

Groton Daily Independent

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Monday, June 24

Senior Menu: Sloppy Joe on bun, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, fruit, whole wheat bread.
Junior Teeners host Watertown, 5 p.m. (2)
U12 B/W at Sisseton, 5:30 p.m. (2)
U8 R/B hosts Britton, 5:30 p.m. (4)
SB at Mellette (U8 at 6 p.m. (1), U10 Gld at 7 p.m. (2))
The Pantry at Community Center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, Potluck at noon
Blood Drive at the Groton Community Center, 1:15 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

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



Tuesday, June 25

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, au gratin potatoes, vegetable capri blend, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.
Junior Legion hosts Hamlin, 5:30 p.m. (2)
Legion at Webster 5:30 p.m. (2)
U12 W/R at Columbia, 7 p.m., 1 7 inning game.
U10 W/R at Claremont, 5:30 p.m. (2)
U8 R hosts Claremont 5:30 p.m. (2)
U8 B at Columbia 6 p.m. (2)
SB U18 hosts Claremont, 6 p.m. (1)
T-Ball G at Columbia 5 p.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
The Pantry at Community Center, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
Olive Grove Ladies League, 6 p.m.
Olive Grove Bridge, Noon

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1440

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Rivers Swell in Iowa

A number of towns across Iowa's northwest and north-central regions were evacuated over the weekend as torrential rains swelled rivers and caused widespread flooding. Sioux County's Rock Valley, home to around 4,000 people, suffered severe flooding after a levee breach—official measurements showed the river cresting more than a foot above record levels.

Many residents remain cut off from power and water treatment facilities. Gov. Kim Reynolds (R) declared a state of emergency and requested expedited federal aid.

Separately, much of the eastern US endured high temperatures and humidity, with more than 100 million Americans under either a heat warning or heat advisory over the weekend. Thermometers reached the upper 90s along the I-95 corridor from Virginia to the Northeast, with Washington, DC, reaching triple digits. The heat is expected to recede toward the latter half of the week.

Tel Aviv Protests

Tens of thousands of protesters gathered in downtown Tel Aviv over the weekend, calling for the government's resignation and for the return of around 120 hostages still believed to be held by Hamas. Organizers said the crowds were the largest since the beginning of the war.

Despite the demonstrations, recent polling suggests a significant majority of Israelis support the current effort, saying the response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack has either been about right (39%) or hasn't gone far enough (34%).

Separately, at least 65 Palestinians were killed in a series of Israeli strikes in both the northern and southern parts of Gaza. The death toll in Gaza has risen to above 37,400, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry; the number does not distinguish between combatants and civilians.

Meanwhile, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant arrived in the US, where funding for the war has become a political flashpoint ahead of the November elections. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will address Congress in person July 24.

Stuck in Space

NASA officials said Friday the return of Boeing's Starliner spacecraft would be delayed indefinitely as engineers reviewed data from the inbound flight to the International Space Station. The vehicle reportedly suffered a number of small helium leaks and experienced issues with five (of 28) thrusters as it docked with the station in early June.

While the mission was Boeing's first successful crewed launch of the Starliner, the overall effort endured a long series of delays. Among other challenges, the first crewed mission was scrubbed in June 2023 after inspectors found flammable tape used aboard the spacecraft, while the current mission was delayed by a month due to a faulty relief valve.

SpaceX, operating under the same NASA contract awarded in 2014, first transported astronauts to the ISS in 2020. The vehicle is rated to stay in outer space for 45 days—a window that began ticking June 6.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Florida Panthers and Edmonton Oilers meet tonight (8 pm ET, ABC) in decisive Game 7 in the Stanley Cup Final.

Reigning 100-meter world champ Sha'Carri Richardson runs 2024 world-leading time to qualify for Paris Olympics at Team USA track and field team trials; see complete results.

"Inside Out 2" becomes 2024's highest-grossing film, pulling in \$285M at the US domestic box office just over a week after opening.

Science & Technology

The US to ban sales of antivirus software products from Russia-based Kaspersky Lab beginning in July, citing national security concerns; company is the world's fourth-largest antivirus software firm by revenue.

Most energetic neutrino ever observed potentially recorded by observatory built at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea.

Population of Rapa Nui—or Easter Island, home to more than 1,000 giant statues—was likely small and resilient and relied on subsistence farming; new study counters theory of population collapse due to resource overconsumption.

Business & Markets

Markets end Friday mixed (Dow +0.0%, S&P 500 -0.2%, Nasdaq -0.2%), as chipmaker Nvidia (-3.2%) sees second straight day of drops.

Existing US home prices hit record high in May with a median price of \$419K, up nearly 6% year-over-year; rise comes despite new inventory of homes for sale jumping more than 18% over same time frame.

Sportswear giant Under Armour to pay \$434M to settle a class-action lawsuit filed by shareholders in 2017 alleging they were misled about the company's financial health.

Politics & World Affairs

Four people killed, nine others wounded after shooter opens fire at an Arkansas grocery store; motivation for attack unclear, gunman was taken into custody after sustaining minor injuries.

Russian officials blame the US for a Ukrainian strike in Crimea that killed six, wounded 100 people; Russia bombs the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv in back-to-back days, killing at least three people.

More than 1,000 people dead during Hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca; officials blame extreme heat, with temperatures reaching 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

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Lincoln County Fatal UTV Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: 27225 480th Ave (Lake Alvine/Nine Mile Creek), five miles NE of Harrisburg, SD

When: 2:10 p.m. Saturday, June 22, 2024

Driver 1: Male, 87, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2013 Kawasaki Mule side x side UTV

Seatbelt/Helmet Use: No

Lincoln County, S.D.- An 87-year-old man died Saturday afternoon in a single vehicle crash five miles northeast of Harrisburg, SD.

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

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2013 Kawasaki Mule was traveling northbound on 480th Avenue from 273rd Street. The road was closed at the time and the east shoulder of the road had washed away. As the driver attempted to turn around, he went backwards over the edge of the washout. The UTV began to roll and the driver was ejected. The driver was pronounced deceased at the scene.

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

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



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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

As we wait for the Vikings to begin training camp next month, we continue our roster breakdown. Last week we covered the tight end position, and this week we move on to the offensive line. For many years, the Vikings' offensive line was a weak link, an Achilles heel that always held the team back. This year, however, the Vikings have one of the better offensive line units in the league. It's not perfect, but compared to the rest of the NFL, it's certainly in the top 10.

The Starters

Left Tackle - The most important position on the offensive line is the left tackle position. Christian Darrisaw has become one of the best LTs in football, which bodes well for whichever quarterback is starting. Now that the Justin Jefferson extension is done, Darrisaw is likely next on the list.

Right Tackle - On the other side of the line, right tackle Brian O'Neill is about as solid as they come. While he has missed some time in the past few years because of injury, there's no doubt O'Neill is a top RT when he's on the field. He and Darrisaw are perhaps the best offensive tackle duo in the league.

Center - The interior of the offensive line is where the biggest concern lies. Center Garrett Bradbury has improved every year he's been in the league, and while he might never live up to the expectations of being a first-round draft pick (18th overall in 2019), he is an average starter who could still improve. His biggest issue is his size. He is athletic for a center, which is great when he's asked to pull and block defenders on the edge. However, when he's lined up against mammoth nose tackles, he struggles.

Left and Right Guard - Last year, the Vikings traded away starting left guard Ezra Cleveland and replaced him with Dalton Risner. Even though he signed midway through the season, he played well and let it be known that he would love to re-sign in Minnesota. Unfortunately for Risner, the Vikings decided to try and fill his spot with Blake Brandel, a backup offensive lineman who the team gave a three-year extension to this offseason. Recently, the Vikings decided to bring Risner back to compete with Brandel for a starting spot on the offensive line. Ed Ingram has been the starting right guard ever since he was over-drafted in 2022. Ingram has been the worst offensive lineman for the Vikings, although he did show marginal improvement last season. Head coach Kevin O'Connell has come out and said it will be a three-way competition between Risner, Brandel, and Ingram for the two starting guard positions.

The Backups

Backing up Darrisaw and O'Neill at offensive tackle will be veteran David Quessenberry and rookie Walter Rouse. Oli Udoh was the Vikings' primary backup tackle for the past few seasons, but he's now in New Orleans. Quessenberry has the inside track for the top backup spot, but the Vikings drafted Rouse with high expectations. However, as is usually the case with young offensive linemen, it will take a few years before Rouse is ready to play any meaningful snaps.

Backing up Bradbury at center will be Dan Feeney, a former third-round pick by the Chargers who started 57 games for them in his four years on the team. He has since jumped around to a few teams, but he comes to Minnesota with 65 starts under his belt.

Theoretically, whoever loses the competition between Risner, Brandel, and Ingram will be the primary backup offensive guard. Fourth on the depth chart figures to be rookie Michael Jurgens, as the Vikings will undoubtedly give him every opportunity to earn his spot.

Filling out the offensive line depth chart (with their position in parenthesis according to the Vikings' website) are Henry Byrd (G), Tyrese Robinson (G), Jeremy Flax (OL), Doug Nester (OL), and Spencer Rolland (OL). All of these players have an uphill battle in front of them to make the Vikings' final 53-man roster.

"Urinary leakage in men and women"

As husband and wife urologists, we talk a lot about the urinary tract and how it affects our patients.

In women, the most common urinary concern is incontinence, or the involuntary leakage of urine. There are several causes and many treatment options exist depending on the type.

The two main types of urinary leakage in women are urge urinary incontinence and stress urinary incontinence. For women with urge incontinence, treatment is aimed at improving quality of life disrupted by overactive bladder. Overactive bladder is characterized by urinary urgency, frequency, waking up at night to urinate, with or without urge urinary incontinence. The most important first steps a patient can take to reduce bother include limiting caffeine intake, minimizing fluid intake (unless you have kidney stones, you do NOT need to drink 8 glasses of water a day), and urinating on a schedule every two hours or so while awake. The next step in treatment is medication. Many medications are no longer used due to unfavorable side effects of dry mouth, constipation and even dementia. Newer medications are much safer and better tolerated. Be sure to ask your doctor if your bladder medication is associated with an increased risk of memory loss and dementia.

If medications fail, "third line therapy" is available. This includes tibial nerve stimulation, Botox bladder injections and an outpatient procedure to place a neuromodulation device (think of this as a pacemaker for the bladder). Treatment duration with Botox can last up to 9-12 months and neuromodulation is typically effective for 10-15 years or more, at which point a battery will need to be replaced.

For women with stress incontinence, the mainstay of treatment is procedural, either with an in office urethral bulking agent or a surgically implanted mid-urethral sling. These procedures can be curative and greatly improve women's quality of life.

In men, the majority of leaking is due to prior prostate cancer surgery. This type of leakage with movement and activity is called male stress urinary incontinence. In addition to pelvic floor muscle exercises, procedural interventions exist as well. The mainstay of treatment is a procedure in which an artificial urinary sphincter is inserted. This is for men with the most severe leakage who are using many pads daily. It involves an inflatable cuff that encircles the urethra, a reservoir behind the pubic bone that stores the fluid when not around the urethral cuff and a pump placed in the scrotum to move the fluid from one location to another. Slings are also used in men with milder incontinence. In both instances, the goal is to get patients down to 1-2 light pads daily.

Men can also experience urge incontinence and treatments are similar as for women; however, some differences do exist which can relate to enlarged prostate.

The bottom line is, if you are suffering from urinary incontinence, many treatment options exist and we encourage you to speak with your doctor about these issues.

-D. Joseph Thum and Lauren Wood Thum are both board certified Urologists at Urology Specialists in Sioux Falls, SD. Dr. Joseph Thum also sees patients in Worthington. In their free time, they enjoy the outdoors and spending time with their sons and German Shepherds. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show providing health information based on science, built on trust, on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



By Lauren Wood Thum, MD and
Dennis Joseph Thum, MD

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Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 Victorious Over Hitmen Jr Legion

By GameChanger Media

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 were victorious against Hitmen Jr Legion 8-4 on Sunday.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 opened the scoring in the first after a steal of home scored one run.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 extended their early lead with two runs in the top of the second thanks to RBI errors by Gavin Kroll and Lincoln Krause.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 added to their early lead in the top of the third inning after Jarrett Erdmann singled, and Alex Abeln grounded out, each scoring two runs.

Nicholas Morris led things off on the mound for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. They surrendered seven hits and four runs over five and two-thirds innings, striking out nine and walking three. Henery Bossly started the game for Hitmen Jr Legion. The starting pitcher gave up four hits and seven runs (five earned) over three innings, striking out two and walking two. Nick Groeblichhoff pitched one and one-third innings of no-run ball for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 in relief. They surrendered one hit, striking out one and walking one.

Erdmann drove the middle of the lineup, leading Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 with two runs batted in. The left-handed hitter went 1-for-3 on the day. Krause and Morris each collected two hits for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. Krause stole four bases. Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 ran wild on the base paths, accumulating seven stolen bases for the game.

Weston Senn led Hitmen Jr Legion with two runs batted in from the number eight spot in the lineup. The first baseman went 1-for-3 on the day. Landon Coyle led Hitmen Jr Legion with three hits in four at bats. Korbon Stark collected two hits for Hitmen Jr Legion in four at bats. Stark stole two bases. Hitmen Jr Legion turned one double play in the game.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 will travel to Hamlin Area 16U for their next game on Thursday.

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Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 **8 - 4** Hitmen Jr Legion

📍 Away 📅 Sunday June 23, 2024

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
GRTN	1	2	4	0	0	1	0	8	8	3
HTMN	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	8	4

BATTING

Groton Jr. Legion F	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause (C)	4	2	2	0	0	0
Jordan Schwan (R...	3	0	0	0	0	1
Kolton Antonsen...	0	0	0	0	1	0
G Englund (3B)	3	1	1	1	0	0
C Simon (3B)	0	0	0	0	0	0
N Morris (P)	3	1	2	0	0	0
K Fliehs (1B)	0	0	0	0	0	0
J Erdmann (CF)	3	1	1	2	1	1
N Groeblinghoff (...)	3	1	0	0	1	0
A Abeln (SS)	3	1	0	1	1	1
K Antonsen (2B)	1	1	0	0	0	0
T Schuster (2B)	1	0	1	0	0	0
T McGannon (LF)	3	0	1	0	0	0
Shayden Wood (...)	1	0	0	0	0	0
G Kroll	3	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	31	8	8	4	4	4

2B: G Englund, N Morris, **TB:** T McGannon, J Erdmann, L Krause 2, G Englund 2, N Morris 3, T Schuster, **HBP:** K Antonsen 2, G Englund, N Morris, **SB:** J Erdmann, L Krause 4, N Groeblinghoff, N Morris, **LOB:** 10

Hitmen Jr Legion	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
T Bray (RF)	4	0	1	1	0	1
L Coyle (SS)	4	0	3	0	0	0
C Jungemann (3B)	4	0	0	0	0	2
H Bossly (P, 2B)	2	0	0	0	2	1
Nolan Adams (C)	3	1	0	0	1	1
K Stark (CF, P)	4	1	2	0	0	1
B Hanne (2B, LF)	3	1	0	0	1	2
W Senn (1B)	3	1	1	2	0	1
A Hlavacek (LF, CF)	3	0	1	1	0	1
Totals	30	4	8	4	4	10

2B: W Senn, **TB:** T Bray, W Senn 2, A Hlavacek, L Coyle 3, K Stark 2, **CS:** H Bossly, **SB:** Nolan Adams, L Coyle, K Stark 2, **LOB:** 9

Groton Locke Electric 2024 Rally Defeats Hitmen Amateurs

By GameChanger Media

Groton Locke Electric 2024 rallied to best Hitmen Amateurs 17-7 on Sunday. Groton Locke Electric 2024 trailed by as many as five runs during the game.

Ty Sieber collected five hits in five at bats in the win. Sieber doubled in the fifth inning, singled in the first inning, singled in the third inning, and singled in the fifth inning.

Groton Locke Electric 2024 opened the scoring in the first after Gunner Brueggman induced Brian Hansen to hit into a fielder's choice, but one run scored.

Tyler Cunningham grounded out, which helped Hitmen Amateurs tie the game at one in the top of the second.

A ground out by Peyton McDonnell gave Hitmen Amateurs the lead, 2-1, in the top of the third.

Alex Morris grounded out, which helped Groton Locke Electric 2024 tie the game at two in the bottom of the third.

Hitmen Amateurs flipped the game on its head in the top of the fourth, scoring five runs on five hits to take a 7-2 lead. The biggest blow in the inning was a double by Rafael Clemente that drove in two.

Groton Locke Electric 2024 flipped the game on its head in the bottom of the fifth, scoring nine runs on three hits to take a 11-7 lead. The biggest blow in the inning was a walk by Aaron Severson that drove in two.

Morris earned the win for Groton Locke Electric 2024. They surrendered two hits and zero runs over five innings, striking out eight and walking one. Brueggman took the loss for Hitmen Amateurs. They went four and two-thirds innings, surrendering eight runs on five hits, striking out nine and walking six. Cole Simon led things off on the hill for Groton Locke Electric 2024. The right-handed pitcher surrendered four hits and seven runs over three innings, striking out two and walking four.

Groton Locke Electric 2024 collected 18 hits in the game. Ben Althoff drove the middle of the lineup, leading Groton Locke Electric 2024 with three runs batted in. The infielder went 2-for-4 on the day. Dylan Frey and Morris each collected multiple hits for Groton Locke Electric 2024. Althoff led Groton Locke Electric 2024 with two walks. Overall, the team had a strong eye at the plate, piling up nine walks for the game. Groton Locke Electric 2024 turned one double play in the game. Groton Locke Electric 2024 were sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Wyatt Locke had the most chances in the field with eight.

Clemente went 2-for-4 at the plate to lead Hitmen Amateurs in hits. Hitmen Amateurs turned one double play in the game. Hitmen Amateurs didn't commit a single error in the field. Lay Winter had the most chances in the field with nine.

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Hitmen Amateurs 7 - 17 Groton Locke Electric 2024

📍 Home 📅 Sunday June 23, 2024

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	R	H	E
HTMN	0	1	1	5	0	0	0	0	7	6	0
GRTN	1	0	1	0	9	0	3	3	17	18	0

BATTING

Hitmen Amateurs	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
P McDonnell (CF)	3	0	0	0	1	2
B Herdman (SS)	4	1	1	0	0	0
P Geditz (1B, P, 1...)	4	1	1	0	0	1
R Clemente	4	1	2	2	0	0
S Bowar (3B)	2	2	1	1	1	1
G Brueggman (P,...)	2	1	0	0	1	2
T Cunningham (2B)	1	0	0	0	0	0
J Kleinsasser (2...)	2	0	1	2	0	0
L Winter (C, 1B)	2	1	0	0	1	0
R Engle (RF, P)	2	0	0	0	0	2
B Cassens (LF)	2	0	0	0	1	2
Totals	28	7	6	5	5	10

2B: R Clemente, J Kleinsasser, **TB:** P Geditz, R Clemente 3, J Kleinsasser 2, B Herdman, S Bowar, **SAC:** R Engle, **SB:** L Winter, S Bowar, **LOB:** 3

PITCHING

Hitmen Amat	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
G Brueggman	4.2	5	8	8	6	9	0
P Geditz	0.0	1	2	2	1	0	0
R Engle	2.1	12	7	6	2	2	0
Totals	7.0	18	17	16	9	11	0

L: G Brueggman, **P-S:** R Engle 66-42, P Geditz 10-3, G Brueggman 107-63, **WP:** P Geditz 2, G Brueggman, **BF:** R Engle 20, P Geditz 2, G Brueggman 26

Groton Locke Elect	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
D Frey (LF)	6	3	3	1	0	2
T Sieber (SS)	5	5	5	1	1	0
B Althoff (3B)	4	1	2	3	2	0
B Hansen (DH)	3	1	1	1	1	0
C Simon (P, CF)	1	1	1	1	0	0
A Morris (1B, P)	4	0	2	2	1	1
S Locke (C)	2	1	0	1	1	2
C Camacho (2B)	2	0	1	0	0	0
W Locke (2B, C)	4	1	1	1	1	2
J Cogley (CF, RF)	4	2	1	0	1	2
A Severson (RF, 1B)	4	2	1	0	1	2
Totals	39	17	18	11	9	11

2B: B Althoff, T Sieber, **TB:** A Severson, C Simon, B Hansen, D Frey 3, B Althoff 3, C Camacho, J Cogley, T Sieber 6, W Locke, A Morris 2, **SB:** B Hansen, B Althoff, **LOB:** 8

Groton Locke	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
C Simon	3.0	4	7	7	4	2	0
A Morris	5.0	2	0	0	1	8	0
Totals	8.0	6	7	7	5	10	0

W: A Morris, **P-S:** C Simon 58-31, A Morris 75-52, **WP:** C Simon, **BF:** C Simon 16, A Morris 18

Bradin Althoff Drives In 4 To Lead Groton Post 39 Past Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion

By GameChanger Media

Bradin Althoff drove in four runs on two hits to lead Groton Post 39 past Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion 9-4 on Sunday. Althoff tripled in the fifth inning, scoring three runs, and doubled in the fourth inning, scoring one.

Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion were the first to get on the board in the second when Chays Mansfield singled, scoring two runs.

Groton Post 39 tied the game in the top of the fourth thanks to a double by Althoff, and an error.

In the bottom of the fourth inning, Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion went back into the lead after Xavier Kadlec singled, and Quinton Fischbach hit a sacrifice fly, each scoring one run.

Groton Post 39 flipped the game on its head in the top of the fifth, scoring seven runs on five hits to take a 9-4 lead. The biggest blow in the inning was a triple by Althoff that drove in three.

Althoff earned the win for Groton Post 39. The reliever surrendered one hit and zero runs over one and two-thirds innings, striking out one and walking none. Fischbach took the loss for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion. They went one and one-third innings, giving up two runs (one earned) on two hits, striking out one and walking two. Brevin Fliehs began the game for Groton Post 39. The starting pitcher surrendered four hits and four runs (two earned) over three and one-third innings, striking out two and walking two. Ashton Remily started on the bump for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion. The lefty allowed zero hits and zero runs over two and two-thirds innings, striking out none and walking none.

Althoff and Teylor Diegel each collected two hits for Groton Post 39.

Number eight hitter, Mansfield, showed the depth of Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion's lineup, by leading them with two hits in two at bats.

Next up for Groton Post 39 is a game at Clark/Willow Lake Senators on Wednesday.

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EARTHTALK ™



The rising demand for cannabis may exacerbate water scarcity & divert freshwater from essential agriculture & municipal needs... Credit:

Pexels.com.

Dear EarthTalk: What are the environmental impacts of the widespread legalization of marijuana in recent years?
-- Mac Styles, Tallahassee, FL

Cannabis is an increasingly popular recreational and medicinal drug that is capable of producing psychogenic effects. As more states legalize cannabis for some medicinal and recreational uses, cannabis production is on the rise.

On average, cannabis requires double the amount of water than food staples like corn, soybean and wheat. Over 60 percent of marijuana grown in the United States originates from California. Additionally, California produces nearly 75 percent of the nation's fruits and nuts and over 33 percent of its vegetables. Californian agriculture is significantly supported by aquifers, surface water diversion, springs and rivers. The rising demand for cannabis may exacerbate water scarcity, divert freshwater from essential agriculture and municipal needs, and harm water ecosystems by altering stream flows.

A single pound of commercial marijuana product correlates to over 4,600 pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions produced. Additionally, cannabis plant matter has been found to contain high concentrations of biogenic volatile organic compounds (BVOCs), especially monoterpenes, which have been linked to increases in ground-level ozone pollution and particulate matter that can lead to severe health issues. Further, cannabis cultivation is often enhanced by pesticides and ammonia-rich fertilizers that are used to supplement the plant's high nitrogen requirement. The ammonia frequently volatilizes into the atmosphere, bonding with nitrogen oxides to produce particulate matter. Runoff from these inputs also causes soil acidification, water eutrophication, oxygen depletion and harm to aquatic life.

Indoor planting facilities require significant energy for lighting, heating, ventilation and dehumidification. One 2012 study even attributed "the energy consumption for this practice in the United States at 1% of national electricity use, or \$6 billion each year." Back then, only 16 states had legalized marijuana for medicinal use. Today, that number has risen to 38 states, suggesting that current energy consumption for indoor cannabis production is likely even higher.

Several foundational changes could make cannabis crops more sustainable. Many states that have legalized cannabis have not established energy standards for indoor cultivation facilities. By mandating LED bulbs instead of metal halide or fluorescent bulbs, policymakers can initiate energy reduction. However, this is not always feasible. Facilities located in cooler areas sometimes rely on the heat generated by non-LED bulbs to keep temperatures warm enough for the cannabis to grow.

In the early days of the cannabis industry, it was widely believed that growers had to use reverse osmosis (RO) to remove heavy metals and sodium from water before applying it to their crops. Roughly half of the water that was put through RO was discarded as wastewater. Yet, testing showed tap water works similarly without impacting product quality, prompting a shift away from RO.

Some facilities are transitioning their root media from traditional, non-recyclable 'stone wool' to a coconut-fiber-based product. Coconut fiber offers improvements in water retention and filtration, allowing plants to maintain a cleaner root environment and reduce watering frequency. Moreover, coconut fiber promotes better aeration and drainage, preventing waterlogging that can lead to root rot.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Don't give up on the FAFSA, advocates for student financial aid urge

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JUNE 24, 2024 6:00 AM

WASHINGTON — Though the new version of the form to apply for federal financial student aid has had its fair share of highly publicized hiccups, U.S. Under Secretary of Education James Kvaal says the department has made a lot of progress in the past couple of months.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid — better known as FAFSA — got a makeover after Congress passed the FAFSA Simplification Act in late 2020. But users faced glitches and technical errors during the Dec. 30 soft launch and past the Jan. 8 official debut for the 2024-25 form, which covers the upcoming school year.

Advocates voiced concerns over the form's failure to adjust for inflation, its formula miscalculation and its tax data errors, prompting processing delays the department has worked to fix. The federal agency has also taken steps to address major issues that prevented parents without Social Security numbers from completing the form.

"We're fixing things at a rapid pace, and we've been keeping the community updated. We have an issues guide on the website that lets people know the problems we're aware of and what the potential solutions are. In almost every case now, there is a way for students to submit the form," Kvaal told States Newsroom in an interview.

"It may be a customer service experience that is not what we originally designed, and so we're gonna continue to try and make this process easier and faster for all students, including those whose parents may not have Social Security numbers, but it is possible now for everyone to submit a FAFSA," Kvaal said.

He oversees higher education and financial aid, including the Office of Federal Student Aid, which is the largest student financial aid provider in the country.

More than 11 million FAFSA submissions

Kvaal said the department has already received more than 11 million FAFSA submissions for the 2024-25 school year.

Last week, the department said it has made "significant progress" in closing the gap in FAFSA submissions to an 8 percent decrease compared to this time last year, down from a nearly 40 percent decrease in March.

For both undergraduate and graduate students, the FAFSA form is a key indicator for financial aid eligibility, which comes in the form of grants, loans, work-study funds and scholarships.

The form is also not exclusive to first-year college students, and those already enrolled must renew their application each academic year.

'It's still not perfect for all applicants'

Though the department has made progress to address major known issues, "the system, certainly six months after it opened, is still not a totally functioning system," according to MorraLee Keller, senior director of strategic programming at the National College Attainment Network, a nonprofit membership and advocacy organization.

"Right now, the form is working for a lot of applicants, but it's still not perfect for all applicants," she added.

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The organization monitors FAFSA completion for graduating high school seniors nationally and compares those figures to the previous school year. Keller said "one thing that we're seeing is the class of '24, at this point in time, is almost 13 percentage points behind in the rate at which the seniors have filed a FAFSA" this past academic year.

"We are significantly behind in the number of FAFSAs, particularly for our graduating seniors, so that is ultimately probably going to have an impact in enrollment because completing a FAFSA is a pretty good indicator about whether you plan to enroll in college this fall," Keller said.

Tennessee, Louisiana, Illinois, Washington, D.C., and Texas have the highest percentages of high school seniors completing the FAFSA form, according to NCAN's tracker. Nevada, Florida, Arizona, Utah and Alaska have the lowest percentages.

Meanwhile, Kvaal said he thinks "it's important to note that just about everybody can get their FAFSA through the process now." He added that "there are some specific instructions that people in certain situations need to follow carefully" and encouraged applicants to pay careful attention to the instructions and help hints.

"The FAFSA is broadly available, and it's not accurate to say that there are students who can't get through them," he said.

New strategy

In early May, the federal agency launched the FAFSA Student Support Strategy, which has now provided more than "\$30 million in funding and counting and has reached more than 180 organizations across the country" in an attempt to get more students to complete the form, according to the department.

The department also recently announced that Jeremy Singer, current president of the College Board, would serve as the new FAFSA executive advisor.

In late May, U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said the department has taken steps aimed at "modernizing" the Office of Federal Student Aid, including the department's search for a new chief operating officer, per a news release. That person would replace Richard Cordray, who, in the midst of backlash and criticism toward the department over the botched rollout, said in April he would depart.

Part of the department's efforts, according to Cardona, also include conducting a "full-scale review" of the Office of Federal Student Aid's "current and historical organization, management, staffing, workflow structures, business processes, and operations" and hiring an independent consulting firm.

The department is also reviewing "contracts and acquisition procedures" in an effort to hold vendors accountable, Cardona said.

If I haven't filled out the 2024-25 FAFSA form, what should I do?

Though students have until June 30, 2025, to complete the 2024-25 FAFSA form, deadlines vary based on individual colleges and states.

Kvaal encouraged anyone considering college this fall to visit [Studentaid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) and fill out the FAFSA as soon as possible.

"If you had been hearing that there were challenges with the form or people were encountering obstacles, we've made a lot of progress in making the form work in recent weeks, and most people, their form is getting through in one to three days, and we're sending information to colleges that they need to make financial aid offers," he said.

Keller also encouraged families to not give up on completing the form.

"The time is not gone — get your FAFSA filed this summer if you want to go to school this fall," she said.

Southeast SD flooding claims at least one life as focus shifts to Dakota Dunes

BY: SETH TUPPER - JUNE 23, 2024 5:41 PM

Federal, state and local officials are focusing their efforts on a voluntary evacuation of Dakota Dunes and a levee construction project across Interstate 29 near McCook Lake as they continue responding to historic rainfall and flooding in southeast South Dakota that has claimed at least one life.

Gov. Kristi Noem led a press conference Sunday in North Sioux City. She shared news of the death but declined to provide any information about the person, circumstances or location, other than saying the death was related to flooding.

"Because of respect for the family, I'm not going to share any details around that," Noem said. "All I'm going to say is that I want to remind everybody to remember the power of water and the flow of water, and to stay away from flooded areas."

Sunday morning, prior to Noem's press conference, the state Department of Public Safety issued a news release saying that an 87-year-old man died Saturday afternoon in a single vehicle crash 5 miles northeast of Harrisburg.

The man was driving a utility terrain vehicle on a road that was closed because one of the shoulders had washed away. The department said the driver attempted to turn around and went backward over the washout, was ejected from the UTV and was pronounced dead at the scene. The man's name has not been released, pending notification of family members.

Asked after the Sunday press conference whether the 87-year-old man's death was the one Noem was referencing, her spokesman Ian Fury said, "I'll let Highway Patrol report that situation as they normally do." Department of Public Safety spokesman Brad Reiners said, "We are not releasing additional information at this time."

Ten to 15 inches of rain fell from Thursday to Saturday in the hardest-hit area of southeast South Dakota, northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota, with totals exceeding 17 inches in some locations. During the rain and the immediate aftermath, many basements and roads flooded, and local emergency responders conducted numerous rescues.

Sioux Falls temporarily asked residents to limit showers, clothes washing, dishwasher use and other contributions to the city's overstressed wastewater system. The city rescinded that request Sunday, saying the system was "trending in the right direction."

Attention has since shifted to rising rivers and creeks. The Big Sioux River at Sioux City surpassed 43 feet Sunday on its way to an expected crest Sunday night, surpassing the former record of 37.7 feet for that segment.

The Big Sioux and other swollen rivers and streams flow into the Missouri River in the southeast corner of the state, as do other rivers such as the Niobrara in Nebraska, placing North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes in the crosshairs of the collected floodwaters.

John Remus is the chief of the Army Corp of Engineers' Missouri River Basin Water Management Division. He said the corps lowered releases from Fort Randall and Gavins Point dams — upstream of North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes — to ease downstream flooding. There is plenty of capacity behind Fort Randall, he said, but the water behind Gavins Point was near the top of the floodgates Sunday afternoon and still rising.

"That's why we have not been able to cut outflows as much as we originally wanted to," Remus said. "We're going to continue to monitor that. It appears that the inflows are starting to peak and turn over. As soon as we can, we'll start decreasing the flows."

The high flows headed for Dakota Dunes led authorities to issue a voluntary evacuation order.

Jason Westcott, emergency management director for Union County, said local crews are working to strengthen dikes in the area and have opened a self-serve sandbag station for local residents at the county highway shop in Elk Point.

But he stressed that people should evacuate if they're in harm's way.

"The county currently is about maxed out on being able to do water rescues at this point," Westcott said. "As we move further into this incident and it becomes more serious in this area, we may not have the ability to rescue people from their homes if they continue to stay there."

Craig Smith, director of operations for the state Department of Transportation, said Interstate 29 would close at 6 p.m. Sunday between exits 2 and 9.

The closure will allow work crews to build a levee across Interstate 90 at Exit 4, just north of North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes, and tie it in with other protective structures. That section of interstate is sandwiched between the Big Sioux River to the east and McCook Lake to the west.

Smith said 1 to 2 feet of water could flow over the interstate there as floodwaters crest, and the closure will remain in effect as long as the levee is needed.

A lengthy detour will route drivers west through Vermillion, via Highway 50 in South Dakota and I-29 Exit 144 in Iowa.

Some other roads in the southeast region of the state remain closed due to flooding. Drivers are encouraged to visit sd511.org or download the SD511 mobile app to view all current road closures, no-travel advisories and highway obstructions.

Noem signed an emergency declaration Saturday, which allows the state to begin paperwork for potential help from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. She urged everyone affected by the flood to document their damages and contact their insurance agent and local emergency manager, so that the information can be used in the state's application to FEMA.

Sunday's weather was dry and hot in southeast South Dakota. The National Weather Service forecast includes chances for isolated storms Monday and Tuesday, and sunny weather on Wednesday.

"We're hoping that by Thursday morning we're in a very different situation and water starts to recede," Noem said.

Majority of tribes say they'll skip Noem's public safety summit, though some will attend

BY: JOHN HULT AND MAKENZIE HUBER - JUNE 23, 2024 7:00 AM

Officials from five of South Dakota's nine Native American tribes said they will not attend Gov. Kristi Noem's Tribal Public Safety Crisis Summit on Monday in Pierre, but at least two tribes do plan to send representatives.

The rest of the guest list and agenda were unclear as of Friday afternoon.

The governor announced the summit amid a flurry of votes by South Dakota's nine tribal nations to ban her from their lands. Those votes came in response to statements by Noem that Native American children lack hope and that their parents aren't there to support them, as well as Noem's allegation that tribal officials personally benefit from a drug cartel presence on reservations.

Noem invited tribal leaders and their respective law enforcement representatives to the summit.

"We solve problems best when we work together and communicate – I hope that this summit will accomplish that," Noem said in a press release announcing the event.

Also invited to the summit, among others, were Attorney General Marty Jackley, U.S. Attorney for the District of South Dakota Alison Ramsdell, Department of Public Safety Secretary Bob Perry, Tribal Relations Secretary Dave Flute and Noem's Tribal Law Enforcement Liaison Algin Young, who was the Oglala Sioux Tribal police chief until his contract ran out this spring.

Jackley will attend, said spokesman Tony Mangan, as will representatives from the state Division of Criminal Investigation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs will have two representatives present, according to BIA spokesperson Robyn Broyles.

Tribal officials have been less eager to participate, for reasons tied to both Noem's comments and their

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own scheduling conflicts.

Lower Brule Chairman Clyde Estes told South Dakota Searchlight that no one from his tribe will attend unless the governor issues an apology for her remarks. Crow Creek Tribal Chairman Peter Lengkeek had a similar response.

Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Police Chief Charles Big Crow said his tribe will not send anyone to the summit. Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribal Police Chief Gary Gaikowski said his tribe will not be represented, in part because he'll be involved in a federal trial.

Oglala Sioux Tribal President Frank Star Comes Out issued a statement in late May saying his tribe will not send representatives. Instead, he said, tribal leaders will attend an event marking Victory Day for the Oceti Sakowin in the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn.

Yankton Sioux tribal leadership will focus on Victory Day, but YST Police Chief Edwin Young said he will attend Monday's summit.

The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe told the Moody County Enterprise that its vice president and tribal police chief will attend, but said many other tribes have declined, or haven't committed to attendance.

Messages and calls about possible attendance to leaders with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and Rosebud Sioux Tribe were not returned as of Friday afternoon.

It's unclear what might happen at the summit. Noem spokesperson Ian Fury told South Dakota Searchlight that the summit will not be open to the media, but materials from the event will be provided afterward.

Noem has hammered on the message of public safety on the state's reservations since Jan. 31, the day she gave a speech to a joint session of the South Dakota Legislature on security at the U.S.-Mexico border. In it, she said the Biden administration's border policies are contributing to a drug trafficking crisis, and said drug cartels have a presence in tribal areas.

Nearly all the methamphetamine and fentanyl in the U.S. originate with drug cartels, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. That agency's 2024 threat assessment notes that cartels have a presence in all 50 states, though South Dakota is on the low end for cases with direct links to cartel members.

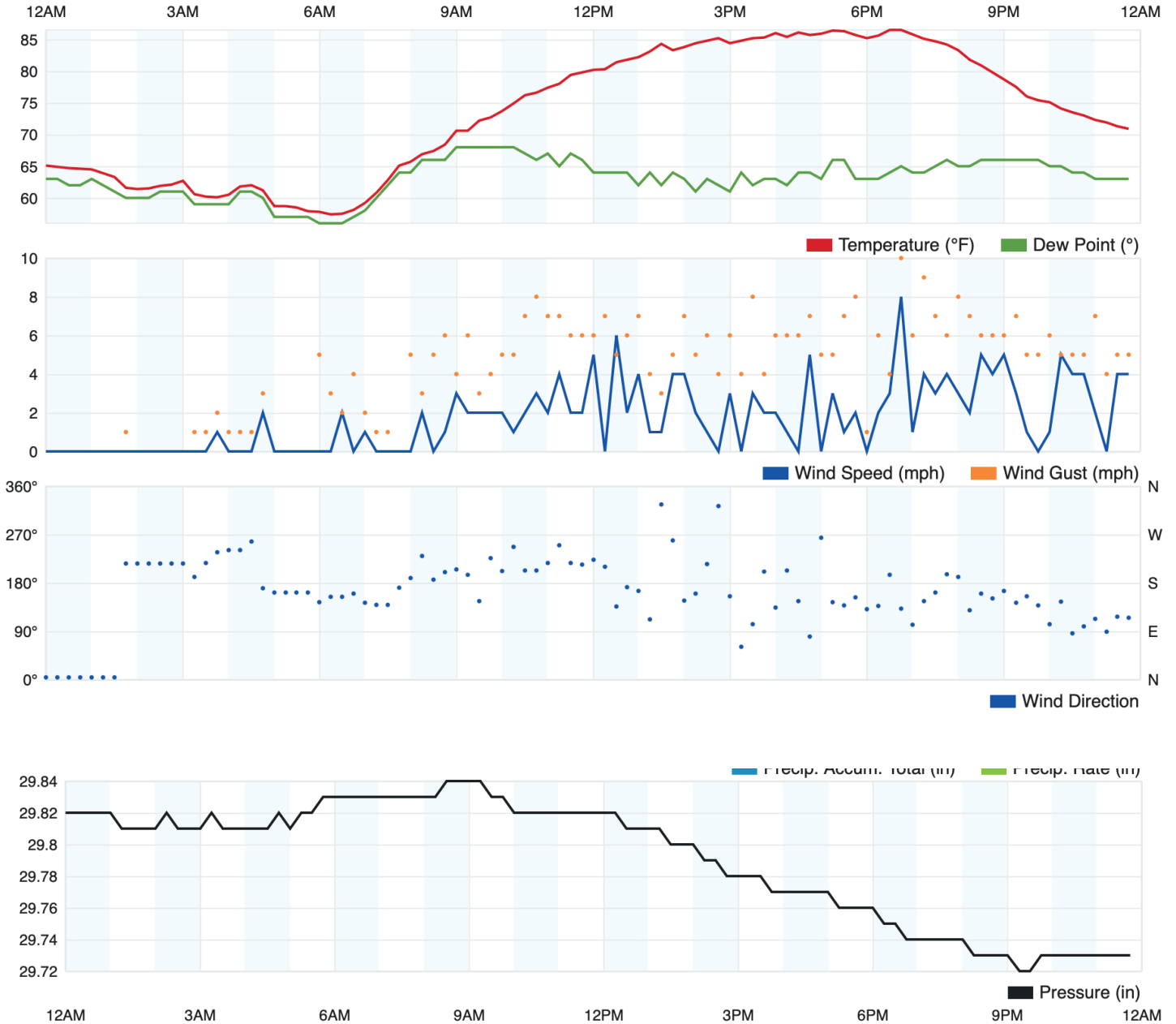
Most federal drug prosecutions involving large quantities of illegal narcotics in South Dakota are linked to larger cities, according to a recent South Dakota Searchlight investigation into the governor's claims about cartels. The drugs tend to move out through the rest of the state from Sioux Falls, Rapid City, or from out-of-state locations like Denver.

Noem has said the summit will be an attempt to address crime, drug use and trafficking, human trafficking and violence on reservations. Despite the tension, Noem and tribal leaders have separately decried what they've described as inadequate federal support of law enforcement resources for tribes.

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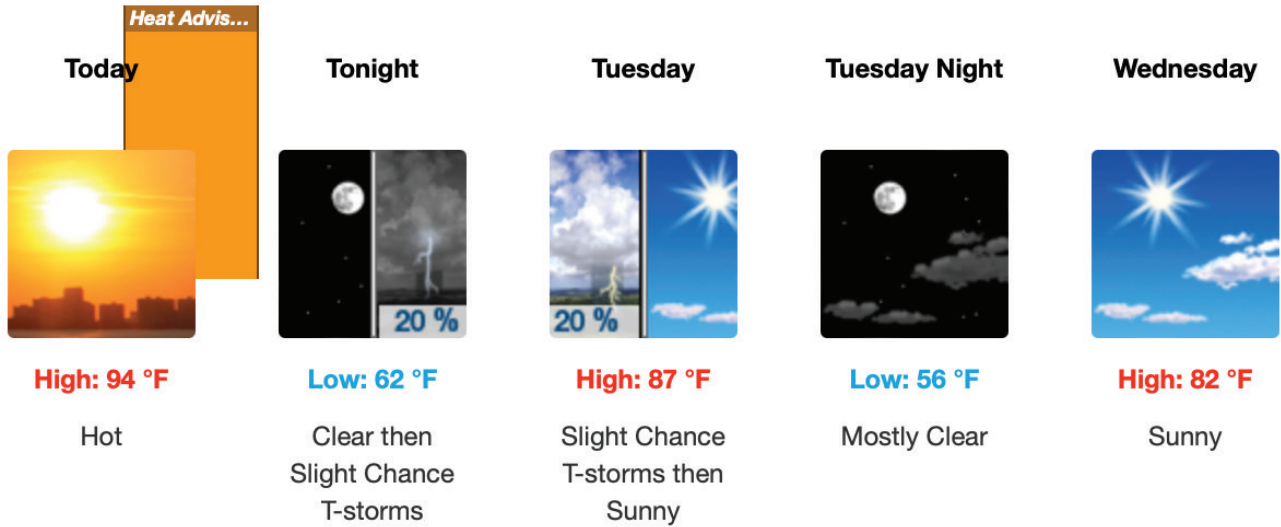
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Heat & Severe Threat Key Messages

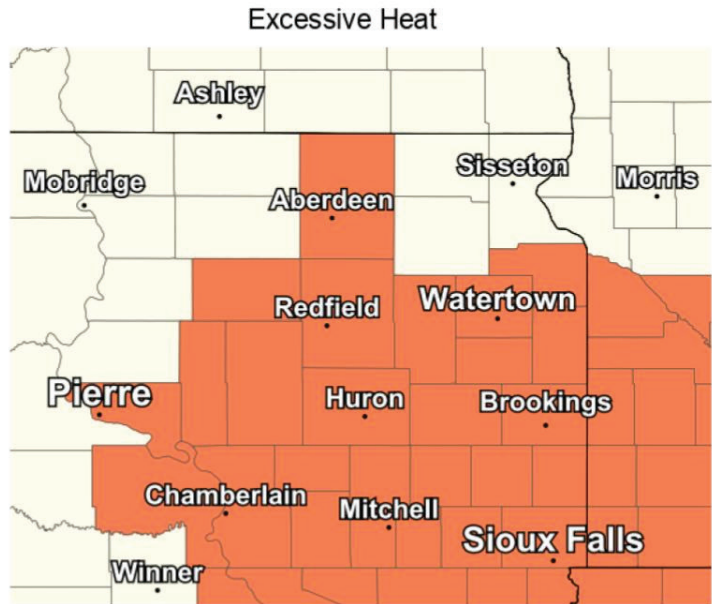
June 24, 2024
4:22 AM

Key Messages - Heat

- Increasing heat and humidity through the day.
- Weak front will bring in drier air which will lower heat index values this afternoon across north central SD
- Heat advisory in effect for parts of central and eastern South Dakota. Heat index values to top 100 degrees.

Key Messages - Thunderstorms

- Heat and high humidity provide for an explosive thunderstorm environment but...
- Strong CAP is in place, confidence that storms develop & persist long enough to produce severe weather is low this afternoon.
- Overnight storms come with a low risk of severe weather.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Hight heat and humidity will make for an explosive atmosphere, however with a CAP in place, it will be tough to generate storms for most of the area. Otherwise, dangerous heat is the main concern today.

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Severe Weather Threat Overview

June 24, 2024
4:26 AM

Monday Afternoon & Evening

Timing/Location

Severe weather has the greatest potential to occur in the afternoon/evening in far northeast South Dakota and western Minnesota

Primary Threats for the **YELLOW** areas

Tornado Potential

Very Low **Low** Medium High

Max Hail Size

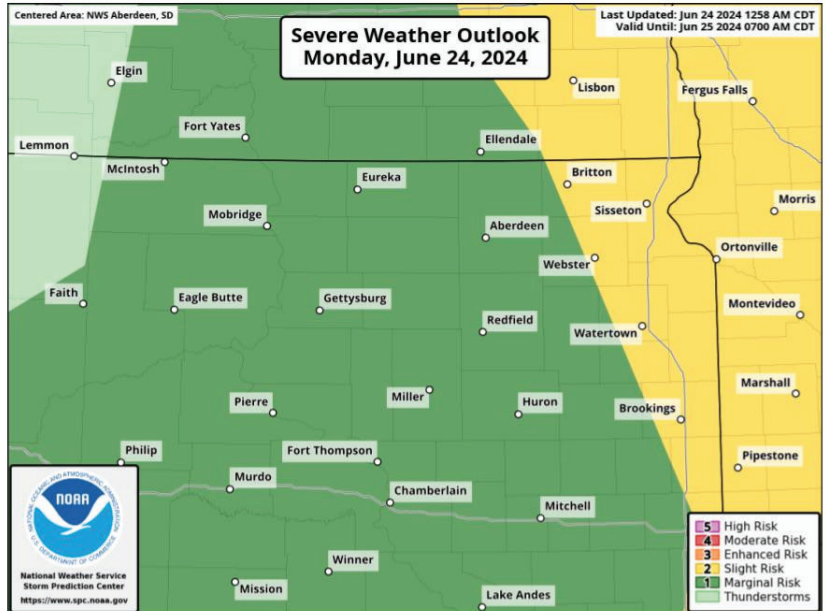
Dimes **Quarters** **Golfball** Baseball

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



Today's Heat Index & Storm Timing

June 24, 2024
4:33 AM

Hourly Heat Index

Severe Storm Threat

Low Threat Storms

	Mon											Tue																																																		
	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am	1am	2am	3am	4am	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am																										
Aberdeen	77	84	87	92	96	98	102	103	103	102	99	94	88	79	75	0	0	0	0	5	5	0	5	5	5	15	15	15	20	20	20	10	10	10	5	5	5	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	5	5	5	5											
Britton	76	83	86	88	91	94	94	96	96	96	92	88	84	75	71	5	10	10	10	10	10	5	5	10	10	15	10	10	10	10	10	10	5	5	5	5	5	10	10	5	10	10	10	10	5	5	5	15	15	15	15											
Brookings	72	77	83	86	90	93	95	100	101	100	98	95	88	83	78	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	10	10	5	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15									
Chamberlain	76	86	91	93	95	98	102	103	103	103	101	99	92	86	82	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	10	10	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15										
Clark	74	76	83	85	88	90	94	95	96	93	92	90	85	75	74	0	0	0	5	10	5	0	5	0	5	15	15	15	15	15	20	20	20	20	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15									
Eagle Butte	74	78	83	85	87	88	87	88	87	87	86	84	78	74	72	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	15	15	15	30	30	30	20	20	20	15	15	15	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5						
Ellendale	75	79	85	88	91	95	96	98	97	96	93	87	82	75	71	5	5	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	10	10	10	10	10	10	5	5	5	5	5	0	0	0	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5						
Eureka	73	77	85	88	91	93	94	93	92	90	86	83	78	72	67	0	0	0	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	20	20	20	20	20	10	10	10	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	10	10	10	5	5	
Gettysburg	75	78	86	91	94	94	96	96	94	92	89	86	79	73	70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	10	15	30	25	20	30	25	20	15	15	15	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	10	15	30	25	20	20	20	15	15	15	15	5	5					
Huron	74	78	86	90	93	97	100	101	102	100	99	96	88	79	78	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	10	15	15	15	15	20	25	20	15	15	15	15	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	20	20	20	25	20	25	20	10	10	10	10	10					
Kennebec	76	85	87	92	97	99	100	100	102	99	98	94	90	79	75	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	20	20	20	25	20	25	25	20	10	10	10	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	10	15	15	15	15	15	15	10	10	10	5	5					
McIntosh	72	75	78	83	84	85	85	84	84	84	81	80	76	69	67	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	15	15	15	10	10	10	5	5	10	5	5	5	15	20	5	5	5	5	5	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10			
Milbank	75	78	86	90	92	95	98	99	102	101	102	94	86	79	75	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	10	15	20	25	25	15	15	15	15	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	10	15	20	20	25	25	15	15	15	15	10	10			
Miller	76	83	88	92	96	100	101	101	101	100	99	94	86	77	75	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	10	15	20	20	25	25	15	15	15	15	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	10	15	20	20	25	25	15	15	15	15	10	10		
Mobridge	76	79	85	89	92	92	93	94	92	90	87	84	81	72	71	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	5	5	10	25	25	20	20	20	15	15	15	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	5	5	10	25	25	20	20	20	15	15	15	5	5			
Murdo	76	83	86	88	93	94	95	95	95	94	91	88	84	77	74	0	0	0	0	0	5	15	30	30	25	30	30	30	30	30	10	10	10	10	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	20	5	10	10	20	15	20	20	15	15	15	10	10					
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Redfield	76	83	88	92	95	100	102	102	101	101	99	95	88	79	74	10	10	15	15	20	15	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	10	10	10	5	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5			
Sisseton	74	78	84	87	88	93	96	96	96	96	95	90	84	78	75	5	5	0	5	10	5	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	10	10	15	15	15	5	20	20	10	10	5	5	0	5	10	5	5	5	0	5	5	5	10	10	15	15	15	10	15	15	15	5	5	
Watertown	74	76	83	86	91	93	96	99	99	99	97	92	85	78	74	5	5	0	5	10	5	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	10	10	15	15	15	10	15	15	15	5	5	5	5	0	5	10	5	5	5	0	5	5	5	10	10	15	15	15	10	15	15	15	5	5
Webster	74	77	83	85	87	89	92	92	93	92	91	87	83	75	73	5	5	0	5	10	5	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	10	10	15	15	15	10	15	15	15	5	5	5	5	0	5	10	5	5	5	0	5	5	5	10	10	15	15	15	10	15	15	15	5	5
Wheaton	74	77	82	85	87	90	91	93	94	93	90	88	85	77	74	5	5	10	20	25	25	20	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	10	20	25	25	20	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 87 °F at 6:33 PM

Low Temp: 57 °F at 6:19 AM

Wind: 10 mph at 6:46 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 43 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 108 in 1988

Record Low: 39 in 2017

Average High: 82

Average Low: 57

Average Precip in June.: 2.96

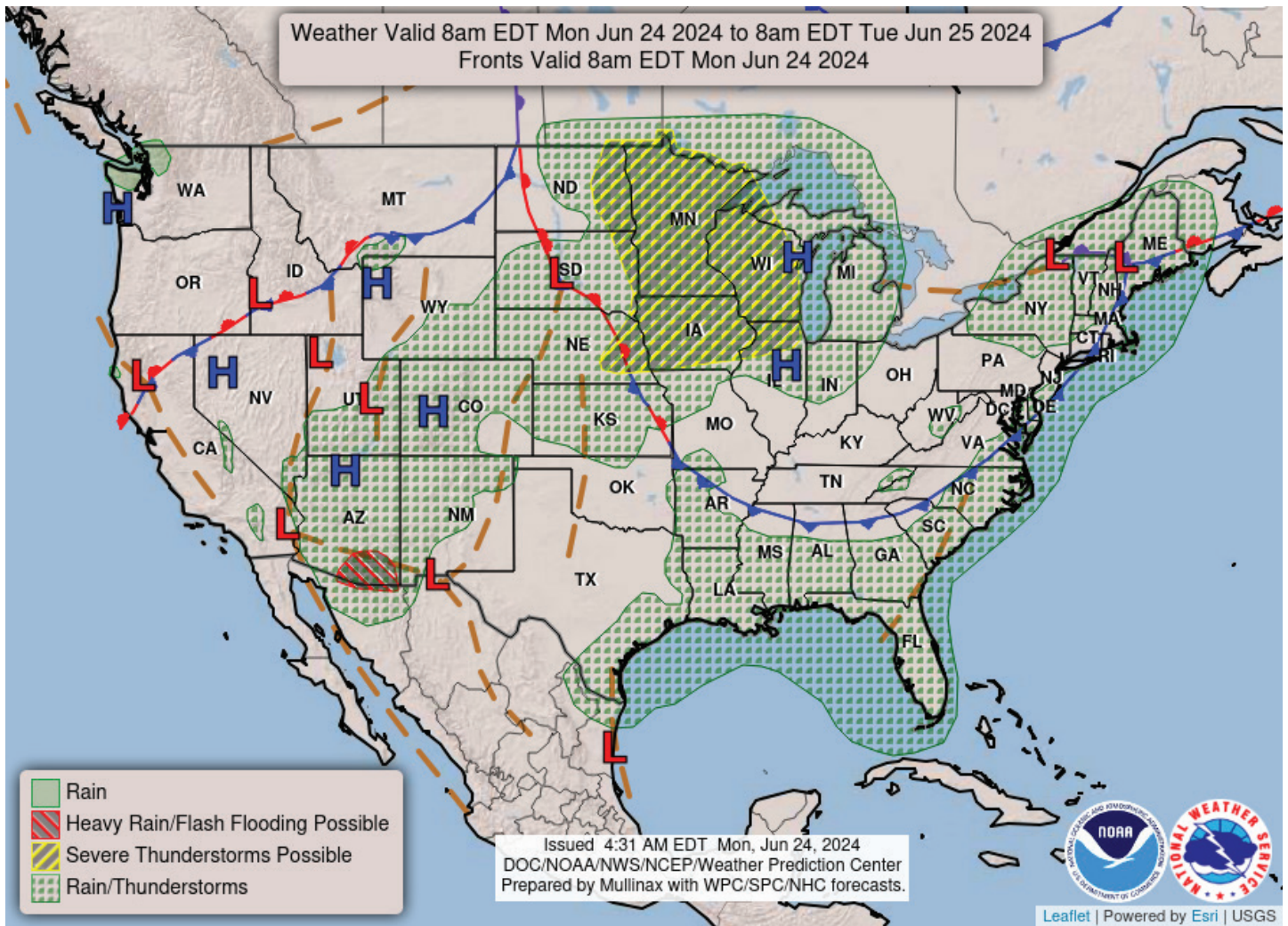
Precip to date in June: 2.73

Average Precip to date: 10.21

Precip Year to Date: 9.80

Sunset Tonight: 9:26:52 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:43:33 am



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Today in Weather History

June 24, 1902: Very strong winds occurred during the evening hours over portions of Hand and Stanley, to Turner and Lincoln Counties. Heavy losses occurred to barns and other farm outbuildings, trees, and windmills. One person was killed, and several were injured. A peak wind gust of 67 mph was recorded in Pierre.

June 24, 2003: An F4 tornado destroyed or heavily damaged all buildings, other structures, and vehicles in the small town of Manchester, in Kingsbury County. Propane and fuel oil tanks were destroyed. Many homes were stripped to the foundation. Of the six residents of the town, four were injured and were transported to hospitals. Three were deemed to be seriously injured, but none of the injuries were listed as life-threatening. One of the injured was in a basement, one was blown out of the home on the way to the same basement, and two were in a mobile home which was destroyed. The tornado damaged crops, trees, and power lines south of Manchester before reaching the town. The tornado also heavily damaged several farms north of Manchester, including two farms on which several buildings, including the houses, were destroyed. About 12 cattle were killed and others injured. The amount of crop damage was not known. Throughout the path, the tornado was observed to have multiple vortices. The tornado was seen and videotaped by numerous storm chasers and researchers. Researchers also deployed weather sensors around the town of Manchester. One of these sensors recorded a 100 millibar pressure drop as the tornado passed.

1816 - The cold weather of early June finally gave way to several days of 90 degree heat in Massachusetts, including a reading of 99 degrees at Salem. (David Ludlum)

1924 - Six men at a rock quarry south of Winston-Salem, NC, sought shelter from a thunderstorm. The structure chosen contained a quantity of dynamite. Lightning struck a near-by tree causing the dynamite to explode. The men were killed instantly. (The Weather Channel)

1929: In Durban, South Africa, a storm drops hailstones the size of baseballs. The rattle produced by the storm is described as sounding like "machine gun fire."

1951 - Twelve inches of hail broke windows and roofs, and dented automobiles, causing more than fourteen million dollars damage. The storm plowed 200 miles from Kingman County KS into Missouri, with the Wichita area hardest hit. It was the most disastrous hailstorm of record for the state of Kansas. (David Ludlum)

1952 - Thunderstorms produced a swath of hail 60 miles long and 3.5 miles wide through parts of Hand, Beadle, Kingsbury, Miner and Jerauld counties in South Dakota. Poultry and livestock were killed, and many persons were injured. Hail ten inches in circumference was reported at Huron SD. (The Weather Channel)

1975: An Eastern Airlines Boeing 727 crashed at JFK airport in New York City. 113 of the 124 people on board the aircraft died. Researcher Theodore Fujita studied the incident and discovered that a microburst caused the crash. His research led to improved air safety. The tower never experienced the microburst, which was held back by a sea-breeze front. The plane crashed 2,400 feet short of the runway.

1987 - Thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes in eastern Colorado. Baseball size hail was reported near Yoder, CO, and thunderstorm winds gusting to 92 mph derailed a train near Pratt, KS. The town of Gould, OK, was soaked with nearly an inch and a half of rain in just ten minutes. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Forty-three cities reported record high temperatures for the date. Valentine NE reported an all-time record high of 110 degrees, and highs of 102 degrees at Casper, WY, 103 degrees at Reno, NV, and 106 degrees at Winnemucca, NV, were records for the month of June. Highs of 98 degrees at Logan, UT, and 109 degrees at Rapid City, SD, equalled June records. Lightning killed twenty-one cows near Conway, SC. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along a warm front produced severe weather from Colorado and New Mexico to Kansas and Nebraska. Thunderstorms spawned seven tornadoes, and produced wind gusts to 80 mph at Wood River, NE, and hail three inches in diameter at Wheeler, KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

ALWAYS ROOM FOR MORE

Whenever I hear the word "gain," I think it is related to "weight," especially my weight. There are very few mornings that I do not step on the scale to get my "daily report" on what I ate yesterday. Most nutritionists do not recommend such a program. But, my hope to see the arrow pointing downward remains steadfast.

A gain or increase can be good or bad, exciting or depressing, encouraging or discouraging, depending on what the gain refers to. If we depend on the stock market, a gain can be a good thing. But, if we see a gain in our debt, it can be disturbing. Our gains or losses, for the most part, are usually in the physical or material realm.

Solomon speaks of a particular type of "gain" - of being able to achieve some "things" that will last as long as we live. These "gains," these valuable lessons are available and offered to us in Proverbs. Our "attaining" more of God's wisdom, or "life gains" is very important for all Christians because we are constantly challenged to "grow" throughout Scripture, and Proverbs provides this path for us if we want to grow.

The word used for "wisdom" in this verse also means skillfulness - applying knowledge that comes from God to our lives every day. If we do so, we will "do the right things the right way."

When we go one step further, we come to the fact that it is possible to develop decision-making skills that are God-honoring and enable us to establish life-principals that will bring us success. God's proverbs can guide us through life, help us in our relationships with others, lead to good practices in business, enrich our homes, and bless God and others.

Prayer: Lord, You've left us "no excuses" on how we are to live life if we are Christians. Thanks for the directions on how to live a successful life! Now, give us courage! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Bible Verse: For gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight. Proverbs 1:2



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: 06.21.24

3 18 27 40 44 19

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$97,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 52 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.22.24

1 26 37 39 44 1

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$3,630,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 7 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.23.24

3 5 23 43 46 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 22 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.22.24

15 20 25 27 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 22 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.22.24

6 23 48 49 54 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 51 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.22.24

4 5 15 32 62 21

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$84,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 51 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Sweltering temperatures persist across the US, while floodwaters inundate the Midwest

By The Associated Press undefined

Millions of Americans sweated through a scorching weekend as temperatures soared across the U.S., while residents were rescued from floodwaters that forced evacuations across the Midwest. One person died during flooding in South Dakota, the governor said.

From the mid-Atlantic to Maine, across the Great Lakes region, and throughout the West to California, public officials cautioned residents about the dangers of excessive heat and humidity. Forecasters say the heat wave will continue early in the week in the Southeast, portions of the South and the Plains.

At the borders of South Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota, floodwaters rose over several days. In northwest Iowa, 13 rivers flooded the area, said Eric Tigges of Clay County emergency management. Entire neighborhoods — and at least one entire town — were evacuated, and the Iowa town of Spencer imposed a curfew Sunday for the second night in a row after flooding that surpassed the record set in 1953.

“When the flood gauge is underwater, it’s really high,” Tigges said at a news conference organized by Spencer officials.

Gov. Kim Reynolds declared a disaster for 21 counties in northern Iowa, including Sioux County. In drone video posted by the local sheriff, no streets were visible, just roofs and treetops poking above the water.

National Guard troops were helping with water rescues and transporting needed medications lost in flooding.

“Businesses are shuttered. Main streets have been impacted,” Reynolds said. “Hospitals, nursing homes and other care facilities were evacuated. Cities are without power, and some are without drinkable water.”

National Weather Service meteorologist Donna Dubberke said parts of northern Nebraska, southeastern South Dakota, southern Minnesota and northwest Iowa received eight times the typical average rainfall. And more heavy rain was expected this week.

In South Dakota, Gov. Kristi Noem declared an emergency after severe flooding in the southeastern part. Several highways were closed.

Areas south of Sioux Falls, the state’s largest city, had an estimated 10 to 15 inches (25 to 38 centimeters) of rain over three days, Weather service hydrologist Kevin Low said.

At least one person died in the floods, Noem said Sunday, without providing details.

Several rivers, including the Big Sioux, James and Vermillion, were expected to peak sometime Monday through Wednesday night, the governor said at a news conference.

“I want to remind everybody to remember the power of water and the flow of water, and to stay away from flooded areas,” Noem said. “We’ve got a few days in front of us here that’ll be a little rough, but we’ll get through it.”

Emergency management officials in the small South Dakota community of Dakota Dunes on Sunday issued a voluntary evacuation order for the area’s roughly 4,000 residents. Dakota Dunes is near the Nebraska and Iowa borders and is sandwiched between the Missouri and Big Sioux rivers, both of which are expected to crest in the coming days. Emergency management in Dakota Dunes warned residents that a mandatory evacuation could come quickly if flood barriers are breached.

Minor to moderate flooding was expected along the Missouri River, according to officials with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

“As long as the levees hold, we’re not expecting any major impacts,” said John Remus, water management division chief for the corps in the Missouri River basin.

But elsewhere, the heat was the biggest worry.

“It’s more important for people who are going to be outside to stay hydrated, because heat, humidity and low winds, even if you’re in good shape and not really acclimated to it, it could be a danger,” said

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Bruce Thoren, a weather service meteorologist in Oklahoma. "It happens quickly."

The cities of Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Philadelphia all saw record heat on over the weekend.

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

The weather service had warned of the potential for rare tornadoes in the Northeast later Sunday. Tornadoes on Saturday struck in Wisconsin, leveling the historic Apple Grove Lutheran Church, founded in 1893 in the town of Argyle.

"The good news is we are all safe," Dan Bohlman, pastor of Apple Grove Lutheran, said on the church website.

Marvin Boyd, meteorologist at the weather service in Burlington, Vermont, said a severe thunderstorm warning was issued for parts of northern New York as a storm with wind gusts exceeding 60 mph (95 kph) and the threat of tornadoes head toward Vermont near Lake Champlain. It was one of several expected to pass through the region Sunday afternoon.

"It's an unusual alignment of ingredients for Vermont and northern New York to produce a threat of tornadoes," Boyd said.

A fire at a lithium battery factory in South Korea kills 22 mostly Chinese migrant workers

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A fire likely sparked by exploding lithium batteries swept through a manufacturing factory near South Korea's capital on Monday, killing 22 mostly Chinese migrant workers and injuring eight, officials said.

The fire began after batteries exploded while workers were examining and packaging them at the second floor of the factory in Hwaseong city, just south of Seoul, at around 10:30 a.m., fire officials said, citing a witness. They said they would investigate the cause of the blaze.

The dead included 18 Chinese, two South Koreans and one Laotian, local fire official Kim Jin-young told a televised briefing. He said the nationality of one of the dead couldn't be immediately verified.

In the past few decades, many people from China, including ethnic Koreans, have migrated to South Korea to seek jobs. Like other foreign migrants from Southeast Asian nations, they often end up in factories or in physically demanding and low-paying jobs shunned by more affluent South Koreans.

Kim also one factory worker remained out of contact and rescuers continued to search the site. He said that two of the eight injured were in serious conditions.

The fire started at one of the factory buildings owned by a company named Aricell. Kim said the victims likely failed to escape via stairs to the ground. He said that authorities will investigate whether there were fire extinguishing systems at the site and if they worked.

Kim said a total of 102 people were working at the factory before the fire occurred.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's No. 2 official, and Interior and Safety Minister Lee Sang-min visited the site later Monday. Han asked officials to provide government assistance for funeral services and support programs for victims' relatives, according to Han's office.

TV footage also showed President Yoon Suk Yeol, wearing a safety helmet and a mask, visiting the site with other officials.

Monday's blaze is one of the deadliest in South Korea in recent years.

In 2020, a fire at a warehouse being built in Icheon city, south of Seoul, killed 38 construction workers. In 2018, 46 people died after a fire ripped through a small hospital with no sprinkler systems in the southern city of Miryang. In 2008, 40 workers, 12 of them ethnic Koreans with Chinese nationality, died after a fire and accompanying explosions tore through a refrigerated warehouse in Icheon city.

South Korea has struggled for decades to improve safety standards and change widespread attitudes that treat safety as subservient to economic progress and convenience.

Russian region of Dagestan holds a day of mourning after attacks kill 19 people

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's southern region of Dagestan held the first of three days of mourning Monday following a rampage by Islamic militants who killed 19 people, most of them police, and attacked houses of worship in apparently coordinated assaults in two cities.

Sunday's violence in Dagestan's regional capital of Makhachkala and nearby Derbent was the latest that officials blamed on Islamic extremists in the predominantly Muslim region in the North Caucasus, as well as the deadliest in Russia since March, when gunmen opened fire at a concert in suburban Moscow, killing 145 people.

The affiliate of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan that claimed responsibility for March's raid quickly praised the attack in Dagestan, saying it was conducted by "brothers in the Caucasus who showed that they are still strong."

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War argued that the Islamic State group's North Caucasus branch, Vilayat Kavkaz, likely was behind the attack, describing it as "complex and coordinated."

Dagestan Gov. Sergei Melikov blamed members of Islamic "sleeper cells" directed from abroad, but didn't give any other details. He said in a video statement that the assailants aimed at "sowing panic and fear," and attempted to link the attack to Moscow's military action in Ukraine — but also provided no evidence.

President Vladimir Putin had sought to blame the March attack on Ukraine, again without evidence and despite the claim of responsibility by the Islamic State affiliate. Kyiv has vehemently denied any involvement.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin has received reports on Sunday's attacks and efforts to help the victims.

The Investigative Committee, the country's top state criminal investigation agency, said all five attackers were killed. Of the 19 people killed, 15 were police.

Among the dead was the Rev. Nikolai Kotelnikov, a 66-year-old Russian Orthodox priest at a church in Derbent. The attackers slit his throat before setting fire to the church, according to Shamil Khadulayev, deputy head of a local public oversight body.

The Kele-Numaz synagogue in Derbent also was set ablaze.

Shortly after the attacks in Derbent, militants fired at a police post in Makhachkala and attacked a Russian Orthodox Church and a synagogue there before being hunted down and killed by special forces.

Russian news reports said the attackers included the two sons and a nephew of Magomed Omarov, the head of the main Kremlin's party United Russia's regional branch in Dagestan. Omarov was detained by police for interrogation, and United Russia quickly dismissed him from its ranks.

In the early 2000s, Dagestan saw near-daily attacks on police and other authorities that was blamed on militant extremists. After the emergence of the Islamic State group, many residents of the region joined it in Syria and Iraq.

The violence in Dagestan has abated in recent years, but in a sign that extremist sentiments still run high in the region, mobs rioted at an airport there in October, targeting a flight from Israel. More than 20 people were hurt — none of them Israelis — when hundreds of men, some carrying banners with antisemitic slogans, rushed onto the tarmac, chased passengers and threw stones at police.

The airport rampage challenged the Kremlin's narrative that ethnic and religious groups coexist in harmony in Russia.

After March's Moscow concert hall attack, Russia's top security agency reported that it had broken up what it called a "terrorist cell" in southern Russia and arrested four of its members who had provided weapons and cash to suspected attackers in Moscow.

Is Trump shielded from criminal charges as an ex-president? A nation awaits word from Supreme Court

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By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the coming days, the Supreme Court will confront a perfect storm mostly of its own making: a trio of decisions stemming directly from the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Within days of each other, if not hours, the justices are expected to rule on whether Donald Trump has immunity from criminal charges over his efforts to overturn his 2020 election defeat and whether Trump supporters who stormed the Capitol can be prosecuted for obstructing an official proceeding.

The court also will decide whether former Trump adviser Steve Bannon can stay out of prison while he appeals his contempt of Congress conviction for defying a subpoena from the House committee that investigated the Capitol attack.

These cases are among the dozen or so major disputes dealing with abortion, homelessness, the power of federal regulators, the opioid epidemic and social media platforms that the justices have left to decide as the traditional end of their term's work nears.

Taken together, the three cases connected to the former president could feed narratives about the court and its conservative supermajority, which includes three justices appointed by Trump and two other justices, Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas, who have rejected calls to step away from the Jan. 6 cases because of questions about their impartiality.

From the perspective of Trump and his allies, the outcomes could provide more fodder for their claims that the Justice Department has treated the Capitol riot defendants unfairly. The riots resulted in more than 1,400 criminal cases in which 200 people have been convicted and more than 850 pleaded guilty to crimes.

That has not deterred Trump and his allies from claiming the Justice Department has treated the Capitol riot defendants unfairly. The outcomes of the cases could give them more reasons to decry the prosecutions.

The court's handling of the immunity issue already has provoked criticism, both that the justices took up the issue at all — particularly given a unanimous federal appeals court ruling that rejected Trump's claim — and more recently that they haven't yet decided it.

Even if the court limits Trump's immunity, or rejects his claims altogether, allowing his trial on election interference to go forward in Washington means "it is unlikely a verdict will be delivered before the election," University of Michigan law professor Leah Litman wrote in *The New York Times*.

While the court has moved more quickly than usual in taking up the immunity case, it has acted far more speedily in other epic cases involving presidential power, including in the Watergate tapes case. Nearly 50 years ago, the court ruled 8-0 a mere 16 days after hearing arguments that Richard Nixon had to turn over recordings of Oval Office conversations, rejecting his claim of executive privilege.

In March, it took the justices less than a month after arguments to rule unanimously that the Constitution's post-Civil War "insurrection clause" couldn't be used by states to kick Trump off the presidential ballot.

The three cases related to Trump's effort to undo his election loss in 2020 highlight how often he has appeared in the court's work this year, though now he is doing so as the Republican Party's presumptive nominee for president. Trump also was a factor in two social media cases and even a trademark dispute over the phrase "Trump too small."

The court almost always finishes its work by the end of June, but it's not certain that will happen this year.

The court will next issue decisions on Wednesday. Among the other cases left to decide:

— Can doctors provide abortions in medical emergencies in states that banned abortion after the court overturned *Roe v. Wade*? In a case out of Idaho, the Biden administration says abortions must be allowed in emergencies where a woman's health is at serious risk, while the state argues it is enough that its strict abortion ban contains an exception to save a woman's life.

— The most significant Supreme Court case in decades on homelessness centers on whether people can be banned from sleeping outdoors when shelter space is lacking. A San Francisco-based appeals court ruled such bans amount to cruel and unusual punishment. Leaders from California and across the West say the ruling makes it harder for them to regulate homeless encampments encroaching on sidewalks and other public places.

— The justices could overturn a 40-year-old decision that has been cited thousands of times in federal

court cases and used to uphold regulations on the environment, public health, workplace safety and consumer protections. The decision colloquially known as Chevron calls on judges to defer to federal regulators when the words of a statute are not crystal clear. The decision has long been targeted by conservative and business interests who say Chevron robs judges of their authority and gives too much power to regulators.

— Three cases remain unresolved at the intersection of social media and government. Two cases involve social media laws in Texas and Florida that would limit how Facebook, TikTok, X, YouTube and other social media platforms regulate content posted by their users. In the third case, Republican-led states are suing the Biden administration over how far the federal government can go to counter controversial social media posts on topics including COVID-19 and election security.

— The Supreme Court controls the fate of a nationwide settlement with OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma that would allocate billions of dollars to combat the opioid epidemic, but also provide a legal shield for members of the Sackler family who own the company. The settlement has been on hold since last summer after the Supreme Court agreed to weigh in.

— Republican-led, energy-producing states and the steel industry want the court to put the Environmental Protection Agency's air pollution-fighting "good neighbor" plan on hold while legal challenges continue. The plan aims to protect downwind states that receive unwanted air pollution from other states.

— Another important regulatory case could strip the Securities and Exchange Commission of a major tool in fighting securities fraud and have far-reaching effects on other regulatory agencies. The court is being asked to rule that people facing civil fraud complaints have the right to a jury trial in federal court.

Can Biden perform and can Trump be boring? Key questions ahead of high-stakes presidential debate

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Rarely, if ever, has one candidate in a presidential debate had so much material to use against the other.

Republican Donald Trump has been convicted of 34 felony counts with serious charges in three other indictments still pending. As president, Trump nominated three of the justices who voted to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and erode abortion access in America, creating a backlash even in conservative-led states. And his sweeping second-term plans include promises of retribution against political enemies in both parties.

Yet the big question for President Joe Biden, fairly or not, is whether he has the physical and mental capacity at 81 years old to press the case against Trump. Perhaps nothing matters more than the level of energy and strength the Democratic incumbent projects on stage.

Both men have glaring flaws that present their opponent with tremendous opportunity, and risk. They will face a huge national audience that will include many people tuning into their 2020 rematch for the first time and who won't see another debate until September, magnifying each success or mistake.

Biden and Trump will face off Thursday at 9 p.m. for 90 minutes inside a CNN studio in Atlanta.

Here are some key questions we'll be watching:

Can Biden perform? Biden's seeming low bar for success has been created, at least in part, by the 78-year-old Trump and his Republican allies, who have relentlessly mocked the Democratic president for apparent stumbles connected to his age for years. Trump's allies have questioned whether Biden can even stay awake and stand up for the entire 90 minutes.

Democrats are hopeful that Biden can bring the same energy he did in his State of the Union address earlier in the year. But a face-off on live television against an opponent who delights in verbal combat is very different from a scripted speech before Congress.

Biden's team is aware that he cannot afford to have a bad night with the nation watching.

Can Trump be boring? Having already locked up his base, Trump has an opportunity with persuadable swing voters and moderates who fueled Biden's victory four years ago and now express concerns about both candidates.

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But to win over the so-called "double haters," Trump cannot simply lean into the red-meat talking points, personal insults and conspiracy theories that typically dominate his public appearances. Instead of more talk of retribution or lies about the U.S. election system, he'll need to offer an optimistic vision for the future and a clear contrast with Biden on traditional kitchen-table issues like health care and education.

He was widely panned for his outbursts in the first 2020 debate with Biden, badgering the then-Democratic nominee and repeatedly interrupting him. Their second debate took a milder tone and focused on their sharply different governing visions.

In short, Trump needs to be somewhat boring on Thursday night. Can he stay disciplined? Some allies are hopeful. History may suggest otherwise.

Navigating the criminal records Trump's extraordinary legal baggage creates opportunity and risk for both candidates on stage.

Biden's campaign has signaled an increasing willingness to lean into Trump's criminal record in recent days. But aside from a few jabs, Biden himself has largely distanced himself from Trump's prosecutions to avoid the appearance of political interference.

Trump, who has been alleging for years without evidence that Biden is responsible for prosecuting him, won't make it easy for the president to toe that line.

Recent polling shows that about half of U.S. adults approve of Trump's New York conviction. And if voters don't think the specific convictions are troublesome, Trump's attempt to conceal an alleged affair with a porn actress is hardly bumper sticker material.

Meanwhile, Biden is aware that Trump may go after 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. Trump has also raised questions about Hunter Biden's foreign business dealings when his father was vice president.

Muted mics and moderators As is often the case, the moderators and the ground rules will likely shape the debate's outcome. And the ground rules for this debate, the first of two scheduled meetings, are unusual.

It's worth noting that the candidates are bypassing the traditional structure determined by the Commission on Presidential Debates and instead relying on a set of mutually agreed rules and conditions.

Biden and Trump will debate at a CNN studio in Atlanta with no audience. There will be no opening statements. Each candidate's microphone will be muted, except when it's his turn to speak. No props or pre-written notes will be allowed on stage. The candidates will be given only a pen, a pad of paper and a bottle of water.

A coin flip determined that Trump would deliver the final closing statement.

The event will be moderated by CNN's Dana Bash and Jake Tapper, two well-respected anchors who have not been shy about calling out Trump's lies and conspiracy theories.

While Bash and Tapper have led critical coverage of Biden at times as well, Biden's camp is no doubt hoping that they'll play an active role in rejecting Trump's potential falsehoods in real time. While Biden's microphone will be muted when Trump is speaking, for example, the moderators' mics will not.

Abortion versus immigration While style sometimes matters more than substance on the debate stage, both candidates have serious policy challenges to navigate.

For Trump, no issue looms larger than abortion. His Supreme Court appointments while president enabled the court to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*, which triggered an avalanche of abortion restrictions across the nation. Trump has repeatedly said he was proud of his role in overturning *Roe*. And Biden will be eager to highlight Trump's role.

Trump, of course, has said he would not support a national abortion ban if reelected. But given his track record on *Roe*, he may have more work to do if he hopes to convince women he can be trusted on a key health care issue.

Biden's greatest political liability, meanwhile, may be immigration. The Democrat's administration has struggled to limit the number of immigrants entering the country at the U.S.-Mexico border. His allies privately acknowledge the issue is a major political liability heading into the fall.

Trump loves nothing more than highlighting illegal immigration, so expect him to pound Biden on the issue.

At the same time, Biden will face tough questions about his leadership in the war between Israel and Hamas. The president has alienated some would-be supporters on both sides given his staunch support — and occasional criticism — of Israel.

He'll have a major opportunity to defend his record on the complicated issue Thursday night. It won't be easy.

Netanyahu says he won't agree to a deal that ends the war in Gaza, testing the latest truce proposal

By TIA GOLDENBERG and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The viability of a U.S.-backed proposal to wind down the 8-month-long war in Gaza was cast into doubt on Monday after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would only be willing to agree to a "partial" cease-fire deal that would not end the war, comments that sparked an uproar from families of hostages held by Hamas.

In an interview broadcast late Sunday on Israeli Channel 14, a conservative, pro-Netanyahu station, the Israeli leader said he was "prepared to make a partial deal -- this is no secret — that will return to us some of the people," referring to the roughly 120 hostages still held in the Gaza Strip. "But we are committed to continuing the war after a pause, in order to complete the goal of eliminating Hamas. I'm not willing to give up on that."

Netanyahu's comments did not deviate dramatically from what he has said previously about his terms for a deal. But they come at a sensitive time as Israel and Hamas appear to be moving further apart over the latest cease-fire proposal, and they could represent another setback for mediators trying to end the war.

Netanyahu's comments stood in sharp contrast to the outlines of the deal detailed late last month by U.S. President Joe Biden, who framed the plan as an Israeli one and which some in Israel refer to as "Netanyahu's deal." His remarks could further strain Israel's ties to the U.S., its top ally, which launched a major diplomatic push for the latest cease-fire proposal.

The three-phased plan would bring about the release of the remaining hostages in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. But disputes and mistrust persist between Israel and Hamas over how the deal plays out.

Hamas has insisted it will not release the remaining hostages unless there's a permanent cease-fire and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. When Biden announced the latest proposal last month, he said it included both.

But Netanyahu says Israel is still committed to destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities, and ensuring it can never again carry out an Oct. 7-style assault. A full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, where Hamas' top leadership and much of its forces are still intact, would almost certainly leave the group in control of the territory and able to rearm.

In the interview, Netanyahu said that the current phase of fighting is ending, setting the stage for Israel to send more troops to its northern border to confront the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, in what could open up a new war front. But he said that didn't mean the war in Gaza was over.

During the initial six-week phase, the sides are supposed to negotiate an agreement on the second phase, which Biden said would include the release of all remaining living hostages, including male soldiers, and Israel's full withdrawal from Gaza. The temporary cease-fire would become permanent.

Hamas appears concerned that Israel will resume the war once its most vulnerable hostages are returned. And even if it doesn't, Israel could make demands in that stage of negotiations that were not part of the initial deal and are unacceptable to Hamas — and then resume the war when Hamas refuses them.

Netanyahu's remarks reinforced that concern. After they were aired, Hamas said they represented "unmistakable confirmation of his rejection" of the U.S.-supported deal, which also received the backing of the United Nations' Security Council.

In a statement late Sunday after Netanyahu's lengthy TV interview, the Palestinian militant group said his position was "in contrast" to what the U.S. administration said that Israel had approved. The group

said that its insistence that any deal should include a permanent cease-fire and the withdrawal of all Israeli forces out of the entire Gaza Strip "was an inevitable necessity to block Netanyahu's attempts of evasion, deception, and perpetuation of aggression and the war of extermination against our people."

Netanyahu shot back and in a statement from his office said Hamas opposed a deal. He said Israel would not withdraw from Gaza until all 120 hostages are returned.

Hamas welcomed the broad outline of the U.S. plan but proposed what it said were "amendments." U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, during a visit to the region earlier this month, said some of Hamas' demands were "workable" and some were not, without elaborating.

Netanyahu and Hamas both have incentives to keep the devastating war going despite the catastrophic toll it has had on civilians in Gaza and the mounting anger in Israel that after so many months Israel has not reached its aims of returning the hostages and defeating Hamas.

The families of hostages have grown increasingly impatient with Netanyahu, seeing his apparent reluctance to move ahead on a deal as tainted by political considerations. A group representing the families condemned Netanyahu's remarks, which it viewed as an Israeli rejection of the latest cease-fire proposal.

"This is an abandonment of the 120 hostages and a violation of the state's moral duty toward its citizens," it said, noting that it held Netanyahu responsible for returning all the captives.

In its Oct. 7 cross-border assault, Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people and took 250 people captive, including women, children and older people. Dozens were freed in a temporary cease-fire deal in late November and of the 120 remaining hostages, Israeli authorities say about a third are dead.

Israel's retaliatory war has killed more than 37,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. It has sparked a humanitarian crisis and displaced most of the territory's 2.3 million population.

It's not as world-famous as ramen or sushi. But the humble onigiri is soul food in Japan

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The word "onigiri" became part of the Oxford English Dictionary this year, proof that the humble sticky-rice ball and mainstay of Japanese food has entered the global lexicon.

The rice balls are stuffed with a variety of fillings and typically wrapped in seaweed. It's an everyday dish that epitomizes "washoku" — the traditional Japanese cuisine that was designated a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage a decade ago.

Onigiri is "fast food, slow food and soul food," says Yusuke Nakamura, who heads the Onigiri Society, a trade group in Tokyo.

Fast because you can find it even at convenience stores. Slow because it uses ingredients from the sea and mountains, he said. And soul food because it's often made and consumed among family and friends. No tools are needed, just gently cupped hands.

"It's also mobile, food on the move," he said.

Onigiri in its earliest form is believed to go back at least as far as the early 11th Century; it's mentioned in Murasaki Shikibu's "The Tale of Genji." It appears in Akira Kurosawa's classic 1954 film "Seven Samurai" as the ultimate gift of gratitude from the farmers.

What exactly goes into onigiri? The sticky characteristic of Japanese rice is key.

What's placed inside is called "gu," or filling. A perennial favorite is umeboshi, or salted plum. Or perhaps mentaiko, which is hot, spicy roe. But in principle, anything can be placed inside onigiri, even sausages or cheese.

Then the ball is wrapped with seaweed. Even one nice big onigiri would make a meal, although many people would eat more.

Some stand by the classic onigiri. Yosuke Miura runs Onigiri Asakusa Yadoroku, a restaurant founded in 1954 by his grandmother. Yadoroku, which roughly translates to "good-for-nothing," is named for her husband, Miura's grandfather. It claims to be the oldest onigiri restaurant in Tokyo.

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There are just two tables. The counter has eight chairs. Takeout is an option, but you still have to stand in line.

"Nobody dislikes onigiri," said Miura, smiling behind a wooden counter. In a display case before him are bowls of gu, including salmon, shrimp and miso-flavored ginger. "It's nothing special basically. Every Japanese has 100% eaten it."

Also a classical flautist, Miura sees onigiri as a score handed down from his grandmother, one which he will reproduce faithfully.

"In classical music, you play what's written on the music sheet. Onigiri is the same," he says. "You don't try to do something new."

Yadoruku is tucked away in the quaint old part of Tokyo called Asakusa. It opens at 11:30 a.m. and closes when it runs out of rice, usually within the hour. Then it opens again for dinner. The most expensive onigiri costs 770 yen (\$4.90), with salmon roe, while the cheapest is 319 yen (\$2). That includes miso soup. No reservations are taken.

Although onigiri can be round or square, animal or star-shaped, Miura's standard is the triangular ones. He makes them to order, right before your eyes, taking just 30 seconds for each.

He places the hot rice in triangular molds that look like cookie cutters, rubs salt on his hands and then cups the rice — three times to gently firm the sides. The crisp nori, or seaweed, is wrapped like a kerchief around the rice, with one end up so it stays crunchy.

The first bite is just nori and rice. The gu comes with your second bite.

"The Yadoroku onigiri will not change until the end of Earth," Miura said with a grin.

Others want to experimentMiyuki Kawarada runs Taro Tokyo Onigiri, which has four outlets in Japan. She is eyeing Los Angeles, too, and then Paris. Her vision: to make onigiri "the world's fast food."

The name Taro was chosen because it's common, the Japanese equivalent of John or Michael. Onigiri, she says, has mass appeal because it's simple to make, is gluten-free and is versatile.

And other Japanese foods like ramen and sushi have found worldwide popularity, she notes.

At her cheerful, modern shop, workers wearing khaki-colored company T-shirts busily prepare the gu and rice balls in a kitchen visible behind the cash register. The shop only serves takeout.

Kawarada's onigiri has lots of gu on top, for colorful toppings, instead of inside. Each one comes with a separately wrapped piece of nori to be placed around it right before you eat.

Her gu gets adventurous. Cream cheese is mixed with a pungent Japanese pickle called "iburigakko," for instance, and each onigiri costs 250 yen (\$1.60). Spam and egg onigiri costs 300 yen (\$1.90); the one adorned with several types of "kombu," or edible kelp, called "Dashi Punch X3," costs 280 yen (\$1.80).

"Onigiri is the infinite universe. We don't get tied down in tradition," said Kawarada.

The customersAsami Hirano, who stopped in while walking her dog, took a long time choosing her meal at Taro Tokyo Onigiri on a recent day.

"I've always loved onigiri since I was a kid. My mother made them," she said.

Nicolas Foo Cheung, a Frenchman who works nearby as an intern, had been to Taro Tokyo Onigiri a few times before and thinks it's a good deal. "It's simple food," he said.

Miki Yamada, a food promoter, intentionally calls onigiri "omusubi," the other common word for rice balls, because the latter more clearly refers to the idea of connections. She says her life's mission is to bring people together, especially since the triple earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters hit her family's rice farm in Fukushima, northeastern Japan, in 2011.

"By facing up to omusubi, I have encountered a spirituality, a basic Japanese-ness of sorts," she said.

There is nothing better, she said, than plain Aizu rice omusubi with a pinch of salt and utterly nothing inside.

"It energizes you. It's that ultimate comfort food," she said.

US struggles with shaky relations and troop cuts in African nations as military leaders meet

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

GABORONE, Botswana (AP) — The forced U.S. troop withdrawals from bases in Niger and Chad and the potential to shift some troops to other nations in West Africa will be key issues as the top U.S. military officer meets with his counterparts this week at a chiefs of defense conference.

Gen. CQ Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, arrived in Botswana Monday as the U.S. faces a critical inflection point in Africa. Increasingly, military juntas that overthrew democratic governments in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are reassessing their ties to the U.S. and the West and turning instead to mercenaries linked to Russia for security assistance.

Speaking to reporters as he traveled to Gaborone, Brown said that as the U.S. pulls its 1,000 troops out of Niger, including from a critical counterterrorism and drone base there, other West African nations want to work with the U.S. and may be open to an expanded American presence.

The conference, he said, will give him a chance to speak with a number of his African counterparts, and listen to their objectives and concerns.

"There's other countries in the region where we already have either small presence or have relationships," Brown said. "Part of this is looking at how we continue to build on those relationships which may provide opportunities for us to posture some of the capabilities we had in Niger in some of those locations."

The U.S. needs to have a dialogue with those nations to see what type and size U.S. military presence they would want, he said, adding, "That's why this conference is important."

Brown and other defense officials say the conference is a chance to show African leaders that the U.S. can listen and accept local solutions. The U.S., said one defense official, has to adjust to the solutions that Africans have identified and not impose external Western ideals.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military relationships, said the Botswana meeting is an opportunity to foster military relationships throughout the continent.

The troop cuts at key bases in Africa's Sahel region raise questions about how to battle what has been a growing tide of violence by extremist groups, including those linked to the Islamic State group and al-Qaida.

The defense official said the U.S. is concerned about the spread of extremist activity from multiple groups into coastal West Africa in particular.

Niger's ruling junta ordered U.S. forces out of the country in the wake of last July's ouster of the country's democratically elected president by mutinous soldiers. French forces had also been asked to leave as the junta turned to the Russian mercenary group Wagner for security assistance.

Washington officially designated the military takeover as a coup in October, triggering U.S. laws restricting the military support and aid. The fracture has broad ramifications for the U.S. because it forced troops to abandon the critical drone base at Agadez that was used for counterterrorism missions in the Sahel.

The senior defense official said the withdrawal of U.S. forces and all the equipment from Niger is about 30% complete, and will be completed on Sept. 15 as required. The official said that the pace of the pullout will ebb and flow, as troops leave based on when their weapons systems and equipment are taken out. Roughly 600 troops currently remain there.

Soon afterward, Chad ordered U.S. forces out of Adjii Kossei Air Base near N'Djamena. About 75 U.S. Army special forces relocated to Europe, and about 20 troops remain in the country along with Marine security forces assigned to the U.S. Embassy.

The U.S. has described the troop cuts in Chad as temporary and could be revisited now that the presidential election there is over. And Brown said that the U.S. will work with the embassy leadership in Chad to take a look at what the future U.S. presence there will be.

Some African nations have expressed frustration with the U.S. for forcing issues, such as democracy and human rights, that many see as hypocrisy, given Washington's close ties to some autocratic leaders elsewhere. Meanwhile, Russia offers security assistance without interfering in politics, making it an appealing partner for military juntas that seized power in places like Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso in recent years.

A key element in any U.S. discussions with African leaders is to recognize that America must calibrate what it asks and expects of those governments and their militaries, said Mvemba Dizolele, director of the Africa Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

"Security and defense policy makers in the United States should not approach Africa thinking that deep inside every African military officer is an American officer waiting to come out," said Dizolele. "That's just not realistic. Every African officer is an officer who's trying to do the best within the conditions that they've been dealt."

He said the U.S. is not always ready to engage with some African countries because of various obstacles such as the Leahy Law that prohibits certain military assistance to foreign forces that violate human rights, and congressional spending restrictions that limit aid to countries whose leadership was overturned in a coup.

Meanwhile, other countries such as Russia and China will provide any military aid and equipment that the African countries can afford to buy, said Dizolele.

New mom who delighted in her daughter is among the dead in Arkansas grocery store shooting

By SUDHIN THANAWALA Associated Press

Callie Weems was reveling in her new role as a mom in the months before a gunman in Arkansas fatally shot her at a grocery store.

Her daughter Ivy, now 10 months old, was a constant source of entertainment and wonder, Weems' mother, Helen Browning, 53, said in a phone interview on Sunday as she shared memories of her daughter. Weems, 23, was among four people fatally wounded and another 11 injured — including the alleged gunman — in the shooting at the Mad Butcher store in Fordyce, Arkansas, Friday, according to authorities. Just an hour before, Weems was marveling that her little girl had let her sleep in until 9 a.m. that morning.

"I bet you feel like a new mom," Browning recalled texting back.

It was the last conversation they had before police say 44-year-old Travis Eugene Posey of New Edinburg opened fire at the store, riddling cars with bullet holes as panicked bystanders ducked and scrambled for cover amid a barrage of gunfire. Weems, a nurse, died helping another gunshot victim, Arkansas State Police Director Mike Hagar said Sunday.

"Instead of fleeing the store, she stopped to render aid in one of the most selfless acts I've ever seen," he said at a news conference.

In all, state police said 15 people were shot Friday, including 12 civilians, two law enforcement officers and Posey.

It was at least the third mass shooting at a U.S. grocery in the last three years. In 2022, a white supremacist killed 10 Black people at a Buffalo supermarket. That came a little more than a year after 10 people were fatally shot at supermarket in Boulder, Colorado.

Police said Sunday that Posey's motive was still unclear, but he appeared to have no personal connection to any of the victims.

He carried a 12-gauge shotgun, a pistol and a bandolier with dozens of extra shotgun rounds, authorities said. He fired most, if not all, of the rounds using the shotgun, opening fire at people in the parking lot before entering the store and firing "indiscriminately" at customers and employees, Hagar said.

Fordyce police and Dallas County sheriff's deputies arrived within minutes, and Posey exited the store and exchanged gunfire with them before they shot him and took him into custody.

For Browning, the tragedy was amplified by her connection to another victim, Roy Sturgis, 50, who was also shot and killed. She said Sturgis was part of her extended family, a logger and a loving father to his daughter.

"Roy was as country as cornbread," she said. "He lived a simple life. He was a simple man."

The other victims who died were identified as Shirley Taylor, 62, and Ellen Shrum, 81.

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Taylor took care of her husband, who had diabetes, and crocheted, her daughter, Angela Atchley, told KTHV in Little Rock, Arkansas.

"She was our family rock," Atchley said.

Fordyce, a city of about 3,200 people located 65 miles (104 kilometers) south of Little Rock, was reeling from the shooting, city council member Roderick Rogers said Sunday.

He went to the grocery store on Friday after people there called for his help.

"It was like a war zone," Rogers said, describing the gunman shooting "like crazy" in the parking lot.

Residents in the tight-knit community worried about victims who were still in the hospital and even about the possibility of another shooting, he said.

"A lot of people are frightened," he said. "They want to feel safe right now."

Hagar said the officers and deputies who responded to the scene knew the shooter and the victims, making the attack particularly difficult and personal.

The wounded range in age from 20 to 65, police said. Five were still hospitalized, including a woman in critical condition.

Police said Posey, who was in custody at the Ouachita County Detention Center, will be charged with four counts of capital murder.

A state police spokesperson said Sunday she believed Posey had an attorney, but she did not know the person's name.

Browning said Posey went to school with her youngest sister, and she never would have thought he could do something so violent.

She plans to raise Ivy now.

"She will know that her mother loved her," she said. "And that she was the sunshine of momma's eyes."

Change in wind direction prompts worry about more North Korean trash balloon launches toward South

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea is monitoring an expected change in the wind direction on Monday that could allow North Korea to send more trash-carrying balloons across their heavily armed border, in their latest bout of tit-for-tat psychological warfare.

Last week, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a major defense deal that observers worry could embolden Kim to direct more provocations at South Korea.

That could include the launching of more huge balloons carrying rubbish toward South Korea in response to a South Korean civilian group's recent floating of balloons with anti-North Korean propaganda into the North.

South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesperson Lee Sung Joon told reporters Monday that the military is closely monitoring North Korean moves because northerly or northwesterly winds, favorable for North Korean balloon launches, were forecast on Monday.

Starting in late May, North Korea launched a series of balloons that dropped manure, cigarette butts, scraps of cloth, waste batteries and vinyl in various parts of South Korea. No highly dangerous materials were found. North Korea said its balloon campaign was a tit-for-tat action against South Korean activists who flew political leaflets critical of its leadership across the border.

Kim's influential sister, Kim Yo Jong, threatened Friday to retaliate after a South Korean group said it sent 20 balloons carrying 300,000 propaganda leaflets, 5,000 USB sticks with South Korean pop songs and TV dramas, and U.S. one-dollar bills across the border the previous night.

"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," Kim Yo Jong said, without saying whether North Korea would launch balloons again.

The South Korean military didn't say how it would respond if North Korea conducts a new round of balloon launches.

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In reaction to North Korea's earlier balloon campaign, South Korea's military on June 9 redeployed gigantic loudspeakers along the border for the first time in six years and resumed anti-North Korean propaganda broadcasts. The broadcasts reportedly included hits by K-pop sensation BTS such as "Butter" and "Dynamite," weather forecasts and news on Samsung, the biggest South Korean company, as well as criticism of North Korea's missile program and its crackdown on foreign videos.

North Korea views front-line South Korean broadcasts and civilian leafleting campaigns as a grave provocation because it bans access to foreign news for most of its 26 million people. North Korea has reacted to past South Korean loudspeaker broadcasts and civilian balloon activities by firing rounds across the border, prompting South Korea to return fire, according to South Korea. No casualties were reported.

Earlier Monday, South Korea, the United States and Japan issued a joint statement strongly condemning expanding military cooperation between Russia and North Korea. It said the North Korean-Russian moves should be of "grave concern" to efforts to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula, the global non-proliferation regime and support for the Ukraine people.

During a meeting in Pyongyang, North Korea's capital, last Wednesday, Kim Jong Un and Putin struck a deal requiring each country to provide aid if attacked and vowed to boost other cooperation. Observers say the accord represents the strongest connection between the two countries since the end of the Cold War. The U.S. and its partners believe North Korea has already been providing Russia with much-needed conventional arms for its war in Ukraine in return for military and economic assistance.

The South Korea-U.S.-Japan statement said the three countries reaffirmed their intention to further boost diplomatic and security cooperation to cope with North Korean threats and prevent an escalation of the situation. It said U.S. commitments to the defense of South Korea and Japan "remain ironclad."

Last Saturday, a nuclear-powered U.S. aircraft carrier arrived in South Korea for a three-way Seoul-Washington-Tokyo military exercise that is expected to begin this month.

North Korea has previously called such joint U.S. military drills an invasion rehearsal and responded with missile tests. North Korea maintains that U.S. hostility forced it to pursue nuclear weapons in self-defense.

Costly election pledges in France stoke fears of splurges that risk pushing country deeper into debt

By JOHN LEICESTER, PAUL WISEMAN and STAN CHOE Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The promises are appealing — and expensive.

Vying to oust the centrist government of President Emmanuel Macron in an upcoming two-round parliamentary election June 30 and July 7, French political parties of both the far right and far left are vowing to cut gasoline taxes, let workers retire earlier and raise wages.

Their campaign pledges threaten to bust an already-swollen government budget, push up French interest rates and strain France's relations with the European Union.

"The snap election could well replace Macron's limping centrist government with one led by parties whose campaigns have abandoned any pretense of fiscal discipline," economist Brigitte Granville of Queen Mary University of London wrote Thursday on the Project Syndicate website.

The turbulence began June 9 when voters handed Macron a defeat at the hands of Marine Le Pen's hard right National Rally party in EU parliamentary elections. Macron promptly and surprisingly called a snap parliamentary election, convinced that French voters would rally to prevent the first far-right government from taking power in France since the Nazi occupation in World War II.

Macron is aligned against both Le Pen's National Rally and the New Popular Front, a coalition of far- to center-left parties.

"The center has kind of evaporated," said French economist Nicolas Veron, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. The National Rally and the New Popular Front are "radical in very different ways, but they're both very far from the mainstream."

The political extremes are benefiting from widespread voter discontent about painful price rises, squeezed

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household budgets and other hardships. The French economy is sputtering: The International Monetary Fund expects it to eke out weak growth of 0.7% this year, down from an unimpressive 0.9% in 2023.

The political pledges to put money in voters' pockets sent economists reaching for calculators. Their answer: The costs could be considerable, at least tens of billions of euros.

News of National Rally's political ascendance sent France's CAC 40 stock index tumbling to its worst week in more than two years, although the market calmed somewhat last week. Yields on French government bonds also rose on worries about the potential strain on government finances.

Macron acknowledged that National Rally's economic pledges "perhaps make people happy," but claimed they would cost 100 billion euros (\$107 billion) annually. And the left's plans, he charged, are "four times worse in terms of cost."

Jordan Bardella, the National Rally president gunning to become France's prime minister in the election, poo-pooes the figure cited by Macron, saying it was "pulled out of the government's hat." But Bardella has yet to detail how much his party's plans would cost or to say how they'd be paid for.

Likewise, the New Popular Front's 23-page list of campaign pledges doesn't cost them out or detail how they'd be financed. But the coalition vows to "abolish the privileges of billionaires," taxing high earners, fortunes and other wealth more heavily. It says it doesn't intend to add to France's debts.

Far-left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, whose France Unbowed party is fielding the largest number of candidates in the coalition, says its platform would require 200 billion euros (\$214 billion) in public spending over five years but would generate 230 billion euros (\$246 billion) in revenue by stimulating France's economy.

Bardella vows to slash sales taxes — from 20% to 5.5% — on fuel, electricity and gas, "because I think there are millions of French people in our country who this year can no longer afford to heat themselves or are forced to limit their trips." The Paris-based Institut Montaigne think tank estimates the cost of that pledge at between 9 billion and 13.6 billion euros (\$9.6 billion to \$14.5 billion) annually in lost revenue. France's Finance Ministry estimates an even bigger dent in public coffers: 16.8 billion euros (\$18 billion) per year.

On the left, the New Popular Front pledges to freeze prices for essentials — fuel, energy and foodstuffs — as part of a package to help some of France's poorest. It's also promising a considerable bump in the minimum wage, raising it by 200 euros (\$214) to 1,600 euros (\$1,711) net per month. The Institut Montaigne says that those two pledges together could amount to an annual hit of between 12.5 billion euros (\$13.4 billion) and 41.5 billion euros (\$44.4 billion) for public finances. It also warns that the wage bump could hurt the economy and jobs by making labor costlier.

Both the left and the right pledge to roll back pension reforms that Macron railroaded through parliament last year in the face of massive street protests, raising the retirement age from 62 to 64 to help finance the pension system. Doing so risks reopening the politically divisive question of how France can continue to adequately fund pensions as its population ages.

Even before the latest political turbulence, France was already under pressure to do something about its unbalanced government budget. The EU watchdogs have criticized France for running up excessive debts. France already is operating with a higher debt load than European neighbors, with its public debt at an estimated 112% of the size of its economy. That compares with less than 90% for the eurozone overall and just 63% for Germany.

The EU has long insisted that member states keep their annual deficits below 3% of gross domestic product. But those targets have often been ignored, even by Germany and France, the EU's biggest economies.

France's deficit last year stood at 5.5%. The EU's Commission recommended that France and six other countries start an "excessive deficit procedure," beginning a long process that can ultimately force a country to take corrective action.

The upcoming election is for the lower house of France's parliament, the National Assembly. Macron would remain president until 2027 even if his party loses, which might require an awkward "cohabitation" with the National Rally on the far right or New Popular Front on the left.

Macron, who had sought to rein in France's budget deficits, would have a greatly reduced say over

economic policy, though he would still oversee foreign and defense policy. With a leftist or rightwing government calling the shots on economic policy, the country's budget problems would likely go unresolved, leading to higher yields on French bonds.

The nightmare scenario would be a replay of what happened to the United Kingdom in September 2022 when then-Prime Minister Liz Truss spooked financial markets after proposing a wave of tax cuts without cutting any spending to offset them. Truss' plan immediately sent the values of the British pound and U.K. government bonds tumbling. The Bank of England ultimately had to step in to stabilize financial markets, while Truss quit after just 45 days in office.

Something similar might happen if a right- or left-wing French government chose to ignore the EU's budget rules and went on a spending spree that sent French bonds tumbling and interest rates higher. The European Central Bank might then be forced to buy French bonds to drive yields lower and calm markets.

"The ECB would be reluctant to come to the rescue of France itself unless and until any future government put in place a credible plan to bring the deficit down," Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist for Capital Economics, wrote Thursday. "But if yields were spiraling out of control, it could also be forced to step in, just as the Bank of England did."

Netanyahu says Israel is winding down its Gaza operations. But he warns a Lebanon war could be next

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that the current phase of fighting against Hamas in Gaza is winding down, setting the stage for Israel to send more troops to its northern border to confront the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

The comments threatened to further heighten the tensions between Israel and Hezbollah at a time when they appear to be moving closer to war. Netanyahu also signaled that there is no end in sight for the grinding war in Gaza.

The Israeli leader said in a lengthy TV interview that while the army is close to completing its current ground offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, that would not mean the war against Hamas is over. But he said fewer troops would be needed in Gaza, freeing up forces to battle Hezbollah.

"We will have the possibility of transferring some of our forces north, and we will do that," he told Israel's Channel 14, a pro-Netanyahu TV channel, in an interview that was frequently interrupted by applause from the studio audience. "First and foremost, for defense," he added, but also to allow tens of thousands of displaced Israelis to return home.

The Iranian-backed Hezbollah began striking Israel almost immediately after Hamas' Oct. 7 cross-border attack that triggered the Gaza war. Israel and Hezbollah have been exchanging fire nearly every day since then, but the fighting has escalated in recent weeks, raising fears of a full-blown war.

Hezbollah is much stronger than Hamas, and opening a new front would raise the risk of a larger, region-wide war involving other Iranian proxies and perhaps Iran itself that could cause heavy damage and mass casualties on both sides of the border.

White House envoy Amos Hochstein was in the region last week meeting with officials in Israel and Lebanon in an effort to lower tensions. But the fighting has continued.

Netanyahu said he hoped a diplomatic solution to the crisis could be found but vowed to solve the problem "in a different way" if needed. "We can fight on several fronts and we are prepared to do that," he said.

He said any deal would not just be "an agreement on paper." He said it would require Hezbollah to be far from the border, an enforcement mechanism and the return of Israelis back to their homes. Tens of thousands of people were evacuated shortly after the fighting erupted and have not been able to go home.

Hezbollah has said it will continue battling Israel until a cease-fire is reached in Gaza. The group's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, warned Israel last week against launching a war, saying Hezbollah has new weapons and intelligence capabilities that could help it target more critical positions deeper inside Israel.

Hezbollah already has unveiled new weapons during the low-level fighting, including hard-to-defend at-

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tack drones that strike with little warning. An Israeli soldier was badly wounded Sunday in a drone strike.

But Israel says it too has shown Hezbollah only a small part of its full capabilities, and that Lebanon will be turned into a second Gaza if there is a war. Israel's army last week said it had "approved and validated" a new plan for a Lebanon offensive.

In the interview, Netanyahu said that Israel's offensive in Gaza is winding down. The Israeli army has been operating in the southern border town of Rafah since early May. It says it has inflicted heavy damage on Hamas in Rafah, which it has identified as the last remaining Hamas stronghold after a brutal war stretching nearly nine months. But he said Israel would have to continue "mowing" operations — targeted strikes aimed at preventing Hamas from regrouping.

Israel launched its air and ground invasion of Gaza immediately after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, which killed some 1,200 people and took about 250 others hostage.

The Israeli offensive has killed over 37,000 Palestinians, unleashed a humanitarian crisis and triggered war crimes and genocide cases at the world's top courts in The Hague.

It also has raised tensions with the United States, with President Joe Biden and Netanyahu clashing publicly over the course of the war. Earlier on Sunday, Netanyahu again repeated his claim that there has been a "dramatic drop" in arms shipments from the U.S., Israel's closest ally, hindering the war effort.

Biden has delayed delivering certain heavy bombs since May over concerns of heavy civilian casualties, but his administration fought back last week against Netanyahu's charges that other shipments had also been affected.

Although the U.S. and other mediators are pushing a cease-fire plan, Netanyahu has ruled out an end to the war until Israel frees all hostages held by Hamas and until it destroys Hamas' military and governing capabilities.

The current phase of the war "is about to end," Netanyahu said. "That doesn't mean the war is about to end."

Netanyahu spoke as his defense minister, Yoav Gallant, was in Washington for talks with American officials about the war and tensions with Lebanon. And next month, Netanyahu has been invited to address Congress for a speech that already is dividing Washington along partisan lines. Some Democrats, angry at Netanyahu's public fighting with Biden, say they will not attend.

American officials also have been pressing Netanyahu to spell out a clear post-war plan for Gaza. The U.S. has said it will not accept a long-term Israeli occupation of the territory.

Netanyahu spelled out a very different vision. He said the only way to guarantee Israel's security is for Israel to maintain military control over the territory.

"There is no one else" capable of doing that, he said. But he said he is seeking a way to create a Palestinian "civilian administration" to manage day-to-day affairs in Gaza, hopefully with backing from moderate Arab countries. He ruled out any role for the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, which was ousted from Gaza by Hamas in a violent 2007 takeover.

Netanyahu said the Israeli army several months ago looked into working with prominent Palestinian families in Gaza, but that Hamas immediately "destroyed them." He said Israel is now looking at other options.

Netanyahu ruled out one option favored by some of his ultranationalist governing partners — re-settling Israelis in Gaza. Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, ending a 38-year presence.

"The issue of settlement is not realistic," he said. "I'm realistic."

'Hamster' crypto craze has taken Iran. It highlights economic malaise ahead of presidential election

By JON GAMBRELL and NASSER KARIMI Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Cab drivers and bikers tap away furiously on their mobile phones as they wait at red lights in the Iranian capital during an early June heatwave. Some pedestrians in Tehran are doing the same. They all believe they could get rich.

The object of their rapt attention? The "Hamster Combat" app.

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A wider crypto craze aside, the app's rise in Iran highlights a harsher truth facing the Islamic Republic ahead of Friday's presidential election to replace late President Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash in May: an economy hobbled by Western sanctions, stubbornly high inflation and a lack of jobs.

Even as presidential candidates make promises about restoring the country's economy, Iranians, who have been hearing for years about bitcoin, are now piling into this app out of sheer hope it might one day pay off — without knowing much about who is behind it.

"It's a sign of being desperate, honestly," said Amir Rashidi, the director of digital rights and security at the Miaan Group who is an expert on Iran. It's about "trying to hang on to anything you have a tiny hope that might some day turn to something valuable."

Those able to divest from holdings in Iran's beleaguered currency, the rial, have purchased property, art, vehicles, precious metals and other hard assets since the collapse of Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

At the time of the deal, the exchange rate was 32,000 rials to \$1. Today, it's nearing 580,000 rials to the dollar — and many have found the value of their bank accounts, retirement funds and other holdings gouged by years of rapid depreciation.

Meanwhile, prices of fruits and vegetables have jumped 50% since last year while the price of meat has risen 70%. The cost of a ride in a shared taxi, common in the Iranian capital, has almost doubled. Even rides in Tehran's Metro, still the cheapest option for the city's commuters, are up some 30%.

"Since morning, I had three visitors to my shop, none of them bought anything," said Mohammad Reza Tabrizi, who runs a clothing shop in downtown Tehran. "Most customers prefer buying from peddlers or pre-owned items in other places."

In underground walkways and other areas of the city, peddlers sell nearly anything they can get their hands on. It's this desperate environment that has seen the public's interest in cryptocurrency and mobile games offering coins rise.

The proliferation of smartphones across Iran, as well as the relatively low cost of mobile service compared to other nations, makes accessing apps like "Hamster Kombat" attractive.

The app is accessed through the messaging app Telegram, which remains popular in Iran despite efforts by the authorities trying to block access to it. It functions like an incremental or a "clicker" game — users repeatedly click on an object or complete repetitive tasks to earn points.

In "Hamster Kombat," users believe they may be able to access a purported cryptocurrency associated with the game that's still not traded publicly.

In an email, individuals describing themselves as the game's developers declined to answer questions about their identities or business plans, but insisted they were "not offering any cryptocurrency in the game."

"We are educating our audience about crypto through gaming mechanics," the email claimed.

Still, the game resembles another app that did offer Iranians cryptocurrency in the past — and it seems that just the promise of what could be free money can drive some Iranians to distraction.

Jokes online show one man tapping on a gravestone as if it were a mobile phone. Another uses a massage gun to rapidly punch a Hamster on the screen.

But the public's fascination with the game has also drawn the attention of authorities.

Rear Adm. Habibollah Sayyari, the deputy chief of Iran's military, described the app as part of the West's "soft war" against Iran's theocracy ahead of the election.

"One of the features of the soft war by the enemy is the 'Hamster' game," Sayyari said, according to the state-run IRNA news agency. He theorized that the "enemy" is popularizing the game so that people would be distracted and not "pay attention to plans of presidential candidates."

"Then (the people) fail to choose the best candidates," Sayyari said. Hard-line pundits in Iran have voiced similar opinions.

The daily JameJam, published by Iran's state television, also warned the ever-increasing interest in the game was a sign of "the dream of becoming rich overnight and gaining wealth without effort." It said those playing range from "builders, mechanics and refrigerator repairmen to colleagues and classmates

in university.”

“A society that instead of working and trying to succeed and earn money turns to such games and looks for shortcuts and windfalls gradually loses the culture of effort and entrepreneurship and moves towards convenience,” the newspaper said, without acknowledging that the country’s economic woes were potentially driving the interest in the app.

The app has even drawn the attention of a 97-year-old Shiite religious scholar, Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi, who is known for his fatwas declaring things “haram,” or “forbidden,” from his office in the holy city of Qom, Iran’s center of Shiite learning, packed with religious schools and revered shrines.

Calling cryptocurrency “the source of many abuses,” Shirazi said people shouldn’t use the “Hamster Kombat” app or others like it involving bitcoin.

Iran isn’t alone in having concerns about the game.

Authorities in Ukraine, locked in a devastating war with Iranian-armed Russia since Moscow’s 2022 invasion, warned that users’ data remains stored in Russia and could potentially put them at risk.

Then there’s the wider risk of malware exposure as consumers in Iran often cannot purchase new software legally or even access legitimate app stores. They also face the risk of state-sponsored hackers targeting them for their political views.

Meanwhile, as Iran’s election campaign goes on, presidential candidates are using Instagram, X and Telegram — all services previously banned by the theocracy after rounds of nationwide protests.

“As long as you are able to pay the price, everything is available,” said Rashidi, the Iran expert.

Japanese emperor to reconnect with the River Thames in state visit meant to bolster ties with UK

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Before Emperor Naruhito of Japan attends a banquet hosted by King Charles III, lays a wreath at Westminster Abbey or tours one of Britain’s premier biomedical research institutes, he’ll kick off this week’s trip to the U.K. by visiting a site that has special meaning for him: The Thames Barrier.

While the retractable flood control gates on the River Thames don’t top most lists of must-see tourist sights, the itinerary underscores the emperor’s fascination with the waterway that is the throbbing heart of London.

That interest was born 40 years ago when Naruhito studied 18th-century commerce on the river as a graduate student at the University of Oxford. But those two years, chronicled in his memoir “The Thames and I,” also forged a special fondness for Britain and its people. The future emperor got a chance to live outside the palace walls, seeing the kindness of strangers who rushed to help when he dropped his purse, scattering coins across a shop floor, and experiencing traditions like the great British pub crawl.

“It would be impossible in Japan to go to a place where hardly anyone would know who I was,” Naruhito wrote. “It is really important and precious to have the opportunity to be able to go privately at one’s own pace where one wants.”

Naruhito and the Empress Masako, who studied at Oxford a few years after her husband, returned to the U.K. on Saturday for a weeklong stay combining the glitter and ceremony of a state visit with four days of less formal events that will allow the royal couple to revisit their personal connections to Britain.

The visit comes at a time when the U.K. is seeking to bolster ties with Japan as it aims to be the most influential European nation in the Indo-Pacific region, said John Nilsson-Wright, the head of the Japan and Korea program at the Centre for Geopolitics at the University of Cambridge. In October 2020, Britain touted an economic partnership with Japan as the first major international trade agreement it had struck since leaving the European Union earlier that year.

“The U.K.-Japan relationship is hugely important. ... It’s based on shared common experience. It’s based also on the affinity between our two peoples,” Nilsson-Wright said. “Britain and Japan can act as a source of stability and, hopefully, mutual reassurance at a time when political change is so potentially destabilizing.”

The trip, originally planned for 2020, was intended to be the emperor’s first overseas visit after he

ascended the Chrysanthemum Throne in 2019. But it was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. He later attended Queen Elizabeth II's funeral.

The state visit begins Tuesday, when Charles and Queen Camilla will formally welcome the emperor and empress before they take a ceremonial carriage ride to Buckingham Palace. Naruhito will also lay a wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldier in Westminster Abbey then return to the palace for a state banquet.

But before the pomp and circumstance begins, Naruhito will visit The Thames Barrier, a series of retractable steel gates that protect London from flooding while allowing ships to continue navigating the river. After the state visit, he and his wife will have time to tour their old colleges at Oxford.

It was at Merton College that the future emperor, who was born Hironomiya Naruhito, was known simply as Hiro because it was easier for faculty and students to remember the nickname (and because the prince liked the sound of it), he wrote in "The Thames and I."

One of his greatest joys at Merton was to go to the Middle Common Room, a meeting place for graduate students, to drink coffee and talk with other students after lunch.

"These moments, with my fellow students, brief as they were, were very important for me," Naruhito wrote.

Britain in the 1980s was a revelation to Naruhito because it seemed to respect the past even as it embraced the future, he said, remembering the peaceful co-existence of scholars in traditional caps and gowns with young people wearing punk rock garb.

"I did not feel that was out of the ordinary," he said. "It seemed to me that both reflected the spirit of the place. This was, after all, a country which produced the Beatles and the miniskirt. I felt that while the British attach importance to old traditions, they also have the ability to innovate."

Naruhito also wrote about the novelty of walking through the streets of Oxford without being noticed, of spending hours in the local records office doing his academic research and of having the chance to do his own shopping and other mundane chores that most people take for granted.

And he remembered climbing a hill northeast of the city just to take in the view.

"It was best toward sunset," he wrote. "I can never forget the moment when the silhouettes of the spires of Oxford one by one caught the evening light and seemed to float above the mists. This mystical sight, which has aroused so much admiration, is called Oxford's dreaming spires."

But behind it all there was always the River Thames, which flows southeast from Oxford to London before emptying into the North Sea.

Naruhito began studying river commerce as a boy when Japan's roads and rivers offered a glimpse of travel and freedom outside the confines of the palace. So when he arrived in Oxford, it was logical to study the Thames.

Looking back at the research papers he wrote 40 years ago, he's flooded with nostalgia, Naruhito told reporters in Tokyo before returning to Britain.

"The memories of my time with the Thames come back to me," he said. "The list goes on and on, including my hard work in collecting historical materials ... the beautiful scenery around me that healed me from my fatigue from research, and the days I jogged along the river."

A Mexico City neighborhood keeps the iconic Volkswagen Beetle alive

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Janette Navarro's 1996 Volkswagen Beetle roars as it barrels up a steep hill overlooking concrete houses stacked like boxes on the outskirts of Mexico City.

She presses her foot on the pedal, passes a lime green Beetle like hers, then one marked with red and yellow, then another painted a bright sea blue.

"No other car gets up here," she said. "Just the vocho."

The Volkswagen Beetle, or "vocho" as it's known in Mexico, may have been born in Germany, but in this hilly neighborhood on the fringes of Mexico City, there's no doubt about it: The "Bug" is king.

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The Beetle has a long history in the country's sprawling capital. The old-school models like these — once driven as taxis — used to dot city blocks as the quirky look captured the fascination of many around the world. It was long known as "the people's car."

But after production of older models halted in Mexico in 2003, and the newer versions in 2019, the Bug population is dwindling in the metro area of 23 million people. But in the northern neighborhood of Cuauhtepac, classic Beetles still line the streets — so much so that the area has been nicknamed "Vocholandia."

Taxi drivers like Navarro say they continue to use the vochos because the cars are inexpensive and the engine located in the back of the vehicle gives it more power to climb the neighborhood's steep hills.

Navarro began driving Beetles for work eight years ago as a way to feed her three children and put them through school.

"When they ask me what I do for work, I say proudly that I'm a vochera (a vocho driver)," Navarro said a day before the International Day of the VW Beetle on Saturday. "This work keeps me afloat ... It's my adoration, my love."

While some of the older cars wobble along, paint long faded after years of wear and tear, other drivers dress their cars up, keeping them in top shape.

One driver has named his bright blue car "Gualupita" after his wife, Guadalupe, and adorns the bottom with aluminum flames blasting out from a VW logo. Another painted their VW pink and white, sticking pink cat eyes on the front headlights.

Mechanics in the area, though, say driving vochos is a dying tradition. David Enojosa, a car mechanic, said his family's small car shop in the city used to sell parts and do maintenance primarily on Beetles. But since Volkswagen halted production five years ago, parts have been harder to come by.

"With the current trend, it will disappear in two or three years," Enojosa said, his hands blackened by car grease. "Before we had too many parts for vochos, now there aren't enough ... So they have to look for parts in repair shops or junkyards."

As he spoke, a customer walked up carrying a worn down bolt, looking for a replacement for his Volkswagen's clutch.

The customer, Jesús Becerra, was in luck: Enojosa strolled out of his shop holding a shiny new bolt.

Less lucky drivers have to do laps around the neighborhood looking for certain parts. Even more cars fall into disrepair and don't pass emissions inspections.

But Becerra is among those who believed that the vochos will endure in his neighborhood.

"You adapt them, you find a way to make it keep running," he said. "You say, 'We're going to do this, fix it and let's go.'"

Others like Joaquín Pérez say continuing to drive his 1991 white, Herbie-style Beetle is a way to carry on his family tradition. He grew up around Bugs, he explained as his car rumbled. His father was a taxi driver just like him and he learned how to drive in a VW.

Now, 18 years into working as a driver himself, his dashboard is lined with trinkets from his family. A plastic duck from his son, a frog stuffed animal from his daughter and a fabric rose from his wife.

"This area, always, always since I can remember has been a place of vochos," he said. "This here is the car of the people."

Some visitors to Israel have a new stop on their tours: Hamas' destruction in the south

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

KIBBUTZ NIR OZ, Israel (AP) — A new kind of tourism has emerged in Israel in the months since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. For celebrities, politicians, influencers and others, no trip is complete without a somber visit to the devastated south that absorbed the brunt of the assault near the border with Gaza.

Jerry Seinfeld, Elon Musk, Michael Douglas, former presidential candidate Nikki Haley, and Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner are a few who have visited, at times posing for photos in front of burned-out homes.

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Many Israelis, including soldiers and security officials, are also visiting on organized trips.

"It's our personal story, but it's also the story of all of the state of Israel," said Irit Lahav, spokeswoman for Kibbutz Nir Oz, who gives many of the tours.

A quarter of the approximately 400 Nir Oz residents fell victim to the attack. Hamas militants killed more than 20 and kidnapped over 80. In the dining hall, a wall of post office boxes is plastered with stickers — red for killed, black for kidnapped, blue for released.

While it's uncomfortable to open the community to visitors, she said it's important for people to "come here and smell the burned smell of death, to imagine your friends or parents here."

Hamas militants killed around 1,200 people as they rampaged through southern Israel, and kidnapped around 250. Health officials in Hamas-run Gaza say more than 37,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war that followed.

Prior to Oct. 7, Lahav ran a tourism company. Now she has turned those itinerary-building skills to the kibbutz where she grew up. Her tour includes the spot in the fence where Hamas militants stormed the kibbutz, along with small details that humanize the scale of destruction, like the candy eggs that melted when the general store was torched.

Many of the kibbutzim and towns that experienced the worst destruction are closed to the public, accessible only via organized tours like those for dignitaries or celebrities, or by invitation from a resident.

Nir Oz decided that the guides must be residents. Rena Bazar, who lives with most of the community in temporary housing elsewhere, is among those giving tours.

At first, it was difficult to return to Nir Oz. She didn't like the idea of strangers on the lawns and in the dining hall with its bullet-riddled windows. But eventually, she understood the importance of helping visitors understand not just what happened, but also what life had been like before Oct. 7.

"I want to make it less about the combat and more about the personal stories of people who were there," Bazar said.

For visiting dignitaries and VIPs, trips to Israel have long included stops at famous religious or cultural sites, such as the Western Wall, Masada, the Sea of Galilee or the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and the national Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem. The visits to the battered kibbutzim and border towns are the latest way to build support and solidarity with Israel's allies abroad.

Other parts of southern Israel are open to the public and encouraging visitors — both foreigners and Israelis from elsewhere.

The city of Sderot runs "resilience tours," connecting groups with survivors who share their memories of Oct. 7 or highlight cultural or culinary offerings. In contrast to the hardest-hit kibbutzim like Nir Oz, most of Sderot's residents have returned.

Hen Cohen, the city's tourism director, estimated that about 200,000 visitors have come during the first half of 2024, compared with 100,000 total in a normal year. Most come via solidarity missions from abroad or are local visitors such as soldiers and police officers on educational tours.

Birthingright Israel, an organization that provides 10-day free trips to Israel for Jewish Americans, said that nearly all of the 13,500 participants expected this summer will visit Sderot and the site of the Nova music festival, where at least 364 people died. These visits provide an economic and morale boost to residents, Cohen said.

The Sderot police station, where 10 officers were killed on Oct. 7 in a standoff that left the station in ruins, is a main attraction. Visitors stop at the local museum, and watch security footage of what happened on Oct. 7, then walk to the empty lot where the police station stood. Twisted metal remains. Israeli flags flutter in the wind. A sign says a memorial will be built there.

"In this dark hour, I wanted to do my part to make sure the people of Israel know that the people of the United States are with you," former U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said while visiting the site. Seinfeld later cried while talking about his own visit to a kibbutz, describing it as "the most powerful experience" of his life.

Zehava Ben Zaken, a lifelong Sderot resident, said it has taken time to adjust to seeing visitors every time

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she walks by. "I'm happy they come to see this place, so they can understand and stand with us," she said.

Hearing the booms from Gaza a few kilometers (miles) away, she hoped that visitors can finally understand Sderot's precarious security situation. "We're totally broken," she said.

South of Sderot, the site of the Nova music festival has become a pilgrimage site for hundreds of visitors per day. Photos of victims are arranged around what had been the main stage. Loved ones have left candles, sculptures, photos and other mementos.

Standing there helped her understand the enormity of loss of life, said Naomi Hanan, a medical student from San Francisco. "It's right in front of your face and there's no denying or ignoring what you've been hearing or seeing through the media," she said.

In a eucalyptus grove near the site, an organization called Triumph of the Spirit offers virtual reality tours of three kibbutzim, including Nir Oz. The tours are currently only open to soldiers on official educational visits, but an English version will be available in the coming weeks for international tourists.

"I feel like I'm in Fortnite!" one soldier said as he slipped on the headset, then went silent as images of destruction appeared.

The videos were created by Miriam Cohen and Chani Kopolovich, who had created such tours of Auschwitz for a Holocaust education experience for people who don't travel to Poland.

"We've made it accessible to go on this tour without damaging peoples' privacy," said Pinchas Tosig, who runs the tent and has 300 to 700 soldiers visit per day.

Some residents of southern Israel are looking beyond the visitors to the future.

In the coming weeks, Nir Oz will start demolishing some buildings to make way for new construction. Residents wonder how to preserve what happened while making space for new lives. Some say part of the destruction should remain. Others don't want reminders — or visitors.

On one tour, Bazar pointed out the safe room where she spent hours hiding on Oct. 7. Her home was mostly spared. Others were burned. She doesn't want the destruction to remain inside Nir Oz and hopes any future memorial will be elsewhere.

"I don't want any child to be impacted by the ruins," she said. "Our cemetery is full. Isn't that memorial enough?"

Conservative-backed group is creating a list of federal workers it suspects could resist Trump plans

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — From his home office in small-town Kentucky, a seasoned political operative is quietly investigating scores of federal employees suspected of being hostile to the policies of Republican Donald Trump, an effort that dovetails with broader conservative preparations for a new White House.

Tom Jones and his American Accountability Foundation are digging into the backgrounds, social media posts and commentary of key high-ranking government employees, starting with the Department of Homeland Security. They are relying in part on tips from his network of conservative contacts, including even workers themselves. In a move that alarms some, they are preparing to publish the findings online.

With a \$100,000 grant from the influential Heritage Foundation, the goal is to post 100 names of government workers to a website this summer to show a potential new administration who might be standing in the way of a second-term Trump agenda — and ripe for scrutiny, reclassifications, reassignments or firings.

"We need to understand who these people are and what they do," said Jones, a former Capitol Hill aide to Republican senators.

The concept of compiling and publicizing a list of government employees shows the lengths that Trump's allies are willing to go to ensure that nothing or no one will block his plans in a potential second term. Jones' Project Sovereignty 2025 comes as Heritage's own Project 2025 is laying the groundwork, with policies, proposals and personnel ready day one of a possible new White House.

The effort, which is focused on top career government officials who are not appointees within the political structure, has stunned democracy experts and shocked the civil service community in what they compare

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to the "red scare" of midcentury McCarthyism.

Jacqueline Simon, policy director at the American Federation of Government Employees, said the language being thrown around — the Heritage Foundation's announcement praised the group for ferreting out "anti-American bad actors" — is "so shocking."

Civil servants are often former military personnel and all are required to take an oath to the Constitution to work for the federal government, not a loyalty test to any one president in the White House, she and others said.

"It just seems as though their goal is to try to menace federal employees and sow fear," said Simon, whose union is backing President Joe Biden for re-election.

As Trump, who has been convicted of felony charges in a hush-money case and is under a four-count federal indictment accusing him of working to overturn the 2020 election, faces a likely rematch with Biden this fall, far-right conservatives have vowed to take a wrecking ball to what they call the deep-state bureaucracy.

The Trump campaign has said repeatedly that outside groups do not speak for the former president who alone is setting his policy priorities.

Conservatives view the federal workforce as overstepping its role to become a power center that can drive or thwart a president's agenda. Particularly during the Trump administration, government officials came under attack from both the White House and Republicans on Capitol Hill, as his own Cabinet often raised objections to some of the former president's more singular or even unlawful proposals.

While Jones' group won't necessarily be recommending whether to fire or reassign any of the federal workers it lists, the work aligns with Heritage's far-reaching Project 2025 blueprint for a conservative administration.

Heritage's Project 2025 proposes reviving the Trump "Schedule F" policy that would try to reclassify tens of thousands of federal workers as political appointees, which could enable mass dismissals - although a new Biden administration rule seeks to make that more difficult. The Heritage project is working to recruit and train a new generation to come to Washington to fill government jobs.

In announcing the \$100,000 "Innovation Award" last month, Heritage said it would support American Accountability Foundation's "investigative researchers, in-depth reports, and educational efforts to alert Congress, a conservative administration, and the American people to the presence of anti-American bad actors burrowed into the administrative state and ensure appropriate action is taken."

Heritage President Kevin Roberts said in a statement the "weaponization of the federal government" has been possible only because of the "deep state of entrenched Leftist bureaucrats." He said he was proud to support the work of American Accountability Foundation workers "in their fight to hold our government accountable and drain it of bad actors."

The federal government employs about 2.2 million people. That includes those in the Washington, D.C, area but also workers who the unions say many Americans know as friends or neighbors in communities across the country.

About 4,000 positions in the government are considered political appointees who routinely change from one presidential administration to the next, but most are career professionals — from landscapers at Veterans Administration cemeteries to economists at the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The public list-making conjures for some the era of Joseph McCarthy, the former senator who conducted grueling hearings into suspected communist sympathizers during the Cold War. They were orchestrated by a top staffer, Roy Cohn, who went on to become a confidant of a younger Trump.

Skye Perryman, CEO of the advocacy group Democracy Forward, said it's all deeply disturbing, and reminiscent of "the darker parts of American history."

"This is part of the overall, highly concerning and alarming trend," she said.

Publicly naming government workers is an "intimidation tactic to try to chill the work of these civil servants," she said, and part of a broader "retribution agenda" under way this election.

"They're seeking to undermine our democracy, they're seeking to undermine the way that our government works for people," she said.

Jones, from his desk overlooking rickhouses storing barrels in the "Bourbon Capitol" of Bardstown, scoffed at comparisons to McCarthyism as "nonsense."

He's a former staffer to former Sen. Jim DeMint, the South Carolina conservative Republican who went on to lead Heritage and now helms the Conservative Policy Institute, where American Accountability Foundation has a mailing address. Jones also worked for Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wisconsin, and provided opposition research for Texas GOP Sen. Ted Cruz's 2016 presidential bid.

With six researchers, Jones' team is operating remotely across the country, poring over the information about federal workers within Homeland Security, State Department and other agencies that deal with immigration and border issues.

Their focus is on the highest ranks of the civil servants — so-called GS-13, GS-14, and GS-15 employees and those in senior executive positions who could put up roadblocks to Trump's plans for tighter borders and more deportations.

"I think it's important to the next administration to understand who those people are," he said.

He dismissed the risks that could be involved in publicly posting the names, salary information and other details of federal workers who have some level of privacy, or the idea that his group's work could be putting employees' livelihoods in jeopardy.

"You don't get to make policy and then say, 'Hey don't scrutinize me,'" he said.

He acknowledges some of the work is often a "gut check" or "instinct" about which federal employees would be suspected of trying to block a conservative agenda.

"We're looking at, 'Are there wrong people on the bus right now that are, you know, openly hostile to efforts to secure the southern border?'"

His own group came under scrutiny as it first probed Biden nominees.

Biden had repealed Trump's Schedule F executive order in January 2021, but a Government Accountability Office report in 2022 found that agencies believed it could be reinstated by a future administration.

Since then, the Biden administration issued a new rule that would make it harder to fire workers. A new administration could direct the Office of Personnel Management to undo the new regulation, but the process would take time and be open to legal challenges.

Prosecutors in classified files case to urge judge to bar Trump from inflammatory comments about FBI

By ERIC TUCKER and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

FORT PIERCE, Fla. (AP) — The federal judge presiding over the classified documents prosecution of Donald Trump is hearing arguments Monday on whether to bar the former president from public comments that prosecutors say could endanger the lives of FBI agents working on the case.

Special counsel Jack Smith's team says the restrictions are necessary in light of Trump's false comments that the FBI agents who searched his Mar-a-Lago estate in August 2022 for classified documents were out to kill him and his family. Trump's lawyers say any gag order would improperly silence Trump in the heat of a presidential campaign in which he is the presumptive Republican nominee.

It was not immediately clear when U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon, a Trump appointee whose handling of the case has been closely scrutinized, might rule. Before turning her attention to the limited gag order sought by prosecutors, she is scheduled to hear additional arguments Monday morning related to the Justice Department's appointment and funding of Smith, whose team brought the charges.

The arguments are part of a three-day hearing that began Friday to deal with several of the many unresolved legal issues that have piled up in a case that had been set for trial last month but has been snarled by delays and a plodding pace. Cannon indefinitely postponed the trial, and it's all but guaranteed that it will not take place before the November presidential election.

Trump faces dozens of felony charges accusing him of illegally hoarding top-secret records at Mar-a-Lago and obstructing the FBI's efforts to get them back. Given the breadth of evidence that prosecutors have put forward, many legal experts have regarded the case as the most straightforward of the four prosecu-

tions against Trump, who has pleaded not guilty. But Cannon has been slow to rule on numerous motions and has proved willing to entertain defense requests that prosecutors say are meritless.

Smith's team objected last month after Trump claimed that the FBI was prepared to kill him while executing a court-authorized search warrant of Mar-a-Lago on Aug. 8, 2022. He was referencing boilerplate language from FBI policy that prohibits the use of deadly force except when the officer conducting the search has a reasonable belief that the "subject of such force poses an imminent danger of death or serious physical injury to the officer or to another person."

Trump falsely claimed in a fundraising email that the FBI was "locked & loaded ready to take me out & put my family in danger."

Prosecutors say such comments pose a significant foreseeable risk to law enforcement, citing as examples an attempted attack on an FBI office in Ohio three days after the Mar-a-Lago search and the more recent arrest of a Trump supporter accused of threatening an FBI agent who investigated President Joe Biden's son, Hunter.

"Deploying such knowingly false and inflammatory language in the combustible atmosphere that Trump has created poses an imminent danger to law enforcement that must be addressed before more violence occurs," prosecutors wrote in a court filing on Friday.

Trump's lawyers say they've failed to show that his comments have directly endangered any FBI official who participated in the Mar-a-Lago search.

"Fundamentally, the motion is based on the fact that President Trump criticized the Mar-a-Lago raid based on evidence from publicly filed motions in this case, as part of his constitutionally protected campaign speech, in a manner that someone in the government disagreed with and does not like," they said.

In one affluent Atlanta suburb, Biden and Trump work to win over wary Georgia voters

By JEFF AMY and BILL BARROW Associated Press

FAYETTEVILLE, Ga. (AP) — President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump will meet for their first general election debate Thursday in Georgia, the battleground that yielded the closest 2020 margin of any state and became the epicenter of Trump's efforts to overturn Biden's election.

Now, in their rematch, Georgia will test which man can best assemble a winning coalition despite their respective weaknesses. Each must persuade grumpy voters in places like Fayette County, a suburb south of Atlanta, that they're less frightening than the alternative.

Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for the third consecutive time, has been convicted of felony crimes and awaits sentencing and three more criminal trials, including in Atlanta. That legal peril could exacerbate his struggles with moderate Republicans and independents, some of whom abandoned him as he helped dismantle the constitutional right to an abortion and refused to accept defeat in 2020.

Biden, the Democratic incumbent, has presided over an inflationary economy, struggled with a Middle East war that divides Democrats, and failed to resolve immigration problems along the southern U.S. border. He faces potential defections from nonwhite and younger voters.

One of Georgia's richest counties, Fayette has long housed retirees and Delta Air Lines workers seeking homes near Atlanta's airport. Now it's also a bastion of Georgia's state-subsidized movie industry. At the Trillith development, a rapidly growing high-end town and movie studio, workers can be overheard discussing the latest Captain America movie being filmed there.

Like other Atlanta suburbs, the 120,000-resident county has been angling left. Democrats haven't yet deposed Fayette's Republican majority, but they got close in December 2022, when Democratic U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock won 49.5% of Fayette's votes in defeating Republican Herschel Walker.

"We do believe that the pathway to the presidency comes right through Fayette County this year," said Joe Clark, chair of the Fayette County Democratic Party and a Fayetteville City Council member.

The Trump campaign on June 13 opened its first Georgia campaign office in Fayetteville.

"They want to try to flip our county," warned Brian Jack, a former Trump aide who recently clinched the

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GOP nomination for a Republican-leaning congressional seat.

Statewide, Republicans say Georgia still tilts toward them. Yes, Democrats won statewide four times in Georgia, starting with Biden in 2020, continuing as Jon Ossoff and Warnock swept to twin victories in a 2021 runoff that clinched Democratic control of the U.S. Senate, and culminating in Warnock's reelection in 2022. But GOP Gov. Brian Kemp won a second term as governor in 2022 over Democrat Stacy Abrams by a comfortable margin, sweeping down-ballot offices along the way.

Lauren Groh-Wargo, Abrams' top strategist, said Democrats were slow to engage in Georgia in 2020. Both sides have been spending heavily this year.

"This is the first time since the 1990s that Georgia has been a top-tier battleground state for the presidential on both sides of the aisle, from the beginning of both campaigns," Groh-Wargo said.

Both sides have work to do. Many voters, Democrats and Republicans, say they're dispirited by the Trump-Biden rematch. Some say they're not sure that they will even vote.

Robert Kennedy Jr.'s independent bid is another wildcard. Kennedy hasn't been certified for the ballot, but he could make Georgia even harder to predict.

Some formerly solid Republicans have taken to splitting their tickets. Trump and Walker showed weakness in metro Atlanta even as Kemp remained strong.

Quentin Fulks, a southwest Georgia native who is Biden's principal deputy campaign manager and steered Warnock's 2022 campaign, estimates that Warnock won 9% of Republican voters.

"Candidate quality matters," said Republican strategist Brian Robinson. Trump ignited "a real realignment" that drew working-class voters without college degrees toward Republicans, Robinson said, but has pushed away college-educated voters.

Some of those voters "still want to vote for Republicans or are willing to," but only in the right circumstances. In Georgia's Republican presidential primary in March, about 78,000 voters — most in metro Atlanta — voted for Nikki Haley over Trump even after Haley suspended her campaign. Haley's total was more than six times Biden's 2020 Georgia victory margin.

Fayette ranks seventh among Georgia's 159 counties in voters who backed Kemp but not Walker. Haley won 13.2% statewide, but nearly 19% in Fayette County.

Rhonda Quillian, shopping at a Peachtree City farmer's market, backed Haley. She says neither Biden nor Trump feel like an option for her. She's considering not voting at all.

Quillian said she liked Trump's policies after she voted for him in 2016, but soured on him, especially after the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot.

"If he wasn't such an egomaniac, I would vote for him in a skinny minute because of the policies," Quillian said. "But he's a little scary when he starts talking and he's trying to overthrow the election and being anti-Constitution and, you know, 'I'm the law.' I'm sorry, no, this is a democratic republic."

For Biden, the challenge is replicating the coalition that delivered his razor-thin margin. Responding to warnings from Georgia Democrats that he must engage with Black voters, the president has visited routinely, and Vice President Kamala Harris has made five trips to Georgia this year.

"We have to talk to Black voters in both urban and rural Georgia," Fulks said. "That is where I start."

Trump has boasted that he will make inroads among Black voters. Robinson acknowledged it's unlikely Trump would get even a fifth of Black voters, but said he wouldn't necessarily have to: Black voters typically account for about 30% of Georgia ballots. If some Black voters stay home, or Biden's share drops even a little, Trump could benefit.

Deidra Ellington, a counselor who lives in Fayetteville, calls the choice between Biden and Trump "slim pickings." Ellington, who is Black, says she no longer feels allegiance to either party.

"It's almost to a point where you're not even able to live paycheck to paycheck," Ellington said. "You get the first paycheck, and then it's borrowing in between before the next paycheck."

In an April poll by The Associated Press and the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, more Democrats said Biden had hurt than helped on the cost of living and immigration. The Biden campaign has been trying to salve that pain.

"The president deeply understands what Americans are going through, and also the fact that there is

more work to do," Fulks said.

Republicans, meanwhile, aim to turn the election into a referendum on Biden's handling of the economy. "My pitch is, are you happy with \$4 a gallon gas and \$6 for a jar of mayonnaise? If you're not, it was not like that when Trump was in office," said Suzanne Brown, a Peachtree City Council member who has canvassed for Republicans this spring.

Democrats say they're out-organizing Trump, aiming to turn out marginal Democrats and persuade independents and moderate Republicans to back Biden. The campaign has a dozen offices and 75 staffers statewide, including some in Fayetteville.

"I think that Trump is underestimating the power of organizing," Fulks said.

Not so, says Republican National Committee spokesperson Henry Scavone. He says the Trump campaign has gone from zero offices to a dozen since June 13.

Republicans, aware voters are in a sour mood, are optimistic but not cocky about places like Fayette County.

"If the election were held today, Donald Trump would almost certainly win here," Robinson said. "But the election isn't being held today."

Gunmen kill 15 police officers and several civilians in Russia's southern Dagestan region

MOSCOW (AP) — More than 15 police officers and several civilians, including an Orthodox priest, were killed by armed militants in Russia's southern republic of Dagestan on Sunday, its governor Sergei Melikov said in a video statement early Monday.

The gunmen opened fire on two Orthodox churches, a synagogue and a police post in two cities, according to the authorities.

Russia's National Anti-Terrorist Committee described the attacks in the predominantly Muslim region with a history of armed insurgency as terrorist acts.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were declared days of mourning in the region.

Dagestan's Interior Ministry said a group of armed men shot at a synagogue and a church in the city of Derbent, located on the Caspian Sea. Both the church and the synagogue caught fire, according to state media. Almost simultaneously, reports appeared about an attack on a church and a traffic police post in the Dagestan capital, Makhachkala.

Authorities announced a counter-terrorist operation in the region. The Anti-Terrorist Committee said five gunmen were "eliminated." The governor said six "bandits" had been "liquidated." The conflicting numbers couldn't be immediately reconciled and it wasn't clear how many militants were involved in the attacks.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attacks. The authorities launched a criminal investigation on the charge of a terrorist act.

Russian state news agency Tass cited law enforcement sources as saying that a Dagestani official was detained over his sons' involvement in the attacks.

Melikov said in the video statement that the situation in the region was under control of the law enforcement and local authorities, and vowed that the investigation of the attacks will continue until "all the sleeping cells" of the militants are uncovered.

He claimed, without providing evidence, that the attacks might have been prepared from abroad, and referenced what the Kremlin calls "the special military operation" in Ukraine in an apparent attempt to link the attacks to it.

In March, gunmen opened fire on a crowd at a concert hall in suburban Moscow, killing 145 people. An affiliate of the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack, but Russian officials also sought to link Ukraine to the attack without providing any evidence. Kyiv has vehemently denied any involvement.

Aerial drone launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels hits ship in the

Red Sea, causing damage and injuries

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — An aerial drone launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels struck and damaged a vessel in the Red Sea on Sunday, officials said, the latest attack by the group targeting shipping in the vital maritime corridor.

The attack comes as the U.S. has sent the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower back home after an eight-month deployment in which it led the American response to the Houthi assaults. Those attacks have reduced shipping drastically through the route crucial to Asian, Middle East and European markets in a campaign the Houthis say will continue as long as the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip rages on.

The drone attack happened around dawn off the coast of the rebel-held port city of Hodeida, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. It said the vessel sustained damage but its mariners on board "were reported safe." It did not elaborate on the extent of the damage to the Liberian-flagged, Greek-owner bulk carrier, but said an investigation was ongoing.

Hours after the attack, Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree claimed the attack, saying the rebels targeted the Transworld Navigator. Saree claimed without offering evidence the rebels instead used a drone boat in the attack, something contradicted by every other report on the assault.

The U.S. military's Central Command also identified the vessel by the same name, saying several mariners on board suffered minor injuries from the attack.

The Transworld Navigator "most recently docked in Malaysia and was en route to Egypt," Central Command said. "This marks the fourth attack by Iranian-backed Houthis on the" vessel.

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

The Houthis have maintained that their attacks target ships linked to Israel, the United States or Britain. However, many of the ships attacked have little or no connection to the Israel-Hamas war — including those bound for the Houthis' main benefactor, Iran.

The Eisenhower, based in Norfolk, Virginia, is returning home after an over eight-month deployment in combat that the Navy says is its most intense since World War II. The San Diego-based USS Theodore Roosevelt will take the Eisenhower's place after a scheduled exercise in the Indo-Pacific, said Pentagon press secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder.

The Roosevelt anchored Saturday in Busan, South Korea, amid Seoul's ongoing tensions with North Korea.

An Israel offensive into Lebanon risks an Iranian military response, top US military leader says

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

ESPARGOS, Cape Verde (AP) — The top U.S. military officer warned on Sunday that any Israeli military offensive into Lebanon would risk an Iranian response in defense of the powerful Hezbollah militant group there, triggering a broader war that could put U.S. forces in the region in danger.

Air Force Gen. CQ Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Iran "would be more inclined to support Hezbollah." He added that Tehran supports Hamas militants in Gaza, but would give greater backing to Hezbollah "particularly if they felt that Hezbollah was being significantly threatened."

Brown spoke to reporters as he traveled to Botswana for a meeting of African defense ministers.

Israeli officials have threatened a military offensive in Lebanon if there is no negotiated end to push Hezbollah away from the border. Just days ago, Israel's military said it had "approved and validated" plans for an offensive in Lebanon, even as the U.S. works to prevent the months of cross-border attacks from spiraling into a full-blown war.

Netanyahu said Sunday he hoped a diplomatic solution could be achieved but said he would solve the

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problem "in a different way" if needed. "We can fight on several fronts and we are prepared to do that," he said.

U.S. officials have tried to broker a diplomatic solution to the conflict. The issue is expected to come up this week as Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant visits Washington for meetings with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other senior U.S. officials.

U.S. President Joe Biden's senior adviser, Amos Hochstein, met with officials in Lebanon and Israel last week in an effort to deescalate tensions. Hochstein told reporters in Beirut on Tuesday that it was a "very serious situation" and that a diplomatic solution to prevent a larger war was urgent.

Brown also said the U.S. won't likely be able to help Israel defend itself against a broader Hezbollah war as well as it helped Israel fight off an Iranian barrage of missiles and drones in April. It is harder to fend off the shorter-range rockets that Hezbollah fires routinely across the border into Israel, he said.

Asked if the U.S. has changed its force posture in the region to better assure troops are protected, he said the safety of the force has been a priority all along and noted that no U.S. bases have been attacked since February.

Brown said the U.S. continues to talk with Israeli leaders and warn against widening the conflict. He said a key message is "to think about the second order of effect of any type of operation into Lebanon, and how that might play out and how it impacts not just the region, but how it impacts our forces in regions as well."

Pentagon officials have said that Austin has also raised concerns about a broader conflict when he spoke to Gallant in a recent phone call.

"Given the amount of rocket fire we've seen going from both sides of the border, we've certainly been concerned about that situation, and both publicly and privately have been urging all parties to restore calm along that border, and again, to seek a diplomatic solution," said Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary, last week.

A war between the two heavily armed foes could be devastating to both countries and incur mass civilian casualties. Hezbollah's rocket arsenal is believed to be far more extensive than Hamas'.

Israel and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah have exchanged fire across Lebanon's border with northern Israel since fighters from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip staged a bloody assault on southern Israel in early October that set off the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

The situation escalated this month after an Israeli airstrike killed a senior Hezbollah military commander in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah retaliated by firing hundreds of rockets and explosive drones into northern Israel and Israel responded with a heavy assault on the militant group.

Israeli strikes have killed more than 400 people in Lebanon, including 70 civilians. On Israel's side, 16 soldiers and 10 civilians have been killed.

An escalation in the conflict could also trigger wider involvement by other Iran-backed militant groups in the region.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said in a speech last Wednesday that militant leaders from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and other countries have previously offered to send tens of thousands of fighters to help Hezbollah, but he said the group already has more than 100,000 fighters.

More than 1,300 people died during Hajj, many of them after walking in the scorching heat

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — More than 1,300 people died during this year's Hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia as the faithful faced extreme high temperatures at Islamic holy sites in the desert kingdom, Saudi authorities announced Sunday.

Saudi Health Minister Fahd bin Abdurrahman Al-Jalajel said that 83% of the 1,301 fatalities were unauthorized pilgrims who walked long distances in soaring temperatures to perform the Hajj rituals in and around the holy city of Mecca.

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Speaking with the state-owned Al Ekhbariya TV, the minister said 95 pilgrims were being treated in hospitals, some of whom were airlifted for treatment in the capital, Riyadh. He said the identification process was delayed because there were no identification documents with many of the dead pilgrims.

He said the dead were buried in Mecca, without giving a breakdown.

The fatalities included more than 660 Egyptians. All but 31 of them were unauthorized pilgrims, according to two officials in Cairo. Egypt has revoked the licenses of 16 travel agencies that helped unauthorized pilgrims travel to Saudi Arabia, authorities said.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief journalists, said most of the dead were reported at the Emergency Complex in Mecca's Al-Muaisem neighborhood. Egypt sent more than 50,000 authorized pilgrims to Saudi Arabia this year.

Saudi authorities cracked down on unauthorized pilgrims, expelling tens of thousands of people. But many, mostly Egyptians, managed to reach holy sites in and around Mecca, some on foot. Unlike authorized pilgrims, they had no hotels to return to to escape the scorching heat.

In a statement Saturday, Egypt's government said the 16 travel agencies failed to provide adequate services for pilgrims. It said these agencies illegally facilitated the travel of pilgrims to Saudi Arabia using visas that don't allow holders to travel to Mecca.

The government also said officials from the companies have been referred to the public prosecutor for investigation.

According to the state-owned Al-Ahram daily, some travel agencies and Hajj trip operators sold Saudi tourist visas to Egyptian Hajj hopefuls, violating Saudi regulations which require exclusive visas for pilgrims. Those agencies left pilgrims in limbo in Mecca and the holy sites in scorching heat, the newspaper said.

The fatalities also included 165 pilgrims from Indonesia, 98 from India and dozens more from Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Malaysia, according to an Associated Press tally. Two U.S. citizens were also reported dead.

The AP could not independently confirm the causes of death, but some countries like Jordan and Tunisia blamed the soaring heat. AP journalists saw pilgrims fainting from the scorching heat, especially on the second and third days of the Hajj. Some vomited and collapsed.

Historically, deaths are not uncommon at the Hajj, which has seen at times over 2 million people travel to Saudi Arabia for a five-day pilgrimage. The pilgrimage's history has also seen deadly stampedes and epidemics.

But this year's tally was unusually high, suggesting exceptional circumstances.

In 2015 a stampede in Mina killed over 2,400 pilgrims, the deadliest incident ever to strike the pilgrimage, according to an AP count. Saudi Arabia has never acknowledged the full toll of the stampede. A separate crane collapse at Mecca's Grand Mosque earlier the same year killed 111.

The second-deadliest incident at the Hajj was a 1990 stampede that killed 1,426 people.

During this year's Hajj period, daily high temperatures ranged between 46 degrees Celsius (117 degrees Fahrenheit) and 49 degrees Celsius (120 degrees Fahrenheit) in Mecca and sacred sites in and around the city, according to the Saudi National Center for Meteorology. Some people fainted while trying to perform the symbolic stoning of the devil.

The Hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam, is one of the world's largest religious gatherings. More than 1.83 million Muslims performed the Hajj in 2024, including more than 1.6 million from 22 countries, and around 222,000 Saudi citizens and residents, according to the Saudi Hajj authorities.

Saudi Arabia has spent billions of dollars on crowd control and safety measures for those attending the annual five-day pilgrimage, but the sheer number of participants makes it difficult to ensure their safety.

Climate change could make the risk even greater. A 2019 study by experts at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that even if the world succeeds in mitigating the worst effects of climate change, the Hajj would be held in temperatures exceeding an "extreme danger threshold" from 2047 to 2052, and from 2079 to 2086.

Islam follows a lunar calendar, so the Hajj comes around 11 days earlier each year. By 2029, the Hajj will occur in April, and for several years after that it will fall in the winter, when temperatures are milder.

With its new pact with North Korea, Russia raises the stakes with the West over Ukraine

By The Associated Press undefined

Behind the smiles, the balloons and the red-carpet pageantry of President Vladimir Putin's visit to North Korea last week, a strong signal came through: In the spiraling confrontation with the U.S. and its allies over Ukraine, the Russian leader is willing to challenge Western interests like never before.

The pact that he signed with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un envisions mutual military assistance between Moscow and Pyongyang if either is attacked. Putin also announced for the first time that Russia could provide weapons to the isolated country, a move that could destabilize the Korean Peninsula and reverberate far beyond.

He described the potential arms shipments as a response to NATO allies providing Ukraine with longer-range weapons to attack Russia. He bluntly declared that Moscow has nothing to lose and is prepared to go "to the end" to achieve its goals in Ukraine.

Putin's moves added to concerns in Washington and Seoul about what they see as an alliance in which North Korea provides Moscow with badly needed munitions for its war in Ukraine in exchange for economic assistance and technology transfers that would enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear weapons and missile program.

A landmark pactThe new agreement with Pyongyang marked the strongest link between Moscow and Pyongyang since the end of the Cold War.

Kim said it raised bilateral relations to the level of an alliance, while Putin was more cautious, noting the pledge of mutual military assistance mirrored a 1961 treaty between the Soviet Union and North Korea. That agreement was discarded after the Soviet collapse and replaced with a weaker one in 2000 when Putin first visited Pyongyang.

Stephen Sestanovich, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations noted that when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev signed the deal with Pyongyang in 1961, he also tested the world's biggest nuclear bomb, built the Berlin Wall and probably started thinking about moves that led to the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

"The question for Western policymakers now is whether Putin is becoming comparably reckless," Sestanovich said in a commentary. "His language in North Korea -- where he denounced the United States as a 'worldwide neocolonialist dictatorship' — might make you think so."

South Korea responded by declaring it would consider sending arms to Ukraine in a major policy change for Seoul, which so far only has sent humanitarian assistance to Kyiv under a longstanding policy of not supplying weapons to countries engaged in conflict.

Putin insisted Seoul has nothing to worry about, since the new pact only envisions military assistance in case of aggression and should act as a deterrent to prevent a conflict. He strongly warned South Korea against providing lethal weapons to Ukraine, saying it would be a "very big mistake."

"If that happens, then we will also make corresponding decisions that will hardly please the current leadership of South Korea," he said.

Asked whether North Korean troops could fight alongside Russian forces in Ukraine under the pact, Putin said there was no need for that.

Potential weapons for PyongyangLast month, Putin warned that Russia could provide long-range weapons to others to hit Western targets in response to NATO allies allowing Ukraine to use its allies' arms to make limited attacks inside Russian territory.

He followed up on that warning Thursday with an explicit threat to provide weapons to North Korea.

"I wouldn't exclude that in view of our agreements with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," Putin said, adding that Moscow could mirror the arguments by NATO allies that it's up to Ukraine to decide how to use Western weapons.

"We can similarly say that we supply something to somebody but have no control over what happens afterward," Putin said. "Let them think about it."

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Sue Mi Terry, senior fellow for Korea studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, warned that Moscow could share weapons technologies with Pyongyang to help improve its ballistic missile capabilities, noting there is evidence of this happening already, with Russia possibly providing help to North Korea with its successful satellite launch in November, two months after Kim last met Putin.

"This is deeply concerning because of the substantial overlap between the technologies used for space launches and intercontinental ballistic missiles," Terry said in a commentary. "Russia can also provide North Korea with critical help in areas where its capabilities are still nascent, such as submarine-launched ballistic missiles."

While raising the prospect of arms supplies to Pyongyang that would violate U.N. sanctions, Putin also said Russia would take efforts at the world body to ease the restrictions — an apparent signal that Moscow may try to keep arms supplies to Pyongyang under the radar and maintain a degree of deniability to avoid accusations of breaching the sanctions.

Russia and North Korea have rejected assertions by the U.S. and its allies that Pyongyang has given Moscow ballistic missiles and millions of artillery shells for use in Ukraine.

Going 'to the end' in a confrontation with the West by explicitly linking prospective arms shipments to Pyongyang to Western moves on Ukraine, Putin warned Kyiv's allies to back off as he pushes his goals in the war — or face a new round of confrontation.

"They are escalating the situation, apparently expecting that we will get scared at some point, and at the same time, they say that they want to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia on the battlefield," Putin said. "For Russia, it will mean an end to its statehood, an end to the millennium-long history of the Russian state. And a question arises: Why should we be afraid? Isn't it better, then, to go to the end?"

Alexander Gabuev, director of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center in Berlin, said Putin's statement reflected an attempt to discourage the U.S. and its allies from ramping up support for Kyiv as Russia pushes new offensives in several sectors of the front line.

"The situation is becoming increasingly dangerous, and Russia believes that it should quickly rap the West over its knuckles to show that its deeper engagement in the war will have a price," he said in remarks carried by Dozhd, an independent Russian broadcaster.

He noted that Putin's statement that Moscow wouldn't know where its arms end up if sent to Pyongyang could have been a hint at North Korea's role as an arms exporter.

Treading cautiously with China, Putin's visits to North Korea handed a new challenge to Pyongyang's top ally, China, potentially allowing Kim to hedge his bets and reduce his excessive reliance on Beijing.

China so far has avoided comment on the new pact, but many experts argue that Beijing won't like losing sway over its neighbor.

Ever since Putin invaded Ukraine, Russia has come to increasingly depend on China as the main market for its energy exports and the source of high-tech technologies in the face of Western sanctions. While forging a revamped relationship with Pyongyang, the Kremlin will likely tread cautiously to avoid angering Beijing.

"Whether this upgraded Russia–North Korea relationship will be without limits depends upon China," which will watch events closely, said Edward Howell of Chatham House in a commentary. "Beijing will have taken stern note of Kim Jong Un's claim that Russia is North Korea's 'most honest friend.' Despite the likely increase in cooperation in advanced military technology between Moscow and Pyongyang, China remains North Korea's largest economic partner."

Six climate protesters run onto 18th green and spray powder, delaying finish of PGA Tour event

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

CROMWELL, Conn. (AP) — Six climate protesters stormed the 18th green while the leaders were lining up their putts for the final hole of regulation at the PGA Tour's Travelers Championship on Sunday, spray-

ing smoke and powder and delaying the finish for about five minutes.

The protesters waved smoke bombs that left white and red residue on the putting surface before Scottie Scheffler, Tom Kim and Akshay Bhatia finished their rounds. Some wore white T-shirts with the words "NO GOLF ON A DEAD PLANET" in black lettering on the front.

"I was scared for my life," Bhatia said. "I didn't even really know what was happening. ... But thankfully the cops were there and kept us safe, because that's, you know, that's just weird stuff."

The PGA Tour issued a statement thanking the Cromwell Police Department "for their quick and decisive action" and noting that there was no damage to the 18th green that affected either the end of regulation or the playoff hole.

Scheffler, who was arrested during a traffic stop at the PGA Championship, also praised the officers.

"From my point of view, they got it taken care of pretty dang fast, and so we were very grateful for that," said Scheffler, the world's No. 1 player, who beat Kim on the first hole of a sudden-death playoff for his sixth victory of the year.

"When something like that happens, you don't really know what's happening, so it can kind of rattle you a little bit," Scheffler said. "That can be a stressful situation, and you would hate for the tournament to end on something weird happening because of a situation like that. I felt like Tom and I both tried to calm each other down so we could give it our best shot there on 18."

Extinction Rebellion, an activist group with a history of disrupting events around the world, claimed responsibility for the protest. In a statement emailed to The Associated Press, the group blamed climate change for an electrical storm that injured two people at a home near the course on Saturday.

"This was of course due to increasingly unpredictable and extreme weather conditions," the statement said. "Golf, more than other events, is heavily reliant on good weather. Golf fans should therefore understand better than most the need for strong, immediate climate action."

After the protesters were tackled by police and taken off, Scheffler left a potential 26-foot clincher from the fringe on the right edge of the cup, then tapped in for par. Kim, who trailed by one stroke heading into the final hole, sank a 10-foot birdie putt to tie Scheffler and force the playoff.

Kim said the protest took his mind off the pressure.

"It kind of slowed things down," he said. "It took the meaning of the putt away for a second. Because for the past 17 and a half holes all you're thinking about is golf, and suddenly when that happens your mind goes into a complete — like, you're almost not even playing golf anymore. I thought it was a dream for a second."

The crowd surrounding the 18th green heckled the protesters by yelling profanities and cheered the police who intervened. After the players putted out in regulation, workers with leaf blowers came out to clean off the remaining powder.

The hole location was moved for the playoff, which was also on No. 18. Scheffler parred the first hole of sudden death to win.

"They left a lot of marks on the greens, which is not right for us players — especially when two guys are trying to win a golf tournament," Kim said. "But I'm very grateful for the tour and the tour security for handling that really well and making us players feel a lot safer."

Ukrainian drones and missiles kill 6 in Russia and Crimea, fresh bombing of Kharkiv leaves 1 dead

By TOM WILLIAMS and ELISE MORTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian authorities said six people died and over 100 were wounded in Ukrainian drone and missile attacks on Sunday, while the second day of Russia's aerial bombing of Kharkiv in north-eastern Ukraine killed at least one person.

Among the dead were five people — including two children — who were hit by falling debris from Ukrainian missiles that were shot down over a coastal area in Sevastopol, a port city in Russia-annexed Crimea,

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said Mikhail Razvozhayev, the city's Moscow-installed governor. Another person died in Grayvoron city in Russia's Belgorod region, bordering Ukraine, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

Razvozhayev said 151 people were wounded in Sevastopol. Falling rocket fragments caused a forest fire of over 150 square meters (1,600 square feet) and set a residential building alight, RIA Novosti said, noting that a fifth missile had exploded over the city.

Russia's Defense Ministry said both Ukraine and the U.S. bore "responsibility for a deliberate missile strike on civilians." It said that U.S.-supplied ATACMS missiles were used in the Ukrainian attack.

Razvozhayev declared Monday a day of mourning in Sevastopol, with public events canceled.

Air defenses overnight shot down 33 Ukrainian drones over Russia's western Bryansk, Smolensk, Lipetsk and Tula regions, the Russian Ministry of Defense said Sunday. No casualties or damage were reported.

A fresh attack on Kharkiv killed at least one person and wounded 11 on Sunday, according to local officials. Mayor Ihor Terekhov said the city was attacked by a guided bomb and that around half of Kharkiv was without electricity because of the strike.

Sunday's attacks came after Russia struck Kharkiv on Saturday afternoon with four aerial bombs, hitting a five-story residential building and killing three people. Regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said that 41 people were still being treated for injuries on Sunday.

In a video address following the attack, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged Ukraine's partners to bolster its air defenses.

"Modern air defense systems for Ukraine — such as Patriots, accelerated training of our pilots for F-16s, and most importantly, sufficient range for our weapons — are truly necessary," he said.

Two people were wounded by falling debris when two Russian missiles were shot down over the Kyiv region overnight, Ukraine's air force commander Mykola Oleschuk said.

Regional Gov. Vadym Filashkin of Ukraine's partly occupied Donetsk region said that Russian attacks on Saturday killed two people and wounded four.

In other developments, the Ukrainian Navy released photos Sunday that it says confirm the destruction of a warehouse in Russia's southern Krasnodar region used to launch and store Iranian-designed Shahed drones.

Navy officials said training instructors and cadets were killed in the attack on Friday night. Moscow has not yet commented on the reports, but officials said air defenses shot down a number of drones in the region overnight on Friday.

Here's a look at Trump's VP shortlist and why each contender may get picked or fall short

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump has narrowed his vice presidential shortlist to a handful of contenders as he prepares to announce his pick in the days before — or perhaps even at — next month's Republican National Convention.

He told reporters Saturday that he already has made his decision and that the person will be in attendance Thursday night in Atlanta at the first debate of the general election campaign against Democratic President Joe Biden.

Trump's choice would likely become the immediate front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination four years from now if Trump were to win a second term, the constitutional limit. But that No. 2 will be under immense pressure from Trump and his allies to show loyalty at all times.

Trump turned on his first vice president, Mike Pence, after Pence rebuffed his boss' efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election, based on false theories promoted by the then-president after his loss to Biden.

Pence has declined to endorse Trump this time around.

Trump has said his top consideration for a vice president is whether someone is qualified to take over as commander in chief.

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But other factors at play: Who can raise money? Who performs well on television? Who will be most effective on the debate stage against Vice President Kamala Harris? Who risks overshadowing Trump, as a lame-duck if he is elected in November, with talk soon of 2028? And who has "the look"?

Trump's campaign has repeatedly cautioned that anyone "claiming to know who or when President Trump will choose his VP is lying, unless the person is named Donald J. Trump."

And given Trump's penchant for unpredictability and drama, the best-laid plans could change.

A look at the top contenders heading into the convention in Milwaukee that will begin July 15.

Doug Burgum Trump likes rich people. North Dakota's two-term governor is most definitely rich.

Before his time as governor, Burgum led a software company that was acquired by Microsoft for more than \$1 billion. He also has worked in real estate development and venture capital and spent millions on his own White House bid.

Burgum had initially run against Trump for the 2024 nomination, but the little-known governor from a sparsely-populated state gained little traction. When Burgum dropped his bid, he quickly endorsed the former president. Since then, Burgum has become one of Trump's most visible defenders, appearing frequently on television, joining him at fundraisers, and traveling to New York for Trump's criminal trial.

But more than that, Trump and Burgum have hit it off personally.

Burgum and his wife, Kathryn, are said to get along especially well with Trump and his team — the kind of rapport that has particular currency in Trump's orbit. It does not hurt that Trump thinks Burgum looks the part — a "central casting" pick.

Selecting Burgum would, in some ways, echo Pence: a staid, uncontroversial governor with lesser national name recognition. Burgum, 67, would be unlikely to compete with Trump for the spotlight or to immediately overshadow him with 2028 talk.

Burgum also brings money and rich friends to the table.

But does the Republican Party want two older white guys atop the ticket?

JD Vance Swept to national prominence by his bestselling memoir, "Hillbilly Elegy," Vance has held office for less than two years. But during his short time in the Senate, the former venture capitalist from Ohio has established himself as one of the fiercest defenders of Trump's "Make America Great Again" agenda, especially when it comes to foreign policy, trade and immigration.

Despite his early criticism of Trump, Vance has become personally close with the former president and his son Donald Trump Jr., who has talked up the senator. Vance has become a fixture of the conservative media circuit, frequently spars with reporters on Capitol Hill and has appeared with Trump at recent fundraisers and at court.

At 39, Vance, would inject some millennial energy into a race that features an 81-year-old (Biden) and a 78-year-old (Trump) at the top of the major parties' tickets. And a debate with Harris would certainly be heated.

But will Trump be able to get over Vance's record of past insults, which he mentions still?

In 2016, Vance was one of Trump's fiercest critics, casting the then-reality TV star as "a total fraud" and "moral disaster" and calling him "America's Hitler."

Vance has said he was proved wrong by Trump's performance in office and the senator now castigates the liberals who made his book a bestseller as they sought a window into understanding Trumpism.

Marco Rubio If picking Vance would excite Trump's base, choosing the Florida senator might expand the ticket's appeal, particularly among deep-pocketed donors and more establishment-minded and moderate Republicans turned off by Trump's rhetoric and extremism.

Rubio, once seen as a GOP hotshot, is now a well-respected voice on foreign policy and national security issues in his party. The son of Cuban immigrants, he speaks Spanish and could help Trump win over the Hispanic voters that his campaign is eagerly courting.

Rubio is also seen as a skilled debater who could hold his own against Harris.

Running alongside Trump might once have seemed unlikely possibility, given that the two were bitter rivals in 2016 for the GOP nomination and viciously attacked one another. Trump belittled Rubio as "Little

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Marco," mocked him for drinking water during speeches and called him a "nervous basket case," who was "disgusting." Rubio said Trump was a "con man" who tried to "swindle" the Republican Party and Rubio tried to question Trump's manhood.

"You know what they say about men with small hands," Rubio quipped at one point during that campaign. But then there is Rubio's Florida "problem," as Trump has called it.

The Constitution says two candidates from the same state cannot run as president and vice president, meaning Rubio would need to change his residency — something he is reportedly willing to do.

But does he really want the job? Rubio has been noticeably less present, publicly, than some of the others vying to be Trump's No. 2 and did not appear with Trump at his criminal trial.

Tim ScottThe only Black Republican in the Senate, the South Carolinian would bring racial and stylistic diversity to the GOP ticket as well as a preacher's touch. The self-described "born-again believer" often quotes Scripture in political speeches that often reach a crescendo of call-and-response.

Scott and Trump worked closely together while Trump was in the White House on a host of policy issues, including Trump's tax cuts, opportunity zones, and criminal justice reform legislation.

Though Scott ran against Trump for the nomination this year, the senator largely declined to criticize the former president. After failing to gain traction despite millions spent on his behalf by high-profile donors, Scott endorsed Trump over fellow South Carolinian Nikki Haley, Trump's U.N. ambassador, and immediately began enthusiastically campaigning across New Hampshire and South Carolina on Trump's behalf.

He continues to make frequent appearances on television and recently launched a \$14 million campaign to win over minority voters in seven key swing states.

Trump has often joked that Scott has made a far better surrogate than he did a candidate.

But that has also raised questions about how Scott might perform on a debate stage with Harris later this year.

Elise StefanikThe only woman on his shortlist, the New York congresswoman could help Trump win over skeptical college-educated and suburban women who sided with Biden in 2020.

Stefanik was once an aide to former House Speaker Paul Ryan and served in President George W. Bush's White House, working for two Republicans now shunned by Trump loyalists. But she transformed during Trump's four years in office into a fully-fledged Trump acolyte.

She defended him vigorously in both of his impeachment trials and railed against his criminal indictments. In 2022, Stefanik was the first member of Republican House leadership to endorse Trump's campaign, and did so before he had even announced.

She saw her profile rise after her aggressive questioning in December of a trio of university presidents over antisemitism on campus that led to two of their resignations. Trump has repeatedly praised that performance.

Stefanik has spent years ingratiating herself with Trump and positioning herself as one of his most trusted allies and confidantes on Capitol Hill.

But as a member of the House, does she have enough experience?

Ben CarsonRelationships and trust matter to Trump. Carson, who served as secretary of housing and urban development during Trump's administration, has developed a strong bond with the former president over the years, despite a contentious start as 2016 rivals.

A soft-spoken former renowned neurosurgeon, Carson, 72, could help Trump win over minority voters as the first Black person to be named to a Republican presidential ticket. Given Carson's age and demeanor, there is little chance of him overshadowing Trump or stealing the spotlight.

But Carson also has a history of controversial comments on abortion, guns and other issues that could cause headaches for the ticket.

Byron DonaldsThe Florida congressman has become one of Trump's most prominent conservative Black supporters and a reliable surrogate on television and at events.

His selection could help bolster Trump's appeal with Black voters, especially the younger Black men that the campaign has been courting as it tries to eat into Biden's 2020 coalition.

At 45, Donalds is also the kind of fresh face who would serve a marked contrast to the men at the top

of both parties' tickets.

But like Rubio, Donalds would likely need to move to join the ticket. And he, too, has a history of controversial statements, including at a recent "Congress, Cognac, and Cigars" event in Philadelphia, where he seemed to reflect favorably on the Jim Crow era as he talked about "the reinvigoration" of the Black family.

"You see, during Jim Crow, the Black family was together. During Jim Crow, more Black people were not just conservative — Black people always have been conservative-minded — but more Black people voted conservatively," Donalds said, according to audio from the Philadelphia Inquirer.

FBI seeks suspects in 2 New Mexico wildfires that killed 2 people, damaged hundreds of buildings

RUIDOSO, N.M. (AP) — Full-time residents of Ruidoso will be allowed to return to their village Monday morning as federal authorities seek to prosecute whoever started a pair of New Mexico wildfires that killed two people and destroyed or damaged more than 1,400 structures.

The FBI said it is offering a reward of up to \$10,000 for information leading to the arrests and convictions of those responsible for the South Fork Fire and Salt Fire in southern New Mexico, which forced thousands to flee.

The federal agency also said it was seeking public assistance in identifying the cause of the fires discovered June 17 near the village of Ruidoso.

But the notice also pointedly suggested human hands were to blame, saying the reward was for information leading to the arrest and conviction of "the person or persons responsible for starting the fires.

Lincoln County Manager Randall Camp said at a news conference Saturday that "we are approaching a thousand homes lost" in the fires.

President Joe Biden issued a disaster declaration for parts of southern New Mexico on Thursday. The move freed up funding and more resources to 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.

The National Interagency Fire Center said the South Fork Fire, which reached 26 square miles (67 square kilometers), was 31% contained Sunday. It said the Salt Fire that has spread over 12 square miles (31 square kilometers) was now 7% contained.

Both fires had been at zero containment Friday. Full containment isn't expected until July 15, according to fire officials.

More than 1,100 firefighters continued to fight the flames in steep and rocky terrain Sunday.

The South Fork and Salt fires are still burning on both sides of Ruidoso and a threat of flash floods still looms over the village.

Authorities said downed power lines, damaged water, sewer and gas lines plus flooding in burn scars continued to pose risks to firefighters and the public.

New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham toured some of the disaster area Saturday with Federal Emergency Management Agency administrator Deanne Criswell.

Even with federal and state assistance on the table, Ruidoso Mayor Lynn Crawford estimates it could take at least five years for the area to fully recover.

Ruidoso officials said those wanting to return home Monday must bring drinking water and at least a week's worth of food. They warned residents that homes may be without gas, electricity or water.

FBI offers reward for information about deadly southern New Mexico wildfires

RUIDOSO, N.M. (AP) — Federal authorities offered a reward for information about those responsible for igniting a pair of New Mexico wildfires that killed two people and destroyed hundreds of homes in the past week.

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The FBI on Saturday offered up to \$10,000 for information in connection with the South Fork Fire and Salt Fire in southern New Mexico, which forced thousands to flee.

An agency statement said it was seeking public assistance in identifying the cause of the fires near Ruidoso, New Mexico, that were discovered June 17. The notice also pointedly suggested human hands were to blame, saying the reward was for information leading to the arrest and conviction of "the person or persons responsible for starting the fires."

The South Fork Fire, which reached 26 square miles (67 square kilometers), was 26% contained on Saturday. The Salt Fire, at 12 square miles (31 square kilometers), was 7% contained as of Saturday morning, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. Full containment was not expected until July 15.

Recent rains and cooler weather have assisted more than 1,000 firefighters working to contain the fires. Fire crews on Saturday took advantage of temperatures in the 70s Fahrenheit (21 to 26 Celsius), scattered showers and light winds to use bulldozers to dig protective lines. Hand crews used shovels in more rugged terrain to battle the fires near the mountain village of Ruidoso.

Elsewhere in New Mexico, heavy rain and flash flood warnings prompted officials to order some mandatory evacuations Friday in the city of Las Vegas, New Mexico; and communities near Albuquerque, about 200 miles (320 kilometers) north of Ruidoso. Las Vegas set up shelters for displaced residents, and some evacuation orders remained in place there on Saturday.

Flash flood warnings were canceled Saturday, though the National Weather Service said afternoon storms could produce excessive runoff and more flooding in the area.

The wildfires have destroyed or damaged an estimated 1,400 structures. Other fallout from the fires, including downed power lines, damaged water, sewer and gas lines, flooding in burn scars, continued "to pose risks to firefighters and the public," according to a Saturday update from the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department.

Evacuations in areas near Ruidoso and road closures were still in effect. In Ruidoso, full-time residents will be allowed to return Monday, though everyday life won't return to normal.

"You're going to need to bring a week's worth of food, you're going to need to bring drinking water," Mayor Lynn Crawford said on Facebook.

President Joe Biden issued a disaster declaration for parts of southern New Mexico on Thursday, freeing up funding and more resources to 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.

Deanne Criswell, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, met with Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, Crawford and Mescalero Apache President Thora Walsh Padilla on Saturday. "These communities have our support for as long as it takes to recover," Criswell posted on the social media platform X.

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.

In the race to replace Sen. Romney, Utah weighs a Trump loyalist and a climate-focused congressman

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

OREM, Utah (AP) — As he led a crowd of picnicking families in the "YMCA" dance, Trent Staggs gleefully waved a "Utah for Trump" flag at a recent campaign rally — one more not-so-subtle reminder to voters that he is backed by the former president in the race to replace retiring U.S. Sen. Mitt Romney.

That endorsement propelled Staggs, who was little known outside the Salt Lake City suburb he leads, to victory at the state's Republican convention in April, where delegates lean far-right. But his credentials

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with Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement may not be enough to win Tuesday's primary, when Utah's more muted GOP electorate gets its say.

The election will determine whether the state wants another moderate conservative like Romney — U.S. Rep. John Curtis is considered the front-runner in the race — or a farther-right candidate more willing to fall in line with Trump. The vote could have larger implications for how Utah fits in with the evolving dynamics of the national Republican Party, which the former president has largely reshaped in his own image.

"We have somebody in John Curtis who would just be a continuation of Mitt Romney," Staggs said during the rally at a park just north of Provo, the city where Curtis once was mayor. "I don't want another senator that has a disharmonious relationship with President Trump."

Curtis is currently the longest-serving member of the House delegation for Utah, a rare Republican stronghold that has half-heartedly embraced Trump, whose brash style and comments about refugees and immigrants do not sit well with many members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. About half of the state's 3.4 million residents belong to the faith known widely as the Mormon church.

Despite losing at the convention, Curtis qualified for the primary ballot using a signature-gathering method created years ago as a work-around for moderate candidates to ensure that their prospects were not doomed by the staunch conservatives who regularly attend conventions.

Jason Perry, director of the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah, said Curtis is "in a very good position." The Republican primary winner is highly favored to win in November over Democratic nominee Caroline Gleich in a state that has not elected a Democrat to the Senate since 1970.

Even if Trump's influence has grown in the state, his supporters could be split between Staggs and two other candidates who say they back Trump's agenda, former Utah House Speaker Brad Wilson and businessman Jason Walton. Wilson was considered a strong candidate to win at convention, but his loss there to Staggs has relegated him to a long shot in the primary.

Curtis is looking to carve out his own brand of conservatism in the post-Romney era of Utah politics, with a focus on bringing Republicans to the table on issues involving climate change. Staggs claims Curtis is "a Democrat posing as a Republican." But with a voting record that aligns almost perfectly with Trump's policy positions, Curtis says he is more conservative than people realize.

The 64-year-old congressman takes the concept of a campaign trail more literally than most. He hosted a series of hikes with constituents to chat about the environment and to get to know them while out in nature.

As founder of the Conservative Climate Caucus on Capitol Hill, he has dedicated himself to teaching fellow Republicans about the consequences of climate change, pushing back against party leaders such as Trump who have falsely claimed it is a hoax and played down the effects of warming temperatures caused by fossil fuel emissions. The caucus takes a market-based approach to climate issues, countering Democratic policies with proposals that Curtis says aim to lower emissions without compromising American jobs and economic principles.

In a state where outdoor recreation is central to thousands of lives and where water access and air quality matter to many, Curtis sees the environment as a winning issue.

Still, Curtis has received broad support in past elections even from the parts of his district that house the state's coal, oil and gas hubs. He has tried to strike a balance, prioritizing preservation of those industries by praising a plan to extend the operational lives of major coal powered plants in his district and urging lawmakers to not rule out fossil fuels as part of an affordable clean energy future. The United States, he argues, can achieve its emission reduction goals while still using some natural gas, which emits less carbon dioxide than other fossil fuels when combusted.

"I think the reason that they're so supportive of me — and I still talk climate — is that I'm the first person that's ever really articulated that they're a part of the solution, not the problem," Curtis said in an interview.

For snowboarding instructor Sara Moore, 34, who identifies as an independent but registered Republican to vote in the primaries, Curtis' emphasis on climate change and the jobs tied to energy production strikes a "refreshing" balance.

"I'm a seasonal worker. We need a climate that can sustain snow," said the Salt Lake City voter. "But I also

recognize how our state's economy and so many livelihoods are dependent on the oil and gas industries."

Staggs, the 50-year-old mayor of Riverton, a suburb south of Salt Lake City, has promoted his endorsement by the Oil & Gas Workers Association, and he told The Associated Press he would prioritize energy dominance over reducing emissions. Staggs was the first to enter the race, even before Romney announced he was not seeking reelection.

Staggs supporter Sally Hemingway, 68, of Riverton, said he has been a caring, accessible and productive mayor. She admires that he was the first to challenge Romney.

"It may be a long shot — I think he knows it — but his campaign has always been about upsetting the status quo since he stepped up to challenge Mitt Romney," she said. "And I think he's done that."

Jacob Mathews, 25, a student and construction worker, and his wife, Maya Mathews, 24, a substitute teacher, were undecided but said they will ultimately vote for the candidate who seems most approachable, supports working families like their own and values the U.S. Constitution. Whether a candidate is backed by Trump "doesn't really matter to us," the couple agreed.

They stopped by their community park in Orem to hear from Staggs and other convention picks who sang in celebration of Trump's birthday. Both left wishing the candidates had spoken more about their policy goals and less about the former president.

"I want to know what you're going to do for Utah," Jacob Mathews said. "You, not anybody else."

UK election betting scandal widens as a fourth Conservative Party official reportedly investigated

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The chief data officer of Britain's Conservative Party has taken a leave of absence, British media reported Sunday, following growing allegations that the governing party's members used inside information to bet on the date of Britain's July 4 national election before it was announced.

The Sunday Times and others reported that Nick Mason is the fourth Conservative official to be investigated by the U.K.'s Gambling Commission for allegedly betting on the timing of the election.

The Times alleged that dozens of bets had been placed with potential winnings worth thousands of pounds.

The reports came after revelations in recent days that two Conservative election candidates, Laura Saunders and Craig Williams, are under investigation by the gambling watchdog. Saunders' husband Tony Lee, the Conservative director of campaigning, has also taken a leave of absence following allegations he was also investigated over alleged betting.

Police said one of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's police bodyguards was arrested Monday on suspicion of misconduct in public office. The arrest came after the gambling regulator confirmed it was investigating "the possibility of offences concerning the date of the election."

The growing scandal, just two weeks ahead of the national election, has dealt a fresh blow to Sunak's Conservative Party, which is widely expected to lose to the opposition Labour Party after 14 years in power.

Sunak said this week that he was "incredibly angry" to learn of the allegations and said that anyone found to have broken the law should be expelled from his party.

Sunak announced on May 22 that parliamentary elections would be held on July 4. The date had been a closely guarded secret and many were taken by surprise because a vote had been expected in the fall.

Saunders, a candidate standing in Bristol, southwest England, has said she will cooperate fully with the investigation.

Williams was Sunak's parliamentary private secretary as well as a member of Parliament running for reelection on July 4. He has acknowledged that he was being investigated by the Gambling Commission for placing a 100-pound (\$128) bet on a July election before the date had been announced.

Senior Conservative minister Michael Gove condemned the alleged betting and likened it to "Partygate," the ethics scandal that contributed to former Prime Minister Boris Johnson's ouster in 2022.

That controversy saw public trust in the Conservatives plummet after revelations that politicians and

officials held lockdown-flouting parties and gatherings in government buildings during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

"It looks like one rule for them and one rule for us," Gove told the Sunday Times. "That's the most potentially damaging thing."

Daisy Cooper, the deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats, said "people are sick and tired of this sleaze" and that Sunak must intervene and order an official inquiry.

The Conservative Party said it cannot comment because investigations are ongoing.

Democrats wrestle with whether to attend Netanyahu's address to Congress as many plan to boycott

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The last time Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the U.S. Congress, nearly 60 Democrats skipped his speech nine years ago, calling it a slap in the face to then-President Barack Obama as he negotiated a nuclear deal with Iran.

With Netanyahu scheduled to address U.S. lawmakers on July 24 and his government now at war with Hamas in Gaza, the number of absences is likely to be far greater.

Congressional Democrats are wrestling with whether to attend. Many are torn between their long-standing support for Israel and their anguish about the way Israel has conducted military operations in Gaza. More than 37,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since the Hamas attack on Oct. 7 that triggered the war, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run territory. The ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its figures.

While some Democrats are saying they will come out of respect for Israel, a larger and growing faction wants no part of it, creating an extraordinarily charged atmosphere at a gathering that normally amounts to a ceremonial, bipartisan show of support for an American ally.

"I wish that he would be a statesman and do what is right for Israel. We all love Israel," former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said recently on CNN about Netanyahu. "We need to help them and not have him stand in the way of that for such a long time."

She added, "I think it's going to invite more of what we have seen in terms of discontent among our own."

Tensions between Netanyahu and Democratic President Joe Biden have been seeping into the public, with Netanyahu last week accusing the Biden administration of withholding U.S. weapons from Israel — a claim he made again Sunday to his Cabinet. After the prime minister leveled the charge the first time, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said, "We genuinely do not know what he's talking about. We just don't."

The invitation from House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., to Netanyahu came after consultation with the White House, according to a person familiar with the matter who was granted anonymity to discuss the sensitive subject. As of now, no meeting between the leaders during Netanyahu's Washington visit has been scheduled, this person said.

Netanyahu said in a release that he was "very moved" by the invitation to address Congress and the chance "to present the truth about our just war against those who seek to destroy us to the representatives of the American people and the entire world."

Republicans first floated the idea in March of inviting Netanyahu after Sen. Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish official in the United States, gave a speech on the Senate floor that was harshly critical of the prime minister. Schumer, D-N.Y., called the Israeli leader "an obstacle to peace" and urged new elections in Israel, even as he denounced Hamas and criticized Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Republicans denounced the speech as an affront to Israel and its sovereignty. Johnson spoke of asking Netanyahu to come to Washington, an invitation that Schumer and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York ultimately endorsed, albeit reluctantly. Pelosi, who opposed the invitation to Netanyahu in 2015 when she was Democratic leader, said it was a mistake for the congressional leadership to extend

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it again this time.

Democratic Sen. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, who attended the 2015 address as a House member, said he saw no reason why Congress "should extend a political lifeline" to Netanyahu.

Rep. Michael McCaul, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said it would be "healthy" for members of both parties to attend. "I think that a lot of Americans are getting a one-sided narrative, especially the younger generation, and I think it's important they hear from the prime minister of Israel, in terms of his perspective," said McCaul, R-Texas.

Interviews with more than a dozen Democrats revealed the breadth of discontent over the coming address, which many feel is a Republican ploy intended to divide their party. Some Democrats say they will attend to express their support for Israel, not Netanyahu.

New York Rep. Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said he has an "obligation" to attend because of that position.

"It should not have taken place," he added. "But I can't control that. And I have to do my job."

Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Md., who leads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has signaled he will be there. Cardin said that what he's looking for in Netanyahu's speech is a "type of message that can strengthen the support in this country for Israel's needs," but also lay the groundwork for peace in the region.

Other Democrats are waiting to see whether Netanyahu will still be prime minister by the time he is supposed to speak to Congress.

There have been open signs of discontent over the handling of the war by Netanyahu's government, a coalition that includes right-wing hard-liners who oppose any kind of settlement with Hamas.

Benny Gantz, a former military chief and centrist politician, withdrew from Netanyahu's war Cabinet this month, citing frustration over the prime minister's conduct of the war. On Monday, Netanyahu dissolved that body. Meantime, a growing number of critics and protesters in Israel have backed a cease-fire proposal that would bring home hostages taken by Hamas.

Rep. Seth Magaziner, D-R.I., said he stands with those "who hope that he's not prime minister by the time late July rolls around. I think that he has been bad for Israel, bad for Palestinians, bad for America." But, he added, he believes it his job to show up when a head of state addresses Congress, "even if it's someone who I have concerns about and disagree with."

Rep. Don Beyer, D-Va., attended the 2015 speech and described it as "among the most painful hours" he has spent while in Congress. He plans to boycott unless Netanyahu became a "champion for a cease-fire."

A large portion of the Congressional Progressive Caucus — lawmakers who are among the most critical of Israel's handling of the war — is expected to skip. Among them is Washington Rep. Pramila Jayapal, the chair of the caucus, who told The Associated Press that it was a "bad idea," to invite Netanyahu.

"We should be putting pressure on him by withholding offensive military assistance so that he sticks to the deal that the president has laid out," she said.

Netanyahu's visit is expected to draw significant protests and some members of Congress are planning an alternative event.

Rep. Jim Clyburn said he is in the early stages of bringing "like-minded" people together to exchange ideas about a path forward for Israelis and Palestinians that includes a two-state solution. The senior Democrat from South Carolina was a vocal critic of Netanyahu's 2015 address, which he and several prominent members of the Congressional Black Caucus viewed as an affront to Obama.

"I just think that, rather than just say, 'I'm not going to go, I'm going to stay away,' I am saying 'I'm going to stay away with a purpose,'" he said. "I'm not going to listen to his foolishness. But here are some ideas that we have that might be a way forward."

Former first lady Melania Trump stays out of the public eye as Donald Trump runs for president

By STEPHANY MATAT and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — After Melania Trump missed key events in her husband's presidential

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bid earlier this year — from the kickoff of the 2024 election in Iowa to Donald Trump's Super Tuesday victory party — reporters asked the former first lady whether she planned to hit the campaign trail. Her response: "Stay tuned."

But since making that comment in March, after she and Donald Trump voted in Florida's primary, Melania Trump has largely refrained from public appearances. The few exceptions have included a couple of fundraisers in April and their son's high school graduation.

The former first lady noticeably did not accompany the presumptive Republican presidential nominee on any of the days of his more than monthlong hush money trial in New York. She was not there last month for the guilty verdict or the following day for his remarks at Trump Tower. She also did not appear June 14 at a 78th birthday party organized for Trump by his fan club, or at any of the campaign rallies he has held in recent months.

Her absence during the trial and for other important moments is unusual, said Katherine Jellison, a professor of history at Ohio University who studies first ladies. But Jellison said maybe it should not come as a surprise as Melania Trump seems reluctant to follow the traditional public role of a politician's wife. As first lady, she also kept a low profile and she was not a regular presence on her husband's losing 2020 presidential campaign.

"But everything the Trumps do seems to be against the standard playbook of how candidates and spouses behave," Jellison said.

Melania Trump's behavior deviates from how other politicians have relied on their spouses. Sometimes male politicians turn to their wives to try to reach out to female voters. Candidates also may be joined by their spouses as a way of giving voters more of a sense of what the candidate is like outside the political arena.

During this year's GOP primary, for example, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' wife, Casey DeSantis, traveled with him, granted interviews and formed a coalition named Mamas for DeSantis before he suspended his bid for the nomination. Vivek Ramaswamy's wife, Dr. Apoorva Ramaswamy, also was on the campaign trail, often appearing along with their two young children to talk about the importance of family.

The Associated Press reached out to 15 people who have been in major fundraisers or in Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate recently. None said they had encountered Melania Trump on the Florida property.

Her office has not responded to several requests for comment. Her only public statement of late came two days after the Florida Republican Party announced with fanfare that son Barron Trump, 18, was chosen as a state delegate for the Republican National Convention and her office said he could not make it, citing prior commitments.

Reporters at the New York courthouse during Trump's felony trial repeatedly asked him, "Where's Melania?" but he never answered. Trump allies cited their son's school calendar as the main reason for her absence without denying it was a delicate time for the family.

Trump's attorney, Todd Blanche, was asked whether there were talks about her accompanying him to court.

"That wasn't a discussion that I wanted to have," Blanche responded, speaking to Miami trial attorney David Oscar Markus for his "For The Defense" podcast. "This was a tough case because of the nature of the charges, the evidence that came in, the history, how long it had been."

Some of the testimony aired how Trump allegedly had sex with porn actor Stormy Daniels in July 2006, about four months after Melania Trump had given birth to Barron; Trump has denied Daniels' claim. Trump's former attorney and fixer Michael Cohen testified that Trump did not appear to care about how the story of an encounter he was looking to bury would hurt his marriage as much as he cared about it damaging his 2016 presidential aspirations.

But Hope Hicks, Trump's 2016 campaign communications chief, testified that Trump was concerned in 2016 about how a story related to Playboy model Karen MacDougal would be viewed by his wife and wanted her to make sure newspapers were not delivered to their residence.

Melania Trump did not post anything on her social media accounts after her husband was convicted on 34 felony counts. That's in contrast to Trump's elder sons, who quickly condemned the verdict. Daughter

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Ivanka Trump posted on Instagram a photo of her as a toddler with a younger Trump and the message "I love you dad." Tiffany Trump, his younger daughter, accompanied him to the courthouse last month for the trial's closing arguments.

"I think it's very hard for her," Trump said about his wife, in an interview with Fox News after the verdict. "I mean, she's fine. But, you know, she has to read all this crap."

Despite her absence on the campaign trail, Trump often mentions her and shares conversations between the two, showing supporters that she is still involved behind the scenes by offering feedback to the former president.

Larry Snowden, president of the "Club 47" fan group, said he last saw the former first lady at a February gala hosted by the "Trumpettes," a group of female supporters. He said he has never had a one-on-one interaction with her, but that when he saw her there, she was "so charming."

"She was so happy, and she was smiling and accommodating anyone that wanted to come up and shake her hand or anything," Snowden said.

Snowden said he does expect Melania Trump to show face throughout the campaign and to make key speeches, but that he also thinks that the former president would "continue to be very protective of her."

Today in History: June 24, Sally Ride completes historic space shuttle mission

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, June 24, the 176th day of 2024. There are 190 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 24, 1983, the space shuttle Challenger — carrying America's first woman in space, Sally K. Ride — coasted to a safe landing at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

Also on this date:

In 1497, the first recorded sighting of North America by a European took place as explorer John Cabot spotted land, probably in present-day Canada.

In 1509, Henry VIII was crowned king of England; his wife, Catherine of Aragon, was crowned queen consort.

In 1807, a grand jury in Richmond, Virginia, indicted former Vice President Aaron Burr on charges of treason and high misdemeanor (he was later acquitted).

In 1939, the Southeast Asian country Siam changed its name to Thailand. (It went back to being Siam in 1945, then became Thailand once again in 1949.)

In 1940, France signed an armistice with Italy during World War II.

In 1946, Fred M. Vinson was sworn in as the 13th chief justice of the United States, succeeding the late Harlan F. Stone.

In 1948, Communist forces cut off all land and water routes between West Germany and West Berlin, prompting the western allies to organize the Berlin Airlift.

In 1957, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Roth v. United States*, ruled 6-3 that obscene materials were not protected by the First Amendment.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon concluded his summit with the visiting leader of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev, who hailed the talks in an address on American television.

In 1992, the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, strengthened its 30-year ban on officially sponsored worship in public schools, prohibiting prayer as a part of graduation ceremonies.

In 2015, a federal judge in Boston formally sentenced Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' sahr-NEYE'-ehv) to death for the 2013 terror attacks. (A federal appeals court later threw out the sentence; the Supreme Court reinstated it.)

In 2018, women in Saudi Arabia were able to drive for the first time, as the world's last remaining ban on female drivers was lifted.

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In 2020, three white men were indicted on murder charges in the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man who was shot while running in a neighborhood near Georgia's coast. (All three were convicted.)

In 2021, a 12-story condominium building in Surfside, Florida, collapsed, killing 98 people.

In 2022, the Supreme Court ended constitutional protections for abortion that had been in place nearly 50 years with the overturning of Roe v. Wade.

Today's Birthdays: Author Anita Desai is 87. Cinematographer Vittorio Storaro is 84. Rock singer Arthur Brown is 82. Actor Michele Lee is 82. Actor-director Georg Stanford Brown is 81. Rock singer Colin Blunstone (The Zombies) is 79. Musician Mick Fleetwood is 77. Actor Peter Weller is 77. Actor Nancy Allen is 74. Reggae singer Derrick "Ducky" Simpson (Black Uhuru) is 74. Actor Joe Penny is 68. Singer-musician Andy McCluskey (Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark) is 65. R&B/pop singer-songwriter Siedah (sy-EE'-dah) Garrett is 64. Actor Iain Glen is 63. Rock singer Curt Smith (Tears for Fears) is 63. Mexican president-elect Claudia Scheinbaum is 62. Singer Hope Sandoval (Mazzy Star) is 58. Actor Sherry Stringfield ("ER") is 57. Singer Glenn Medeiros is 54. Musician Ariel Pink is 46. Actor-producer Mindy Kaling is 45. Actor Minka Kelly is 44. Actor Justin Hires is 39. Singer Solange Knowles is 38. Actor Max Ehrich is 33. Actor Beanie Feldstein is 31. Actor Harris Dickinson is 28.