gaza falls flat as lawlessness blocks distribution

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israeli military said Sunday that it was establishing a new safe corridor to deliver aid into southern Gaza. But days later, this self-declared “tactical pause” has brought little relief to desperate Palestinians.

The United Nations and international aid organizations say a breakdown in law and order has made the aid route unusable.

With thousands of truckloads of aid piled up, groups of armed men are regularly blocking convoys, holding drivers at gunpoint and rifling through their cargo, according to a U.N. official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the media on the issue.

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The lawlessness is a major obstacle to aid distribution to southern and central Gaza — where an estimated 1.3 million Palestinians displaced from Rafah, or more than half of Gaza's entire population, are now sheltering in tent camps and cramped apartments without adequate food, water, or medical supplies.

Here is a closer look at the security challenges facing the U.N. and aid organizations.

Israel's 'tactical pause' stymied Israel said Sunday it would observe daily pauses in combat along a route stretching from Kerem Shalom — the strip's only operational aid crossing in the south — to the nearby city of Khan Younis. Before the pause, aid organizations had reported that the need to coordinate trucks' movement with the Israelis in an active combat zone was slowing aid distribution.

The head of the U.N.'s World Food Program said Thursday that the pause has made "no difference at all" in aid distribution efforts. "We haven't been able to get in," said Cindy McCain in an interview with Al-Monitor. "We've had to reroute some of our trucks. They've been looted. As you know, we've been shot at and we've been rocketed."

The U.N. official familiar with the aid effort said that there has been no sign of Israeli activity along the route. The U.N. tried to send a convoy of 60 trucks down the road Tuesday to pick up aid at Kerem Shalom. But 35 of the trucks were intercepted by armed men, the official said.

In recent days, the groups have moved closer to the crossing and set up roadblocks to halt trucks loaded with supplies, the U.N. official said. They have searched the pallets for smuggled cigarettes, a rare luxury in a territory where a single smoke can go for \$25.

The surge in lawlessness is a result of growing desperation in Gaza and the power vacuum left by Hamas's waning power over the territory, said Mkhaimar Abusada, an associate professor of political science at Al-Azhar University in Gaza who is now in Cairo.

With the enclave's police force targeted by Israel, he said, crime has reemerged as an untreated issue in Gaza.

"After Hamas came to power, one of the things that they brought under their control was the lawlessness of the so-called big clans," said Abusada. "Now, that's left for the Palestinians on their own to deal with it. So once again, we are seeing shootings between families, there are thefts, all the bad things are happening."

UNRWA, the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, used to deploy local Palestinian police to escort aid convoys, but many refused to continue serving after airstrikes killed at least eight police officers in Rafah, the agency said.

Israel says the police are legitimate targets because they are controlled by Hamas.

Is any aid still getting into Gaza? The situation has largely paralyzed aid distribution to the south — particularly since Gaza's nearby Rafah crossing with Egypt was closed when Israel invaded the city early last month.

The U.N. official said that 25 trucks of flour used the route Tuesday. Some private commercial trucks also got through — many of which used armed security to deter groups seeking to seize their cargo. An AP reporter stationed along the road Monday saw at least eight trucks pass by, armed security guards riding on top.

Before Israel's offensive into the city of Rafah, hundreds of fuel trucks routinely entered the area.

The U.N. has now begun rerouting some fuel trucks through northern Gaza. Farhan Haq, a U.N. spokesman, said five fuel trucks entered Gaza Wednesday. The U.N. humanitarian office reported that these were the first fuel deliveries since early June and supplies remain scarce.

Aid groups say only a ceasefire and a reopening of the Rafah crossing could significantly increase aid flow to the area.

The military body in charge of coordinating humanitarian aid efforts, COGAT, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Security concerns also afflict aid from U.S. pier project The U.S. installed a pier off Gaza's coast last month, aiming to provide an additional route for aid to enter Gaza. But the ambitious project has suffered repeated logistical and security setbacks.

Cyprus and US officials said the pier was up and running again Thursday after being detached for a

second time last week because of rough seas. COGAT said Thursday there were “hundreds of aid pallets awaiting collection and distribution by the U.N. aid agencies.”

But there, too, security concerns are hindering distribution of aid.

The U.N. suspended its cooperation with the pier on June 9 – a day after rumors swirled that the Israeli military had used the area in a hostage rescue operation that left over 270 Palestinians dead. Photos of the operation showed an Israeli military helicopter in what appeared to be the vicinity of the pier.

Both Israel and the US deny the pier was used in the operation. But the perception that the pier was used for military purposes could endanger humanitarian workers, and threaten humanitarian groups’ principles of neutrality, the U.N. says.

Aid workers said they are working with the Israelis to find a solution, but that the security burden falls squarely on Israel’s shoulders.

Officials from the U.N. and other humanitarian organizations, including Samantha Power, head of the U.S. Agency for International Development, met with Israel’s military chief and COGAT officials this week to seek solutions.

USAID said afterward that the meeting ended with promises of specific actions, but gave no details.

South Korea will consider supplying arms to Ukraine after Russia and North Korea sign strategic pact

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea said Thursday that it would consider sending arms to Ukraine, a major policy change that was suggested after Russia and North Korea rattled the region and beyond by signing a pact to come to each other’s defense in the event of war.

The comments from a senior presidential official came hours after North Korea’s state media released the details of the agreement, which observers said could mark the strongest connection between Moscow and Pyongyang since the end of the Cold War. It comes at a time when Russia faces growing isolation over the war in Ukraine and both countries face escalating standoffs with the West.

According to the text of the deal published by North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency, or KCNA, if either country gets invaded and is pushed into a state of war, the other must deploy “all means at its disposal without delay” to provide “military and other assistance.” But the agreement also says that such actions must be in accordance with the laws of both countries and Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which recognizes a U.N. member state’s right to self-defense.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the pact at a summit Wednesday in Pyongyang. Both described it as a major upgrade of bilateral relations, covering security, trade, investment, cultural and humanitarian ties.

The office of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol issued a statement condemning the agreement, calling it a threat to his country’s security and a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, and warned that it would have negative consequences on Seoul’s relations with Moscow.

“It’s absurd that two parties with a history of launching wars of invasion — the Korean War and the war in Ukraine — are now vowing mutual military cooperation on the premise of a preemptive attack by the international community that will never happen,” Yoon’s office said.

At the United Nations in New York, South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul called it “deplorable” that Russia would act in violation of multiple U.N. sanctions resolutions against North Korea that Moscow voted for.

Yoon’s national security adviser, Chang Ho-jin, said that Seoul would reconsider the issue of providing arms to Ukraine to help the country fight off Russia’s full-scale invasion.

South Korea, a growing arms exporter with a well-equipped military backed by the United States, has provided humanitarian aid and other support to Ukraine, while joining U.S.-led economic sanctions against Moscow. But it hasn’t directly provided arms to Kyiv, citing a longstanding policy of not supplying weapons to countries actively engaged in conflict.

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Speaking to reporters in Hanoi, where he traveled after Pyongyang, Putin said Thursday that supplying weapons to Ukraine would be "a very big mistake" on South Korea's part. If that happens, Putin said that it would lead to "decisions that are unlikely to please the current leadership of South Korea."

He said that South Korea "shouldn't worry" about the agreement, if Seoul isn't planning any aggression against Pyongyang.

Asked whether Ukrainian strikes on Russian regions with Western-supplied weapons could be considered an act of aggression, Putin said that "it needs to be additionally studied, but it's close to it," and that Moscow isn't ruling out supplying weapons to North Korea in response.

A number of NATO allies, including the United States and Germany, recently authorized Ukraine to hit some targets on Russian soil with the long-range weapons they are supplying to Kyiv. Earlier this month, a Western official and a U.S. senator said that Ukraine has used American weapons to strike inside Russia.

Putin has said in response that Moscow "reserves the right" to arm Western adversaries, and reiterated that notion on Thursday.

"I said, including in Pyongyang, that in this case we reserve the right to supply weapons to other regions of the world," he said. "Keeping in mind our agreements with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, I'm not ruling that out."

The summit between Kim and Putin came as the U.S. and its allies expressed growing concern over a possible arms arrangement in which Pyongyang provides Moscow with badly needed munitions for the 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.

Following their summit, Kim said the two countries had a "fiery friendship," and that the deal was their "strongest-ever treaty," putting the relationship at the level of an alliance. He vowed full support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Putin called it a "breakthrough document," reflecting shared desires to move relations to a higher level.

North Korea and the former Soviet Union signed a treaty in 1961, which experts say necessitated Moscow's military intervention if the North came under attack. The deal was discarded after the collapse of the USSR, replaced by one in 2000 that offered weaker security assurances.

There's ongoing debate on how strong of a security commitment the deal entails. While some analysts see the agreement as a full restoration of the countries' Cold War-era alliance, others say the deal seems more symbolic than substantial.

Ankit Panda, a senior analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said that the text appeared to be carefully worded as to not imply automatic military intervention.

But "the big picture here is that both sides are willing to put down on paper, and show the world, just how widely they intend to expand the scope of their cooperation," he said.

The deal was made as Putin visited North Korea for the first time in nearly a quarter-century, a trip that showcased their personal and geopolitical ties. Kim hugged Putin twice at the airport, their motorcade rolling past giant Russian flags and Putin portraits, before a welcoming ceremony at Pyongyang's main square attended by what appeared to be tens of thousands of spectators.

According to KCNA, the agreement also states that Pyongyang and Moscow must not enter into agreements with third parties, if they infringe on the "core interests" of any of them and mustn't participate in actions that threaten those interests.

KCNA said that the agreement requires the countries to take steps to prepare joint measures for the purpose of strengthening their defense capabilities to prevent war and protect regional and global peace and security. The agency didn't specify what those steps are, or whether they would include combined military training and other cooperation.

The agreement also calls for the countries to actively cooperate in efforts to establish a "just and multipolar new world order," KCNA said, underscoring how the countries are aligning in face of their separate confrontations with the United States.

How the pact affects Russia's relations with South Korea is a key development to watch, said Jenny

Town, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center in Washington and director of the North Korea-focused 38 North website.

"Seoul had already signed onto sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, souring its relations with Moscow. Now with any ambiguity of Russia's partnership with North Korea removed, how will Seoul respond?" she said. "Is there a point where it decides to cut or suspend diplomatic ties with Russia or expel its ambassador? And have we reached it?"

Kim has made Russia his priority in recent months as he pushes a foreign policy aimed at expanding relations with countries confronting Washington, embracing the idea of a "new Cold War" and trying to display a united front in Putin's broader conflicts with the West.

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 U.S., 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 South Korea with balloons, and Seoul broadcasting anti-North Korean propaganda with its loudspeakers.

Politician who pushed Philippines natural gas boom is behind firm that planned to profit

By ED DAVEY Associated Press

BATANGAS, Philippines (AP) — An influential politician in the Philippines, who has been a cheerleader for natural gas power, is behind a company that planned to make a fortune from it, an Associated Press investigation of thousands of pages of documents has found.

Gov. Hermilando Mandanas of Batangas province and his late wife stood to profit from a buildout of liquified natural gas power — he owned the largest share in a real estate firm that soared in value as energy companies moved in, while he promoted the expansion in media interviews and public events. The firm also launched its own natural gas project.

Experts in government ethics deplored the scenario, with one environmental law advocate calling for an investigation into Mandanas. In an interview with the AP, Mandanas denied his associated businesses are involved with the buildout and called natural gas the best choice for the country.

The major commitment to natural gas comes at a time when many countries are ramping down the use of the fossil fuels that cause climate change. Scientists say that to avoid profound disruption from climate change, no new fossil fuel infrastructure that emits carbon dioxide can be built. Some analysts say all the Philippines' future electricity growth could be met with clean renewables.

Filipinos will likely pay more for electricity than if the country went all in for wind and solar power, because in many places renewable energy is now the cheapest form of new electricity.

The construction also is happening in an ecologically vibrant zone with coral reefs and communities that depend on their fish. The AP previously reported that both could be harmed by the planned power stations.

Gerry Arances, who heads up the Center for Energy, Ecology and Development, a Philippine nonprofit, said natural gas was not the path the country should have chosen.

"There's only one reason" it became the Philippines' energy priority. "That is greed and self-interest."

Promoters of the gas plants see the Batangas region, about two hours south of Manila, as a new energy center for the country. Four gas power plants sit along the coastline already and four more are planned. Six new terminals for importing chilled, liquefied natural gas are also on the way in Batangas or have started operating.

The government says it wants the Philippines to become an LNG hub for the entire Asia-Pacific region.

"It is needed very much for development," Mandanas told the AP in an interview in the white-columned regional capitol. The electricity will attract other industries, he said, which benefits the entire country.

Mandanas is well known in the Philippines for winning a landmark Supreme Court case that increased

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local government funding nationwide.

The governor said he was "very conscious" that what he referred to as the "center of marine biodiversity of the entire world" needed to be protected, and his administration is taking such action. "We have to balance the need of the environment and development," he said.

Alleged conflict of interest Not only did companies affiliated with the governor own coastal real estate where gas developments are happening, the family firm, AbaCore Capital Holdings Inc., launched its own gas power project in Batangas.

Legal experts said these dealings violate the Philippine law on ethics in public office and very possibly the nation's law on local government. Philippine politicians are not allowed to own major stakes in companies with goals that could be at odds with their official duties. Governors must also maintain a balanced ecology and conserve marine resources.

Michael Henry Yusingco, a lawyer and fellow at the Philippine Institute for Autonomy and Governance, called the situation a clear conflict of interest that could merit Mandanas's suspension or removal from office. He said there was a strong case that the governor is not meeting his legal responsibilities to the environment or residents, which would be a dereliction of duty.

Mandanas led a takeover of AbaCore in the 1980s, building it into a real estate behemoth beyond its original interests in mining and gaming.

When voters returned him to the governor's seat in 2016 after an absence, Mandanas stepped down from the CEO position at AbaCore. His wife Regina Reyes took over the post.

In the Philippines press, AbaCore is frequently referred to as a Mandanas family company. Documents filed with the Philippines Securities and Exchange Commission shows as of last fall, Mandanas still owned almost 30% of it through a complex structure involving three layers of Philippine companies.

In 2019, Reyes said publicly that her husband's policies would benefit the family company. Addressing shareholders, she said the infrastructure buildout in Batangas "implemented and led by its current governor" would boost AbaCore, increasing property values, cash flow and revenue.

The energy industry moving in, she said, would help AbaCore grow, continuing, "We expect land values to increase exponentially." In a separate interview with Philippine TV, she agreed the gas expansion meant the value of surrounding areas rose, benefitting shareholders.

Reyes died of natural causes in May 2022, and Mandanas recently remarried.

San Miguel Corporation, one of the Philippines' biggest power providers, affirmed in an email to the AP that its LNG projects there "led to a substantial increase in local property values." They rose more than 13-fold, it said.

Mandanas was in Beijing during a deal signing in 2019 that involved an AbaCore sister company in which he now holds a large stake. The AbaCore affiliate and three Chinese firms agreed to build a \$3 billion LNG complex, including a power plant, in the fishing village of Simlong in Batangas.

According to filings with Philippine authorities in December 2018, four properties including the land in Simlong, where the power hub will be built, were valued at \$6.2 million. Shortly after that deal was struck, they were revalued at more than \$30.6 million. The vast majority of AbaCore's income has come from land revaluations in recent years, its filings show.

Asked in an interview whether the Simlong energy hub was a conflict of interest, Mandanas suggested AbaCore's role was limited to selling land.

"Probably one of the subsidiaries sold a piece of property" to the developers, indicating a distance from the transaction. "That would be probably the involvement of AbaCore."

"AbaCore is not in any energy business here in Batangas," he said.

Yet that conflicts with AbaCore statements in official documents from 2021 that its then-renamed AbaCore Energy Hub would result in "huge recurring revenues."

Mandanas did not reply to followup questions via email.

Call for an investigation Elizabeth David-Barrett, director of the Centre for the Study of Corruption at University of Sussex, England, reviewed the AP's findings and agreed with Yusingco, the Philippine governance attorney, that they amount to a conflict of interest and the "abuse of entrusted power for private

gain which harms the public interest.”

A professor in political science at the University of the Philippines, Maria Ela Atienza, said Mandanas may also be violating a Philippine law on conduct and ethics. She cited a ban on favors being granted to relatives.

Yusingco called it “a sad, tragic aspect of Philippine politics. Political dynasties thrive because of their business interests, and their business interests thrive because of their positions in government.”

“The really tragic result (is) fisherfolks suffering, the environment suffering.”

Barnaby Pace, at the nonprofit Center for International Environmental Law, said evidence of Mandanas’s business interests in the LNG buildout was “deeply concerning” and demanded authorities investigate.

“LNG projects should be reviewed in light of this information,” he said. “The local population has a right to know what’s behind the push for LNG facilities.”

New Louisiana law requiring classrooms to display Ten Commandments churns old political conflicts

By KEVIN MCGILL and SARA CLINE Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A bill signed into law this week makes Louisiana the only state to require that the Ten Commandments be displayed in every classroom in public schools and colleges — and stirs the long-running debate over the role of religion in government institutions.

Under the new law, all public K-12 classrooms and state-funded universities will be required to display a poster-sized display of the Ten Commandments in “large, easily readable font” next year.

Civil liberties groups planned lawsuits to block the law signed by Republican Gov. Jeff Landry, saying it would unconstitutionally breach protections against government-imposed religion. “We’re going to be seeing Gov. Landry in court,” said Rachel Laser, the president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

State officials are stressing the history of the Ten Commandments, which the bill calls “foundational documents of our state and national government.”

Similar bills requiring the Ten Commandments be displayed in classrooms have been proposed in other statehouses — including Texas, Oklahoma and Utah.

Reasonable and needed or unconstitutional and harmful? At Archbishop Shaw High School, a Catholic-run school in suburban New Orleans, the head of school, the Rev. Steve Ryan, said he was pleased that the Ten Commandments will be posted on public school walls.

“These laws, which are part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, are good safeguards for society. They are actually reasonable,” Ryan said.

In Baton Rouge, Attorney General Liz Murrill, a Republican ally of Landry, said she was looking forward to defending the law.

“The 10 Commandments are pretty simple (don’t kill, steal, cheat on your wife), but they also are important to our country’s foundations,” she said on social media.

Opponents of the law argued that eroding the constitutional barrier between religion and government is illegal and unfair.

“We’re worried about public school families and students in Louisiana,” Laser said. “They come from a variety of different traditions and backgrounds, different religious beliefs, nonreligious beliefs and students in those classrooms will be made to feel like outsiders when they see the government endorsing one set of narrow religious beliefs over others.”

Louisiana’s 2020 teacher of the year, Chris Dier, echoed those fears, and said he doesn’t intend to post the Ten Commandments in his classroom.

“I don’t believe in doing something that is unconstitutional and harmful to students,” he said. It is unclear whether there is a punishment for refusing to comply with the mandate.

The law was praised by former Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore, who was removed from office in 2003 after disobeying a federal judge’s order to remove a 5,280-pound (2.4 metric tonne)

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granite Ten Commandments display from the state court building.

"Nobody can make you believe in God. Government can't tell you that, but it must acknowledge the God upon which this nation is founded," Moore said.

Members of the Islamic Society of North America and the Council on American-Islamic Relations expressed concerns about the law.

"Is it to highlight universal principles that everyone should embrace? Or is the intent to send a message to Muslim students or others that, 'Your religion — not welcome here, only one understanding of one religion is welcome here?'" said Edward Ahmed Mitchell, national deputy director of CAIR.

Mitchell said Muslims respect the Ten Commandments, which are largely reinforced by similar passages throughout the Quran and the teachings of the prophet Muhammad. But he said the context is troubling for reasons including the use of a Ten Commandments translation associated with evangelicals and other Protestants.

Earlier Ten Commandments controversies In 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a similar Kentucky law violated the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution, which says Congress can "make no law respecting an establishment of religion." The high court found that the law had no secular purpose but rather served a plainly religious purpose.

In its most recent rulings on Ten Commandments displays, the Supreme Court held in 2005 that such displays in a pair of Kentucky courthouses violated the Constitution. At the same time, the court upheld a Ten Commandments marker on the grounds of the Texas state Capitol in Austin. Those were 5-4 decisions but the court's makeup has changed, with a 6-3 conservative majority now.

The main differences in the two cases — at least according to the one swing vote, then-Justice Stephen Breyer — was that the Kentucky counties' officials demonstrated an unmistakable track record of religious motives in the posting, whereas the motives behind the Texas display were more on the "borderline" between religious and secular. Plus, Breyer said, the Texas monument had passed a test of time, standing among other monuments for decades without legal challenge.

Other religion-government fights After he was removed as chief justice of Alabama Supreme Court in 2003 for his refusal to remove the Ten Commandments monument, Moore was elected to the post again, but was suspended from the bench in 2016 after a judicial discipline panel ruled he had urged probate judges to refuse marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Moore disputed the accusation.

Louisiana has had a prominent role in the church-state legal fight before. In 1987, the Supreme Court struck down a 1981 Louisiana statute that required instruction on evolution to be accompanied by teaching on "creation science." The court found that the statute had no identifiable secular purpose and the "pre-eminent purpose of the Louisiana Legislature was clearly to advance the religious viewpoint that a supernatural being created humankind."

Mississippi has mandated the display of "In God We Trust" in schools since 2001. Louisiana passed a similar mandate that became law last year.

The latest pushes to post the Ten Commandments follow a major victory for the religious right in 2022: The Supreme Court ruled that a high school football coach in the state of Washington who knelt and prayed on the field after games was protected by the Constitution.

How the Ten Commandments are viewed Jews and Christians regard the Ten Commandments as having been given by God to Moses, according to biblical accounts, on Mount Sinai. Not every Christian tradition uses the same Ten Commandments. The order varies as does the phrasing, depending on which Bible translation is used. The Ten Commandments in the signed Louisiana legislation are listed in an order common among some Protestant and Orthodox traditions.

Disputes over the law likely won't just be about whether the commandments should be mandated on school room walls, but also which version, said James Hudnut-Beumler, a professor of American religious history at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

"The Ten Commandments always look universal until you put a shortened list up on the wall and discover that there's room for dispute."

A US veteran died at a nursing home, abandoned. Hundreds of strangers came to say goodbye

By PATRICK WHITTLE and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Maine (AP) — Former U.S. Marine Gerry Brooks died alone at a nursing home in Maine, abandoned and all but forgotten. Then the funeral home posted a notice asking if anyone would serve as a pallbearer or simply attend his burial.

Within minutes, it was turning away volunteers to carry his casket.

A bagpiper came forward to play at the service. A pilot offered to perform a flyover. Military groups across the state pledged a proper sendoff.

Hundreds of people who knew nothing about the 86-year-old beyond his name showed up on a sweltering afternoon and gave Brooks a final salute with full military honors Thursday at the Maine Veterans' Memorial Cemetery in Augusta.

Patriot Guard Riders on motorcycles escorted his hearse on the 40-mile route from the funeral home in Belfast, Maine, to the cemetery. Members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars paid tribute with a 21-gun salute. Volunteers held American flags next to the casket while a crane hoisted a huge flag above the cemetery entrance.

Some saluted while filing by. Others sang The Marines' Hymn.

"It's an honor for us to be able to do this," said Jim Roberts, commander of the VFW post in Belfast. "There's so much negativity in the world. This is something people can feel good about and rally around. It's just absolutely wonderful." He said Brooks' son, granddaughter and son-in-law came to the funeral but did not speak during the service.

Roberts said the VFW is called a couple times a year about a deceased veteran with no family or with one that isn't willing to handle the funeral arrangements. But "we will always be there." Like other veterans helping out Thursday, he hadn't known Brooks.

So many groups volunteered to take part in paying tribute that there wasn't enough space to fit them into the 20-minute burial service, said Katie Riposta, the funeral director who put out the call for help last week.

"It renews your faith in humanity," she said.

More than 8 million of the U.S. veterans living are 65 or older, almost half the veteran population. They are overwhelmingly men. That's according to a U.S. Census Bureau report last year. As this generation dies, it said, their collective memory of wartime experiences "will pass into history."

Much about Brooks' life is unknown.

He was widowed and lived in Augusta. He died on May 18, less than a week after entering a nursing home, Riposta said. A cause of death was not released.

The funeral home and authorities reached his next of kin, but no one was willing to come forward or take responsibility for his body, she said.

"It sounds like he was a good person, but I know nothing about his life," Riposta said, noting that after Brooks' death, a woman contacted the funeral home to say he had once taken her in when she had no other place to go, with no details.

"It doesn't matter if he served one day or made the military his career," she said. "He still deserves to be respected and not alone."

The crowd on Thursday wasn't all strangers — and it turned out Brooks hadn't been one, either.

Victoria Abbott, executive director of the Bread of Life shelter in Augusta, said he had come every day to eat at their soup kitchen, always ready to crack "dad jokes" and make the staff smile. He had a favorite table.

"Your quintessential 80-year-old, dad jokes every day," Abbott said. "He was really great to have around. He was part of the soup kitchen family."

But most people there Thursday met him too late. The memorial book posted online by Direct Cremation of Maine, which helped to arrange the burial, had a few strangers' good wishes.

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"Sir," one began, and ended with "Semper Fi."

The two others, a couple, thanked Brooks for his service. "We all deserve the love kindness and respect when we are called home. I hope that you lived a full beautiful life of Love, Kindness, Dreams and Hope," they wrote.

They added: "Thank you to all those who will make this gentleman's service a proper, well deserved good bye."

Linda Laweryson, who served in the Marines, said this was the second funeral in little over a year that she has attended for a veteran who died alone. Everyone deserves to die with dignity and be buried with dignity, she said.

Laweryson read a poem during the graveside service written by a combat Marine who reflects on the spot where Marines graduate from boot camp.

"I walked the old parade ground, but I was not alone," the poem reads. "I walked the old parade ground and knew that I was home."

US will redirect air defense interceptor missiles to Ukraine that other allies had on order

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House announced Thursday that it will rush delivery of air defense interceptor missiles to Ukraine by redirecting planned shipments to other allied nations, as Washington scrambles to counter increased Russian attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure.

National security spokesman John Kirby said the U.S. had taken the "difficult but necessary decision to reprioritize near-term planned deliveries of foreign military sales to other countries," though he wouldn't say which nations would be affected or how many.

"Right now, we know that Ukraine urgently needs these additional capabilities," Kirby said on a call with reporters, adding, "Obviously more is needed, and it's needed now."

The announcement comes after President Joe Biden, during last week's Group of Seven meeting in Italy, suggested such action might be necessary, saying, "We've let it be known for those countries that are expecting, from us, air defense systems in the future, that they're going to have to wait."

"Everything we have is going to go to Ukraine until their needs are met," Biden said. "And then we will make good on the commitments we made to other countries."

The U.S. was already sending Ukraine a consistent stream of interceptors for its air defense systems, including for the Patriot missile batteries and the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, or NASAMS. But Kirby said that more was urgently needed as Russia's military has accelerated missile and drone attacks against cities and infrastructure centers "trying to destroy Ukraine's energy system ahead of this winter."

Russia has resumed its aerial pounding of Ukraine's power grid while Kyiv's forces are again targeting Russian oil facilities with drone strikes, as each side seeks to hinder the other's ability to continue fighting.

The number of interceptors to be sent isn't clear but Kirby said it could involve "hundreds" of Patriot interceptor missiles.

Kirby said Ukraine will get prioritized shipments as soon as systems roll off assembly lines for the next about 16 months, and those will provide the country with "enough capability" during that period.

After that, he said, "Countries that have been asked to delay will start to get" deliveries of systems they had already ordered.

Kirby said the move means "a range of countries" will face delays in receiving missile systems that are being diverted to Ukraine but that the shift would not affect Taiwan or what it "continues to need and receive for self-defense" in the face of potential threats from China.

Asked to describe how other countries reacted to the shift, Kirby said they were "broadly understanding of it."

"They know how serious the need is in Ukraine," he said.

Border Patrol reports arrests are down 25% since Biden announced new asylum restrictions

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of arrests by Border Patrol agents of people illegally crossing into the United States fell in May to the third lowest of any month during the Biden presidency, while preliminary figures released Thursday show encounters with migrants falling even more in the roughly two weeks since the president announced new rules restricting asylum.

The figures are likely welcome news for a White House that has been struggling to show to voters concerned over immigration that it has control of the southern border. But the number of people coming to the border is often in flux, dependent on conditions in countries far from the U.S. and on smugglers who profit from global migration.

Border Patrol made 117,900 arrests of people entering the country between the official border crossing points in May, Customs and Border Protection said in a news release. That's 9% lower than during April, the agency said. The agency said preliminary data since President Joe Biden's June 4 announcement restricting asylum access shows arrests have fallen by 25%.

"Our enforcement efforts are continuing to reduce southwest border encounters. But the fact remains that our immigration system is not resourced for what we are seeing," said Troy A. Miller, the acting head of CBP.

The U.S. has also benefitted from aggressive enforcement on the Mexican side of the border, where Mexican authorities have been working to prevent migrants from making their way to the U.S.-Mexico border.

The figures are part of a range of data related to immigration, trade and drug seizures that is released monthly by CBP. The immigration-related figures are closely watched at a time of intense political scrutiny over who is entering the country and whether the Biden administration has a handle on the situation.

Immigration is a top concern for voters, with many saying Biden hasn't been doing enough to secure the country's borders. Former President Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for president, has made immigration a cornerstone of his campaign by saying he's going to deport people in the country illegally en masse and take other measures to crack down on immigration.

After Biden announced his plan to restrict asylum access at the southern border, opponents sued, saying it was no different from a similar effort under Trump.

15 shot after a 'sideshow' took over a peaceful Juneteenth celebration in Oakland, police say

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Fifteen people were shot after an illegal "sideshow" took over a peaceful Juneteenth celebration in Oakland, California, police said Thursday.

Investigators are seeking multiple shooters — more than 50 shell casings were recovered at the scene — following the violence Wednesday night at Lake Merritt, but no arrests had been made by Thursday afternoon.

About 20 vehicles -- mostly all-terrain vehicles and dirt bikes — arrived around 8:15 p.m. Wednesday and started a sideshow on the north side of the lake as 5,000 people attended the Juneteenth event.

Sideshows, also known as street takeovers, involve stunts like doughnuts, drifting and burnouts. Street takeovers often involve hundreds of spectators. Cars block access to an intersection, stopping traffic in all directions and making it harder for police to respond. It's become a widespread problem around the country, including Oakland and other cities across the U.S.

Oakland Police Chief Floyd Mitchell on Thursday said one person walked across the hood of a sideshow vehicle. Multiple occupants got out and attacked the person, whose injuries required them to be hospitalized.

Some of the people in the crowd also attacked police officers, Mitchell said during a news conference. A woman was taken into custody for assaulting an officer while the officer was giving first aid to a gunshot victim.

Detectives are combing social media for leads to the shooters' identities, Mitchell said.

At least one gunshot victim was in critical condition. The victims' ages ranged from 20 to 30 years old. Other injuries included the loss of fingers and minor gunshot wounds.

"The opportunity to celebrate with your family and friends should never be marred by gunfire," Mitchell said.

June 19, or Juneteenth, 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.

Juneteenth was designated a federal holiday in 2021 and 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.

In 2021, a shooting during a Juneteenth celebration at Lake Merritt left several people injured and a 22-year-old San Francisco man dead.

NCAA presents options to expand March Madness tournaments from current 68 teams, AP source says

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

The NCAA has presented a plan to Division I conference commissioners that would expand the lucrative men's and women's basketball tournaments by four or eight teams alongside an option to leave each field at 68 teams, according to a person familiar with the details.

The proposals were outlined to the commissioners this week by NCAA Senior Vice President of Basketball Dan Gavitt and NCAA Vice President for Women's Basketball Lynn Holzman, the person told The Associated Press on Thursday on condition of anonymity because no official announcements have been made. The news was first reported by Yahoo! Sports.

Under the proposal, expansion of the 68-team field included both four- and eight-team models. The NCAA would keep its 64-team bracket but would add play-in games involving the 10 through 12 seeds.

If the men's tournament were to expand it is expected the women's tourney would as well.

"It is appropriate to look at expansion, and we need to do that," Atlantic Coast Conference Commissioner James Phillips said Thursday during the Associated Press Sports Editors summer conference. "We're looking at it."

He didn't go into details on the proposal, which he said now "goes in front of the basketball committee, basketball oversight."

"When do you get to the point when the regular season doesn't matter?" he added. "Modest expansion is something I would prefer."

Many in college basketball have said they believe the 68-team fields and three weekends of play are ideal but pressure has grown to add teams and games to one of the most popular sports events on the U.S. calendar. Last year, the NCAA Division I board of directors approved recommendations that included allowing one quarter of teams in larger sports to compete in championship events; in that scenario, March Madness tourneys could expand to nearly 90 teams.

The NCAA is currently in the midst of an eight-year extension of its TV deal for the men's tournament worth \$8.8 billion that runs through 2032. That would not be expected to change if a handful of teams are added.

More games would provide a small boost through ticket sales and merchandise, but the pool of money the NCAA uses to pay out conferences and member schools would essentially stay the same. What could change, however, is how that money would be divided up if the tournament broadens.

Expansion would also mean the men's tournament would have to find an additional site besides Dayton for its First Four games. The Ohio city already has games on Tuesday and Wednesday and wouldn't be able to host additional play-in games ahead of the tourney's traditional first-round opening on Thursday. Women's play-in games are at the same campus sites as the first two rounds of the tournament.

Expansion is largely backed by larger conferences and smaller leagues do not want to lose the automatic bids that come with a conference tournament championship or face the prospect of always being slotted for the play-in games.

The earliest the NCAA Tournament could expand would be the 2025-26 season, the person told AP. The NCAA basketball oversight committee meets next week and the tournament selection committee has a meeting next month.

The men's tournament last expanded in 2011 when it went from 64 to 68 teams. The women's tournament matched that in 2022.

The women's tournament is coming off its most successful year ever that included a record audience of 18.7 million for the title game win by South Carolina over Iowa, the highest for a basketball broadcast of any kind in five years. It outdrew the men's championship game — UConn winning its second consecutive title with a win over Purdue — by nearly 3 million viewers. The women's tournament also had record attendance.

The Lakers are hiring JJ Redick as their new head coach, an AP source says

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — JJ Redick is being hired as the head coach of the Los Angeles Lakers, a person with knowledge of the decision tells The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity Thursday because the Lakers hadn't yet publicly announced the decision to hire the former guard for his first coaching job.

The 39-year-old Redick is an extraordinary choice by the Lakers, who hired a 15-year veteran with absolutely no coaching experience to lead a franchise with 17 NBA titles, one of the biggest brand names in world sports — and LeBron James, the top scorer in league history.

Redick was a proficient outside shooter for six teams before his retirement in September 2021, when he moved into a career in broadcasting and podcasting. He joined ESPN's lead commentary team earlier this year.

ESPN first reported the decision.

Before Redick finished broadcasting the NBA Finals, he met with the Lakers last weekend and apparently did well enough to end the franchise's lengthy coaching search. Less than two weeks after UConn coach Danny Hurley turned down the Lakers' ardent advances, Redick has accepted the job in a remarkable three-year journey from the court to the broadcast booth to the Lakers' bench.

Redick replaces Darvin Ham, who was fired May 3 despite leading the Lakers to two playoff berths and a Western Conference finals appearance in 2023.

Redick began recording a regular podcast with James two months ago, and their "Mind the Game" collaboration is already wildly popular, with listeners often emerging impressed by the duo's basketball acumen and high-level discussion of tactics and motivation.

Now these two minds will be working together for the Lakers, with Redick leading a roster headlined by James, who is six months younger than Redick.

Everything is contingent on James deciding to return to play with Anthony Davis and the Lakers, of course. James, who will enter his 22nd NBA season this fall, could decline his \$51.4 million contract option this month to become a free agent.

But hiring Redick seems to be another calculated move by the Lakers to maximize their chances of keeping the 20-time All-Star and the driving force behind their 2020 championship team.

Redick's coaching experience is limited to his children's youth teams, but he has been around the game his entire life. He is the leading scorer in the history of Duke, where he played four seasons under Mike Krzyzewski.

And though Redick is an unorthodox choice, his unlikely ascent is not without some precedent in Lakers lore and recent NBA history.

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Pat Riley was a broadcaster for the Lakers in November 1979 when Paul Westhead took over as their head coach after Jack McKinney nearly died in a bicycle accident. Westhead hired Riley as an assistant without coaching experience, and Riley became the Lakers' head coach in late 1981 after Westhead clashed with Magic Johnson.

Riley promptly led the Lakers to four championships in the 1980s to begin his incredible career as a coach and executive.

And then there's Steve Kerr, the former shooting guard and Phoenix Suns executive who had never coached before he took over at Golden State in 2014. Kerr has led Stephen Curry's Warriors to four championships and six NBA Finals appearances in the past decade.

Redick's arrival ends another unusual offseason coaching search for owner Jeanie Buss, general manager Rob Pelinka and the Lakers, who are hiring their eighth head coach since Phil Jackson's final departure in 2011, and their fourth since James arrived as a free agent in 2018.

Los Angeles needed six weeks to settle on Ham in the summer of 2022, but the longtime assistant coach was dismissed after the Lakers lost to defending champion Denver in the first round of the Western Conference playoffs.

Ham led the Lakers to two winning seasons and a victory in the inaugural In-Season Tournament last year, but many fans and observers — and, clearly, the Lakers' front office — were not impressed by his leadership or preparation.

Davis memorably said during the playoffs that the Lakers "have stretches where we don't know what we're doing on both ends of the floor."

The Lakers hired Ham after firing Frank Vogel, who had been fired exactly 18 months after he won a title in the Florida bubble. Vogel replaced Luke Walton after another long coaching search in which the Lakers were widely reported to have wanted Tyronn Lue, only for a deal to fall apart over issues with money and control.

The Putin-Kim summit produced an unusual — and speedy — flurry of glimpses into North Korea

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

The imagery from Pyongyang emerged quickly, notable in its variety — glimpses into North Korea in near-real time that showed its leader, Kim Jong Un, grinning and glad-handing with Russian President Vladimir Putin and showing him around the capital of one of the world's least accessible nations.

For those who follow the happenings of the Kim family's three-generation rule, the coverage of the Kim-Putin meeting this week — visuals released only by the respective propaganda arms of each government — represented an extraordinary flurry of views into a nation where imagery that feels even remotely off the cuff, not vetted and edited ad nauseam, is rare.

The pair marched on the red carpet in Kim Il Sung Square, named after the current leader's grandfather and the nation's founder. They gazed upon a sea of balloon-toting children. They reviewed a military parade and eyed a crowd waving pompoms. They saw — but were not shown interacting with — groups of North Korean citizens, who if the past is any indication were meticulously vetted before getting anywhere near the scene.

Those images were vivid and plentiful, but they represented the predictable output of an experienced propaganda apparatus.

Far more striking were the in-between moments that managed to peek through — also calibrated carefully, but revealing a smidgen more about the North and its leader than most imagery does. From stills and videos made by both Russian and North Korean state media operations (independent journalists were not given access to cover Putin's visit), the images were many and varied.

Here was Kim showing Putin a bust he'd had made of the Russian leader as a gift. Here were the two leaders hugging, looking at horses and Korean Pungsan dogs, leaning in for informal conversations, laughing at a "gala concert." And here were cutaways to the background of a state dinner — complete with

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camera dollies, rooms before the leaders entered and other outtake-style shots that surface less often in North Korea's home-grown imagery.

One of the most impactful sequences came from Kremlin pool video, filmed just before Putin's arrival in Pyongyang. It showed Kim on the tarmac with his hands behind his back, silhouetted against the airport gate and a scarlet welcome sign behind him, pacing and awaiting his counterpart's presence. It was easy to imagine that Kim Jong Un was, for a moment, not the packaged leader of an authoritarian government but a weary man waiting for a plane after dark.

Perhaps most noteworthy was the sense that all this was coming at the world in almost real time — mostly through Russian pool imagery. The North Korean government's own images usually present its leader and nation as stilted, rigid and slightly out of sync — and photos usually emerge well after an event takes place.

Also at play: Imagery from the North's main propaganda organ, the Korean Central News Agency, has occasionally been digitally manipulated before being transmitted; stringent vetting is required before it can be used.

Part of what made this week's images so compelling was the occasional appearance of spontaneity. The overwhelming share of imagery out of North Korea feels staged — because so much of it is. Awkward and deferential people typically surround Kim, as they did his father and grandfather. And often Kim appears awkward himself.

But in these frames and footage, amid the fast-moving nature of the week's events, that set-piece feel sometimes seemed absent. And it made North Korea appear more like other places, rather than reinforcing the "hermit kingdom" image.

Photos and video can distance us. They can draw us nearer. They can humanize. They can show, to the many, places that only the few see. And sometimes, collectively, they can offer some small epiphanies about a place, its people, even its leader.

To look at this week's photos and video from Pyongyang is to know just a bit more about what makes North Korea tick — even if that wasn't the primary intent of the propagandists who created them.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. fails to qualify for CNN's debate. It'll be a showdown between Biden and Trump

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has failed to qualify for next week's debate in Atlanta, according to host network CNN, falling shy of benchmarks both for state ballot qualification and necessary polling.

The missed markers mean that the June 27 showdown will be solely between Democratic President Joe Biden and presumptive Republican nominee Donald Trump. That denies Kennedy a singular opportunity to stand alongside the leading candidates in an attempt to lend legitimacy to his longshot bid and convince potential supporters that he has a shot at winning.

In a statement Thursday, Kennedy called his exclusion from the debate "undemocratic, un-American, and cowardly."

Both the Biden and Trump campaigns fear that Kennedy could play spoiler in what's anticipated to be a close general election.

According to the criteria set out by CNN, candidates would be invited to participate in the debate if they had secured a place on the ballot in states totaling at least 270 votes in the Electoral College, the minimum needed to win the presidency.

Biden and Trump have easily cleared the polling threshold but won't be certified for the ballot until their parties formally nominate them later this summer. Both have secured enough delegates to lock in their nominations.

Kennedy's campaign says he has satisfied the requirements to appear on the ballot in 22 states, with a combined 310 electoral votes, though not all have affirmed his name will be listed. California, the largest prize on the electoral map with 54 votes, will not certify any candidates until Aug. 29.

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Candidates were also required to reach a polling threshold of 15% in four reliable national polls by June 20, another metric CNN said Kennedy failed to meet. According to the network, Kennedy has received at least 15% in three qualifying polls so far and is currently on the ballot in six states, making him currently eligible for 89 Electoral College votes.

Last month, Kennedy filed an election complaint alleging CNN is colluding with Biden and Trump to exclude him from the June 27 debate, alleging that the participation requirements were designed to ensure only Biden and Trump would qualify and claiming that he is being held to a higher standard.

CNN has said the complaint is without merit. Kennedy's campaign did not immediately respond to a message Thursday seeking comment on CNN's announcement and asking if he planned to take any further action about his exclusion.

Last month, Biden and Trump agreed to the CNN debate and a second on Sept. 10 hosted by ABC, bypassing the nonpartisan commission that has organized debates for nearly four decades.

After winning a coin toss, Biden's campaign chose the right podium position, meaning that he will be on the right side of viewers' screens, with Trump on the left, according to CNN. Trump's campaign then opted to deliver his closing statement after Biden.

Both campaigns have agreed to appear at podiums, and microphones will be muted except for the candidate whose turn it is to speak.

The Supreme Court upholds a tax on foreign income over a challenge backed by business interests

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld a tax on foreign income over a challenge backed by business and anti-regulatory interests, declining their invitation to weigh in on a broader, never-enacted tax on wealth.

The justices, by a 7-2 vote, left in place a provision of a 2017 tax law that is expected to generate \$340 billion, mainly from the foreign subsidiaries of domestic corporations that parked money abroad to shield it from U.S. taxes.

The law, passed by a Republican Congress and signed by then-President Donald Trump, includes a provision that applies to companies that are owned by Americans but do their business in foreign countries. It imposes a one-time tax on investors' shares of profits that have not been passed along to them, to offset other tax benefits.

But the larger significance of the ruling is what it didn't do. The case attracted outside attention because some groups allied with the Washington couple who brought the case argued that the challenged provision is similar to a wealth tax, which would apply not to the incomes of the very richest Americans but to their assets, like stock holdings. Such assets now get taxed only when they are sold.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh wrote in his majority opinion that "nothing in this opinion should be read to authorize any hypothetical congressional effort to tax both an entity and its shareholders or partners on the same undistributed income realized by the entity."

Underscoring the limited nature of the court's ruling, Kavanaugh said as he read a summary of his opinion in the courtroom, "the precise and very narrow question" of the 2017 law "is the only question we answer."

The court ruled in the case of Charles and Kathleen Moore, of Redmond, Washington. They challenged a \$15,000 tax bill based on Charles Moore's investment in an Indian company, arguing that the tax violates the 16th Amendment. Ratified in 1913, the amendment allows the federal government to impose an income tax on Americans. Moore said in a sworn statement that he never received any money from the company, KisanKraft Machine Tools Private Ltd.

But Kavanaugh said the tax the Moores disputed was akin to other taxes, including those on foreign-earned income and partnerships. A ruling for the Moores could have called into question those other provisions of the tax code and threatened losses to the U.S. Treasury of several trillion dollars, Kavanaugh noted, echoing the argument made by the Biden administration.

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Justice Clarence Thomas, joined by Justice Neil Gorsuch, wrote in dissent that the Moores paid taxes on an investment "that never yielded them a penny." Under the 16th Amendment, Thomas wrote, the only income that can be taxed is "income realized by the taxpayer."

Lawyers for the Moores said they were disappointed by the ruling, but took some hope from its narrowness. "What this means is that the constitutionality of other species of future taxes — such as a national wealth tax — remains entirely unaddressed by the court's opinion," said Dan Greenberg, general counsel of the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

Greenberg pointed to a separate opinion from Justice Amy Coney Barrett, joined by Justice Samuel Alito, that agreed the Moores should lose this case. But Barrett also sided with the dissenters in arguing that income has to be realized — in essence, received — to be taxed in accord with the Constitution.

Kavanaugh's opinion left the issue of realization open and there are now four justices, one shy of a majority, who have declared their opposition to taxes, like a wealth tax, that don't require realization.

Leslie Samuels, a tax expert who served in the Treasury Department during the Clinton administration, said the court's decision was unsettling because it seemed to encourage more legal challenges to taxes and warn Congress that its ability to impose new taxes may be restricted.

"While the government won, the Moores' backers effectively achieved some important and disquieting successes for the future," Samuels said.

The case also had kicked up ethical concerns and raised questions about the story the Moores' lawyers told in court filings. Alito rejected calls from Senate Democrats to step away from the case because of his ties to David Rivkin, a lawyer who is representing the Moores.

Public documents show that Charles Moore's involvement with the company, including serving as a director for five years, is far more extensive than court filings indicate.

The case is *Moore v. U.S.*, 22-800.

After Drake battle, Kendrick Lamar turns victory lap concert into LA unity celebration

By RYAN PEARSON AP Entertainment Writer

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) — Not content with merely taking a victory lap after winning his battle against fellow rap superstar Drake, Kendrick Lamar turned his Juneteenth "Pop Out" concert at the Forum into a cathartic livestreamed celebration of Los Angeles unity.

Lamar curated a three-hour concert featuring a mix of up-and-coming LA rappers and stars including Tyler, The Creator, Steve Lacy and YG. When it was his turn to take the stage, the 37-year-old rapper powered through a set with Black Hippy collaborators Schoolboy Q, Ab-Soul and Jay Rock, performed his Drake diss songs "Euphoria" and "6:16 in LA," then was joined on-stage by Dr. Dre.

The two West Coast titans performed "Still D.R.E." and "California Love" and Dre called Lamar "one of the greatest that ever did it" before quieting the roaring crowd by requesting a moment of silence. It was a misdirect. He then delivered the "Sixth Sense" quote that opens Lamar's chart-topping "Not Like Us": "I see dead people."

A crowd of 17,000 that included The Weeknd, LeBron James, Ayo Edebiri and Rick Ross rapped along to every word of the biting-but-jubilant DJ Mustard production, which Lamar restarted twice after the first verse and performed four times in full.

Shuffling, frolicking, dancing and spinning around him as Lamar strode the stage in a red hoodie: NBA stars Russell Westbrook and DeMar DeRozan, Mustard, rapper Roddy Ricch and even a teenage dance troupe led by the krumping innovator Tommy the Clown.

Lamar reveled in the moment: "Y'all ain't gon' let nobody disrespect the West Coast. Y'all ain't gon' let nobody imitate our legends, huh," he said, referring to Drake's use of an AI tool to mimic 2Pac's voice on one of his diss records. He also added a line to "Euphoria" referencing Drake's purchase of 2Pac's jewelry: "Give me 2Pac ring back and I might give you a little respect."

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But the Compton native had more on his mind, calling out to specific men and women to join him on-stage for a group photo.

"Let the world see this," he said. "You ain't seen this many sections on one stage keeping it together and having peace. ... For all of us to be on this stage together, unity, from East side ... LA, Crips, Bloods, Piru — this ... is special, man. We put this ... together just for ya'll.

"This ... ain't got nothing to do with no song at this point, ain't got nothing to do with no back and forth records, it's got everything to do with this moment right here. That's what this ... was about, to bring all of us together."

After the final song, Lamar exited, saying "I promise you this won't be the last of us." The stabbing horns of the "Not Like Us" instrumental kicked in once again and the crowd rapped the lyrics without Lamar as they filed through hallways out to the parking lot. The Twitch and Prime Video livestream concluded.

The feud that energized hip-hop fans over the last few months had long been a sort of cold war, with coded, subtle and deniable insults woven into some of the two rappers' biggest hits over the past decade, from "Energy" to "All The Stars," "Gyalchester" to "HUMBLE." It began after Lamar's attention-grabbing verse on Big Sean's 2013 "Control," in which he laid out his ambition to beat out Drake and other top rappers. The Canadian actor-turned-rapper, who as the bigger star had hand-picked Lamar to join his second headlining tour a year earlier, felt personally insulted.

The two then took widely divergent paths as their careers flourished on parallel paths. Drake shares images of his wealth and jokey memes online, collaborates regularly with up-and-coming artists and integrates bubbling musical trends in hip-hop and the broader pop world to pump out club-ready singles at a consistent pace. Lamar often disappears from the public eye for years at a time to build deeply introspective concept albums featuring few voices other than his own — while maintaining a minimal social media presence.

Drake's taste-making ability mostly kept him on top of the rap world, with an approach that matched the direction of pop music as a whole. But as his hit-making consistency diminished, an opening emerged. Lamar, Future and Metro Boomin kicked off their direct assault on Toronto's king in March with "Like That."

Lamar made his disdain clear: He sees Drake as a talented outsider who enjoys and profits from hip-hop culture but didn't grow up in it, code-switching his way into the mainstream without a core identity or authenticity. His nail-in-the-coffin final verse on "Not Like Us" sums up his view: "You run to Atlanta when you need a few dollars / No, you not a colleague, you a ... colonizer."

Putin signs deals with Vietnam in bid to shore up ties in Asia to offset Moscow's growing isolation

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin signed at least a dozen deals with his Vietnamese counterpart on Thursday and offered to supply fossil fuels, including natural gas, to Vietnam during a state visit that comes as Moscow is seeking to bolster ties in Asia to offset its growing international isolation over its war in Ukraine.

Putin and President To Lam agreed to further cooperate in education, science and technology, oil and gas exploration and clean energy. The two countries also agreed to work on a roadmap for a nuclear science and technology center in Vietnam.

Of the 12 publicly announced agreements, none overtly pertained to defense but Lam said there were other deals that were not made public.

Putin said the two countries share an interest in "developing a reliable security architecture" in the Asia-Pacific region with no room for "closed military-political blocs." Lam added that both Russia and Vietnam wanted to "further cooperate in defense and security to cope with non-traditional security challenges."

The agreements between Russia and Vietnam were not as substantial as the pact Putin signed with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un Wednesday, which pledged mutual aid in the event of invasion, said

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Nigel Gould-Davies, a senior fellow for Russia and Eurasia with the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, and a former British ambassador to Belarus.

Putin's recent visits to China and now North Korea and Vietnam are attempts to "break the international isolation," said Nguyen Khac Giang, an analyst at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Giang said Russia is important to Vietnam for two reasons: It is the biggest supplier of military equipment to the Southeast Asian nation, and Russian oil exploration technologies help maintain Vietnam's sovereignty claims in the contested South China Sea.

Vietnam also has licensed Russian state-controlled oil company Zarubezhneft to develop an offshore block of its southeastern coast.

On the South China Sea, Lam said that both sides would "support and ensure security, safety, freedom of navigation and aviation" and the resolution of disputes peacefully and in accordance to international law without the use of force, according to official Vietnamese media.

Putin arrived in Hanoi on Thursday morning from North Korea after signing the strategic pact, which comes as both countries face escalating standoffs with the West and could mark their strongest connection since the end of the Cold War.

In Hanoi, Putin also met Vietnam's most powerful politician, Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, according to the official Vietnam News Agency.

Putin drove to Vietnam's Presidential Palace on Thursday afternoon, where he was greeted by school children waving Russian and Vietnamese flags.

Much has changed since Putin's last visit to Vietnam in 2017. Russia now faces a raft of U.S.-led sanctions for its invasion of Ukraine. In 2023, the International Criminal Court in Hague issued an arrest warrant for Putin for alleged war crimes, making it difficult for the Russian leader to travel internationally. The Kremlin rejected the warrant as "null and void," stressing that Moscow doesn't recognize the court's jurisdiction.

Putin's trip resulted in a sharp rebuke from the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam, which said that "no country should give Putin a platform to promote his war of aggression and otherwise allow him to normalize his atrocities." If Putin is allowed to travel freely it "could normalize Russia's blatant violations of international law," it said in a statement.

The U.S. and its allies have expressed growing concerns over a possible arms arrangement in which North Korea provides Russia with badly needed munitions for use in Ukraine in exchange for Russian economic assistance and technology transfers that could enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear weapons and missile programs.

Both countries deny accusations of weapons transfers, which would violate multiple U.N. Security Council sanctions that Russia previously endorsed.

It is unlikely that Vietnam would supply significant quantities of weapons to Russia and risk the progress that it has made with NATO members on military equipment, particularly the U.S., said Ridzwan Rahmat, a Singapore-based analyst with the defense intelligence company Janes.

"I would imagine Vietnam wouldn't want to take a risk, inviting the wrath of Western countries by supplying the Russians," Rahmat said.

Hanoi and Moscow have had diplomatic relations since 1950, and this year marks 30 years of a treaty establishing "friendly relations" between Vietnam and Russia. Prashanth Parameswaran, a fellow with the Wilson Center's Asia Program, said Vietnam is "reinforcing" that relationship even while it diversifies with newer partners.

Evidence of the long relationship and its influence can be seen in Vietnamese cities like the capital, where many Soviet-style apartment blocks are now dwarfed by skyscrapers. A statue of Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Union, stands in a park where kids skateboard every evening. Many in the Communist Party's top leadership in Vietnam studied in Soviet universities, including party chief Trong.

In an article written for Nhan Dan, the official newspaper of Vietnam's Communist Party, Putin thanked "Vietnamese friends for their balanced position on the Ukrainian crisis" and hailed the country as a "strong supporter of a fair world order" based on international law, equality and geopolitical non-interference.

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Vietnam's pragmatic policy of "bamboo diplomacy" — a phrase coined by Trong referring to the plant's flexibility, bending but not breaking in the shifting headwinds of global geopolitics — is being increasingly tested.

A manufacturing powerhouse and an increasingly important player in global supply chains, Vietnam hosted both U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping in 2023.

Putin's visit is important for Hanoi on a diplomatic level, said Gould-Davies, the former ambassador. "Perhaps for Vietnam it's a matter of just showing that it's able to maintain this very agile balance of its bamboo diplomacy," he said. "Already in the course of a year they've hosted visits by the heads of state of the three most powerful countries in the world, which is pretty impressive."

For Russia, the visit seems to have been more about optics than anything else, he said, as Moscow seeks to engage and influence other countries, particularly in the so-called Global South.

"Since the war began, Putin has not been able to travel much or very far, and he's made very few trips beyond the countries of the former Soviet space," he said.

Vietnam has remained neutral on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But neutrality is getting trickier, Vietnam needs support from the U.S. to advance its economic ambitions and diversify its defense ties, Parameswaran said. "It has to carefully calibrate what it does with Russia in an environment of rising tensions between Washington and Moscow."

Bilateral trade between Russia and Vietnam totaled \$3.6 billion in 2023, compared to \$171 billion with China and \$111 billion with America.

Since the early 2000s, Russia has accounted for around 80% of Vietnam's arms imports. This has been declining over the years due to Vietnamese attempts to diversify its supplies. But to entirely wean itself off Russia will take time, Giang said.

Given Putin's international isolation, Vietnam is doing the Russian leader a "huge favor and may expect favors in return," Andrew Goledzinowski, the Australian ambassador to Vietnam, wrote on social media platform X.

"Vietnam will always act in Vietnam's interests and not anyone else's," he wrote.

So long plastic air pillows: Amazon shifting to recycled paper filling for packages in North America

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

Amazon is shifting from the plastic air pillows used for packaging in North America to recycled paper because it's more environmentally sound, and it says paper just works better.

The company said Thursday that it's already replaced 95% of the plastic air pillows with paper filler in North America and is working toward complete removal by year's end.

"We want to ensure that customers receive their items undamaged, while using as little packaging as possible to avoid waste, and prioritizing recyclable materials," Amazon said.

It is the company's largest plastic packaging reduction effort in North America to date and will remove almost 15 billion plastic air pillows from use annually.

Almost all customer deliveries for Prime Day this year, which happens next month, will contain plastic no air pillows, according to Amazon.

The e-commerce giant has faced years of criticism about its use of plastic from environmental groups, including a nonprofit called Oceana, which has been releasing its own reports on Amazon's use of plastic packaging.

Matt Littlejohn, senior vice president of strategic initiatives at Oceana, said that Amazon's efforts to reduce plastic packaging is welcome news, but that there's still more that the company can do.

"While this is a significant step forward for the company, Amazon needs to build on this momentum and fulfill its multiyear commitment to transition its North America fulfillment centers away from plastic," Littlejohn said in a prepared statement. "Then, the company should expand these efforts and also push

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innovations like reusable packaging to move away from single-use packaging everywhere it sells and ships.”

There has also been broad support among Amazon investors who have urged the company to outline how will will reduce waste.

The company disclosed the total of single-use plastic across global operations for the first time in 2022 after investors sought more details on plans to reduce waste. The company said that it used 85,916 metric tons of single-use plastic that year, an 11.6% decrease from 2021.

Amazon began transition away from plastic air pillows in October at an automated fulfillment center in Ohio. The company said that it was able to test and learn at the center there, which helped it move quickly on transitioning to recycled paper filling.

The transition process included changing out machinery and training employees on new systems and machines.

Amazon discovered through testing that the paper filler, which is made from 100% recyclable content and is curbside recyclable, offers the same, if not better protection during shipping compared with plastic air pillows, the company said.

Christian Garcia, who works at Amazon’s fulfillment center in Bakersfield, California, said in a release that the paper filler is easier to work with and that the machinery gives staff more space so that it’s easier to pack orders.

Ongoing efforts to reduce waste include a campaign to ship items without any additional packaging, the company said. In 2022, 11% of all of Amazon’s packages shipped worldwide were without added delivery packaging.

Other efforts include piloting new technology with artificial intelligence and robotics company Glacier to use AI-powered robots to automate the sorting of recyclables and collect real-time data on recycling streams for companies. It’s also partnering with the U.S. Department of Energy on new materials and recycling programs.

Russia obliterates Ukraine’s front-line towns faster with hacked bombs and expanded air base network

By LORI HINNANT, VASILISA STEPANENKO and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KHARKIV, Ukraine (AP) — The first shock wave shattered aisles stacked almost to the ceiling with home improvement products. The next Russian bomb streaked down like a comet seconds later, unleashing flames that left the megastore an ashen shell.

A third bomb failed to detonate when it landed behind the Epicenter shopping complex in Kharkiv. Investigators hope it will help them trace the supply chain for the latest generation of retrofitted Russian “glide bombs” that are laying waste to eastern Ukraine. The Soviet-era bombs are adapted on the cheap with imported electronics that allow distant Russian warplanes to launch them at Ukraine.

Other cities that have been devastated by the weapons include Avdiivka, Chasiv Yar and Vovchansk, and Russia has nearly unlimited supplies of the bombs, which are dispatched from airfields just across the border that Ukraine has not been able to hit.

Store manager Oleksandr Lutsenko said the May 25 attack hints at Russia’s aim for Kharkiv: “Their goal is to turn it into a ghost city, to make it so that no one will stay, that there will be nothing to defend, that it will make no sense to defend the city. They want to scare people, but they will not succeed.”

Russia has accelerated its destruction of Ukraine’s front-line cities in 2024 to a scale previously unseen in the war using the glide bombs and an expanding network of airstrips, according to an Associated Press analysis of drone footage, satellite imagery, Ukrainian documents and Russian photos.

The results can be seen in the intensity of recent Russian attacks. It took a year for Russia to obliterate Bakhmut, where the bombs were first used. That was followed by destruction in Avdiivka that took months. Then, only weeks were needed to do the same in Vovchansk and Chasiv Yar, according to images analyzed by AP that showed the smoldering ruins of both cities.

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Now, Russia is putting the finishing touches on yet another airstrip less than 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Ukraine and launching the bombs routinely from multiple bases just inside Russian borders, according to the AP analysis of satellite pictures and photos from a Russian aviation Telegram channel.

The bombing of the Epicenter in Kharkiv killed 19 people, including two children. In all, glide bombs have hit the city more than 50 times this year, according to Spartak Borysenko of the Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office.

He showed investigation documents to AP that identified at least eight Russian air bases used to launch the attacks, all within 100 kilometers (60 miles) of Ukraine. He said at least one of the munitions had foreign electronics and was made in May. That date suggests Russia is using the bombs rapidly and that it has successfully circumvented sanctions for dual-use items.

Photos on Russian Telegram channels linked to the military show glide bombs being launched three and four at a time. In one launch of four bombs, the AP traced the aircraft's location to just outside the Russian city of Belgorod, near the air base now under construction. All four bombs in the photo were headed west — with Vovchansk and Kharkiv in their direct line of fire.

At the end of May, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia was launching more than 3,000 of the bombs every month, with 3,200 used in May alone.

Oleh Katkov, whose military-oriented site Defense Express first traced the launch location, said hitting air bases is key to slowing the pace of the bombings by forcing Russian planes to launch farther away.

"This doesn't mean they will completely stop their bombings, but it will become more difficult for them," Katkov said. "They will be able to make fewer sorties per day."

For months, Ukrainian officials complained bitterly about restrictions on using Western-supplied weapons against targets in Russia, including the airfields that house Russian bombers. The United States and Germany recently authorized some targets in Russia, but many others remain off-limits.

The newest airfield, just outside Belgorod, has a 2,000-meter (-yard) runway, the AP analysis found. Construction began late summer 2023, during the failed Ukrainian counteroffensive.

A Ukrainian intelligence official, who provided information to AP on condition of anonymity, said his government had been closely following the construction, which did not yet appear complete in a photo taken mid-June.

The official also noted that Belarus provides sanctuary for Russian bombers. A map created by the Ukrainian battlefield analysis site DeepState showed 10 airfields in Belarus, including five just across the border from Ukraine.

In all, the DeepState map shows 51 bases used by Russia within 600 kilometers (370 miles) of Ukrainian-controlled territory, including three in occupied eastern Ukraine, six in the illegally annexed peninsula of Crimea, and 32 in Russia.

"The greatest strategic advantage Russia has over Ukraine is its advantage in the sky," Zelenskyy said last week. "This is missile and bomb terror that helps Russian troops advance on the ground."

Russia launches up to 100 guided bombs daily, Zelenskyy said. Besides missiles and drones, which Russia already routinely uses for attacks, the bombs cause "an insanely destructive pressure."

The base material for the glide bombs comes from hundreds of thousands of Soviet-era unguided bombs, which are then retrofitted with retractable fins and guidance systems to carry 500 to 3,000 kilograms (1,100 to 6,600 pounds) of explosives. The upgrade costs around \$20,000 per bomb, according to the Center for European Policy Analysis, and the bombs can be launched up to 65 kilometers (40 miles) from their targets — outside the range of Ukraine's regular air defense systems.

The bombs are similar in concept to the American Joint Direct Attack Munition, or JDAM, missiles, which have had their GPS systems successfully jammed by Russian forces in Ukraine.

Because Russia does not have the strength to occupy eastern cities such as Kharkiv, bombing is their preferred option, said Nico Lange, an analyst with the Center for European Policy Analysis.

"From their point of view, the strategy seems to be to terrorize the cities enough that people will leave," Lange said.

Back at the Epicenter home improvement store, surveillance footage taken just before the explosion showed salesperson Nina Korsunova walking across the floor toward the aisle that she was staffing that day. Then there was a blinding flash, and the camera cut out.

Korsunova curled into the fetal position as a display crashed on top of her. She uncovered her eyes just in time to see the second bomb streak inside. With her eardrums blown out, she could hear nothing and saw not a single sign of life.

"I thought I was alone and that they had abandoned me there. It gave me the strength to climb out," she said. She crawled over piles of shattered lamps, and cables snarled her legs as she climbed through debris from the electrical supply aisle.

Two weeks later, the skeleton of the building reeked of a disorienting combination of scorched metal and laundry detergent that spilled from melted jugs in the cleaning products aisle.

Neither Korsunova nor the store manager have any plans to leave their hometown.

"It didn't break me," she said. "I will remain in Kharkiv. This is my home."

The fate of the latest cease-fire proposal hinges on Netanyahu and Hamas' leader in Gaza

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The fate of the proposed cease-fire deal for Gaza hinges in many ways on two men: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas' leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar.

Each leader faces significant political and personal pressures that may be influencing their decision-making. And neither seems to be in a rush to make concessions to end the devastating eight-month-long war and free hostages taken by Hamas in its Oct. 7 attack.

Hamas has accepted the broad outline of the plan but requested "amendments." Netanyahu has publicly disputed aspects of it, even though the U.S. has framed it as an Israeli plan.

Among the major sticking points is how to move from an initial temporary truce in the deal's first phase to a permanent cease-fire that includes an end to the fighting and full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza. Here is a look at what may be driving the two leaders:

Netanyahu is 'buying time' Throughout the war, the long-serving Israeli leader has been criticized for letting political considerations get in the way of his decision-making.

His government is buoyed by two ultranationalist parties that oppose cease-fire deals. Instead, they prefer continuous military pressure to try to defeat Hamas and free the hostages. They also talk about "encouraging" Palestinians to leave and reestablishing Israeli settlements, which were dismantled when Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005 after a 38-year occupation.

Netanyahu himself has taken a tough line on the cease-fire, saying he will not end the war until Hamas' military and governing capabilities are destroyed.

But with his hard-line partners pledging to topple the government if a cease-fire is struck, Netanyahu has been pushed even farther into the corner. His reliance on them to remain in power recently intensified after a centrist member of his war Cabinet, former military chief Benny Gantz, quit over frustrations with Netanyahu's handling of the conflict.

Netanyahu has had to balance internal pressures against demands from the Biden administration, which is promoting the latest cease-fire proposal, and from families of hostages who believe only a deal can set their loved ones free. Tens of thousands of Israelis have joined mass protests in support of the hostage families.

Netanyahu appears to be siding with his far-right governing partners for the moment, knowing they hold the key to his immediate political survival, although he says he has the country's best interests in mind.

Their departure from the government could lead to new elections, which would open him up to a vote that could end his rule and likely the start of investigations into the failures of Oct. 7.

Netanyahu is also on trial for corruption, proceedings that have continued throughout the war yet have

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faded from the public consciousness. A cease-fire deal could refocus attention on the charges, which have dogged the Israeli leader for years and which he adamantly denies.

Netanyahu's political fortunes appear to have improved over the course of the war. His public support plummeted in the aftermath of Hamas' surprise attack on southern Israel. But over time it has gradually ticked up. While he would still face a tough path toward reelection, he isn't a write-off.

"He runs the war as he wants, which means very slowly. He's buying time," said Gideon Rahat, a senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank, and chairman of the political science department at Jerusalem's Hebrew University.

Rahat said Netanyahu is also keen to push on with the war in the hopes that former U.S. President Donald Trump returns to office, possibly giving Israel more leeway in its fight against Hamas.

"I don't see any cease-fire that really comes close to being something he adopts," Rahat said. "But he's not the only one that controls reality."

Sinwar's mission is to survive Hamas' leader in Gaza also appears to be in no rush to sign on to a deal.

The militant group's exiled leadership is somewhat varied in its opinion on how to approach a cease-fire agreement. But Sinwar — the mastermind of the Oct. 7 attacks — has particular weight on the matter.

As a Hamas stalwart who spent decades in Israeli prisons, he has incentives to keep the war going.

On a personal level, his life may be on the line. Israel vowed to kill him in response to the October assault, and Sinwar is believed to be hiding deep within Gaza's underground tunnels surrounded by Israeli hostages.

If a cease-fire takes hold, Sinwar will be taking a great risk stepping out in public.

"I think he understands that he's kind of a dead man walking. But it's a matter of how long can he hold out?" said Khaled el-Gindy, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Middle East Institute think tank.

But Sinwar is motivated by more than just his own personal fate. Steeped in Hamas' radical ideology, Sinwar seeks Israel's destruction and has made political gains by watching the war harm Israel's international standing and boost support for the Palestinian cause.

Israel has faced surging international criticism — from its Western allies, from the international justice system, from protesters around the world — over its conduct during the war. That has deepened Israel's global isolation, brought accusations that it is committing genocide against Palestinians and driven the prosecutor at the International Criminal Court to seek the arrests of Israeli leaders.

Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council think tank, wrote on the social platform X that Sinwar was also "counting on the sustained global outcry due to the horrendous killing of Gazans to force Israel to stop the war eventually," on his own terms.

But Sinwar could face some difficult questions of his own when the war ends — not only over his personal role in the atrocities of Oct. 7 but also from the Palestinian public as the full extent of the wartime devastation and the years-long process of reconstruction sink in.

El-Gindy said Sinwar wasn't deterred by the high price Palestinian civilians in Gaza are paying in the war, seeing it as an unavoidable sacrifice on the road toward liberation.

From Sinwar's perspective, continuing to fight Israel's powerful army, even if only through pockets of resistance, denies Israel a victory, el-Gindy said.

"Their whole mission is to survive," he said. "If they survive, they win."

Treason trial of Russian American woman opens as tensions rise between Washington and Moscow

MOSCOW (AP) — The trial of a Russian American dual citizen whom Russia accuses of treason opened on Thursday as tensions rise between Washington and Moscow, including over the arrests of two American journalists.

The trial is being held behind closed doors in Yekaterinburg, in the same court that next week is to begin hearing the case of Evan Gershkovich, a Wall Street Journal reporter who was arrested in March 2023 and charged with espionage.

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The defendant was identified by Russian authorities as Los Angeles resident Ksenia Karelina, although U.S. media reports frequently use the surname Khavana, the name of her ex-husband.

Karelina was born in Yekaterinburg and was arrested in February while visiting her family.

Russia's main domestic security agency, the Federal Security Service, charges that Karelina raised money for a Ukrainian organization that was providing weapons, ammunition and other supplies to the Ukrainian military. Her boyfriend has said she made a single donation of about \$50 to a Ukrainian organization, according to media reports.

Karelina faces a sentence of up to 20 years in prison if convicted. Almost all Russian criminal cases that make it to court end in convictions. The trial was adjourned in the afternoon and the next session was set for Aug. 7, Russian news agencies said.

Gershkovich, the highest-profile American behind bars in Russia, is accused of gathering secret information from a tank factory in Nizhny Tagil, about 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of Yekaterinburg. His employers deny the allegation, and the U.S. State Department has declared him to be wrongfully detained.

Gershkovich's trial, also closed, is to begin next Wednesday.

A journalist for U.S.-funded Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe with U.S. and Russian dual citizenship has been held since October on charges of gathering military information and failing to register as a foreign agent.

Since sending troops into Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has sharply cracked down on dissent and has passed laws that criminalize criticism of the operation in Ukraine and remarks considered to discredit the Russian military. Concern has risen since then that Russia could be targeting U.S. nationals for arrest.

Illegally brewed liquor kills at least 34 with dozens hospitalized in southern India

NEW DELHI (AP) — At least 34 people have died and dozens hospitalized after drinking illegally brewed liquor in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, local media reported on Thursday.

The state's chief minister M K Stalin said the 34 died after consuming liquor that was tainted with methanol, according to the Press Trust of India news agency.

The incident occurred in the state's Kallakurichi district, where more than 100 people are being treated in various hospitals, top district official M S Prasanth said. He added that the number of those who are in critical condition keeps changing, suggesting that the death toll could rise.

Ambulances, doctors and specialists from nearby areas were deployed to the district.

Government officials earlier said several people who were vomiting and had stomach pain were admitted to hospitals Wednesday, triggering a police investigation.

Later that day, Stalin, the chief minister, said in a post on social media platform X that those involved in the crime have been arrested, and action has also been taken against officials who failed to prevent it. "Such crimes that ruin the society will be suppressed with an iron fist," he added.

Deaths from illegally brewed alcohol are common in India, where the poor cannot afford licensed brands from government-run shops. The illicit liquor, which is often spiked with chemicals such as pesticides to increase potency, has also become a hugely profitable industry as bootleggers pay no taxes and sell enormous quantities of their product to the poor at a cheap rate.

In 2022, more than 30 people died in eastern India's Bihar state after allegedly drinking tainted liquor sold without authorization. Earlier that same year, at least 28 died from drinking altered liquor in Gujarat state. And in 2020, at least 120 people died after drinking tainted liquor in India's northern Punjab state.

Can a marriage survive a gender transition?

Yes, and even thrive. How these couples make it work

By JEFF McMILLAN Associated Press

Marissa Lasoff-Santos and the person she would marry quickly fell head over heels in love. Lasoff-Santos was a gay woman. Her girlfriend was a bisexual woman — or so they thought. Now her partner has become her husband, and they both identify as queer. And things are better than ever.

"We've always just had this deep connection, so that's why, like, I never stopped loving him throughout any of this," says Lasoff-Santos, a 33-year-old librarian in Michigan. "I've become more attracted to him. I guess part of it is just, like, that confidence in him and, like, he just seems so happy."

Lasoff-Santos' relationship and others like it show that a partner's gender transition does not necessarily mean a death sentence for a marriage. Data is scant, but couples and therapists say that in many cases, a relationship grows and flourishes under the light of new honesty.

Such marriages, when they do prevail, can underscore the resilience of love, the flexibility of sexual identity and the diversity in LGBTQ+ relationships 20 years after the first same-sex marriages in the U.S. and with Pride Month in its sixth decade.

"Even though he was the one transitioning, I felt like I was going through my own transition," Lasoff-Santos says. "It was definitely hard to not, I guess, come across as kind of selfish, because I was going through all these emotions, and he was going through his own journey."

Kristie Overstreet, a sexologist and psychotherapist who says she has worked with trans people for 18 years, says about 2 in 5 relationships survive a transition. And Kelly Wise, a sex therapist in Pennsylvania, estimates that about half of relationships in his practice that experience a gender transition end — for many reasons.

"Gender identity milestones often arise around times that many things are evolving within people and their relationships," Wise says in an email.

A recent U.S. Census Bureau report on same-sex households doesn't reflect marriages in transition because the bureau doesn't ask questions about gender identity.

Avril Clark operates Distinction Support, an online network that helps supportive partners of trans and nonbinary people. Her spouse, a soccer referee at the time, came out as transgender in 2018, changed her name to Lucy and brought the couple much attention. Before then, Avril says, they had kept their arrangement private and "lived a double life" for 15 years.

"I needed somebody to talk to that knew how I was feeling," Avril says. "And I looked around, and there weren't any groups that were for me. They were full of people that were very angry and bitter and didn't want anybody else's relationship to work because their relationship hadn't worked."

Lucy Clark says Avril had been pressing her to come out for years, "but I didn't because I thought it would affect football. And I loved football and had it in my mind that I would give it up." She didn't, and she now manages Sutton United Women in south London.

Avril Clark says that when she took over Distinction in 2017, it had about 50 members worldwide, but now there are "way over 500."

"I've got this group with all these people on it, all fighting, some of them fighting to make their relationship work," she says.

The Reddit group r/mypartneristrans, which describes itself as "a supportive, educational, and safe space for the partners of trans and gender-diverse people," counts 61,000 members.

Topics include questions about how to handle Mother's Day and Father's Day; unwelcoming relatives; sex and pregnancy; and how to categorize a cisgender partner's sexual orientation. In other words, now that I'm a woman married to a woman, does that make me a lesbian?

Clark says some people call themselves "heteroflexible."

"It doesn't mean 'I am a lesbian' or 'I'm a gay person,'" she says. "It just means, 'For this one person I am prepared to be flexible.'"

She estimates her group is 90% cisgender women and 5% transgender or nonbinary people who may

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also have a partner in transition. The remaining 5% are cisgender husbands, she says.

For people already in a same-sex relationship, a partner's gender transition can bring angst but also self-discovery.

Lasoff-Santos says she had previously wondered if she could ever be married to a man. "And I always said no. And I think it's hilarious just now that I am."

Couples in transition find different ways to address life from "before" — trips, memories, weddings, anniversaries, family events, photos.

"The partner that isn't transitioning may want to display and still share all of these versus their partner who may not want these visible or talked about," Overstreet says in an email.

Lasoff-Santos and her husband married in 2018 as he was beginning his transition. They had a son in 2021. When her husband shows their son pictures of himself pre-transition, it's just "Papa with long hair," Lasoff-Santos says.

One partner may sense a shift the other does not. Emily Wilkinson, 33, who lives near Seattle, says she doesn't doubt "that I love Cameron and will continue to love Cameron." But her vision of their love has changed since her spouse began transitioning last year.

For Cameron, 39, "Our love doesn't feel any different to me, but I'm not the one who has to adjust in our relationship." They spoke on the condition that their last name not be used to avoid potential consequences at work, where they are not out.

There can be joy in coaching a partner in their new identity.

Rhiannon Rippke-Koch, 45, lives in a small city in Iowa with Sophia Koch, her recently transitioned wife of the same age. She recalls the first time Sophia got to be herself for a whole weekend, during a trip to Des Moines.

"I took her to Victoria's Secret and had them measure her for a bra," Rippke-Koch says. "And I took her to Sephora, and they did, you know, the whole makeup thing where, you know, with color palettes, and showed her how to do her eyeshadow and foundation and all that sort of stuff. So —"

"It was awesome," Sophia finishes, beaming.

The couple also bond over experiences Sophia previously denied herself because of notions about masculinity — musicals, flowers. Rhiannon says they're now "much more intimate, and not even in a sexual way. But we talk about things more. We have more things in common now than we did before."

Today in History: June 21, U.S. Constitution goes into effect

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, June 21, the 173rd day of 2024. There are 193 days left in the year. Summer begins today.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 21, 1788, the United States Constitution went into effect as New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify it.

On this date:

In 1377, King Edward III died after ruling England for 50 years; he was succeeded by his grandson, Richard II.

In 1834, Cyrus Hall McCormick received a patent for his reaping machine.

In 1942, an Imperial Japanese submarine fired shells at Fort Stevens on the Oregon coast, causing little damage.

In 1954, the American Cancer Society presented a study to the American Medical Association meeting in San Francisco which found that men who regularly smoked cigarettes died at a considerably higher rate than non-smokers.

In 1964, civil rights workers Michael H. Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James E. Chaney were slain in Philadelphia, Mississippi; their bodies were found buried in an earthen dam six weeks later. (Forty-one years later on this date in 2005, Edgar Ray Killen, an 80-year-old former Ku Klux Klansman, was found

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guilty of manslaughter; he was sentenced to 60 years in prison, where he died in January 2018.)

In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Miller v. California*, ruled that states may ban materials found to be obscene according to local standards.

In 1977, Menachem Begin (men-AH'-kem BAY'-gihn) of the Likud bloc became Israel's sixth prime minister.

In 1982, a jury in Washington, D.C. found John Hinckley Jr. not guilty by reason of insanity in the shootings of President Ronald Reagan and three other men.

In 1989, a sharply divided Supreme Court ruled that burning the American flag as a form of political protest was protected by the First Amendment.

In 1997, the WNBA made its debut as the New York Liberty defeated the host Los Angeles Sparks 67-57.

In 2010, Faisal Shahzad (FY'-sul shah-ZAHD'), a Pakistan-born U.S. citizen, pleaded guilty to charges of plotting a failed car bombing in New York's Times Square. (Shahzad was later sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2011, the Food and Drug Administration announced that cigarette packs in the U.S. would have to carry macabre images that included rotting teeth and gums, diseased lungs and a sewn-up corpse of a smoker as part of a graphic campaign aimed at discouraging Americans from lighting up.

In 2012, Miami's LeBron James capped his title bid with 26 points, 13 assists and 11 rebounds as he led the Heat in a 121-106 rout of the Oklahoma City Thunder to win the NBA Finals in five games.

In 2013, the Food Network said it was dropping Paula Deen, barely an hour after the celebrity cook posted the first of two videotaped apologies online begging forgiveness from fans and critics troubled by her admission to having used racial slurs in the past.

In 2018, first lady Melania Trump visited with migrant children during a brief stop at a Texas facility housing some children separated from their parents at the border; she caused a stir when she left Washington wearing a green, hooded military jacket with lettering that said, "I REALLY DON'T CARE, DO U?"

In 2021, a tornado packing 140 mph winds swept through communities in heavily populated suburban Chicago, damaging more than 100 homes and causing multiple injuries.

In 2022, a month after the Uvalde, Texas school massacre, the state's public safety chief testified that police had enough officers on the scene to have stopped a gunman three minutes after he entered the building and killed 19 students and two teachers.

In 2023, The U.S. Agriculture Department approved the applications of two companies to sell chicken grown from animal cells, not from slaughtered birds.

Today's Birthdays: Composer Lalo Schifrin is 92. Actor Bernie Kopell is 91. Actor Monte Markham is 89. Songwriter Don Black is 86. Actor Mariette Hartley is 84. Rock singer-musician Ray Davies (The Kinks) is 80. Actor Meredith Baxter is 77. Actor Michael Gross (Baxter's co-star on the sitcom "Family Ties") is 77. Rock musician Joe Molland (Badfinger) is 77. Rock musician Don Airey (Deep Purple) is 76. Rock musician Joey Kramer (Aerosmith) is 74. Rock musician Nils Lofgren is 73. Actor Robyn Douglass is 72. Actor Leigh McCloskey is 69. Cartoonist Berke Breathed is 67. Actor Josh Pais is 66. Country singer Kathy Mattea is 65. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown is 64. Actor Marc Copage (koh-PAJ') is 62. Actor Sammi Davis is 60. Actor Doug Savant is 60. Country musician Porter Howell is 60. Actor Michael Dolan is 59. Writer-director Lana Wachowski is 59. Actor Carrie Preston is 57. Rapper/producer Pete Rock is 54. Country singer Allison Moorer is 52. Actor Juliette Lewis is 51. Actor Maggie Siff is 50. Musician Justin Cary is 49. Rock musician Mike Einziger (Incubus) is 48. Actor Chris Pratt is 45. Rock singer Brandon Flowers is 43. Britain's Prince William is 42. Actor Jussie Smollett is 42. Actor Benjamin Walker is 42. Actor Michael Malarkey is 41. Pop singer Kris Allen (TV: "American Idol") is 39. Pop/rock singer Lana Del Rey is 39. Actor Jascha Washington is 35. Country musician Chandler Baldwin (LANCO) is 32. Pop singer Rebecca Black is 27.