

# Groton Daily Independent

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July 8-11  
U12 State Tourney in Parker

July 11  
5:30 p.m.: U8 hosts Webster, DH (All Groups),  
Nelson Field  
5:30 p.m.: U8 hosts Doland, 1 game (All Groups),  
Falk Field  
6:30 p.m.: U10 hosts Doland, 1 game (R/W)  
6 p.m.: U12 SB at Webster, DH

July 12  
6 p.m.: Legion at Milbank, 1 game  
5:30 p.m.: Jr. Legion at Milbank, DH  
6 p.m.: U12 SB at Britton, DH  
6 p.m.: U8 SB at Clark, DH

July 13  
5 p.m.: Legion at Mobridge, 1 game  
6:30 p.m.: Jr. Legion at Mobridge, 1 game  
5:30 p.m.: U10 vs. Renegades in Watertown, DH,  
(R/B)

July 14  
5:30 p.m.: Legion hosts Webster, DH  
Jr. Teeners just be completed by this date  
6 p.m.: U12 SB hosts Faulkton, DH  
6 p.m.: U8 SB at Claremont, 1 game  
7 p.m.: U10 SB at Claremont, 1 game

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



Jul 15-17  
U10 State Tourney in Salem

July 18  
6 p.m.: Jr. Legion hosts Frederick, DH

July 19-21  
Legion Regions at Redfield

July 22-24  
Jr. Teeners State Tourney at Hayti

July 23-24  
Jr. Legion Region

July 29-Aug. 2  
State Legion at Gregory

August 5-7: State Jr. Legion at Clark

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

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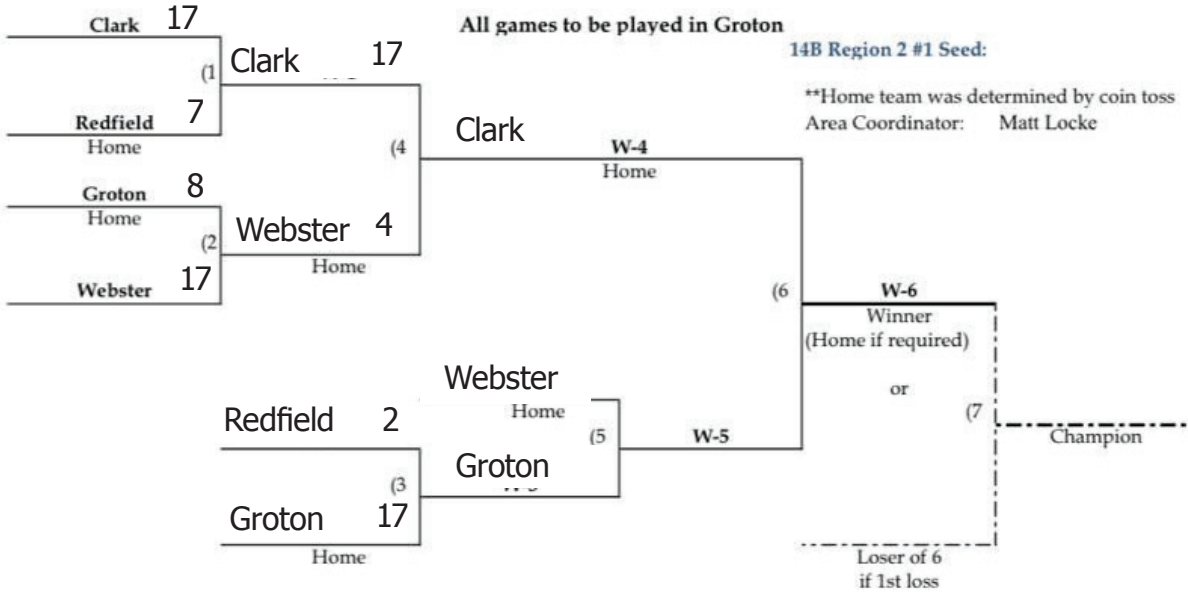
Department of SD VFW Baseball  
14U Class B Region 2 Bracket

## Continues Today

All games to be played in Groton

14B Region 2 #1 Seed:

\*\*Home team was determined by coin toss  
Area Coordinator: Matt Locke



**Game Dates and Times**

Date: Sunday 7/10  
Game 1 - 12 PM  
Game 2 - 2 PM  
Game 3 - 5 PM  
Game 4 - 7 PM

**Game Dates and Times**

Date: Monday 7/11  
Game 5 - 5 PM  
Game 6 - 7 PM

**Game Dates and Times**

Date: Tuesday 7/??  
Game 7 - 6 PM (If required)

Random numbers were used to determine seeding

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## *"Sunshine, Lollipops and Rainbows"*

Wednesday, July 13 at Noon  
Ladies Luncheon & Program

Silent Auction  
10:30 - 11:30  
Door Prizes

Ty Eschenbaum  
will be the speaker

Advance tickets  
required \$10.00



Call Kay Espeland 492-3507 or  
Alice Jean Peterson 216-2835



## Groton holds Summer Fest and Car Show at City Park



**Mayor Scott Hanlon and Honorary Lions Member April Abeln pose for a picture by the Mayor's car. Hanlon also gave the welcome greeting prior to the event.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Groton Legion Post #39 presented the colors. Pictured are Bruce Babcock and Les Hinds with Mayor Hanlon.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**The Barstool Boys- Bob Boehmer (Groton native) and Bob Bawdon played music in the City Park all day.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Julianna Kosel sang the National Anthem prior to the event.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



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**Groton Lions members Nancy Larsen and Karyn Babcock pictures with volunteers Katelyn Nehlich and Doug Heinrich at the car show registration table.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Many people were in the park waiting on car show winners to be announced.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



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**CM&A Church led the service at the City Park before the car show.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Over 2 dozen vendors were in the City Park including Next Level Nutrition, LipSense, Norwex and many more.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Beauty Brew Coffee & Boutique along with Scotty D's and Burbu Magic Sweets served many people in Groton's City Park.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



**Almost 100 cars were in the City Park on Sunday. Next years event is planned for Sunday, July 9th.** (Photo courtesy April Abeln)



## Enhancing Awareness of PTSD

Summertime. For most, this signals thoughts of warm weather and good times with family and friends. Sadly, what brings happiness for some can trigger stress and sorrow for others. In the words of a Vietnam War veteran, "The fourth of July was once my favorite holiday with friends and family...but now it is a day I wish never existed."

Now ask, what could this veteran, a victim of a farming accident, a female sexual abuse victim, a child who lost his mother to domestic violence and a survivor of a tornado all have in common? The answer is post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD.

As defined by the CDC, PTSD is an intense, uncontrollable emotional and physical reaction to a reminder of a traumatic event or distressing memories. Though most people associate this disorder with service members and war, the reality in our society is that PTSD is diverse and far reaching. It is estimated that 70 percent of the population will experience at least one traumatic event in their lifetime and current research shows that about six percent of American adults will suffer from PTSD.

The privilege of talking with hundreds of patients has opened my eyes to the variation of PTSD symptoms and its commonplace in our society.

Some PTSD symptoms are intrusive such as distressing memories, dreams, or flashbacks. Others experience intense psychological or physiological reactions to triggers. The need for avoidance causes some suffering from PTSD to shut out memories of the event and evade reminders such as people, places, situations, or objects. PTSD can alter mood and thoughts which can lead to feelings of blame, fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame and inability to experience positive emotions. Common symptoms also include irritability and angry outbursts; reckless or self-destructive behaviors such as substance use; hypervigilance; and problems with concentrating and sleep.

The reality is that PTSD is complex and affects everybody differently, so a treatment that works for one person may not work for another. Currently, the main treatments for PTSD are medications and/or psychotherapy. Support from family, friends and groups are crucial to recovery.

It can be difficult to take that first step to ask for help but with time and treatment PTSD can be managed and controlled. Research shows that the symptoms of PTSD last much longer for those not receiving treatment versus those that receive treatment. By creating more awareness and discussing the diverse nature of PTSD more people will be inspired to get help or give help to those suffering. If you are unsure where to start, ask your family doctor or search for local mental health providers.

Veronica Radigan, M.D., a psychiatrist in Sioux Falls, South Dakota is a contributing Prairie Doc® columnist and a guest this week on the Prairie Doc® Q&A show. Follow The Prairie Doc® at [www.prairedoc.org](http://www.prairedoc.org) and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



**Veronica Radigan, M.D.**

## Thats Life/Tony Bender Midsummer night's quiz

Man, I feel like Rip Van Bender. I woke up today and it was mid-July, and I haven't even put away the snow shovels, yet. Plus, it's about time to cull the herd. So here we go with a Midsummer's Quiz. Those of you who fail will be canceled. The good news is we're grading on a curve greater than any of Kim Kardashian's. And, as Jackie Gleason used to say, away, we go!

### 1. Name the quarterback the Cleveland Browns traded for.

- a. Deshaun "Happy Ending" Watson
- b. Vincent "The Chin" Gigante
- c. Aaron "I've Lost My Mind" Rodgers
- d. Brownie "Brown-Noser" Brownstein

### 2. A recent article in Best Life named this as the most annoying sign.

- a. Gemini. It's a well-known fact that all of them are on drugs.
- b. Long Haired Freaky People Need Not Apply
- c. Out of Order
- d. No Right Turn on Red. Which seems inappropriately political.

### 3. Movies are back after a COVID-induced hiatus. What changes have taken place since you've been at the theater?

- a. Loan officers now stationed at concessions
- b. Junior Mints are all grown up.
- c. It's still the same batch of popcorn.
- d. Now, according to scripture, er, I mean North Dakota Century Code, life begins when you put your arm around your girlfriend.

### 4. Organizers believe they have enough ballots to get recreational marijuana on the North Dakota ballot which means:

- a. The End of the World as We Know it. But I Feel Fine.
- b. Another loosey-goosey operation
- c. Dogs and Cats living together
- d. What was the question again?

### 5. What has happened to the Twins bullpen?

- a. Nuke Laloosh's breathing through the wrong eye lid again.
- b. Lollygaggers!
- c. Grounds crew accidentally aimed pitcher's mound toward first base. On the upside, pickoffs are up dramatically.
- d. Edibles now legal in Minnesota

### 6. The first image from NASA's James Webb telescope discovered:

- a. A spectacular nebula
- b. A spectacular nebulizer
- c. A spectacular Nebakanezzer
- d. Your car keys

### 7. Monkey Pox is:

- a. A really cool band name.
- b. Going to kill us all.
- c. Kinda racist against monkeys
- d. Term of affection among weirdos

### 8. Elon Musk backed out of the Twitter deal because:

- a. Child support is crushing him
- b. He's a twit
- c. No extended warranty
- d. That bird has flown

### 9. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson resigned because:

- a. Needs to find himself
- b. The time it takes to get his hair just right just isn't worth it, anymore.
- c. Came to the sad conclusion that he'll never be queen
- d. Shot a man in Reno just to watch him die

### 10. You can spend hundreds on your cat and they will still:

- a. Prefer an Amazon box
- b. Remain aloof
- c. Eat you if you've fallen and can't get up
- d. Refuse to shake paws for a treat

### BONUS: A really good band name:

- a. Good Guys With Guitars
- b. Booger Police
- c. Aaron Rodgers' Man Bun
- d. Hunter Biden's Laptop

**Answers:** 1. d; 2. a.; 3. a.; 4. d. 5. b; 6. d; 7. c; 8. c; 9. c.; 10. a; Bonus: b. Grades: 11-9: And they criticize public education. 6-8 correct: Close enough for rock-n-roll. 3-5 correct: Close enough for jazz. 0-2 correct: Yeah, I know we're grading on a curve, but gee whiz. OK, I'm looking the other way, Gump.



## Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

As we enter the second half of the offseason for the Vikings, we carry on with our analysis of the different position groups for the Vikings. We'll look at any competition that might occur, as well as make our predictions for who will make the final 53-man roster. This week we will look at the linebackers.

### Linebackers:

Lock to make the 53-man roster: Eric Kendricks, Jordan Hicks, and Brian Asamoah

Eric Kendricks will enter his eighth season as the starting middle linebacker for the Vikings. For how consistently good Kendricks has been for the Vikings over those years, it is hard to believe he only has one pro bowl to show for it. It shows how much the pro bowl has become a popularity contest and less of an indicator on individual success.

Moreover, for the first time since 2014, Eric Kendricks will enter the season without his linebacker mate, Anthony Barr, who left the Vikings for free agency. To fill-in for Barr's loss, the Vikings signed Jordan Hicks this offseason. Like Kendricks, Hicks is entering his eighth season in the NFL, previously playing for the Eagles and Cardinals. By expert's accounts, Hicks lacks the explosive athleticism you see in some linebackers in today's NFL but makes up for it with his intelligence.

The other lock to make the roster is rookie Brian Asamoah. Asamoah is an undersized linebacker with explosive closing speed on ball carriers. Despite his lack of size, Asamoah appears to be unafraid of the big hit. If he fills in for either Kendricks or Hicks at any point this season, he should be a player that's hard to ignore when on the field.

Players competing for the final spots on the linebacker group: Blake Lynch, Troy Dye, Chazz Surratt, and Ryan Connelly

Interesting thing about this group of guys is that they might have to rely on their success on special teams if they want to make the final roster. Of these five players, I would guess that Chazz Surratt is the most likely to make the team as he is entering his second year, and was unable to show what many potential scouts raved about when he was drafted. Furthermore, Chazz Surratt is still learning the linebacker position, given that he switched from quarterback to linebacker during college at North Carolina.

After Surratt, Blake Lynch makes this roster because he can be a reliable special teams' player and a backup who can fill in for Kendricks or Hicks should they get hurt. Troy Dye is a player who I could see getting cut. Dye is entering his third season and has yet to show anything more than bring a special team's player.

As for Ryan Connelly, I would lean toward him getting cut. However, like the other linebackers on this list, he is a reliable special teams' player. If he shows a consistency at that part of the game, the Vikings may be inclined to keep him on the final roster.

Likely to be cut or placed on the practice squad: William Kwenkeu

### 53-man roster predictions:

Jack Kolsrud's prediction

Eric Kendricks, Jordan Hicks, Brian Asamoah, Blake Lynch, and Chazz Surratt

Duane Kolsrud's prediction

Eric Kendricks, Jordan Hicks, Brian Asamoah, Blake Lynch, and Chazz Surratt. Wishful thinking is Anthony Barr would be given a chance to return after pursuing free agency and getting no traction from the rest of the league. With his athleticism, he would seem to be a good fit for this new 3-4 defense.

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## #543 in a series

### Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Reported numbers are holding steady; there really hasn't been much overall change in a couple of months. Of course, we know we're not reporting anything like all of the cases—more on that later—and states are reporting less frequently, so whatever their official numbers, they're not coming in on a regular basis anyhow. That's all something of a concern because it means we're sort of flying blind; we won't know we're in trouble until the trouble is pretty bad. The seven-day, new-case average has been hanging right around that 100,000 mark; tonight it's 107,533. The pandemic total is 88,442,095, which means we've notched another million. Thursday's the day we passed the 88-million-case mark; for a month and a half, we've been logging another million cases every 10 days or so. Although this isn't all the cases, it's still really too fast. Here's the history from the first of the year:

January 19 – 68 million – 1 day  
January 20 – 69 million – 1 day  
January 21 – 70 million – 1 day  
January 24 – 71 million – 3 days  
January 25 – 72 million – 1 day  
January 27 – 73 million – 2 days  
January 29 – 74 million – 1 day  
February 1 – 75 million – 3 days  
February 4 – 76 million – 3 days  
February 9 – 77 million – 5 days  
February 16 – 78 million – 7 days  
March 3 – 79 million – 15 days  
March 31 – 80 million – 28 days  
April 27 – 81 million – 27 days  
May 11 – 82 million – 14 days  
May 20 – 83 million – 9 days  
May 31 – 84 million – 11 days  
June 8 – 85 million – 8 days  
June 17 – 86 million – 9 days  
June 27 – 87 million – 10 days  
July 7 – 88 million – 10 days

The seven-day average number hospitalized has been increasing, but slowly; we're currently at 37,463. Deaths have been pretty much unchanged for weeks too. Tonight, the seven-day average is 322 with a pandemic total of 1,017,286. I keep considering whether I should continue reporting these statistics, case numbers in particular. It feels a little pointless when we know we're missing most of them, but in the somewhat forlorn hope a developing trend will be instructive, even if the actual numbers are vastly underreported, I'm going to continue for a while yet. We'll see what the future brings.

BA.4 and BA.5, the latest versions of the Omicron variant, are taking over from their predecessors. BA.5 accounts for more than half of cases (53.6%, 10 points higher than a week ago), which makes it the dominant variant in the US. BA.4 accounts for another 16.5 percent—it appears to be a little worse at transmitting than its partner—so together, we're looking at over 70 percent for these two subvariants. You may have noticed these two are always discussed together; that's because they have identical spike mutations—the ones we think really matter in terms of getting into host cells and in terms of host immunity. They can be differentiated by mutations in other locations, but their spikes are really the same. They both exhibit S-gene target failure (SGTF), something we've talked about before. You may recall that this means the spike protein (S) genes don't amplify in the PCR test in the same way nucleocapsid or 'viral body' genes do; so specimens showing N, but not S, amplification are said to exhibit SGTF. Remember back when Omicron (which was BA.1) first popped up and scientists discovered it was easy to spot



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from the PCR data because it caused SGTF? At that time, Delta, which does not exhibit SGTF, was the dominant variant, so when PCR results came back, anything with SGTF was going to be Omicron (BA.1); everything else was Delta. That made it possible to identify Omicron infections without fancy genome sequencing until BA.2 came along and did not show SGTF. Apparently, we've toggled back to SGTF again because pretty much everything we're seeing is Omicron; so once again, the PCR test is enabling us to sort out BA.4 or BA.5 from the dwindling number of cases with BA.2 or BA.2.12.1.

The BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants are even more transmissible than the earlier subvariants of Omicron, BA.4 less so than BA.5, as noted above; their mutated spikes are also better at escaping our immune response than their predecessors. We don't have any real idea any more how many new cases there are per day, but many experts think we're over a million; and we know we're getting a whole lot of reinfections, even of people who had a BA.2 infection quite recently. We've talked about the fact that Omicron infections don't seem to confer much protection against another Omicron infection, and that seems to have a lot to do with what's going on here. We're also highly likely to turn up more mutations at this transmission rate. The good news, if anything about this virus can be considered good these days, is that hospitalizations remain, relatively speaking, low and the death rate has not increased in at least a couple of months.

Yet, according to the Washington Post's reporting, "There is widespread agreement among infectious-disease experts that this remains a dangerous virus that causes illnesses of unpredictable severity—and they say the country is not doing enough to limit transmission." I'd go a step further and say the country isn't doing anything at all to limit transmission. Neither are we as individuals. As nearly as I can determine, we're back to business as usual with no alteration at all in most folks' routines. People are reacting to widespread infection among their friends and neighbors with a collective shrug and a return to the life patterns of 2019. I guess there aren't enough people dying these days. Meanwhile, this virus continues to mutate. And mutate some more. BA.5 is not the last iteration of it we're going to see, and that has a lot of folks worried..

While deaths are not increasing so far, we would do well to remember that dying isn't the only bad outcome for Covid-19. Among those other bad outcomes is long-Covid or post-acute sequelae of Covid (PASC), constellations of symptoms that linger weeks or months after the acute infection has resolved. Severity ranges from annoying symptoms to major disability. One of many things we don't yet understand about long-Covid is who's at risk; but I've read an interesting summary of current thinking on that point. The following are the six risk groups which have been speculated to exist.

(1) Reinfections: There is evidence that the risk for long-Covid, hospitalization, and death increases with each bout of Covid-19; some of that evidence arises from work being done at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis and the VA St. Louis Health Care System. We've cited earlier peer-reviewed and published work on long-Covid from this research team; and they're back with a preprint article (so this one's not yet peer-reviewed) on risks associated with reinfections. This team has been working with a data set covering 5,693,208 million people who include 257,427 with first infection, 38,926 with reinfection, and 5,396,855 non-infected controls. Here is what these authors say: "We show that compared to people with first infection, reinfection contributes additional risks of all-cause mortality, hospitalization, and adverse health outcomes in the pulmonary and several extrapulmonary organ systems" and that "the risks . . . persisted in the post-acute phase of reinfection, and most were still evident at 6 months after reinfection." This last—"persisted in the post-acute phase of reinfection" and "still evident at 6 months after reinfection"—refer directly to PASC. They further show "that the risk and burden increased in a graded fashion according to the number of infections." So the more times you're infected, the greater your risk for PASC and long-lasting problems.

(2) High viral loads. If during the acute phase of infection, there were large numbers of virus particles present, the person is more likely to develop long-Covid. A research team at the Institute for Systems Biology, the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, and the University of Washington published a paper in Cell this spring which examined factors associated with PASC, and found higher viral loads correlated with later development of long-Covid irrespective of how severe the patients' symptoms were in the acute phase. This accounts for the fact that the severity of the disease doesn't seem to have much to do with

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whether you're going to develop long-Covid and also provides some indication that antiviral medications could reduce the risk for long-Covid by reducing that load.

(3) Dormant Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) infection. EBV causes infectious mononucleosis, a fairly frequently-occurring infection in young adults which often goes unrecognized because many cases are very mild or entirely asymptomatic. There is some thinking EBV is also associated with chronic fatigue syndrome; while we're not sure yet about that, we do know that this is a virus with a tendency to latency, that is, hiding in the patient's body after the acute phase of infection without causing symptoms. The study referenced above found another risk factor for long-Covid is reactivated EBV circulating in the patient's bloodstream. It is not yet clear whether Covid-19 is responsible for reactivating EBV, but it's a good working hypothesis that it does.

(4) Autoimmunity. The same study as above also spotted autoantibodies (auto means self; these antibodies target the patient's own tissues) as a risk factor. I am not entirely clear on this one, but I believe the thinking is that autoantibodies develop during acute Covid-19 and it is these antibodies which are causing the trouble, not so much preexisting autoantibodies in someone who has rheumatoid arthritis or lupus erythematosus, for example. This paper did say only six percent of long-Covid patients with autoantibodies had been diagnosed with an autoimmune condition before they had Covid-19; so I'm thinking these are antibodies newly developed consequent to the SARS-CoV-2 infection. If I get clarification on this, I'll update you here.

(5) Neurologic symptoms of Covid-19. This suspicion arises from work with PASC patients, and the hypothesis is that some folks with neural damage due to the virus have neurons misinterpreting lingering inflammation or residual virus and signaling the body that more oxygen and rest are needed, producing symptoms of shortness of breath and fatigue, even though there is no actual clinical need for the additional oxygen or rest. These would be symptoms produced by the neurologic malfunction, not by other body systems' damage. The thinking is that these folks may turn out to be those with neurological symptoms during the acute phase—things like headaches and loss of the senses of taste and/or smell. I'm not sure how knowing this will help—or whether it will; after all, gasping for breath is gasping for breath whether there is a real need to do so or simply a brain insisting you need to. However, among my many shortcomings in this endeavor is that I am not a neurologist, so there may be something here we can do if this is what's going on. I will update as further information becomes available.

(6) Lack of vaccination. This one we've talked about before, most recently in my Update #539 posted June 7, 2022, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/pfbid02KtuB2iUmE3aVLQoys9tBKbiB-V5H9mSJ4BRSHVGVuDZbYAX43AUPwbMJySJfskdY1I>. This is a discussion of the peer-reviewed paper from that group at Washington University and VA St. Louis mentioned above. While we're not yet sure just how much vaccination helps, we're pretty sure it does reduce the risk for long-Covid. That alone is an excellent reason to be vaccinated and boosted as many times as recommended for you and your age group.

The upshot for all of this, of course, is that you really don't want to get Covid-19 if you can help it—and you can help it if you choose. Once you're infected, there isn't much you can do about your chances.

Because just about everyone is getting Covid-19 these days, I've been fielding a lot of questions about what to do if you test positive or if you've been exposed or if you're exposed to someone who was exposed; so I thought I'd give you the basic outlines for the current guidance from the CDC. This can seem pretty confusing, and it's tempting to blame the scientists for not having easy, one-step rules. Problem is, the virus, not the scientists, is driving these guidelines; you can't simplify what's not simple. When you get down to it though, this isn't rocket science; there are underlying principles here, and they're not all that difficult to parse. Here are the basics.

The two general principles operating in the timing are (1) If infected, you are most infectious to others from 2 days before your symptoms begin until about 3 days after—it is possible to transmit the virus for longer, but these are the days of greatest danger; and (2) although it is possible, it is uncommon to transmit more than 10 days after symptoms begin.

If you develop symptoms OR if you test positive (even without symptoms), you should isolate at home for 5 days. Here, you count the day the symptoms developed (if you have them) or the test was positive



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as Day 0 and count from there. Within your home, you should isolate from others, keeping yourself to a confined, non-shared area as much as possible and masking whenever in the presence of others. Other household members should mask around you or in any area you have been unmasked (for example, the room in which you eat) as well. If you have been fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and other symptoms are improving, you may end isolation after Day 5 and, for the next 5 days, continue to wear a high-quality, well-fitting mask whenever you're with others. During days 6-10, you shouldn't go anywhere you are unable to wear a mask (a restaurant, for example), travel, or be with people who are at high risk for severe disease. If at any time you develop symptoms or have a positive test, it would be a service to notify those with whom you've had close contacts, especially in the period of highest infectiousness—from 2 days before through 3 days after the symptoms developed or the test result was positive.

With respect to testing results, be aware that the antigen tests (home tests) rarely give a false positive result, so if the test says you are infected, chances are excellent you are infected. They are, on the other hand, a bit prone to returning false negative results, even in symptomatic individuals; so if you have symptoms and test negative, you should follow up with another antigen test a couple of days later or get a PCR test (the kind you get at the clinic)—these are far less likely to give false negatives. It is wise to isolate until you have that second negative antigen test or negative PCR test.

If you have a known exposure—what's called a close contact (15 minutes total exposure over a 24-hour period at a distance of less than 6 feet to a known case), what happens next depends whether you are up-to-date on vaccinations (that is fully vaccinated and boosted). In cases of exposure, Day 0 is the day the close contact occurred; in the case of an ongoing exposure, it is the last day of close contact.

If you are not up-to-date on vaccinations, you will follow the guidelines above for those with a positive test, quarantining at home through Day 5 and continuing to mask around others through Day 10, avoiding travel, and avoiding contact with those at risk. Those who are up-to-date on vaccination do not need to quarantine. You should, however, wear a well-fitting mask when around others on Days 0 through 10, take precautions when traveling, and avoid those at high risk.

People who have a known close contact should test on Day 5 and again on Day 10. If you develop symptoms, you should be tested as soon as possible after they develop and again two days later if the first test was negative. If symptoms develop OR if there is a positive test, you will revert to the guidelines for those with symptoms or a positive test above with Day 0 as the day of the test or the day symptoms developed, whichever came first.

If you are a close contact of a close contact, then stay in touch with the close contact. If that person is quarantining and testing per guidelines, you will be guided by what turns up there. I am aware these guidelines presuppose good faith on the part of all involved, something on which we cannot necessarily rely these days. I don't know what to say about that; but I do know we're not going to wrestle this thing to the mat until we start to take this virus seriously. People who are at low risk for severe disease and death have been feeling free to take their chances; but it troubles me greatly that they're willing to let you take your chances even when you are unaware there's a risk.

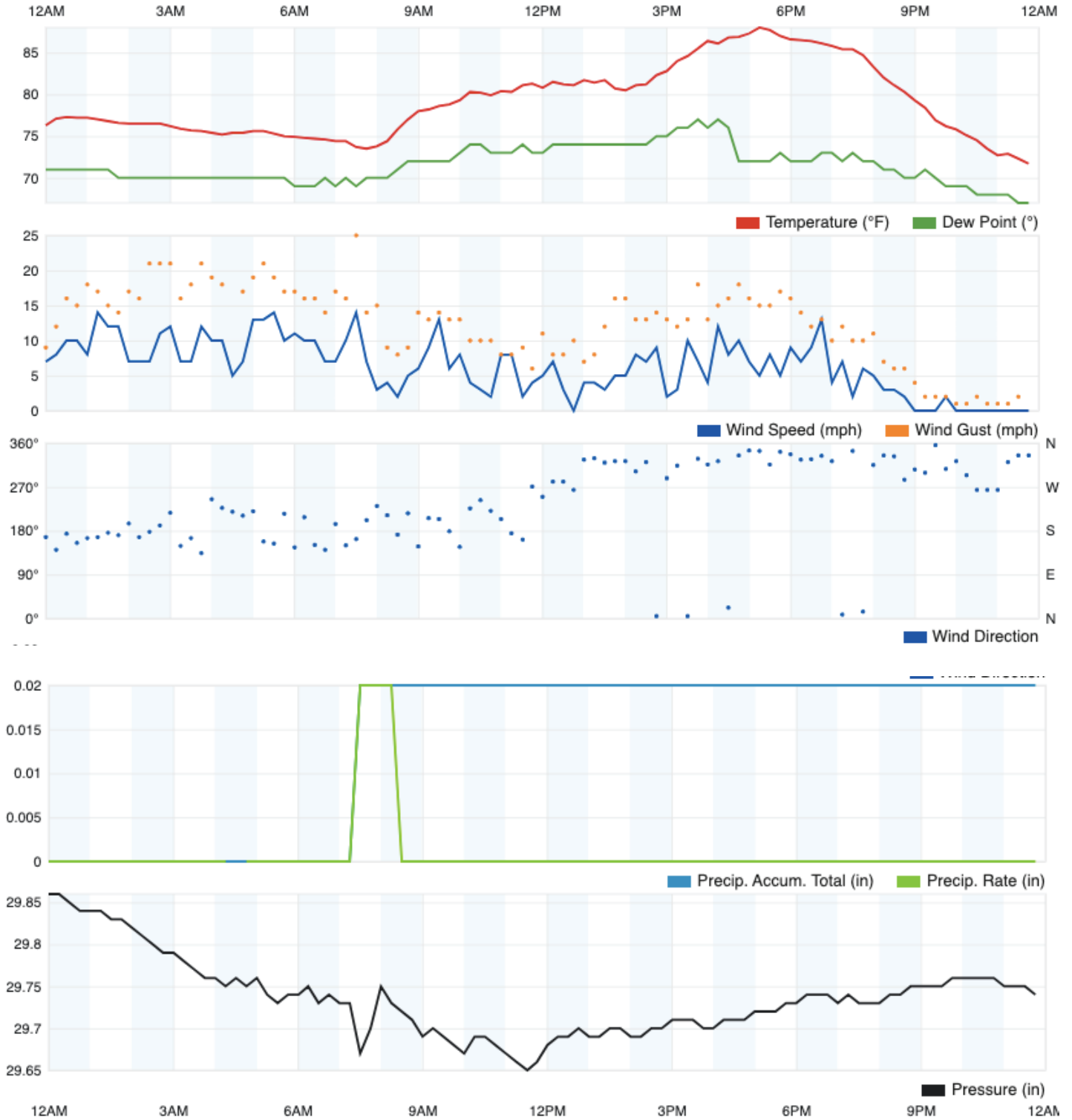
Anyone who's wondering why this thing won't just go away doesn't have to look far. Far too many of us are entirely willing to let you pay with no life at all or a seriously distorted one for their ability to resume a "normal life." This is simply where we are.

And that's it for tonight. Keep yourself safe, and we'll talk again in a few days.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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Monday



Breezy.  
Chance  
T-storms then  
Sunny

High: 82 °F

Monday  
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 60 °F

Tuesday



Sunny

High: 86 °F

Tuesday  
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 60 °F

Wednesday



Sunny

High: 88 °F

## The Week Ahead

Monday



Morning  
Thundershowers  
Clearing &  
Breezy

HI: 77 to 82

Tuesday



Breezy

HI: 82 to 88

LO: 57 to 65

Wednesday



HI: 85 to 93

LO: 59 to 62

Thursday



HI: 92 to 100

LO: 62 to 70

Friday



HI: 91 to 95

LO: 66 to 71

Updated: 7/11/2022 4:06 AM Central

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Showers and thundershowers ending this morning with mostly dry conditions coming up for the next few days along with a bit of a heat wave.

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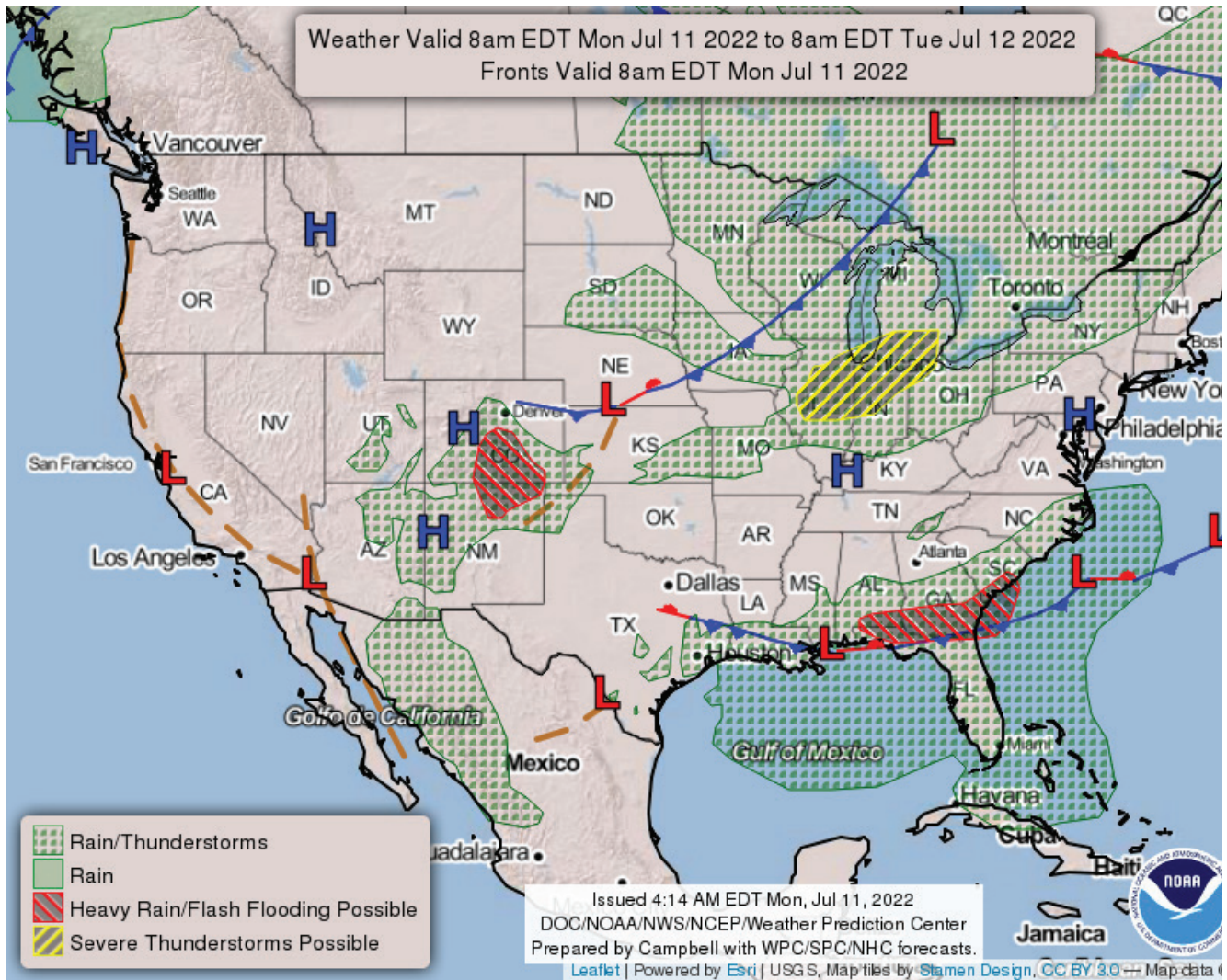
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 88 °F at 5:16 PM**  
**Low Temp: 72 °F at 11:49 PM**  
**Wind: 25 mph at 7:29 AM**  
**Precip: 0.04**

Day length: 15 hours, 29 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 110 in 1930  
Record Low: 45 in 1941  
Average High: 85°F  
Average Low: 60°F  
Average Precip in July.: 1.26  
Precip to date in July.: 2.25  
Average Precip to date: 12.27  
Precip Year to Date: 13.83  
Sunset Tonight: 9:22:28 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:54:20 AM





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## Today in Weather History

July 11, 1909: A deadly, estimated F2 tornado moved ESE across the Simpson Park section of Big Stone City in South Dakota. A bus was thrown from the road, and the driver was killed. Two homes and several barns were destroyed. As the tornado crossed the foot of Big Stone Lake, it tore apart a railroad yard and killed four of the 26 Armenian laborers who were living in box cars at Ortonville, Minnesota. Nineteen were injured.

July 11, 1981: Severe thunderstorms moved eastward across the entire length of the South Dakota along the northern portion of the state. Hail, with the largest up to nine inches in circumference, resulted in 100 percent crop loss, damage to numerous buildings and loss of livestock. Trees were stripped, and large limbs were broken. High winds also accompanied these storms. Storms lasted into the early morning hours on the 12. Thunderhawk in Corson County had estimated winds of 70 to 75 mph that destroyed a machine shop and seven metal grain storage bins. In and around Pollock, a silo was moved three feet off the foundation. Power and telephone lines were down. Rainfall measured 2.28 inches in two hours in Pollock.

1888 - Heavy snow reached almost to the base of Mt. Washington, NH, and the peaks of the Green Mountains were whitened. (David Ludlum)

1936: From July 5-17, temperatures exceeding 111 degrees in Manitoba and Ontario claimed 1,180 lives (mostly the elderly and infants) during the most prolonged, deadliest heat wave on record. Four hundred of these deaths were caused by people who drowned seeking refuge from the heat. In fact, the heat was so intense that steel rail lines and bridge girders twisted, sidewalks buckled, crops wilted and fruit baked on trees. Some record temperatures include; 112 degrees at St. Albans and Emerson, Manitoba, 111 at Brandon, Manitoba, 108 at Atikokan, Ontario, and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

1987 - Early morning thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 90 mph at Parkston, SD, and wind gusts to 87 mph at Buffalo, MN. Later in the day strong thunderstorm winds at Howard WI collapsed a circus tent injuring 44 persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced heavy rain in southern Texas, with totals ranging up to 13 inches near Medina. Two men drowned when their pick-up truck was swept into the Guadalupe River, west of the town of Hunt. Ten cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Baltimore, MD, reported a record high reading of 102 degrees for the second day in a row. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather from North Dakota to Indiana. Thunderstorms in North Dakota produced tennis ball size hail at Carson. Thunderstorms in Indiana produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Fort Wayne. Five cities in the Southern Atlantic Coast Region reported record high temperatures for the date, including Lakeland, FL, with a reading of 100 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990: The costliest hailstorm in U.S. history occurred along the Front Range of the Colorado Rockies. (Denver, Colorado): Softball-sized hail destroyed roofs and cars, causing more than \$600 million in total damage.

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## TWO IN ONE

Have you ever heard anyone accuse Jacob of being the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of the Bible? This way of looking at Jacob was brought to my attention recently. A very strange description of one who has such a significant role in Scripture.

Consider these facts: We see a constant struggle of good versus evil. He rises, yet falls short of his goals. His life is one constant battle between two natures: one earthbound and the other filled with divine intentions.

No one can describe his life in a single word. It is certainly appropriate to speak of Abraham as a man of faith or Joseph as a person of purity. But it does not seem possible to summarize Jacob's many-sided life into one word unless it would be the word "inconsistent."

His early years present a vivid picture of these inconsistencies. He was a cheat - having cheated both his father and brother. Yet, he constantly tried to do better.

He might have died as a Jekyll and Hyde, but one night he was forced to face his sins and make a decision about his future. And when he realized that he was at the end of his resources, he finally turned to God to be saved from his sins and self-destructive ways.

After that God-changing event, he went from victory to victory, with hope and help from the Lord.

There is no limit to what God can do for each of us. What He did for Jacob, He can do for us: "Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God." Wrestling with sin? Turn to God now!

Prayer: How foolish we are, Father, to struggle in our own strength when Yours is available. Save us now! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God. Psalm 146:5



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## 2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)  
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,  
04/07/2022 Groton CDE  
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)  
04/09/2022 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm  
04/23/2022 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
04/24/2022 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)  
05/07/2022 Lions Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)  
St John's Lutheran Church VBS 9-11am  
05/30/2022 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)  
Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)  
06/17/2022 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start  
06/18/2022 Groton Triathlon  
06/20/2022 Ladies Invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration 10am Start  
06/25/2022 How can we... "Love Groton"? United Methodist Church 9:30am  
07/04/2022 Firecracker Couples Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start  
(4th of July)  
07/10/2022 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)  
07/20/2022 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar 11am-1pm at the Groton Legion  
07/21/2022 Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/22/2022 Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start  
Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20  
07/27/2022 Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm  
08/05/2022 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm  
08/12/2022 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament  
United Methodist Church VBS 5-8pm  
Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot  
09/10/2022 Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm  
09/11/2022 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm  
Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm  
10/07/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am  
10/31/2022 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)  
10/31/2022 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm  
11/12/2022 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)  
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)  
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course  
Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm  
01/29/2023 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)

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## Withering drought shows Lake Mead boat graveyard

By JOHN LOCHER Associated Press  
BOULDER CITY, Nev. (AP) — An abandoned old power boat juts upright from the cracked mud like a giant tombstone. Its epitaph might read: Here lay the waters of Lake Mead.

The largest U.S. reservoir has shrunk to a record low amid a punishing drought and the demands of 40 million people in seven states who are sucking the Colorado River dry. The megadrought in the U.S. West has been worsened by climate change. Wildfire season has become longer and blazes more intense, scorching temperatures have broken records and lakes are shriveling.

Receding waters of Lake Mead National Recreation Area have revealed the skeletal remains of two people along with countless desiccated fish and what has become a graveyard of forgotten and stranded watercraft.

Houseboats, sailboats and motorboats have been beached, creating a surreal scene in an otherwise rugged



**Bobby Rhinebolt, right, smokes a cigarette while sitting beside Victor Perez near a formerly sunken boat implanted upright in mud and now above the water line at the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Wednesday, June 22, 2022, near Boulder City, Nev. As the water level at the lake recedes, sunken boats and other debris are appearing along the shoreline.** (AP Photo/John Locher)



**A sign marks the water line from 2002 near Lake Mead at the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Saturday, July 9, 2022, near Boulder City, Nev. The largest U.S. reservoir has shrunk to a record low amid a punishing drought and the demands of 40 million people in seven states who are sucking the Colorado River dry.** (AP Photo/John Locher)

desert landscape. A buoy that once marked a no-boat-zone sits in the dirt, not a drop of water anywhere in view. Even a sunken World War II-era craft that once surveyed the lake has emerged from the ebbing waters.

Nature did not create this still water paradise for fishing, camping and kayaking. The mighty Colorado River that divides Nevada from Arizona once flowed beneath the walls of Black Canyon until the Hoover Dam was erected in 1935 for irrigation, flood control and hydropower.

The reservoir is now below 30 percent of capacity. Its level has dropped 170 feet (52 meters) since reaching a high-water mark in 1983, leaving a bright white line of mineral deposits on the brown canyon walls that looms over passing motor boats as high as a 15-story building.

Most of the boat ramps have been gated and marina docks moved into deeper waters. A sign that marks the water level in 2002 inconceivably stands above a road that descends to boat slips in the distance.

The dropping water levels have consequences not

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only for the cities that depend on the future source of water but for boaters who have to navigate shallow waters and avoid islands and sandbars that lurk below the surface before emerging.

Craig Miller was motoring around on his houseboat last month when the engine died and he floated to shore. Within days, the knee deep water where his boat came to a rest was gone.

"It's amazing how fast the water went down," Miller said. "I was landlocked."

He bought pumps and tried to dredge the sand around the boat to create a channel to the water, but couldn't stay ahead of the receding waters. A tow from shallow waters, originally estimated at \$4,000, ballooned to a \$20,000 salvage job when he became marooned.

Miller spent three weeks on the beached boat, spending much of it soaking in the water to stay cool in the



**Craig Miller sits in his stranded houseboat at the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Thursday, June 23, 2022, near Boulder City, Nev. Miller had been living on the stranded boat for over two weeks after engine trouble and falling lake levels left the boat above the water level.**

(AP Photo/John Locher)

triple-digit heat. The day before he was told by park rangers that he had to get the boat off the sand, Dave Sparks, a social media personality known as Heavy D, who had seen a video about Miller's plight, showed up with a crew to pull the boat from the shore and tow it to a marina.

Others have flocked to the dried lake bed for selfies in the haunting landscape or against the backdrop of what looks like a colossal ring around a bathtub.

The dried lake bottom looks like shattered glass, the cracks expanding in the hot sun and mud fading from brown to beige.

A small school of dead fish have been propped on their tails and arranged in a circle.

As the sun sets to the West over Las Vegas, the light illuminates the translucent hollowed-out body and empty eye socket of one fish. Its mouth is open as if it is trying to breathe.



**A bathtub ring of light minerals shows the high water line of Lake Mead near water intakes on the Arizona side of Hoover Dam at the Lake Mead National Recreation Area Sunday, June 26, 2022, near Boulder City, Nev. The reservoir is now below 30 percent of capacity, Its level has dropped 170 feet (52 meters) since reaching a high-water mark in 1983.** (AP Photo/John Locher)



## News from the Associated Press

### **South Dakota Democrats pick their candidates at convention**

FORT PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Democrats picked their candidate in what they hope will be a winnable race for Secretary of State but opted not to name a challenger for state Attorney General.

The delegates to the state convention chose former journalist Tom Cool, who ran for auditor in 2018, to challenge Republican Monae Johnson who beat out incumbent Steve Barnett, according to the Sioux Falls Argus Leader. Johnson based her campaign around “election integrity” in a nod to Republican fears that were instigated by former President Donald Trump’s false claims that the 2020 election was stolen.

“They keep whining about election integrity, which we know are their code words for voter suppression,” said Cool, of Sioux Falls. “They don’t just want to go along with the Supreme Court and go back to the 1950s, they want to return to the 1850s when it was only white men controlling this country.”

The Democrats didn’t nominate a candidate to challenge Marty Jackley, the former South Dakota attorney general running to reclaim his old job after his successor was removed from office last month.

The Democrats also backed retired public administrator John Cunningham for state treasurer and military veteran Stephany Marty for state auditor.

State Rep. Jennifer Keintz received enthusiastic support to be Jamie Smith’s running mate in his campaign to beat Republican incumbent Gov. Kristi Noem.

### **Over-the-counter birth control? Drugmaker seeks FDA approval**

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the first time, a pharmaceutical company has asked for permission to sell a birth control pill over the counter in the U.S.

HRA Pharma’s application on Monday sets up a high-stakes decision for health regulators amid legal and political battles over women’s reproductive health. The company says the timing was unrelated to the Supreme Court’s recent decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

Hormone-based pills have long been the most common form of birth control in the U.S., used by millions of women since the 1960s. They have always required a prescription, generally so health professionals can screen for conditions that raise the risk of rare, but dangerous, blood clots.

The French drugmaker’s application compiles years of research intended to convince the Food and Drug Administration that women can safely screen themselves for those risks and use the pill effectively.

“For a product that has been available for the last 50 years, that has been used safely by millions of women, we thought it was time to make it more available,” said Frederique Welgryn, HRA’s chief strategy officer.

An FDA approval could come next year and would only apply to HRA’s pill, which would be sold under its original brand name, Opill. The company acquired the decades-old drug from Pfizer in 2014, but it’s not currently marketed in the U.S.

Reproductive rights advocates want to see other prescription contraceptives move over the counter and, eventually, for abortion pills to do the same.

That potential for a precedent-setting decision once again places the FDA under an intense political spotlight.

Late last year, the agency was condemned by abortion opponents and praised by women’s rights advocates when it loosened access to abortion pills. The agency faced similar political pressures in 2006 when it approved over-the-counter use of the emergency contraception pill Plan B.

Many conservative groups stress they are only interested in curtailing abortion, and state bans often explicitly exclude contraception.

Even before Monday’s announcement, Democratic lawmakers were calling on the FDA to swiftly consider any such requests.

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"We urge FDA to review applications for over-the-counter birth control pills without delay and based solely on the data," said more than 50 members of the House's Pro-Choice Caucus in a March letter.

Many common medications have made the switch from behind the pharmacy counter, including drugs for pain relief, heartburn and allergies.

In each case, companies must show that consumers can understand the drug's labeling, evaluate its risks and use it safely and effectively without professional supervision. HRA spent seven years conducting the FDA-required studies, including a trial that followed 1,000 women taking its pill for six months.

Behind the company's efforts is a coalition of women's health researchers and advocates who have worked for nearly two decades to make contraceptives more accessible, especially to groups with less access to health care.

The Oral Contraceptives Over-the-Counter Working Group helped fund some of HRA's research and is mobilizing support behind a media campaign dubbed Free the Pill.

"A lot of our research has been about making the case to help inspire and support a company to take this work on," said Kelly Blanchard, president of Ibis Reproductive Health, a group member that supports abortion and contraceptive access.

Birth control pills are available without a prescription across much of South America, Asia and Africa. Last year, Paris-based HRA won U.K. approval for the first birth control pill available there without a prescription.

Advocates were particularly interested in HRA's drug because they say it's likely to raise fewer safety concerns.

The pill contains a single synthetic hormone, progestin, which prevents pregnancy by blocking sperm from the cervix.

Most birth control pills contain progestin plus estrogen, which can help make periods lighter and more regular. Progestin-only pills are generally recommended for women who can't take the more popular combination pills due to health issues.

But estrogen also accounts for most of the blood clot risk associated with oral contraceptives. FDA's labeling warns against their use in certain women already at risk for heart problems, such as those who smoke and are over 35.

For most women, the drugs are overwhelmingly safe. For every 10,000 women taking combination pills annually, three to nine will suffer a blood clot, according to FDA data. That compares with one to five clots among 10,000 women who aren't taking birth control.

And medical professionals point out that blood clot rates are much higher in women who become pregnant, when hormone levels and reduced blood flow increase clotting risk.

"What I definitely see is a misunderstanding of the dangers of these pills. It is much safer to take the pill than to be pregnant" said Dr. Maura Quinlan, a Northwestern University physician and member of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. She was not involved in HRA's application or research.

The medical association supports making all hormone-based contraceptives available over the counter. Last month, the nation's largest physician groups, the American Medical Association, endorsed making birth control pills available over the counter.

Still, support is not universal.

Diana Zuckerman of the nonprofit National Center for Health Research says comparing the safety risks of the pills with pregnancy is not the right approach.

Many women take birth control pills to regulate their periods or reduce bleeding, said Zuckerman, whose group evaluates medical research. "Those are real benefits, but they are not worth the risk of potentially fatal blood clots," she said.

The FDA has long monitored the safety of oral contraceptives, updating their warnings over the years.

Last year, the agency placed a hold on a study by drugmaker Cadence Health, which has also been working on an over-the-counter pill. The agency told the company to conduct additional blood pressure checks of trial participants. The company says it is "working to overcome this regulatory hurdle."

The FDA is required to hold a public meeting to evaluate HRA's application before making a decision. Safety considerations are likely to take center stage.



Executives at HRA, which is owned by Perrigo Co., expect a decision in the first half of 2023.

Advocates hope it will be the first of many.

"Once we see the approval of this product, it will demonstrate that it's possible and that the data is strong," Blanchard said. "Hopefully we'll see the process speed up from here."

## Thousands gather to mark Srebrenica massacre, bury victims

By ELDAR EMRIC Associated Press

SREBRENICA, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Thousands of people converged on the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica Monday to mark the 27th anniversary of Europe's only acknowledged genocide since the Holocaust and attend the funeral of 50 recently identified victims.

As mourners from around Bosnia and the world were arriving in Srebrenica, families of victims were preparing to rebury their loved ones and maybe find some closure after the decades-long search for their remains in mass graves scattered around the town.

Idriz Mustafic was in Srebrenica to bury the partial remains of his son, Salim, who was only 16 when he was murdered in the July 1995 massacre, along with thousands of other men and boys from the Bosniak ethnic group, which is primarily Muslim.

"My older son, Enis, was also killed; we buried him in 2005. Now I am burying Salim," Mustafic said.

"(Forensic experts) have not found his skull, (but) my wife got cancer and had to undergo surgery, we just couldn't wait any longer to bury the bones that we found, to at least know where their graves are," he added.

The Srebrenica killings were the bloody crescendo of Bosnia's 1992-95 war, which came after the breakup of Yugoslavia unleashed nationalistic passions and territorial ambitions that set Bosnian Serbs against the country's two other main ethnic factions — Croats and Bosniaks.

In July 1995, at least 8,000 Bosniak males from Srebrenica were separated by Serb troops from their wives, mothers and sisters, chased through woods around the eastern town and killed by those forces.

The perpetrators plowed their victims' bodies into hastily made mass graves which they later dug up with bulldozers and scattered among other burial sites to hide the evidence of the crime. During the process, the half-decomposed remains were ripped apart by bulldozers so that body parts are still being found in mass graves around Srebrenica and being put together and identified through DNA analysis.

When the remains are identified, they are returned to their relatives and reburied in the Potocari memorial center and cemetery, just outside Srebrenica, each July 11 — the anniversary of the day the killing began in 1995.

Mana Ademovic, who lost her husband and many other male relatives in the massacre, was among those attending the commemoration ceremonies in Srebrenica on Monday. Ademovic found her husband's partial remains and reburied him years ago but said she "must be in Srebrenica every July 11."

"It is easier when you have a grave to visit, no matter how many bones are buried inside," she said, while sitting among the graves at the vast and still-expanding memorial cemetery, hugging her husband's white marble headstone.

But "it is impossible to describe how one feels imagining how (massacre victims) suffered" before their death, she added.

So far, the remains of more than 6,600 people have been found and buried at the cemetery.

In the two previous years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only a relatively small number of survivors were allowed to attend the annual commemoration service and collective funeral of the victims in Srebrenica. But with restrictions lifted, tens of thousands are expected to attend this year, including numerous international diplomats and dignitaries.

The Srebrenica killings were the only episode of the Bosnian war to be legally defined as genocide.

Bosnian Serb wartime political leader Radovan Karadzic and his military commander, Ratko Mladic, were both convicted of and sentenced for genocide in Srebrenica by a special U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague. In all, the tribunal and courts in the Balkans have sentenced close to 50 Bosnian Serb wartime

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officials to more than 700 years in prison for the Srebrenica killings.

Bosnian Serb leaders, however, continue to downplay or even deny the 1995 massacre and celebrate Karadzic and Mladic as heroes.

## Trump associates' ties to extremists probed by Jan. 6 panel

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, MICHELLE R. SMITH and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

After members of the far-right Oath Keepers extremist group stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan 6, 2021, their leader called someone on the phone with an urgent message for then-President Donald Trump, another extremist told investigators.

While gathered in a private suite at the Phoenix Park Hotel, an Oath Keeper member says he heard their leader, Stewart Rhodes, repeatedly urge the person on the phone to tell Trump to call upon militia groups to fight to keep the president in power.

"I just want to fight," Rhodes said after hanging up with the person, who denied Rhodes' appeal to speak directly to the Republican president, court records say.

Federal prosecutors have not said who they believe Rhodes was speaking to on that call, which was detailed in court documents in the case of an Oath Keeper member who has pleaded guilty in the riot. An attorney for Rhodes says the call never happened.

The story, however, has raised questions about whether the extremist group boss may have had the ear of someone close to Trump on Jan. 6 — an issue that could take center stage when the House committee that's investigating the insurrection holds its next public hearing on Tuesday.

The Jan. 6 committee has said it is looking closely at any ties between people in Trump's orbit and extremist groups accused of helping put into motion the violence at the Capitol.

Top leaders and members of the Oath Keepers and another far-right group — the Proud Boys — have been charged with seditious conspiracy in the most serious cases the Justice Department has brought so far in the Jan. 6 attack.

Neither federal prosecutors nor House investigators have alleged that anyone in the Trump White House was in communication with extremist groups in the run-up to Jan. 6.

But at least two men close to Trump — longtime friend Roger Stone and his former national security adviser Michael Flynn — have known contacts with far-right groups and extremists who, in some cases, are alleged to have been involved in Jan. 6.

Cassidy Hutchinson, a former aide to Trump White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, also told the House committee that she heard the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers mentioned leading up to the "Stop the Steal" rally in Washington on Jan. 6. But no further details about that have been revealed.

Cassie Miller, a Southern Poverty Law Center senior research analyst who has provided the committee with information about extremists, said she expects lawmakers to build on that testimony and possibly reveal more information about connections between people close to Trump and groups like the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys.

"Right now, things are very blurry," Miller said.

During the committee's last televised hearing, Hutchinson told lawmakers that Trump instructed Meadows to speak with Stone and Flynn the day before the riot. Hutchinson said Meadows called both Flynn and Stone on the evening of Jan. 5, but she said she didn't know what they spoke about.

In posts on the social media platform Telegram after the hearing, Stone denied ever speaking to Meadows on the phone. When asked by The Associated Press for comment about the call, Flynn's brother replied in an email that the Jan. 6 hearing "is a clown show."

Neither Stone nor Flynn has been charged in connection to the Capitol riot, and both of them have invoked their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination before the House committee. Trump pardoned each of them after they were convicted by jurors or pleaded guilty in cases unrelated to Jan. 6.

During events in Washington before the riot, Stone used members of the Oath Keepers — a far-right militia group that recruits current and former military, first responders and law enforcement — as security



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guards.

Photos and video on Jan. 5 and 6 show Stone flanked by people dressed in Oath Keepers gear. Among them was Joshua James, then the leader of the group's Alabama chapter, who has pleaded guilty to seditious conspiracy and is cooperating with authorities investigating the insurrection.

Stone, an informal Trump adviser, has denied having any knowledge of or involvement in anything illegal on Jan. 6.

"The Oath Keepers provided security for me on the voluntary basis on January 5. Nothing more nothing less," he wrote recently on Telegram.

On Friday, attorneys for Rhodes told the committee that their client wants to testify in person and publicly. A spokesperson for the committee declined to comment, but it's unlikely lawmakers would agree to Rhodes' conditions.

The committee already interviewed Rhodes for hours behind closed doors, but he invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination under the direction of his attorneys when asked about the post-election period, one of his lawyers, James Lee Bright, told the AP. Bright said Rhodes now wants to "confront the narrative they are portraying," which he believes is "completely wrong."

Rhodes, a former U.S. Army paratrooper, and four co-defendants are scheduled for trial in Washington in September. The Oath Keepers have largely avoided public forums since Jan. 6, and it's unclear who is handling the "day to day" operations of the group with Rhodes behind bars, said Oren Segal, vice president of the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism.

The Oath Keepers have denied there was any plan to storm the Capitol. They say their communications and planning leading up to Jan. 6 was only about providing security for right-wing figures like Stone before the riot as well as protecting themselves against possible attacks from antifa activists.

Stone has also not been shy about a close association with Enrique Tarrio, the former Proud Boys chairman who is scheduled to stand trial in December on sedition charges alongside other members of the extremist group that refers to itself as a politically incorrect men's club for "Western chauvinists."

In February 2019 — one month after being charged with witness tampering and other crimes in special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation — Stone was summoned back to court to answer for a post on his Instagram account featuring a photo of the judge with what appeared to be the crosshairs of a gun. On the witness stand, Stone publicly identified Tarrio as one of five or six "volunteers" who provided him with images and content to post on social media. Stone said his house functioned as a headquarters for his volunteers.

Trump commuted Stone's 40-month prison sentence in that case days before he was due to report to prison and pardoned him months later.

The Proud Boys have been trying to forge connections with mainstream Republican figures since Vice Media co-founder Gavin McInnes started the group in 2016, Miller said.

A Proud Boys member told the Jan. 6 committee that membership in the group skyrocketed after Trump refused to outright condemn the group during his first debate with Biden. Instead, Trump told the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by."

And while extremist groups tend to collapse after law-enforcement authorities jail their top leaders, that hasn't seemed to have happened to the Proud Boys. Despite a brief lull in activity after the riot, 2021 became one of the most active years for the extremist group, according to Miller.

Flynn also had contact with some far-right groups before Jan. 6. In the weeks after the election, Flynn became a leading figure in the campaign to sow doubt about the results and urge Trump to take extraordinary measures to stay in power.

Flynn called Trump's loss a "coup in progress," and publicly suggested Trump should seize voting machines and floated the idea of martial law. He and several allies ultimately brought those ideas directly to Trump in an Oval Office meeting that December. Flynn was also a featured speaker at a large rally in Washington on Dec. 12, 2020, backing Trump's desperate efforts to subvert his election loss.

In text messages later filed in court, Rhodes — the Oath Keepers leader — and other members discussed

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how members of the group had worked with another far-right group, 1st Amendment Praetorians, or 1AP, to provide personal security to Flynn that day. A photograph taken by UPI shows Flynn leaving the rally with Rhodes and at least one member of 1AP.

The House committee has subpoenaed 1AP Founder Robert Patrick Lewis, noting in a letter to Lewis that he claimed to coordinate regularly with Flynn and also claimed to be in contact with Rhodes prior to Jan. 6.

Lewis, who has not been charged in Jan. 6, has said the group was made up of military and law enforcement veterans, and provided pro bono security and intelligence in the months after the election. In a recent defamation lawsuit, Lewis and another member of 1AP, Philip Luelsdorff, have denied involvement with the planning or execution of the Capitol attack, and said that 1AP has never been a militia or paramilitary group.

Flynn pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI during the Russia investigation before being pardoned by Trump a little more than a month before the Capitol riot.

## Ukraine official says Russia strikes 'absolute terrorism'

By MSTYSLAV CHERNOV Associated Press

KHARKIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian missiles pounded Ukraine's second-largest city early on Monday, local administrator said, describing the attacks as "absolute terrorism."

Governor of the Kharkiv region Oleh Syneihubov said on Telegram that the Russian forces only hit civilian targets in three missile strikes on the northeastern city.

"All (three were launched) exclusively on civilian objects, this is absolute terrorism!" Syneihubov said.

One of the missiles destroyed a school, another a residential building while the third landed near warehouse facilities, said Syneihubov.

He said latest reports were that three people died and 28 were wounded in the attacks.

The strikes came just two days after a Russian rocket attack smashed into apartment buildings in eastern Ukraine, killing at least 19 people. A total of eight people have been rescued, emergency officials said.

The strike late Saturday destroyed three buildings in a residential quarter of the town of Chasiv Yar, inhabited mostly by people who work in nearby factories.

Russian attacks in the east also have continued, with the governor of the Luhansk region saying on Monday that the shelling hit settlements on the administrative border with the Donetsk region.

Russian forces carried out five missile strikes and four massive rounds of shelling in the area, Serhiy Haidai said.

The Luhansk and Donetsk regions together make up Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland known as Donbas, where separatist rebels have fought Ukrainian forces since 2014.

Russia earlier this month captured the last major stronghold of Ukrainian resistance in Luhansk, the city of Lysychansk.

After the seizure of Lysychansk some analysts predicted Moscow's troops likely would take some time to rearm and regroup but Ukrainian officials said there has been no pause in attacks.

The British military assessed that Russian troops weren't getting needed breaks.

The Defense Ministry wrote on Twitter on Monday that online videos suggested at least one tank brigade in the war was "mentally and physically exhausted" as they had been on active combat duty since the start of the war in February.

The British said: "The lack of scheduled breaks from intense combat conditions is highly likely one of the most damaging of the many personnel issues the Russian (Ministry of Defense) is struggling to rectify amongst the deployed force."

Also on Monday, the main Russian gas pipeline to Germany began a 10-day closure for maintenance amid European fears Moscow may not turn the flow back on after its completion.

## Sri Lanka in political vacuum as talks go on amid crisis

By KRISHAN FRANCIS Associated Press



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COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka was in a political vacuum for a second day Monday with opposition leaders yet to agree on who should replace its roundly rejected leaders, whose residences are occupied by protesters angry over the country's deep economic woes.

Protesters remained in President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's residence, his seaside office and the prime minister's official home, which they stormed on Saturday demanding the two leaders step down. It marked the most dramatic day of protests during three months of a relentless crisis that has pushed many to the brink to despair amid acute shortages of fuel, food, medicine and other necessities.

The protesters, who come from all walks of life, vowed to stay put until the resignations of the leaders are official.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said Saturday he would leave office once a new government is in place, and hours later the speaker of Parliament said Rajapaksa would step down Wednesday.

Wickremesinghe's office said Monday that Rajapaksa had confirmed his earlier decision to resign on Wednesday.

Also Monday, a group of nine Cabinet ministers announced they will quit immediately to make way for an all-party government, outgoing Justice Minister Wijayadasa Rajapakshe said. Wickremesinghe's office said meanwhile that another group that met the prime minister decided to stay on until a new government is formed.

The president hasn't been seen or heard publicly since Saturday and his location is unknown. But his office said Sunday that he ordered the immediate distribution of a cooking gas consignment to the public, suggesting that he was still at work.

Opposition party leaders have been in discussion to form an alternative unity government, an urgent requirement of a bankrupt nation to continue discussions with the International Monetary Fund for a bailout program.

Lawmaker Udaya Gammanpila said the main opposition United People's Front and lawmakers who have defected Rajapaksa's ruling coalition have had discussions and agreed to work together. Main opposition leader Sajith Premadasa and Dullas Alahapperuma, who was a minister under Rajapaksa, have been proposed to take over as president and prime minister and have been asked to decide on how to share the positions before a meeting with the parliamentary speaker later Monday.

"We can't be in an anarchical condition. We have to somehow reach a consensus today," Gammanpila said.

Opposition parties are also concerned over military leaders making statements about public security in the absence of a civil administration.

Lawmakers have discussed Chief of Defense Staff Gen. Shavendra Silva's statement over the weekend calling on people's cooperation to maintain law and order, said Kavinda Makalanda, spokesperson for Premadasa.

"A civil administration is the need, not the military in a democratic country," Makalanda said.

If opposition parties fail to form a government by the time Rajapaksa resigns, Wickremesinghe as prime minister will become acting president under the constitution. However, in line with the protesters' demand, opposition parties are keen on not allowing him take over even as acting president.

They say Wickremesinghe should promptly resign and allow Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena take over as acting president — the next in line according to the constitution.

Rajapaksa appointed Wickremesinghe as prime minister in May in an effort to solve the shortages and start economic recovery. But delays in alleviating the shortages of basic supplies has turned public anger against him with protesters accusing him of protecting the president.

Wickremesinghe had been part of crucial talks with the IMF for a bailout program and with the World Food Program to prepare for a predicted food crisis. The government must submit a plan on debt sustainability to the IMF in August before reaching an agreement.

Sri Lanka is relying on aid from India and other nations as leaders try to negotiate a bailout with the IMF. Wickremesinghe said recently that negotiations with the IMF were complex because Sri Lanka was now a bankrupt state.

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Sri Lanka announced in April that it was suspending repayment of foreign loans due to a foreign currency shortage. Its total foreign debt amounts to \$51 billion, of which it must repay \$28 billion by the end of 2027.

Months of demonstrations have all but dismantled the Rajapaksa political dynasty, which has ruled Sri Lanka for most of the past two decades but is accused by protesters of mismanagement and corruption.

## Japan's Kishida calls for unity to achieve Abe's unmet goals

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Boosted by a new election mandate, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday called for party unity for political stability and to achieve the assassinated former leader Shinzo Abe's unfinished goals of strengthening the military and revising the war-renouncing constitution.

Kishida's governing Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner Komeito secured a solid majority of seats in the parliament's upper house in elections Sunday that were imbued with meaning after Abe was shot to death while campaigning Friday.

Kishida welcomed the victory but also acknowledged that unifying the party will be a hard task without Abe, who even after resigning as prime minister in 2020 had led a powerful party faction.

"Because we've lost a great leader, undeniably we could be affected in many ways," Kishida said. "Our party must unite as we face difficult issues."

At a time of security and economic challenges in and outside Japan, Abe's death is most regrettable, Kishida said. "We will inherit his will and tackle the issues he had to leave unachieved," including an amendment to the U.S.-drafted postwar pacifist constitution.

Sunday's vote gave the LDP-led coalition 146 seats in the 248-seat upper chamber, the less powerful of parliament's two houses. The result means Kishida could rule uninterrupted until a scheduled election in 2025 and allows him to work on long-term policies.

Advancement on amending the constitution is now a realistic possibility. With the help of two opposition parties supportive of a charter change, the governing bloc now has two-thirds majority in the upper chamber needed to propose an amendment. The governing bloc already had the needed support in the lower house.

Earlier Monday, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Kishida to offer condolences and deliver a letter from President Joe Biden to Abe's family.

"We simply want them to know that we deeply feel the loss on the personal level as well," Blinken told Kishida. "Mostly I'm here because the United States and Japan are more than allies — we are friends."

Blinken said Abe "did more than anyone to elevate the relationship between the United States and Japan to new heights."

Blinken was the highest-ranking U.S. official to visit Japan in the aftermath of Abe's death. The wake and funeral for Japan's longest-serving political leader are expected in coming days.

Abe, 67, stepped down as prime minister two years ago, citing health reasons. He said he regretted leave many of his goals unfinished, including revising a constitution that some ultra-conservatives consider a humiliation.

He was the grandson of another prime minister and became Japan's youngest prime minister in 2006, at age 52. The overly nationalistic stint in office abruptly ended a year later, also because of his health, prompting six years of annual leadership change.

He returned to the premiership in 2012, vowing to revitalize the nation and get its economy out of its deflationary doldrums with his "Abenomics" formula, which combines fiscal stimulus, monetary easing and structural reforms. He won six national elections and built a rock-solid grip on power.

On Sunday, the suspect accused of his murder was transferred to a local prosecutors' office for further investigation, and a top regional police official acknowledged possible security lapses allowed the gunman to get close to Abe.

The suspect, Tetsuya Yamagami, told investigators he acted because of Abe's rumored connection to an organization that he resented, police said. Some Japanese media identified the group as the Unification

Church.

## **With Biden, Palestinians seeking freedom get permits instead**

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

For more than two years, the Biden administration has said that Palestinians are entitled to the same measure of “freedom, security and prosperity” enjoyed by Israelis. Instead, they’ve gotten U.S. aid and permits to work inside Israel and its Jewish settlements.

The inconsistency is likely to come up when President Joe Biden visits Israel and the occupied West Bank this week for the first time since assuming office.

Israeli officials will likely point to the thousands of work permits issued to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, allowing them to make far higher wages and injecting much-needed cash into economies hobbled by Israeli restrictions. Biden will likely tout the tens of millions of dollars in aid to the Palestinians he restored after it was cut off during the Trump years.

Supporters say such economic measures improve the lives of Palestinians and help preserve the possibility of an eventual political solution.

But when Biden is driven past Israel’s towering separation barrier to meet with Palestinians in the West Bank town of Bethlehem, he will hear a very different story — about how Israel is cementing its decades-long military rule over millions of Palestinians, with no end in sight.

“Economic measures do have the potential to positively contribute to making peace, but that would require Israel and the U.S. having a plan to end this 55-year-old military occupation,” said Sam Bahour, a Palestinian-American business consultant based in the West Bank.

“They don’t, so any so-called economic ‘confidence-building measures’ are merely occupation-entrenching measures,” Bahour said.

Israel’s short-lived coalition government issued 14,000 permits to Palestinians in Gaza, which has been under a crippling blockade since the Islamic militant group Hamas seized power 15 years ago. Israel says the blockade is needed to prevent Hamas from arming itself.

Israel also increased the number of permits issued in the West Bank, where well over 100,000 Palestinians work inside Israel and the settlements, mostly in construction, manufacturing and agriculture. It has even begun allowing small numbers of Palestinian professionals to work in higher-paying jobs in Israel’s booming high-tech sector.

The government billed those and other economic measures as goodwill gestures, even as it approved the construction of thousands of additional settler homes in the occupied West Bank.

The Biden administration has adopted a similar strategy, providing financial assistance to Palestinians but giving Israel no incentive to end the occupation or grant them equal rights. Even its relatively modest plan to reopen a U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem serving Palestinians hit a wall of Israeli opposition.

Ines Abdel Razek, advocacy director at the Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy, says both the United States and the European Union are “throwing money at the Palestinians” instead of owning up to their complicity in the occupation.

“All Biden is trying to do is maintain a certain quiet and calm, which for Palestinians means entrenched colonization and repression,” she said.

Michael Milshtein, an Israeli analyst who used to advise the military body in charge of civilian affairs in the territories, says the theory of “economic peace” — or promoting economic development in the absence of peace negotiations — goes back decades.

He says it’s making a resurgence because of the prolonged lack of any peace process and the political crisis within Israel, but at best will only bring temporary calm.

“This is the way to preserve stability,” he said. “This is not a way to solve deep political problems.”

For individual Palestinians, the permits are a godsend. Their average wage inside Israel is around \$75 a day, twice the rate in the West Bank, according to the World Bank. In Gaza, where unemployment hovers



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around 50%, tens of thousands lined up for the permits last fall.

But critics say the permits — which Israel can revoke at any time — are yet another tool of control that undermines the development of an independent Palestinian economy.

“Every permit Israel issues to Palestinian workers goes to serve Israel’s economic development and hollows out Palestine’s workforce, so we in the private sector will remain unable to create a different economic reality,” Bahour said.

Even as it issues work permits, Israel is tightening its grip on what’s known as Area C — the 60% of the West Bank under full Israeli control according to interim peace agreements signed in the 1990s. The Palestinian Authority has limited autonomy in an archipelago of cities and towns.

Area C includes most of the West Bank’s open space and natural resources. The World Bank estimates that lifting heavy restrictions on Palestinian access to the area would boost their economy by a third. Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war, and the Palestinians want it to form the main part of their future state.

That’s not on the table.

Israel’s political system is dominated by right-wing parties that view the West Bank as an integral part of Israel. Even if Lapid, who supports a two-state solution, manages to form a government after Nov. 1 elections — which recent polls suggest is unlikely — his coalition would almost certainly rely on some hard-line parties.

It’s often argued that even if economic measures do not lead to a political solution, they still promote stability — but history hasn’t borne that out.

In the 1980s, nearly half of Gaza’s labor force was employed in Israel and workers could travel in and out with ease. Hamas, which opposes Israel’s existence, burst onto the scene in 1987 with the outbreak of the first Palestinian intifada, or uprising against Israeli rule. The second Palestinian uprising, in 2000, also erupted during a period of relative prosperity.

The Gaza permits, the first to be issued since the Hamas takeover, appear to provide a powerful incentive for the militant group to maintain calm, as any rocket fire could cause thousands of people to lose good-paying jobs. Then again, conflict between Israel and Hamas has always come at a staggering cost to Palestinians.

In the West Bank, where far more Palestinians have the coveted permits, a recent wave of violence has brought deadly attacks inside Israel and near-daily military raids.

A recent poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research found that 65% of Palestinians support the so-called confidence-building measures, including the issuing of permits. The survey included 1,270 Palestinians from across the West Bank and Gaza, with a margin of error of 3 percentage points.

But the same poll also found some striking measures of despair: Support for a two-state solution dropped from 40% to 28% in just three months, and 55% of those surveyed support “a return to confrontations and armed intifada.”

## ‘Terrorism’: Abe killing seen as attack on Japan’s democracy

By FOSTER KLUG and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — An attack on democracy and freedom of speech. A throwback to the political murders of prewar Japan. Terrorism.

Public outrage, handwringing and vows of defiance by politicians and on social media are widespread following the daylight assassination by homemade gun of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, a major political force even after he stepped down in 2020 as the nation’s longest-serving political leader.

“The bullet pierced the foundation of democracy,” the liberal Asahi newspaper, a regular foil of the conservative, sometimes history-revisionist Abe, said in a front-page editorial after the killing. “We tremble with rage.”

Part of the collective fury is because crime is so rare in Japan, where it’s not uncommon to see cell-

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phones and purses lying unattended in cafes. Gun attacks are vanishingly rare, especially in recent years and especially in political settings, though they have happened.

But the shock can also be traced to the setting: Abe was killed near a crowded train station, in the middle of a campaign speech for parliamentary elections, something that Japan, despite a long history of one-party political domination and growing voter apathy, takes seriously.

Mikito Chinen, a writer and doctor, declared on Twitter that he voted Sunday because "it's important to demonstrate that democracy will not be defeated by violence."

This attack is unique, marking the first assassination of a former or serving leader in postwar Japan, said Mitsuru Fukuda, a crisis management professor at Nihon University, and its consequences could be grave.

"Our society may have become one where politicians and dignitaries can be targeted any time, and that is making people uneasy about getting attacked for freely expressing their views," Fukuda said.

Many here remember the political and social turmoil of prewar Japan, when the authorities demanded unquestioned obedience on the home front as imperial troops marched across Asia; it was the antithesis of democracy, a time when assassinations, government intimidation of dissidents and curbs on free speech and assembly were rife.

In modern liberal democracies, political killing is almost unheard of, though there are still examples of political violence, such as the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

The motive of Abe's suspected gunman, who was arrested after being tackled by security, isn't yet clear, though police and media reports indicate that it wasn't political.

But the reemergence of assassination just days before national elections in one of the world's most stable and affluent countries — and one that acts, along with its U.S. ally, as a political and security bulwark against decidedly undemocratic neighboring nations like China and North Korea — has raised fears that something fundamental has changed.

"Japan is a democracy, so the murder of a former prime minister is an attack on us all," The Japan Times said in an editorial. "This was an act of terrorism."

Political leaders carried on with their campaigns after Abe's death, with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party that Abe was once the leader of scoring an even bigger victory Sunday than expected.

"In the middle of our election, which is the foundation of democracy, we absolutely must never let violence shut out free speech," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said ahead of the election, amid heightened security.

Despite Japan's high living standards and enviable safety, there are occasional acts of extreme violence, including attacks carried out by those who express a sense of failure and isolation.

One of the most recent was in October, when a man dressed in a Joker outfit stabbed an elderly man, then spread oil before setting a fire on a Tokyo subway and attempting to attack more people with a knife.

In the realm of politics, perhaps the most striking postwar assassination came in 1960, when a rightist attacked socialist leader Inejiro Asanuma with a sword before an audience of thousands.

Gun attacks, however, are a different story.

Japan has some of the strictest gun control laws in the world, based on orders issued in 1946 by occupying U.S. forces. According to the latest Justice Ministry's annual crime paper, police made 21 firearms arrests in 2020; 12 were gang related.

In 1994, a gunman shot at but missed Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa during a speech. Nagasaki Mayor Ichio Ito was assassinated by gunshot in 2007.

Stephen Nagy, a professor of politics and international relations at Tokyo's International Christian University, said many of the people he's talked to consider Abe's attack "a lone wolf incident," not an assault on democracy.

"The primary concern was about the vacuum in leadership that will emerge as the largest political faction (Abe's) has just lost their leader and this will have implications for the trajectory of domestic politics," Nagy said.

Compared to the United States and Europe, security for political and business leaders in Japan has often been less strict, except for at special, high-profile international events.

That was partly because of the perception of a lack of threat.

But the nature of the very public attack on Abe could lead to an emergency review of the way Japan guards its officials, and a tightening of security at election campaigns or large-scale events.

Japan used to be safe enough for politicians to get close to ordinary people, to chat and shake hands, Fukuda said. "It was a happy environment, but we may be losing it."

"In a society where the risk of assassination is realistic, security levels have to be raised," he said. "It's an unfortunate development, but we cannot protect our safety otherwise."

## **New coronavirus mutant raises concerns in India and beyond**

By LAURA UNGAR and ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

The quickly changing coronavirus has spawned yet another super contagious omicron mutant that's worrying scientists as it gains ground in India and pops up in numerous other countries, including the United States.

Scientists say the variant – called BA.2.75 – may be able to spread rapidly and get around immunity from vaccines and previous infection. It's unclear whether it could cause more serious disease than other omicron variants, including the globally prominent BA.5.

"It's still really early on for us to draw too many conclusions," said Matthew Binnicker, director of clinical virology at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. "But it does look like, especially in India, the rates of transmission are showing kind of that exponential increase." Whether it will outcompete BA.5, he said, is yet to be determined.

Still, the fact that it has already been detected in many parts of the world even with lower levels of viral surveillance "is an early indication it is spreading," said Shishi Luo, head of infectious diseases for Helix, a company that supplies viral sequencing information to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The latest mutant has been spotted in several distant states in India, and appears to be spreading faster than other variants there, said Lipi Thukral, a scientist at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology in New Delhi. It's also been detected in about 10 other countries, including Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom and Canada. Two cases were recently identified on the West Coast of the U.S., and Helix identified a third U.S. case last week.

Fueling experts' concerns are a large number of mutations separating this new variant from omicron predecessors. Some of those mutations are in areas that relate to the spike protein and could allow the virus to bind onto cells more efficiently, Binnicker said.

Another concern is that the genetic tweaks may make it easier for the virus to skirt past antibodies — protective proteins made by the body in response to a vaccine or infection from an earlier variant.

But experts say vaccines and boosters are still the best defense against severe COVID-19. In the fall it's likely the U.S. will see updated formulations of the vaccine being developed that target more recent omicron strains.

"Some may say, 'Well, vaccination and boosting hasn't prevented people from getting infected.' And, yes, that is true," he said. "But what we have seen is that the rates of people ending up in the hospital and dying have significantly decreased. As more people have been vaccinated, boosted or naturally infected, we are starting to see the background levels of immunity worldwide creep up."

It may take several weeks to get a sense of whether the latest omicron mutant may affect the trajectory of the pandemic. Meanwhile Dr. Gagandeep Kang, who studies viruses at India's Christian Medical College in Vellore, said the growing concern over the variant underlines the need for more sustained efforts to track and trace viruses that combine genetic efforts with real world information about who is getting sick and how badly. "It is important that surveillance isn't a start-stop strategy," she said.

Luo said BA.2.75 is another reminder that the coronavirus is continually evolving — and spreading.

"We would like to return to pre-pandemic life, but we still need to be careful," she said. "We need to accept that we're now living with a higher level of risk than we used to."



## Biden celebration of new gun law clouded by latest shooting

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is hosting a “celebration” of a new bipartisan law meant to reduce gun violence that, after just 16 days in effect, already has been overshadowed by yet another mass shooting.

The bill, passed after recent gun rampages in Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde, Texas, incrementally toughens requirements for young people to buy guns, denies firearms to more domestic abusers, and helps local authorities temporarily take weapons from people judged to be dangerous.

But the South Lawn event on Monday morning comes a week after a gunman in Highland Park, Illinois, killed seven people at an Independence Day parade, a stark reminder of the limitations of the new law in addressing the American phenomenon of mass gun violence.

Biden on Saturday invited Americans to share with him via text — a new White House communications strategy — their stories of how they’ve been impacted by gun violence, tweeting that “I’m hosting a celebration of the passage of the Safer Communities Act.”

The law is the the most impactful firearms violence measure Congress has approved since enacting a now-expired assault weapons ban in 1993. Yet gun control advocates — and even White House officials — say it’s premature to declare victory.

“There’s simply not much to celebrate here,” said Igor Volsky, director of the private group Guns Down America.

“It’s historic, but it’s also the very bare minimum of what Congress should do,” Volsky said. “And as we were reminded by the shooting on July 4, and there’s so many other gun deaths that have occurred since then, the crisis of of gun violence is just far more urgent.”

Volsky’s group, along with other gun violence advocacy groups, was set to host a news conference on Monday outside the White House calling on Biden to stand up a dedicated office at the White House to address gun violence with a greater sense of urgency.

Biden has left gun control policy to his Domestic Policy Council, rather than establishing a dedicated office like he stood up to address climate change or the gender policy council he established to promote reproductive health access.

“We have a president who really hasn’t met the moment, who has chosen to act as a bystander on this issue,” Volsky said. “For some reason the administration absolutely refuses to have a senior official who can drive this issue across government.”

The president signed the bipartisan gun bill into law on June 25, calling it “a historic achievement” at the time.

“Time is of the essence. Lives will be saved,” Biden said in the Roosevelt Room during a hastily arranged signing ceremony before he flew to Europe. Referencing the families of shooting victims he has met, the president said: “Their message to us was, ‘Do something.’ How many times did we hear that? ‘Just do something. For God’s sake, just do something.’ Today we did.”

White House officials said Biden doesn’t see the passage of the bill as the finish line, but rather a foundation that needs to be built on. The Illinois shooting occurred nine days after the bill signing.

“I recently signed the first major bipartisan gun reform legislation in almost 30 years into law, which includes actions that will save lives,” Biden said after July 4th shooting. “But there is much more work to do, and I’m not going to give up fighting the epidemic of gun violence.”

On Friday, Biden responded to the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe by taking note of how the shooting had shocked people in Japan. The country has a strikingly low incidence of gun violence compared to the U.S., which has experienced thousands of gun deaths already this year.

Most of the new law’s \$13 billion in spending would be used for bolstering mental health programs and for schools, which have been targeted by shooters in Newtown, Connecticut; Parkland, Florida; and many other gun massacres. It was the product of weeks of closed-door negotiations by a bipartisan group of senators who emerged with a compromise.

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It does not include far tougher restrictions that Democrats and Biden have long championed, such as a ban on assault-type weapons and background checks for all gun transactions. Biden on Monday was expected to reiterate his call for those tougher measures, but prospects are slim for any further congressional action.

## Mexico, US presidents to meet amid newly tense relationship

By MARK STEVENSON and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The U.S.-Mexico relationship — a straightforward tradeoff during the Trump administration, with Mexico tamping down on migration and the U.S. not pressing on other issues — has become a wide range of disagreements over trade, foreign policy, energy and climate change.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador is to visit Washington on Tuesday to meet with President Joe Biden, a month after López Obrador snubbed Biden's invitation to the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles. Mexico's leader had demanded that Biden invite to the summit the leaders of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela — all countries with anti-democratic regimes — and he has also called U.S. support for Ukraine "a crass error."

On that, and other issues, it's clear López Obrador is getting along much worse with Biden than with Donald Trump, who threatened Mexico, but wanted only one thing from his southern neighbor: stop migrants from reaching the border.

"I think it is more that the Biden administration has tried hard to re-institutionalize the relationship and restore the relationship that's not centered solely on immigration and trade. And I think as a result that leads to issues coming up that AMLO is less comfortable talking about," Andrew Rudman, director of the Mexico Institute at the Wilson Center, said, using the Spanish acronym by which Mexicans refer to the president.

U.S. officials want López Obrador to retreat on his reliance on fossil fuels and his campaign to favor Mexico's state-owned electricity utility at the expense of foreign-built plants powered by gas and renewable energy. Washington has filed several complaints under the U.S.-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement pushing Mexico to enforce environmental laws and rules guaranteeing trade union rights.

López Obrador also has angrily rejected any U.S. criticism of the killings of journalists in Mexico or his own efforts to weaken checks and balances in Mexico's government. He is also angered by U.S. funding of civic and non-governmental groups in Mexico that he claims are part of the opposition.

It all adds up to a witches' brew in bilateral relations.

"At the end of the day, the problem is that you have the complete mismatch in this relationship," said Arturo Sarukhan, who served as Mexico's ambassador to the U.S. from 2006 to 2013.

The United States "needs Mexico as a key partner on everything from 'near shoring' (manufacturing for the U.S. market) ... in terms of competitiveness, in terms of North American energy security, energy independence, energy efficiency," Sarukhan said. "The problem is you have a Mexican president who doesn't care about any of these things."

What the Mexican president is interested in talking about is inflation, which in June spiked to almost 8%. Inflation and the economic after-effects of the pandemic are leading an increasing number of Mexicans to emigrate — 22 of the 53 migrants who recently died after being abandoned by smugglers in a semi-trailer in Texas were Mexican.

"We have to look for a way to act together, help each other in controlling inflation," López Obrador said Friday. "That is a topic I am going to propose. We have a plan."

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the same day that the Bidens are looking forward to welcoming Lopez-Obrador and his wife at the White House.

"They will discuss a broad and deep agenda, including joint efforts on migration, food security and economic opportunity, and so the president looks forward to having that conversation," Jean-Pierre said.

She sidestepped questions about Lopez Obrador's repeated public criticism of the Biden administration, including U.S. efforts to extradite Wikileaks founder Julian Assange from the U.K. for prosecution.

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"We see AMLO, the president of Mexico, as a partner," she said, adding that many conversations would be had. "And I'm going to leave it at that."

The question is how hard the Biden administration is willing to push Mexico on anything.

With Republicans like Texas Gov. Greg Abbot relentlessly pointing at the migration issue, Mexico holds huge leverage. It is under no obligation to accept anyone returned at its border except Mexican citizens, but it has allowed the U.S. to continue to deport migrants of other nationalities under Title 42 health regulations.

López Obrador badly wants the U.S. to grant more work visas to Mexicans and Central Americans. While that remains a touchy issue in U.S. domestic politics, more visas could help tame clandestine border crossings.

Increasing such visas "would seem to be a way to resolve the labor shortage we have in this country, and also reduce some of the pressure on Mexico and Central America," Rudman said. "So it seems like something that Lopez Obrador is for, and the Biden administration might be inclined to offer."

Sarukhan thinks Biden is in a situation similar to that of European leaders who essentially outsourced immigration controls on hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees and migrants to Turkey, which accepted them and prevented them from going on to Greece. The Europeans, in exchange, have had to put up with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's increasingly autocratic ways and foreign policy snubs, he said.

"In many ways, the Biden administration is in its own Erdogan trap," said Sarukhan.

As if to underline the parallel, the Turkish president is scheduled to visit Mexico later in July, perhaps to shore up a new kind of "non-aligned" bloc like the one that existed during the Cold War in the 1960s and '70s.

López Obrador seldom passes up a chance to irritate the United States. He recently said the Statue of Liberty should be dismantled and returned to France if Assange is imprisoned in the U.S..

Still, there are some signs that Mexico has tried to make up for the summit and other slights.

In late May, Mexico started to crack down on hundreds of meth and fentanyl labs that have been sending to the U.S. a steady stream of those drugs, which have caused the overdose deaths of tens of thousands of Americans.

Mexico's seizures of meth labs went from six in May to 72 in June, and many of those labs appear to have been operating for years. And days before López Obrador left for Washington, authorities raided two large warehouses in the northern city of Culiacan, finding a half ton of fentanyl and a half million fentanyl pills.

Rudman is skeptical the Mexican army just suddenly found out so many labs were operating. "How could Mexico not have known?" Rudman asks.

The question remains of why López Obrador got along so much better with Trump than he does with Biden.

"I think you can argue that AMLO and Trump ran similar campaigns and won for similar reasons," said Rudman.

López Obrador's program of encouraging Mexican self-sufficiency in food, energy and other areas harkens back to a Trump-like nationalism.

"It's make Mexico great again," Rudman said.

## Abe's killing haunts Japan with questions on homemade guns

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The shooting sent shudders through low-crime, orderly Japan: A prominent politician was killed by a man emerging from a crowd, wielding a homemade firearm so roughly constructed it was wrapped in tape.

The 40-centimeter-long (16-inch) weapon used to kill former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Friday as he campaigned for his ruling party in western Japan, looked crude, more like a propellant made of pipes taped together and filled with explosives.

A raid of the suspect's home, a one-room apartment in Nara, turned up several such guns, police said.



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Unlike standard weapons, homemade guns are practically impossible to trace, making an investigation difficult.

Firearms are rarely used in Japan, where most attacks involve stabbings or dousing a place with gasoline and setting it ablaze, or running haywire on the street in a vehicle.

Strict gun control laws likely forced the attacker to make his own weapon. Tetsuya Yamagami, who was arrested on the spot, was a former member of Japan's navy and knew how to handle and assemble weapons.

Crime experts say instructions on how to make guns are floating around on the internet and guns can be made with a 3D printer.

Some analysts characterized the attack on Abe as "lone-wolf terrorism." In such cases, the perpetrator plots and acts alone, with the solitary nature of the crime also making it difficult to detect in advance.

The motive for Abe's assassination remains unclear. Police said Yamagami told investigators he acted because of Abe's rumored connection to an organization he resented but had no problem with the former leader's political views. Media reports said it was a religious organization.

Japan has seen attacks on politicians in the past. In 1960, Abe's grandfather, then-Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, was stabbed but survived. In 1975, when then-Prime Minister Takeo Miki was assaulted at the funeral for former Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, Abe's great-uncle, Japan set up a security team modeled after the American Secret Service.

Hideto Ted Osanai, chief executive at the International Bodyguard Association in Japan, and other experts believe that the Japanese may have merely learned superficial things like escort formation rather than the prevention mindset critical to security.

"Japanese are so used to leading peaceful lives, the security guards were caught asleep," says Yasuhiro Sasaki, president of Safety-Pro, a Tokyo-based security company.

Sasaki said he couldn't believe that no one moved to protect Abe in the seconds between the first and the second shot, a scene shown over and over on national TV.

Guards should have acted by physically pulling Abe away from danger, Sasaki said. More critically, he wondered why weren't they aware of a suspicious person approaching, drawing what could be a weapon from a bag?

Isao Itabashi, chief of the research division at the Council for Public Policy, which oversees such risks, said that providing security during an election campaign was challenging when the whole point is for politicians to get close to people.

Unlike the U.S., the use of bulletproof glass is relatively scant in Japan, and security officials rarely resort to shooting potential attackers.

"The presumption here is that people are not armed," Itabashi said.

Osanai worried more people may make their own weapons like the one used in Abe's assassination in "copycat crimes." He noted a trend of disgruntled people turning to random crimes, indiscriminately targeting victims.

"Japan's conformist culture makes it difficult for some people to live freely, and they put great pressure on themselves. When they blame themselves, they turn to suicide. When they blame others, they turn to indiscriminate crimes," he said.

Last year, a man wearing a Joker costume brandished a knife and started a fire on a Tokyo train, injuring 17 people. In December 2021, arson at a clinic in Osaka killed 25 people. In 2019, another arson in a Kyoto animation studio killed 36 people.

## Japan ruling party wins big in polls in wake of Abe's death

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's governing party and its coalition partner scored a major victory in a parliamentary election Sunday imbued with meaning after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe amid uncertainty about how his loss may affect party unity.

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The Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner Komeito raised their combined share in the 248-seat chamber to 146 — far beyond the majority — in the elections for half of the seats in the less powerful upper house.

With the boost, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida stands to rule without interruption until a scheduled election in 2025.

That would allow Kishida to work on long-term policies such as national security, his signature but still vague “new capitalism” economic policy, and his party’s long-cherished goal to amend the U.S.-drafted postwar pacifist constitution.

A charter change proposal is now a possibility. With the help of two opposition parties supportive of a charter change, the governing bloc now has two-thirds majority in the chamber needed to propose an amendment, making it a realistic possibility. The governing bloc already has secured support in the other chamber.

Kishida welcomed the major win but wasn’t smiling, given the loss of Abe and the hard task of unifying his party without him. In media interviews late Sunday, Kishida repeated: “Party unity is more important than anything else.”

He said responses to COVID-19, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and rising prices will be his priorities. He said he will also steadily push for reinforcing Japan’s national security as well a constitutional amendment.

Kishida and senior party lawmakers observed a moment of silence for Abe at the party election headquarters before placing on the whiteboard victory ribbons next to the names of candidates who secured their seats.

Abe, 67, was shot while giving a campaign speech in the western city of Nara on Friday and died of massive blood loss. He was Japan’s longest-serving political leader over two terms in office, and though he stepped down in 2020 was deeply influential in the LDP while heading its largest faction, Seiwakai.

“This could be a turning point” for the LDP over its divisive policies on gender equality, same-sex marriages and other issues that Abe-backed ultra-conservatives with paternalistic family values had resisted, said Mitsuru Fukuda, a crisis management professor at Nihon University.

Japan’s current diplomatic and security stance is unlikely to be swayed because fundamental changes had already been made by Abe. His ultra-nationalist views and pragmatic policies made him a divisive figure to many, including in the Koreas and China.

Following the assassination, Sunday’s vote took on new meaning, with all of Japan’s political leaders emphasizing the importance of free speech and defending democracy against acts of violence.

Abe’s killing may have resulted in sympathy votes. Turnout on Sunday was around 52%, up about 3 points from the previous 48.8% in 2019.

“It was extremely meaningful that we carried out the election,” Kishida said Sunday. “Our endeavor to protect democracy continues.”

On the final day of campaigning Saturday, party leaders avoided fist-bumps and other friendly gestures in close contact with the public — a sign of tightened security following Abe’s assassination during a campaign rally.

Abe’s body has been returned to his home in Tokyo’s upscale Shibuya, where many mourners, including Kishida and top party officials, paid tribute. His wake and funeral are expected in coming days.

On Sunday, the suspect accused of his murder was transferred to a local prosecutors’ office for further investigation, and a top regional police official acknowledged possible security lapses allowed the gunman to get close to Abe and fire his homemade gun at him.

The suspect, Tetsuya Yamagami, told investigators he acted because of Abe’s rumored connection to an organization that he resented, police said, but had no problem with the former leader’s political views. The man hated a religious group that his mother was obsessed about and that bankrupted a family business, according to media reports, including some that identified the group as the Unification Church.

Nara prefectural police chief Tomoaki Onizuka said Saturday that problems with security were undeniable, that he took the shooting seriously and will review the security procedures.

Abe stepped down two years ago blaming a recurrence of the ulcerative colitis he’d had since he was a

teenager. He said he regretted leave many of his goals unfinished, including revising Japan's war-renouncing constitution. While some conservatives consider the post-World War II charter a humiliation, the public is more supportive of the document.

Abe was groomed to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi. His political rhetoric often focused on making Japan a "normal" and "beautiful" nation with a stronger military through security alliance with the United States and bigger role in international affairs.

He became Japan's youngest prime minister in 2006, at age 52. But his overly nationalistic first stint abruptly ended a year later, also because of his health, prompting six years of annual leadership change.

He returned to office in 2012, vowing to revitalize the nation and get its economy out of its deflationary doldrums with his "Abenomics" formula, which combines fiscal stimulus, monetary easing and structural reforms. He won six national elections and built a rock-solid grip on power.

Japan is known for its strict gun laws. With a population of 125 million, it had only 21 gun-related criminal cases in 2020, according to the latest government crime paper. Experts say, however, some recent attacks involved use of consumer items such as gasoline, suggesting increased risks for ordinary people to be embroiled in mass attacks.

## **Sri Lanka opposition meets to name new gov't amid turmoil**

By KRISHAN FRANCIS Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka's opposition parties met Sunday to agree on a new government a day after the president and prime minister offered to resign following the most dramatic day of monthslong turmoil, with protesters storming the leaders' homes in rage over an economic crisis.

Protesters remained in President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's residence, his seaside office and the prime minister's home, saying they would stay until the resignations are official. The president's whereabouts were unknown, but a statement from his office said he ordered the immediate distribution of a cooking gas consignment to the public, suggesting that he was still at work.

Soldiers were deployed around the city but troops simply watched from afar as crowds of people splashed in the pool of Rajapaksa's sprawling residence, lounged on beds and took selfies of themselves on their cellphones to capture the moment. The chief of defense staff, Shavendra Silva, called for public support to maintain law and order.

Occupants of the prime minister's official residence cooked in an outdoor kitchen, played the tabletop game carrom and slept on sofas.

Ranjith Madduma Bandara, a top official in the main opposition United People's Force, said that separate discussions were held with other parties and lawmakers who broke away from Rajapaksa's ruling coalition and more meetings were planned. It was unclear when an agreement might be reached.

Another opposition lawmaker, M. A. Sumanthiran, said earlier that all opposition parties combined could easily muster the 113 members needed for a majority in Parliament, at which point they would call on Rajapaksa to install the new government and resign.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said Saturday he would leave office once a new government is in place, and hours later the speaker of Parliament said Rajapaksa would step down Wednesday. Pressure on both men had grown as the economic meltdown set off acute shortages of essential items, leaving people struggling to obtain food, fuel and other necessities.

If both president and prime minister resign, Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena will take over as temporary president, according to the constitution.

Rajapaksa appointed Wickremesinghe as prime minister in May in an effort to solve the shortages and start economic recovery.

Wickremesinghe had been part of crucial talks with the International Monetary Fund for a bailout program and with the World Food Program to prepare for a predicted food crisis. The government must submit a plan on debt sustainability to the IMF in August before reaching an agreement.

Analysts say it is doubtful any new leader could do more than Wickremesinghe. His government's efforts



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showed promise, with much-needed fertilizer being distributed to farmers for next season's cultivation and cooking gas orders arriving in the country Sunday.

"This kind of unrest could create confusion among international organizations like the IMF and the World Bank," political analyst Ranga Kalansooriya said, adding that a new administration should agree on a common program for economic recovery.

He said while Wickremesinghe was working in the right direction, his administration was not implementing a long-term plan to go with its focus on solving day-to-day problems.

It is unlikely that an all-party government will agree on IMF-backed economic reforms without some parties losing their political support.

Wickremesinghe said Saturday it was not proper for him to leave without a government in place.

"Today in this country we have a fuel crisis, a food shortage, we have the head of the World Food Program coming here and we have several matters to discuss with the IMF," he said. "Therefore, if this government leaves there should be another government."

Four Cabinet ministers have resigned since Saturday's protests.

Even though both Wickremesinghe and Abeywardena, the parliament speaker, said in their speeches that they had spoken with the president, they did not say anything about his whereabouts.

Protesters also broke into the prime minister's private residence and set it on fire during the melee on Saturday. A party official, Ruwan Wijewardena, said Wickremesinghe was inside when the protesters gathered but security officers removed him to a different location.

Wijewardena said such acts will only polarize the society and political parties.

"If these kinds of incidents keep on going, we can wave bye-bye to the IMF and any international assistance that is going to come to the country," he said. "If there is lawlessness, if there is no coming together among the political groups, there is no way the international community can come in and help this country."

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Washington was tracking the developments in Sri Lanka and urged Parliament to work quickly to implement solutions and address the people's discontent.

Speaking at a news conference in Bangkok, Blinken said the United States condemns attacks against the peaceful demonstrators while calling for a full investigation into any protest-related violence.

Pope Francis opened his Sunday remarks after noon prayers at the Vatican by voicing concern about Sri Lanka.

"I unite myself to the pain of the people of Sri Lanka, who continue to suffer the effects of the political and economic instability," the pontiff said. "Together with the bishops of the country, I renew my appeal for peace, and I implore those who have authority not to ignore the cry of the poor and the needs of the people."

Sri Lanka is relying on aid from India and other nations as leaders try to negotiate a bailout with the IMF. Wickremesinghe said recently that negotiations with the IMF were complex because Sri Lanka was now a bankrupt state.

Sri Lanka announced in April that it was suspending repayment of foreign loans due to a foreign currency shortage. Its total foreign debt amounts to \$51 billion, of which it must repay \$28 billion by the end of 2027.

Months of demonstrations have all but dismantled the Rajapaksa political dynasty, which has ruled Sri Lanka for most of the past two decades but is accused by protesters of mismanagement and corruption. The president's older brother resigned as prime minister in May after violent protests saw him seek safety at a naval base. He later moved into a house in Colombo.

## Yosemite fire grows as crews protect iconic sequoias

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, Calif. (AP) — A wildfire threatening the largest grove of giant sequoias in Yosemite National Park more than doubled in size in a day, and firefighters were working in difficult terrain Sunday to protect the iconic trees and a small mountain town as the U.S. weathers another very active year for fires.

Campers and residents near the blaze were evacuated but the rest of the sprawling park in California

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remained open, though heavy smoke obscured scenic vistas and created unhealthy air quality.

"Today it's actually the smokiest that we've seen," Nancy Phillipe, a Yosemite fire information spokesperson, said Sunday. "Up until this morning, the park has not been in that unhealthy category, but that is where we are now."

More than 500 mature sequoias were threatened in the famed Mariposa Grove but there were no reports of severe damage to any named trees, including the 3,000-year-old Grizzly Giant.

A sprinkler system set up within the grove kept the tree trunks moist and officials were hopeful that the steady spray of water along with previous prescribed burns would be enough to keep flames at bay, Phillipe said.

The cause of the Washburn Fire was under investigation. It had grown to nearly 2.5 square miles (6.7 square kilometers) by Sunday morning, with no containment.

Beyond the trees, the community of Wawona, which is surrounded by parkland, was under threat, with people ordered to leave late Friday. In addition to residents, about 600 to 700 people who were staying at the Wawona campground in tents, cabins and a historic hotel were ordered to leave.

Temperatures were expected rise and reach the lower 90s in the coming days, but fire crews working in steep terrain were not contending with intense winds, said Jeffrey Barlow, senior meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

The giant sequoias, native in only about 70 groves spread along the western slope of California's Sierra Nevada range, were once considered impervious to flames but have become increasingly vulnerable as wildfires fueled by a buildup of undergrowth from a century of fire suppression and drought exacerbated by climate change have become more intense and destructive.

Phillipe, the park spokesperson, previously said some of the massive trunks had been wrapped in fire-resistant foil for protection, but she corrected herself on Sunday and said that was not the case for this fire. However, crews have wrapped a historic cabin in the protective foil, she said.

Lightning-sparked wildfires over the past two years have killed up to a fifth of the estimated 75,000 large sequoias, which are the biggest trees by volume and a major draw for tourists to the national park that's the size of the state of Rhode Island.

There was no obvious natural spark for the fire that broke out Thursday next to the park's Washburn Trail, Phillipe said. Smoke was reported by visitors walking in the grove that reopened in 2018 after a \$40 million renovation that took three years.

A fierce windstorm ripped through the grove over a year ago and toppled 15 giant sequoias, along with countless other trees.

The downed trees, along with massive numbers of pines killed by bark beetles, provided ample fuel for the flames.

Meanwhile, most evacuation orders were lifted Saturday in the Sierra foothills about 80 miles (128 kilometers) to the northwest of the Yosemite fire, where a fire broke out on July 4. The Electra Fire that began near Jackson was mostly contained, and only areas directly within the fire's perimeter remained under evacuation orders, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

In Utah, smoke and ash emanating from a growing wildfire in rural Tooele County blew into Salt Lake City on Saturday. By Sunday afternoon, the Jacob City Fire had grown to 5.9 square miles (15.3 square km), with zero containment, officials said.

Elsewhere in Utah, firefighters contending with heavy winds battled the 12.4-square-mile (32.2-square-km) Halfway Hill Fire in Filmore. Law enforcement on Saturday arrested four men who investigators said abandoned a campfire that ignited the blaze.

So far in 2022, over 35,000 wildfires have burned nearly 4.7 million acres in the U.S., according to the National Interagency Fire Center, well above average for both wildfires and acres burned.

## Griner's name permeates WNBA All-Star Game, Team Wilson wins

By JAY COHEN AP Sports Writer

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CHICAGO (AP) — Brittney Griner was everywhere Sunday — before, during and after the WNBA All-Star Game.

Everywhere except where the league's best players felt she should be — playing alongside them on the court.

A'ja Wilson, Breanna Stewart and the rest of the WNBA All-Stars wore Griner's name and her No. 42 on the back of their jerseys for the second half of Team Wilson's 134-112 victory over Team Stewart. It was another moment in the league's continued push for Griner's release from her detention in Russia.

"BG's one of us. She's our sister," Wilson said, "and at the end of the day, we're going to do whatever we can to amplify the platform that we have to make sure that everyone is doing what they need to do to make sure that she gets home safely."

Griner, 31, has been detained since February after police at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport said they found vape canisters containing cannabis oil in her luggage. The eight-time All-Star pleaded guilty Thursday to drug possession charges that could see a sentence of to up to 10 years in prison.

Griner was announced as an honorary All-Star starter before Sunday's game, drawing cheers from the crowd of 9,572 at the home of the defending champion Sky. The players lined up along the sideline to show off their Griner jerseys before the start of the second half.

Team Wilson guards Sabrina Ionescu and Courtney Vandersloot hugged Cherelle Griner, Brittney's wife, before play resumed.

"We just wanted to make sure at some point that we were able to, on national television, obviously in front of a (big) crowd, put Brittney's name in the forefront," Seattle Storm guard Sue Bird said. "That was our way of honoring her."

It was the last All-Star Game for Bird and Sylvia Fowles, two pillars of the league who plan to retire after this season. Fowles had the day's biggest highlight, picking up a steal and throwing down a dunk for Team Wilson with 4:04 left in the first half.

"It was just in the moment," Fowles said. "I didn't really think about it."

Bird received a huge ovation when she checked out with 2:10 left, and acknowledged the cheers with a wave.

"That moment was really special," Bird said.

Las Vegas aces guard Kelsey Plum was named MVP after she scored 30 points for Team Wilson in her first All-Star appearance. Sabrina Ionescu had 19 points, six assists and six rebounds, and Chicago Sky forward Candace Parker finished with 15 points and eight boards.

Plum matched the league's All-Star Game scoring record. Maya Moore also scored 30 points in 2015.

"What a way to send off Syl and Sue," Plum said. "I think for me, I just personally wanted to go out and have a ton of fun."

Jonquel Jones, the reigning WNBA MVP who plays for the Connecticut Sun, had 29 points and 13 rebounds for Team Stewart. Jones also made the game's first 4-point shot with 7:04 left in the first quarter.

"I practiced them yesterday and shot it a lot in the warmups," Jones said. "I felt comfortable and confident shooting them."

It was the first WNBA All-Star Game in Chicago, and the league landed in the Windy City at perhaps its strongest position since it began play in 1997. Viewership is up, some major corporate partners have signed on and a wave of promising young stars like Wilson, Ionescu and Plum are moving to the forefront.

Commissioner Cathy Engelbert announced this year's WNBA Finals teams will travel on charter flights, and the league is increasing its postseason bonus pools by almost 50% to \$500,000. Next season will be extended to 40 games, up from 36 this year, and Engelbert said the league has been meeting with potential ownership groups for expansion teams.

"We continue to work really hard on the transformation of the business to improve the player experience," Engelbert said.

Engelbert also is doing whatever she can to help Griner and her family. Griner's guilty plea could be an effort by her and her advisers to expedite the court proceedings.

"She remains a huge priority for us, continues to have our full support," Engelbert said. "Fully focused



on getting her home safely and as soon as possible.”

## Djokovic tops Kyrgios for 7th Wimbledon, 21st Slam trophy

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) — Novak Djokovic waited. He waited for Nick Kyrgios to lose focus and lose his way. Waited to find the proper read on his foe’s big serves. Waited until his own level rose to the occasion.

Djokovic is not bothered by a deficit — in a game, a set, a match. He does not mind problem-solving. And at Wimbledon, for quite some time now, he does not get defeated.

Djokovic used his steady brilliance to beat the ace-delivering, trick-shot-hitting, constantly chattering Kyrgios 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (3) on Sunday for a fourth consecutive championship at the All England Club, seventh overall there, and 21st from all Grand Slam tournaments.

“It’s weird. I felt like he didn’t do anything amazing today,” said the unseeded Kyrgios, offering an assessment with which some might not concur, given that Djokovic accumulated 31 winners and merely eight unforced errors over the last two sets, while facing zero break points in that span.

“But he was just so composed. That’s what I was just thinking to myself. In big moments, it just felt like he was never rattled. I feel like that’s his greatest strength: He just never looks rattled,” said Kyrgios, about whom those words likely have not been uttered. “He just looks completely within himself the whole time. Didn’t look like he was playing overaggressive, even though it felt like he was playing big.”

Among men, only Roger Federer owns more Wimbledon titles than Djokovic, with eight, and only Rafael Nadal owns more major trophies, with 22.

“The more you win, it’s logical the more confident, the more comfortable you feel out there every next time you step out on the court,” said the top-seeded Djokovic, who was pleased to hear some spectators at Centre Court chanting his nickname, “No-le! No-le!” as he served out the final point of a tremendously well-played tiebreaker.

As of now, Djokovic will not be able to try to pull even with Nadal by winning the U.S. Open, which begins in late August: The 35-year-old Serbian can’t enter the United States because he decided not to get any shots against COVID-19, the same reason Djokovic missed the Australian Open in January.

“I’m not vaccinated,” Djokovic said Sunday, “and I’m not planning to get vaccinated.”

Aside from his experience — 32 Grand Slam final appearances versus one for the unseeded Kyrgios — his skill and his clutch gene shined in the concluding tiebreaker, and all of those qualities were present for two particularly pivotal games that helped swing the match.

“Key moments,” Djokovic called them.

They were games in which Djokovic steeled himself, and Kyrgios blinked. And games that Kyrgios would not let go as he began engaging in running monologues, shouting at himself or his entourage (which does not include a full-time coach), earning a warning for cursing, finding reason to disagree with the chair umpire he fist-bumped before the match, and chucking a water bottle.

With Djokovic serving for the second set at 5-3, Kyrgios got to love-40 — a trio of break points. But Kyrgios played a couple of casual returns, and Djokovic eventually held. When that set ended, Kyrgios waved dismissively toward his box, sat down and dropped his racket to the turf, then grouched to no one in particular: “It was love-40! Can it get any bigger or what?! Is that big enough for you?!”

Djokovic noticed.

“He knew on this stage, when Nick starts to talk, he’s going to be vulnerable,” said Djokovic’s coach, 2001 Wimbledon champion Goran Ivanisevic. “That happened.”

In the third set, with Kyrgios serving at 4-all, 40-love, he again let a seemingly sealed game get away, with Djokovic breaking there.

“It was a huge momentum shift,” Djokovic said, “because up to that point we were quite even.”

Kyrgios was almost perfect in the first set, with 11 winners before he made a second unforced error. The 40th-ranked Kyrgios, a 27-year-old from Australia, never had been past the quarterfinals in 29 previous Grand Slam appearances — and the last time he made it even that far was 7 1/2 years ago.

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His talent is unmistakable. But over the years, Kyrgios has drawn more notice for his preference for style over substance on court, his tempestuousness that has earned him ejections and suspensions and his taste for the nightlife.

During the past two weeks alone, Kyrgios racked up \$14,000 in fines — one for spitting at a heckling spectator after a first-round victory, another for cursing during a wildly contentious win against No. 4 seed Stefanos Tsitsipas in the third round — and caught flack for wearing a red hat and sneakers before or after matches at a place where all-white clothing is mandated. Word also emerged that he is due in court next month in Australia to face an assault allegation.

On Sunday, Kyrgios tried shots between his legs, hit some with his back to the net, pounded serves at up to 136 mph and produced 30 aces. He used an underarm serve, then faked one later.

For all of the significant records and other factoids logged in the 560-page Wimbledon Compendium — including categories such as “ambidextrous players” or “runners-up who wore glasses in a final” — no mention is made of “underarm serves in a gentleman’s final,” but it seems safe to say that was a first.

Perhaps, in some ways, it would have been fitting for such a unique player to emerge as the champion at such a unique Wimbledon.

All players representing Russia or Belarus were barred by the All England Club because of the war in Ukraine; among those banned was No. 1-ranked Daniil Medvedev, the reigning U.S. Open champion. In response, the WTA and ATP tours took the unprecedented step of revoking all ranking points from Wimbledon (Djokovic, for example, earned zero points for his title and will slide to No. 7 on Monday).

A woman who was born in Russia but has represented Kazakhstan for four years, Elena Rybakina, won the women’s trophy Saturday with a 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 victory over Ons Jabeur. There’s more: Federer missed the tournament for the first time since the late 1990s, The No. 2 man in the rankings, Alexander Zverev, sat out injured. Three of the top 20 seeded men, including 2021 runner-up Matteo Berrettini, pulled out of Wimbledon after testing positive for COVID-19. And Nadal withdrew with a torn abdominal muscle before he was supposed to face Kyrgios in the semifinals.

On Sunday, it was Djokovic holding the trophy, as he has so often. He trailed in the final, just as he had in the quarterfinals (when he was two sets down) and the semifinals. Just as he had in last year’s French Open and Wimbledon finals. Just as he had in the 2019 final at the All England Club, facing two championship points against Federer.

Each time, he waited for the opportunity to seize control. Each time, he won.

“So the run keeps going,” Djokovic said after his unbeaten streak at Wimbledon reached 28 victories. “I feel very connected with this court and with this tournament, without a doubt.”

## Trump ally Bannon now willing to testify before Jan. 6 panel

By HOPE YEN and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Steve Bannon, a former White House strategist and ally of Donald Trump who faces criminal charges after months of defying a congressional subpoena over the Capitol riot, has told the House committee investigating the attack that he is now willing to testify.

Bannon’s turnabout was conveyed in a letter late Saturday from his attorney, lawmakers said, as the committee prepares to air some of its most striking revelations yet this week against Trump in what may be its final set of hearings.

“I expect that we will be hearing from him and there are many questions that we have for him,” said Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif. She and other committee members said in television interviews Sunday they intend to have Bannon sit for a private interview, which they typically conduct in a deposition with sworn testimony.

Bannon had been one of the highest-profile Trump-allied holdouts in refusing to testify before the committee, leading to two criminal counts of contempt of Congress last year for resisting the committee’s subpoena. He has argued that his testimony is protected by Trump’s claim of executive privilege. The committee contends such a claim is dubious because Trump had fired Bannon from the White House in 2017 and Bannon was thus a private citizen when he was consulting with the then-president in the run-up

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to the riot on Jan. 6, 2021.

Still, in recent days, as the former president grew frustrated with what he decried as a one-sided presentation by the committee of seven Democrats and two Republicans, Trump said he would waive that privilege claim, according to a letter Saturday to Bannon's lawyer.

"If you reach an agreement on a time and place for your testimony, I will waive executive privilege for you, which allows for you to go in and testify truthfully and fairly, as per the request of the unselect committee of political thugs and hacks," Trump wrote.

The committee's Thursday evening hearing will examine the three-hour plus stretch when Trump failed to act as a mob of supporters stormed the Capitol. It will be the first hearing in prime time since the June 9 debut that was viewed by 20 million people.

A hearing Tuesday will focus on the plotting and planning of the insurrection by white nationalist groups such as the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters, and will also highlight testimony taken Friday from former White House counsel Pat Cipollone.

It comes after surprise testimony last month from former Trump White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson provided the most compelling evidence yet that Trump could be linked to a federal crime. Since then, the committee has seen an influx of new information and confidential tips.

Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., suggested that Bannon "had a change of heart, and after watching, presumably, all of these people come forward, including Cassidy Hutchinson, he's decided that he wants to come in, and if he wants to come in, I'm certain that the committee would be very interested in hearing from him."

Bannon's trial on the two criminal counts is July 18. A hearing in his case was scheduled for Monday in federal court in Washington. Bannon has been seeking a delay in his trial to at least fall.

It's unclear how much Bannon intends to cooperate. He has expressed a preference to appear before the committee in a public hearing. The committee is making clear he must first sit for a private interview, typically in a sworn deposition. It's also possible he may opt to appear and then refuse to answer questions, citing his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

"The way that we have treated every single witness is the same, that they come in, they talk to the committee there," Raskin said. "If they're going to take a deposition, they're sworn under oath. It's videotaped. It's recorded, and then we take it from there."

The committee says it wants to hear from Bannon because he "had specific knowledge about the events planned for Jan. 6 before they occurred." It cited as an example comments that he made on his podcast the day before the riot.

"It's not going to happen like you think it's going to happen. OK, it's going to be quite extraordinarily different. All I can say is strap in," Bannon said in that podcast. "All hell is going to break loose tomorrow. ... So many people said, 'Man, if I was in a revolution, I would be in Washington.' Well, this is your time in history."

House investigators have been digging deeper into the evidence collected so far about the role extremist groups played in the deadly insurrection and what Trump was doing as the violence ensued down the street from the White House.

Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., who will lead Thursday's hearing with Rep. Elaine Luria, D-Va., described the upcoming testimony as key to providing an extensive timeline of what Trump did and did not do in those critical hours on the afternoon of Jan. 6, 2021. That includes Trump's tweet criticizing Vice President Mike Pence for lacking "courage" as angry protesters outside the Capitol were heard chanting "Hang Mike Pence" for not challenging Democrat Joe Biden's 2020 election victory.

"We want to show the American people what was the president doing during that time," Kinzinger said Sunday. "The rest of the country knew that there was an insurrection. The president obviously had to have known there was an insurrection. So where was he? What was he doing? It's a very important hearing. Pay attention. Because I think it goes to the heart of what is the oath of a leader."

Tuesday's hearing will explore efforts to assemble the mob on the National Mall and then organize the march down Pennsylvania Avenue, where some rioters — armed with pipes, bats and bear spray — charged into the Capitol, quickly overrunning the overwhelmed police force. More than 100 police officers were



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injured, many beaten, bloodied and bruised, that day.

It will also highlight a meeting on Dec. 18, 2020 at the White House in which former Trump lawyers Sidney Powell and Rudy Giuliani, onetime Trump national security adviser Michael Flynn and others floated the idea of seizing voting machines and invoking national security emergency powers, to the heated objection from several White House lawyers who argued that Trump needed to accept his defeat, according to Raskin, who will lead Tuesday's hearing.

"We're gonna get to use a lot of Mr. Cipollone's testimony," he said. "He was aware of every major move, I think, that Donald Trump was making to try to overthrow the 2020 election and essentially seize the presidency."

Kinzinger spoke on ABC's "This Week, Lofgren was on CNN's "State of the Union" and Raskin appeared on CBS' "Face the Nation."

## 15 killed in Russian strike in Ukraine, 20 believed trapped

By FRANCESCA EBEL Associated Press

CHASIV YAR, Ukraine (AP) — Dozens of Ukrainian emergency workers labored Sunday to pull people out of the rubble after a Russian rocket attack smashed into apartment buildings in eastern Ukraine, killing at least 15 people. More than 20 people were believed still trapped.

The strike late Saturday destroyed three buildings in a residential quarter of the town of Chasiv Yar, inhabited mostly by people who work in nearby factories.

On Sunday evening, rescuers were able to remove enough of the bricks and concrete to retrieve a man who had been trapped for almost 24 hours. Rescuers laid him on a stretcher and he was quickly taken to a hospital.

Ukraine's Emergency Services said the latest rescue brought to six the number of people dug out of the rubble. Earlier in the day, they made contact with three others still trapped alive beneath the ruins.

Pavlo Kyrylenko, governor of the Donetsk region that includes Chasiv Yar, said an estimated 24 people were believed still trapped, including a 9-year-old child.

Cranes and excavators worked alongside rescue teams to clear away the ruins of one building, its walls completely shorn off by the impact of the strike. The thud of artillery on the nearby front line resonated just a few miles away, making some workers flinch and others run for cover.

Valerii, who gave only his first name, was desperately waiting to hear news of his sister and 9-year-old nephew, who lived in the collapsed building and had not answered his calls since Saturday night.

"Now I'm waiting for a miracle" he said, as he stood before the ruins and started to pray, hands clasped together tightly.

"We do not have good expectations, but I am avoiding such thoughts," he said.

Kyrylenko said the town of about 12,000 was hit by Uragan rockets that are fired from truck-borne systems. Chasiv Yar is 20 kilometers (12 miles) southeast of Kramatorsk, a city that is a major target of Russian forces as they grind westward.

However, later Sunday, Viacheslav Boitsov, deputy chief of emergency service in the Donetsk Region, told the Associated Press that four shells hit the neighborhood and they were likely Iskander missiles.

Residents said they heard at least three explosions and that many people were badly wounded in the blasts. A group of neighbors sat Sunday in a courtyard quietly discussing who was wounded and who was still missing.

"There was an explosion, all the windows blew out and I was thrown to the ground, said 45-year-old Oksana, who gave only her first name. She was in her third-floor apartment when the missiles struck.

"My kitchen walls and balcony have completely vanished," she added, struggling to hold back tears. "I called my children to tell them I was alive."

Irina Shulimova, a 59-year-old retiree, recalled the terror. "We didn't hear any incoming sound, we just felt the impact. I ran to hide in the corridor with my dogs. Everyone I knew started calling me to find out what had happened. I was shaking like a leaf," she said.

Front doors and balconies were torn apart in the blast, and heaps of twisted metal and bricks lay on the

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ground. Crushed summer cherries were smeared on shattered window panes.

A 30-year-old technology worker named Oleksandr said his mother was among those injured in the explosion.

"Thank God I wasn't injured, it was a miracle," he said, touching the crucifix around his neck.

Although the home he shares with his mother is now shattered, he said he doesn't plan to leave the neighborhood.

"I only have enough money to support myself for another month. Lots of people are fed up already of refugees coming from the east — no one will feed or support us there. It's better to stay," said Oleksandr, who declined to give his surname.

Another resident who gave only his first name, Dima, had lived for more than 20 years on the ground floor of one of the buildings that was hollowed out in the attack. He walked back and forth across the rubble.

"As you can see, my home is lost," he said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused the Russians of intentionally targeting civilians.

"Anyone who orders such strikes, everyone who carries them out in ordinary cities, in residential areas, kills absolutely consciously," he said in an address to Ukrainians on Sunday night. "After such hits, they won't be able to say that they didn't know or didn't understand something."

Saturday's attack was just the latest in a series of strikes against civilian areas in the east, even as Russia repeatedly claims it is only hitting targets of military value.

Twenty-one people were killed earlier this month when an apartment building and recreation area came under rocket fire in the southern Odesa region. Another at least 19 people died when a Russian missile hit a shopping mall in the city of Kremenchuk in late June.

There was no comment about the Chasiv Yar attack at a Russian Defense Ministry briefing on Sunday.

The Donetsk region is one of two provinces along with Luhansk that make up the Donbas region, where separatist rebels have fought Ukrainian forces since 2014. Last week, Russia captured the city of Lysychansk, the last major stronghold of Ukrainian resistance in Luhansk.

Russian forces are raising "true hell" in the Donbas, despite assessments they were taking an operational pause, Luhansk governor Serhiy Haidai said Saturday.

After the seizure of Lysychansk, some analysts predicted that Moscow's troops likely would take some time to rearm and regroup.

But "so far there has been no operational pause announced by the enemy. He is still attacking and shelling our lands with the same intensity as before," Haidai said.

He later said Ukrainian forces had destroyed some ammunition depots and barracks used by the Russians.

## Parents of slain Israeli-American girl seek Biden meeting

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The family of an Israel-American girl killed in a 2001 Palestinian suicide bombing in Jerusalem is seeking a meeting with President Joe Biden in hopes of forcing Jordan to extradite a woman convicted in the deadly attack.

The parents of Malki Roth turned to Biden on Sunday asking to meet with the president when he comes to Jerusalem this week. They want the president to put pressure on Jordan, a close American ally, to send Ahlam Tamimi to the U.S. for trial.

"We are bereaved parents as you are, sir. We have a burning sense that injustice in the wake of our child's murder is winning," Frimet and Arnold Roth wrote in their letter. "We ask that you address this as only the leader of the United States can."

The Roths have been waging a campaign for the extradition of Ahlam Tamimi since she was released by Israel in a 2011 prisoner swap with the Hamas militant group. Under that deal, Tamimi was sent to her native Jordan, where she lives freely and has been a familiar face in the media. Jordanian authorities have rebuffed calls to extradite her.

On Aug. 9, 2001, a Palestinian bomber walked into a Jerusalem pizzeria and blew himself up, killing 15

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people. Two American citizens, including 15-year-old Malki Roth, were among the dead.

Tamimi, who chose the target and guided the bomber there, was arrested weeks later and sentenced by Israel to 16 life sentences. Since her release, she has expressed no remorse and even boasted that she was pleased with the high death toll. In a 2017 interview with The Associated Press, she said the Palestinians have a right to resist Israel by any means, including deadly attacks.

Roth has repeatedly called on U.S. authorities to press Jordan, which has received billions of dollars in American assistance, to turn over Tamimi for trial.

The United States has charged Tamimi with conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction against American nationals. The charge was filed under seal in 2013 and announced by the Justice Department four years later. Her name was added to the FBI's list of Most Wanted Terrorists.

The U.S. and Jordan signed an extradition treaty in 1995. But in 2017, Jordan's high court blocked her extradition, reportedly claiming the treaty was never ratified.

Two years ago, the Trump administration said it was considering withholding aid to Jordan over the case, but ultimately no action was taken.

Jordan is one of the United States' closest partners in the Arab world, seen as a force of moderation and stability in the volatile Middle East. American officials appear to be wary of sparking a diplomatic crisis with a key ally.

"Something is obviously terribly wrong with how the pursuit of America's most wanted female fugitive is going," the Roths wrote in their letter, sent to Biden through the U.S. Embassy.

"We want to explain this to you better in a face-to-face meeting," they added. "We want you to look us in the eyes, Mr. President, and tell us how Jordan's king can be a praiseworthy ally."

Biden is scheduled to land in Israel on Wednesday before traveling to a Mideast summit in Saudi Arabia on Friday. He has no plans to be in Jordan, though Jordanian officials are expected at the summit.

There was no immediate comment from either the White House or the Jordanian Royal Hashemite Court.

Roth's letter was sent days after the family of a Palestinian-American journalist killed while covering an Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank lashed out at Biden over his administration's response to her death.

Relatives of Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh expressed "grief, outrage and (a) sense of betrayal" in a letter accusing the U.S. of trying to erase Israeli responsibility for her death.

A U.S. investigation concluded that Abu Akleh was likely killed by Israeli fire, but also said there was "no reason to believe" she was deliberately targeted. Israel says Abu Akleh was killed during a gun battle with Palestinian militants, and it is unclear who fired the deadly shot. The Palestinians say Israel intentionally killed her.

The White House declined to comment on the letter or the family's request for a meeting during his visit.

## Report: Uber lobbied, used 'stealth' tech to block scrutiny

The Associated Press undefined

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Uber aggressively pushed into markets around the world, the ride-sharing service lobbied political leaders to relax labor and taxi laws, used a "kill switch" to thwart regulators and law enforcement, channeled money through Bermuda and other tax havens and considered portraying violence against its drivers as a way to gain public sympathy, according to a report released Sunday.

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, a nonprofit network of investigative reporters, scoured internal Uber texts, emails, invoices and other documents to deliver what it called "an unprecedented look into the ways Uber defied taxi laws and upended workers' rights."

The documents were first leaked to the British newspaper The Guardian, which shared them with the consortium.

In a written statement. Uber spokesperson Jill Hazelbaker acknowledged "mistakes" in the past and said CEO Dara Khosrowshahi, hired in 2017, had been "tasked with transforming every aspect of how Uber operates ... When we say Uber is a different company today, we mean it literally: 90% of current Uber



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employees joined after Dara became CEO.”

Founded in 2009, Uber sought to skirt taxi regulations and offer inexpensive transportation via a ride-sharing app. The consortium’s Uber Files revealed the extraordinary lengths that the company undertook to establish itself in nearly 30 countries.

The company’s lobbyists — including former aides to President Barack Obama — pressed government officials to drop their investigations, rewrite labor and taxi laws and relax background checks on drivers, the papers show.

The investigation found that Uber used “stealth technology” to fend off government investigations. The company, for example, used a “kill switch” that cut access to Uber servers and blocked authorities from grabbing evidence during raids in at least six countries. During a police raid in Amsterdam, the Uber Files reported, former Uber CEO Travis Kalanick personally issued an order: “Please hit the kill switch ASAP ... Access must be shut down in AMS (Amsterdam).”

The consortium also reported that Kalanick saw the threat of violence against Uber drivers in France by aggrieved taxi drivers as a way to gain public support. “Violence guarantee(s) success,” Kalanick texted colleagues.

In a response to the consortium, Kalanick spokesman Devon Spurgeon said the former CEO “never suggested that Uber should take advantage of violence at the expense of driver safety.”

The Uber Files say the company cut its tax bill by millions of dollars by sending profits through Bermuda and other tax havens, then “sought to deflect attention from its tax liabilities by helping authorities collect taxes from its drivers.”

## Average US gasoline price falls 19 cents to \$4.86 per gallon

CAMARILLO, Calif. (AP) — The average U.S. price of regular-grade gasoline plunged 19 cents over the past two weeks to \$4.86 per gallon.

Industry analyst Trilby Lundberg of the Lundberg Survey said Sunday that the continued decline comes as crude oil costs also fall.

“Assuming oil prices do not shoot up from here, motorists may see prices drop another 10-20 cents as the oil price cuts continue making their way to street level,” Lundberg said in a statement.

The average price at the pump is down 24 cents over the past month, but it’s \$1.66 higher than it was one year ago.

Nationwide, the highest average price for regular-grade gas was in the San Francisco Bay Area, at \$6.14 per gallon. The lowest average was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, at \$4.19 per gallon.

According to the survey, the average price of diesel dropped 13 cents since June 24 to \$5.76 a gallon.

## Chinese bank depositors face police in angry protest

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A large crowd of angry Chinese bank depositors faced off with police Sunday, some roughed up as they were taken away, in a case that has drawn attention because of earlier attempts to use a COVID-19 tracking app to prevent them from mobilizing.

Hundreds of people held up banners and chanted slogans on the wide steps of the entrance to a branch of China’s central bank in the city of Zhengzhou in Henan province, about 620 kilometers (380 miles) southwest of Beijing. Video taken by a protester shows plainclothes security teams being pelted with water bottles and other objects as they charge the crowd.

Later videos posted on social media show an unclear number of protesters being shoved forward individually and down stairs by security teams dressed in plain white or black T-shirts. Phone calls to Zhengzhou city and Henan province police rang unanswered.

The protesters are among thousands of customers who opened accounts at six rural banks in Henan and neighboring Anhui province that offered higher interest rates. They later found they could not withdraw their funds after media reports that the head of the banks’ parent company was on the run and wanted

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for financial crimes.

"We came today and wanted to get our savings back, because I have elderly people and children at home, and the inability to withdraw savings has seriously affected my life," said a woman from Shandong province, who only gave her last name, Zhang, out of fear of retribution.

What had been a local scandal became a national incident last month because of the misuse of the COVID-19 tracking app. Many who set out for Zhengzhou to demand action from regulators found that their health status on the app had turned red, preventing them from traveling. Some reported being questioned by police after checking into their hotel about why they had come to the city. Five Zhengzhou officials were later punished.

The protesters assembled before dawn on Sunday in front of the People's Bank of China building in Zhengzhou. Police vehicles with flashing lights can be seen in videos taken in the early morning darkness. Police closed off the street and by 8 a.m. had started massing on the other side, Zhang said.

Besides uniformed police, there were the teams of men in plain T-shirts. A banking regulator and a local government official arrived, but their attempts to talk to the crowd were shouted down. Zhang and another protester, a man from Beijing surnamed Yang, told the AP the protesters had heard from the officials before and don't believe what they say. Yang declined to be identified by his full name, fearing pressure from authorities.

The police then announced to the protesters from a vehicle with a megaphone that they were an illegal assembly and would be detained and fined if they didn't leave. Around 10 a.m., the men in T-shirts rushed the crowd and dispersed them. Zhang said she saw women dragged down the stairs of the bank entrance.

Zhang herself was hit, and said she asked the officer, "Why did you hit me?" According to her, he responded: "What's wrong with beating you?"

Yang said he was hit by two security officers including one who had fallen off the stairs and mistakenly thought in the chaos that Yang had hit or pushed him.

"Although repeated protests and demonstrations don't necessarily have a big impact, I think it is still helpful if more people get to know about us, and understand or sympathize with us," Yang said. "Each time you do it, you might make a difference. Although you will get hit, they can't really do anything to you, right?"

The protesters were bused to various sites where Zhang said they were forced to sign a letter guaranteeing they would not gather anymore.

Late Sunday, Henan banking regulators posted a short notice on their website saying that authorities are speeding up the verification of customer funds in four of the banks and the formulation of a plan to resolve the situation to protect the rights and interests of the public.

## 'Thor: Love and Thunder' scores franchise best debut

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Four movies in, Thor is still bringing the hammer down at the box office.

"Thor: Love and Thunder" earned \$143 million in its opening weekend in North America, according to studio estimates Sunday. It's a franchise best for the God of Thunder and another success story of the summer 2022 box office season.

The second Thor movie directed by Taika Waititi opened on 4,375 screens this weekend, starting with Thursday previews. It easily topped the box office, bumping "Minions: The Rise of Gru" into second place. Including international showings, where "Love and Thunder" opened in 47 territories starting in the middle of last week, its global total is already at \$302 million.

"It's another home run for Marvel," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. "It's unheard of for a Marvel movie not to open at No. 1."

The Thor franchise has grown with each subsequent film, which is both a rarity in franchise filmmaking in general but also not uncommon for those of the Marvel variety. The first film opened to \$65.7 million in 2011, followed by \$85.7 million for "The Dark World" in 2013 and \$122.7 million for 2017's "Ragnarok."

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Waititi, who also directed "Ragnarok," is widely credited with rejuvenating the series, infusing it with humor, irreverence and leaning into larger-than-life metal aesthetics.

Critics skewed mostly positive and the Rotten Tomatoes score is currently sitting at 68% fresh. Audiences, who gave the film a B+ CinemaScore, were heavily male (60%) and 53% were between the ages of 18 and 34, according to exit polls. IMAX reported that \$23 million of the global total came from their screens.

"Love and Thunder" brings back Chris Hemsworth, Tessa Thompson and Natalie Portman, whose Jane Foster becomes the Mighty Thor. Russell Crowe also co-stars as Zeus and Christian Bale plays the villain Gorr the God Butcher. It also boasts the biggest production budget of the Thor films, at a reported \$250 million.

And yet, it's noteworthy that "Thor: Love and Thunder" isn't even the biggest Marvel opening of the year. That title is held by "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness," which debuted to \$185 million in early May on the heels of the box office phenomenon that was "Spider-Man: No Way Home."

The Minions carved out a second-place spot with \$45.6 million in weekend two, bringing its domestic total to \$210.1 million and its worldwide grosses to \$399.9 million.

The summer's workhorse "Top Gun: Maverick" placed third in its seventh weekend in theaters with \$15.5 million. With its domestic total currently at \$597.4 million, the Tom Cruise film is poised to cross \$600 million by Monday — one of only 12 films ever to do so.

In limited release, the documentary "Fire of Love" launched this weekend in three locations and made an estimated \$22,328, while Claire Denis' "Both Sides of the Blade" earned \$25,000 from four locations.

The weekend should net out with around \$236.1 million total, which Dergarabedian said is "truly impressive."

"Every week, the marketplace becomes more pre-pandemic like," he said. "This feels like a traditional summer movie season weekend. It's a huge difference from a year ago."

The summer 2022 box office continues to look bright for both Hollywood and theater owners, up 217% from last summer. The year as a whole passed the \$4 billion mark last week which is up 233% from last year but still trailing the last pre-pandemic box office year, 2019, by 30%.

"Audiences are embracing the movie theater experience with a greater enthusiasm," Dergarabedian said. "By now, every demographic is interested in going back to theaters. The challenge for theaters going forward is just having enough new movies."

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "Thor: Love and Thunder," \$143 million.
2. "Minions: The Rise of Gru," \$45.6 million.
3. "Top Gun: Maverick," \$15.5 million.
4. "Elvis," \$11 million.
5. "Jurassic World: Dominion," \$8.4 million.
6. "The Black Phone," \$7.7 million.
7. "Lightyear," \$2.9 million.
8. "Marcel the Shell with Shoes On," \$340,000.
9. "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness," \$262,000.
10. "Mr. Malcolm's List," \$245,416.

## Biden says he's mulling health emergency for abortion access

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. (AP) — President Joe Biden said Sunday he is considering declaring a public health emergency to free up federal resources to promote abortion access even though the White House has said it doesn't seem like "a great option."

He also offered a message to people enraged by the Supreme Court's ruling last month that ended a constitutional right to abortion and who have been demonstrating across the country: "Keep protesting."



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Keep making your point. It's critically important."

The president, in remarks to reporters during a stop on a bike ride near his family's Delaware beach house, said he lacks the power to force the dozen-plus states with strict restrictions or outright bans on abortion to allow the procedure.

"I don't have the authority to say that we're going to reinstate Roe v. Wade as the law of the land," he said, referring to the Supreme Court's decision from 1973 that had established a national right to abortion. Biden said Congress would have to codify that right and for that to have a better chance in the future, voters would have to elect more lawmakers who support abortion access.

Biden said his administration is trying to do a "lot of things to accommodate the rights of women" after the ruling, including considering declaring a public health emergency to free up federal resources. Such a move has been pushed by advocates, but White House officials have questioned both its legality and effectiveness, and noted it would almost certainly face legal challenges.

The president said he has asked officials "to look at whether I have the authority to do that and what impact that would have."

On Friday, Jen Klein, the director of the White House Gender Policy Council, said it "didn't seem like a great option."

"When we looked at the public health emergency, we learned a couple things: One is that it doesn't free very many resources," she told reporters. "It's what's in the public health emergency fund, and there's very little money — tens of thousands of dollars in it. So that didn't seem like a great option. And it also doesn't release a significant amount of legal authority. And so that's why we haven't taken that action yet."

## In Mideast, Biden struggling to shift policy after Trump

By AAMER MADHANI and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden took office looking to reshape U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, putting a premium on promoting democracy and human rights. In reality, he has struggled on several fronts to meaningfully separate his approach from former President Donald Trump's.

Biden's visit to the region this week includes a meeting with Saudi Arabia's King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the oil-rich kingdom's de facto leader who U.S. intelligence officials determined approved the 2018 killing of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey.

Biden had pledged as a candidate to recalibrate the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia, which he described as a "pariah" nation after Trump's more accommodating stand, overlooking the kingdom's human rights record and stepping up military sales to Riyadh.

But Biden now seems to be making the calculation that there's more to be gained from courting the country than isolating it.

Biden's first stop on his visit to the Mideast will be Israel. Here, again, his stance has softened since the firm declarations he made when running for president.

As a candidate, Biden condemned Trump administration policy on Israeli settlements in the West Bank. As president, he's been unable to pressure the Israelis to halt the building of Jewish settlements and has offered no new initiatives to restart long-stalled peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

Biden also has let stand Trump's 2019 decision recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which reversed more than a half-century of U.S. policy.

The Biden administration "has had this rather confusing policy of continuity on many issues from Trump — the path of least resistance on many different issues, including Jerusalem, the Golan, Western Sahara, and most other affairs," says Natan Sachs, director of the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

Now Biden appears to be trying to find greater equilibrium in his Mideast policy, putting focus on what's possible in a complicated part of the world at a time when Israel and some Arab nations are showing greater willingness to work together to isolate Iran — their common enemy — and to consider economic cooperation.

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"Biden is coming in, in essence making a choice," Sachs said. "And the choice is to embrace the emerging regional architecture."

Biden on Saturday used an op-ed in the Washington Post — the same pages where Khashoggi penned much of his criticism of Saudi rule before his death — to declare that the Middle East has become more "stable and secure" in his nearly 18 months in office and he pushed back against the notion that his visit to Saudi Arabia amounted to backsliding.

"In Saudi Arabia, we reversed the blank-check policy we inherited," Biden wrote. He also acknowledged "there are many who disagree" with his decision to visit the kingdom.

He pointed to his administration's efforts to push a Saudi-led coalition and Houthis to agree to a U.N.-brokered cease-fire — now in its fourth month — after seven years of a war that has left 150,000 people dead in Yemen. Biden also cited as achievements his administration's role in helping arrange a truce in last year's 11-day Israel-Gaza war, the diminished capacity of the Islamic State terrorist group in the region and ending the U.S. combat mission in Iraq.

But Biden's overall Mideast record is far more complicated. He has largely steered away from confronting some of the region's most vexing problems, including some that he faulted Trump for exacerbating.

Biden often talks about the importance of relationships in foreign policy. His decision to visit the Mideast for a trip that promises little in the way of tangible accomplishments suggests he's trying to invest in the region for the longer term.

In public, he has talked of insights gained from long hours over the years spent with China's Xi Jinping and sizing up Russia's Vladimir Putin. He's relished building bonds with a younger generation of world leaders including Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Japan's Fumio Kishida

Biden has met every Israeli prime minister dating back to Golda Meir, has a long-standing relationship with Jordan's King Abdullah II and was deeply involved as vice president in helping President Barack Obama wind down the Iraq War. But Biden, who came of age on the foreign policy scene during the Cold War and sees the rise of China as the most pressing crisis facing the West, has been less oriented toward the Middle East than Europe and Asia.

"He doesn't have the personal relationships. He doesn't have the duration of relationships," said Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

He arrives at an uncertain moment for Israeli leadership. Former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid last month dissolved the Knesset as their politically diverse coalition crumbled. Lapid, the former foreign minister, is now the caretaker prime minister.

Biden also will face fresh questions about his commitment to human rights following the fatal shooting of Palestinian American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Independent investigations determined that she was likely shot by an Israeli soldier while reporting from the West Bank in May.

The Abu Akleh family, in a scathing letter to Biden, accused his administration of excusing the Israelis for the journalist's death. The State Department last week said U.S. security officials determined that Israeli gunfire likely killed her but "found no reason to believe that this was intentional."

Two of the most closely watched moments during Biden's four-day Middle East visit will come when he meets with Israeli opposition leader and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and when he sees the Saudi crown prince.

But neither encounter is likely to dramatically alter U.S.-Mideast political dynamics.

Both leaders seem to have set their eyes on a post-Biden America as the Democratic president struggles with lagging poll numbers at home driven by skyrocketing inflation and unease with Biden's handling of the economy, analysts say.

"Both of these leaders in my judgment are now looking past the Biden administration, and looking very much forward to the return of Donald Trump or his avatar," said Aaron David Miller, who served six secretaries of state as an adviser on Arab-Israeli negotiations and now is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "I think it's a complex trip, and I think we should be extremely realistic about these expectations."

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Biden's prospects for progress on returning the U.S. to the Iran nuclear deal, brokered by Obama in 2015 and withdrawn from by Trump in 2018, remain elusive. The administration has participated indirectly in Vienna talks aimed at bringing both Washington and Tehran back into compliance with the deal. But the talks have thus far proved fruitless.

As a candidate, Biden promised the Saudis would "pay the price" for their human rights record. The sharp rhetoric helped Biden contrast himself with Trump, whose first official foreign trip as president was to the kingdom and who praised the Saudis as a "great ally" even after the Khashoggi killing.

Biden's tough warning to the Saudis came at a moment when oil was trading at about \$41 barrel; now, prices are closer to \$105. The elevated oil prices are hurting Americans at the gas pump and driving up prices on essential goods, while helping the Saudis' bottom line.

White House officials have said energy talks would make up one component of the Saudi leg of the president's visit, but they have played down the prospect of the Saudis agreeing to further increase oil production because the kingdom says it is nearly at production capacity.

But Bruce Riedel, who served as a senior adviser on the National Security Council for four presidents, said the Saudi Arabia visit is "completely unnecessary" under the circumstances.

"There's nothing that Joe Biden is going to do in Jeddah that the secretary of state or the secretary of defense, or frankly, a really good ambassador couldn't do on his own," Riedel said. "There's no outcome that's going to come from this that really warrants a presidential visit."

## Russia claims credit for Elena Rybakina's Wimbledon title

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) — The Russian Tennis Federation was quick to claim Elena Rybakina as "our product" on her run to the women's title at Wimbledon.

They then praised her training program in the country after she won the Venus Rosewater Dish as Wimbledon champion while representing Kazakhstan.

"It's the Russian school, after all. She played here with us for a long time, and then in Kazakhstan," Russian Tennis Federation president Shamil Tarpishchev told sports website Championat on Saturday after Rybakina beat Ons Jabeur 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 on Centre Court.

The 23-year-old Rybakina was born on Moscow and played in the Russian system until 2018, when financial issues led to her nationality switch.

There's been no official reaction from the Kremlin on Rybakina's Wimbledon success, but some commentators have claimed her victory as a Russian achievement and a symbolic snub to the All England Club's ban on players representing Russia and Belarus.

Players from those countries were banned from the Wimbledon tournament because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Some Russian state media outlets emphasized Rybakina's roots in Moscow, with others opting to call her simply a "representative of Kazakhstan."

The last Russian woman to win a Grand Slam singles title was Maria Sharapova at the French Open in 2014. Moscow-born Sofia Kenin, who left Russia as a baby and plays for the United States, won the Australian Open in 2020.

Kazakhstan, meanwhile, is ecstatic at having its first Grand Slam singles champion.

"Kazakhstani tennis player Elena Rybakina has achieved a historic victory in the extremely prestigious Wimbledon tournament. I heartily congratulate this outstanding athlete!" President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev wrote on Twitter.

Rybakina's win is the culmination of a long-term plan for tennis in Kazakhstan. The oil and gas-rich Central Asian nation has a long tradition of homegrown success in sports like boxing and cycling but has often relied on recruiting talented tennis players from Russia.

Rybakina, known for the big serve which has brought a tour-leading 253 aces this year, made the switch at 19 when her career stalled because of financial issues. The Kazakhstan Tennis Federation stepped in with an offer — represent them in exchange for the cash needed to support the global lifestyle of a tennis



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player. Rybakina said this week she feels like she lives on tour rather than in any one place.

When Rybakina — nervous, barely smiling, seemingly not quite sure what she had achieved — climbed into the stands at Centre Court on Saturday to celebrate with her team, she embraced first KTF president Bulat Utemuratov, then Yaroslava Shvedova, the former player who has become her mentor. Shvedova, similarly to Rybakina, was born in Moscow, switched allegiance to Kazakhstan in 2008 and won two Grand Slam doubles titles.

Rybakina's victory also comes at a tense time in relations between Russia and Kazakhstan.

The year began with Russia deploying troops to its Central Asian neighbor to suppress protests which turned violent. The government in Kazakhstan welcomed that move but has been notably reluctant to endorse Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which started the following month. President Tokayev said in front of Putin at a televised conference in St. Petersburg last month that Kazakhstan would not recognize the two Russia-backed separatist governments in eastern Ukraine.

Rybakina has been guarded in her comments on the invasion.

"I just want the war to end as soon as possible. Peace, yeah," she said after her quarterfinal match.

Of the ban on players representing Russia, Rybakina said: "When I heard this, this is not something you want to hear because we are playing sport. Everybody wants to compete. They were not choosing where they born."

## Crypto plunge is cautionary tale for public pension funds

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — When the Houston Firefighters Relief and Retirement Fund bought \$25 million in cryptocurrencies, with the fund's chief investment officer touting their potential, retired fire Capt. Russell Harris was concerned.

Harris, 62, has attended the funerals of 34 firefighters killed in the line of duty. He was already worried about his pension after an overhaul by state and city officials cut payments as they grappled with the ability to pay out benefits. He didn't see crypto, unproven in his eyes, as an answer.

"I don't like it," Harris said. "There's too many pyramid schemes that everybody gets wrapped up in. That's the way I see this cryptocurrency at this time. ... There might be a place for it, but it's still new and nobody understands it."

The plunge in prices for Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies in recent weeks provides a cautionary tale for the handful of public pension funds that have dipped their toes in the crypto pool over the past few years. Most have done it indirectly through stocks or investment funds that serve as proxies for the larger crypto market. A lack of transparency makes it difficult to tell whether they've made or lost money, let alone how much, and for the most part fund officials won't say.

But the recent crypto meltdown has prompted a larger question: For pension funds that ensure teachers, firefighters, police and other public workers receive guaranteed benefits in retirement after public service, is any amount of crypto investment too risky?

Many public pension funds across the U.S. are underfunded, sometimes seriously so, which leads them to take risks to try to catch up. That doesn't always work out, and the risk extends not just to the funds but to taxpayers who might have to bail them out, either through higher taxes or diverting spending away from other needs.

Keith Brainard, research director for the National Association of State Retirement Administrators, said he wasn't aware of more than a handful of public pension funds that have invested in crypto.

"There may come a day when crypto settles down and becomes adequately understood and mature as a potential investment that public pension funds might embrace them," Brainard said. "I'm just not sure that we're there yet."

The U.S. Department of Labor urges "extreme care" in crypto investments because of the high risks. The recent plunge in crypto prices has caused Washington to more closely scrutinize the freewheeling industry. After the collapse of \$40 billion crypto asset known as Terra, senators in both parties have pro-

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posed legislation that would regulate crypto for the first time, and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has called for more oversight of crypto ventures.

The Houston Firefighters Relief and Retirement Fund's cryptocurrency investment wasn't very big — just \$15 million in what was then a \$5.5 billion portfolio.

It's not clear how that panned out in the cryptocurrency market slide this year. Officials from fund and the union didn't respond to multiple requests for comment. But the fund bought in when bitcoin prices were close to their peak of nearly \$67,000, and they've been on the decline since then, dipping below \$20,000 in June.

The fund's chairman, Brett Besselman, said in a first-quarter report that it was healthy with an overall rate of return of 33.7% in 2021. Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner said earlier this year that the 2017 overhaul is working well and, thanks to strong returns in 2021, has put his city's pension funds well ahead of schedule toward eliminating their unfunded liabilities.

Houston's experiment, which fund managers touted as the first announced direct purchase of digital assets by a U.S. pension plan, followed a series of bigger but indirect investments by two pension funds for Fairfax County of Virginia. They put over \$120 million into funds that seek opportunities in the crypto world, such as blockchain technology, digital tokens and cryptocurrency derivatives. As in Houston, the Virginia investments are a tiny share of the funds' \$7.2 billion in assets.

Since 2018, the Fairfax County Employees' Retirement System and Fairfax County Police Officers Retirement System have put money into venture capital funds that invest in blockchain and a hedge fund that seeks to harness some of the volatility inherent in the space, said Jeffrey Weiler, executive director of Fairfax County Retirement Systems. He said the goal was to invest in infrastructure that underlies blockchain technology, which managers continue to view as a high-growth area.

Crypto-related investments aren't necessarily deliberate. The Minnesota State Board of Investment manages a portfolio worth around \$130 billion for several public employee pension plans and other entities. A recent report shows it held small stakes as of Dec. 31 in the crypto exchange Coinbase Global and the bitcoin miners Riot Blockchain and Marathon Digital Holdings with a combined market value of \$5.3 million. It also listed two holdings of fixed-income securities from Coinbase with a market value of \$2.2 million.

Mansco Perry, the board's executive director and chief investment officer, said the board invests heavily in stock indexes, so those holdings were most likely in one of its index funds or were purchased by an outside investment manager.

"We don't own cryptocurrency, but if a company is big enough to be in an index, more than likely we own it," Perry said.

The Minnesota board may look at crypto-related investments someday just to learn about them, Perry said, "but it's not a high priority. ... I would say we're nowhere close to making an investment decision to move forward, but that doesn't mean we never will."

The country's largest public pension fund, the California Public Employees' Retirement System, known as CalPERS, took a tiny stake in 2017 in Riot Blockchain that grew to over \$1.9 million by late 2020. Securities and Exchange Commission filings show it reached \$5.4 million before CalPERS got out sometime in the second quarter of 2021. Officials declined to give details, but it was a miniscule play in CalPERS' total portfolio of well over \$400 billion.

According to SEC filings, the State of Wisconsin Investment Board apparently began testing the waters early last year with purchases of Coinbase, Marathon and Riot Blockchain. Those holdings grew to at least \$19.3 million, against a total portfolio of \$48.2 billion, by the end of the first quarter this year. Board officials did not respond to requests for comment.

New Jersey's main state pension fund appears from SEC filings to have started investing in some crypto-related stocks in the second quarter of 2021. As of the end of March 2022, the state had about \$9.5 million in combined holdings in Coinbase, Riot Blockchain and Marathon. New Jersey state treasury officials said they don't comment on specific investments.

Other public funds that have taken smaller stakes include the Utah Retirement Systems, which once held

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a \$13.2 million stake in Coinbase but doesn't anymore. The Pennsylvania Public School Employees' Retirement System held as much as \$2.6 million worth of Coinbase last summer but was down to \$681,000 by the end of the first quarter, after selling most of its stake, while adding about \$398,000 worth of Marathon starting in the second half of 2021.

Harris, the retired Houston fire captain, said he sees his pension as a contract that should be honored, given the risks that firefighters routinely take. While he's generally happy with how his pension fund has performed, he's still uneasy about crypto. He also points out that firefighters in Houston and many other U.S. communities generally aren't eligible for Social Security.

"There's just a lot of people out there, if they lose that pension it's over," Harris said. "Some of these older retirees, I just do not know how they're surviving."

## Biden defends pending visit to Saudi Arabia in opinion piece

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden, preparing for a trip to Saudi Arabia amid criticism of its poor human rights record, defended his decision in a newspaper opinion piece, insisting that he had long supported reforms and sought to "reorient but not rupture" relations with a longstanding strategic partner.

In the article posted online Saturday night by The Washington Post, Biden pointed to developments in the Middle East that he contended had made the region more stable and secure than when the Trump administration ended, among them intense diplomacy as well as military action against state-sponsored attacks. But his framing of the Saudi relationship in particular appeared defensive, especially with some in the U.S. demanding that he not lend legitimacy to the government with a visit.

Biden linked U.S. strength and security to countering Russian aggression and competition from China, then argued that engaging directly with countries like Saudi Arabia could help promote those efforts. The president said he aimed to strengthen a U.S.-Saudi partnership "going forward that's based on mutual interests and responsibilities, while also holding true to fundamental American values."

"I know that there are many who disagree with my decision to travel to Saudi Arabia," Biden wrote. "My views on human rights are clear and long-standing, and fundamental freedoms are always on the agenda when I travel abroad, as they will be during this trip, just as they will be in Israel and the West Bank."

It was notable that Biden's op-ed appeared in the Sunday opinion section of the Post, whose writer Jamal Khashoggi was murdered by Saudi agents in 2018.

On that issue, Biden contended he had responded with sanctions against the Saudi forces involved in the killing and issued scores of visa bans for anyone found harassing dissidents abroad. The president also noted that he released a U.S. intelligence report that asserted Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had approved of the operation that led to Khashoggi's murder.

Biden is expected to meet with the crown prince during his trip.

## Today in History: Alexander Hamilton's fatal duel

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, July 11, the 192nd day of 2022. There are 173 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 11, 1804, Vice President Aaron Burr mortally wounded former Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton during a pistol duel in Weehawken, New Jersey. (Hamilton died the next day.)

On this date:

In 1798, the U.S. Marine Corps was formally re-established by a congressional act that also created the U.S. Marine Band.

In 1859, Big Ben, the great bell inside the famous London clock tower, chimed for the first time.

In 1864, Confederate forces led by General Jubal Early began an abortive invasion of Washington, D.C., turning back the next day.

In 1914, Babe Ruth made his Major League baseball debut, pitching the Boston Red Sox to a 4-3 victory



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over Cleveland.

In 1955, the U.S. Air Force Academy swore in its first class of cadets at its temporary quarters at Lowry Air Force Base in Colorado.

In 1972, the World Chess Championship opened as grandmasters Bobby Fischer of the United States and defending champion Boris Spassky of the Soviet Union began play in Reykjavik, Iceland. (Fischer won after 21 games.)

In 1979, the abandoned U.S. space station Skylab made a spectacular return to Earth, burning up in the atmosphere and showering debris over the Indian Ocean and Australia.

In 1989, actor and director Laurence Olivier died in Steyning, West Sussex, England, at age 82.

In 1991, a Nigeria Airways DC-8 carrying Muslim pilgrims crashed at the Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, international airport, killing all 261 people on board.

In 1995, the U.N.-designated "safe haven" of Srebrenica (sreh-breh-NEET'-sah) in Bosnia-Herzegovina fell to Bosnian Serb forces, who then carried out the killings of more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys. The United States normalized relations with Vietnam.

In 2006, eight bombs hit a commuter rail network during evening rush hour in Mumbai, India, killing more than 200 people.

In 2020, President Donald Trump wore a mask during a visit to a military hospital; it was the first time he had been seen in public with one.

Ten years ago: Unflinching before a skeptical NAACP crowd in Houston, Republican Mitt Romney declared he'd do more for African-Americans than Barack Obama, the nation's first black president. Hillary Rodham Clinton became the first U.S. secretary of state to visit Laos in more than five decades.

Five years ago: Emails released by Donald Trump Jr. revealed that he'd been told before meeting with a Russian attorney during the presidential campaign that the Russian government had information that could "incriminate" Hillary Clinton. MSNBC "Morning Joe" host and former Republican congressman Joe Scarborough announced that he was leaving the Republican party, partly because of its loyalty to President Donald Trump. Seattle's Robinson Cano homered off Cubs closer Wade Davis leading off the 10th inning and the American League beat the National League 2-1 in the All-Star game.

One year ago: Billionaire Richard Branson hurtled into space aboard his own winged rocket ship over the New Mexico desert, beating out his rival Jeff Bezos and bringing astro-tourism a step closer to reality. Novak Djokovic tied Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal by claiming his 20th Grand Slam title, coming back to beat Matteo Berrettini 6-7 (4), 6-4, 6-4, 6-3 in the Wimbledon final. Actor Charlie Robinson, best known for his long-running role as the court clerk Mac Robinson on the sitcom "Night Court," died in Los Angeles at 75.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Susan Seaforth Hayes is 79. Singer Jeff Hanna (Nitty Gritty Dirt Band) is 75. Ventriloquist-actor Jay Johnson is 73. Actor Bruce McGill is 72. Actor Stephen Lang is 70. Actor Mindy Sterling is 69. Actor Sela Ward is 66. Reggae singer Michael Rose (Black Uhuru) is 65. Singer Peter Murphy is 65. Actor Mark Lester is 64. Jazz musician Kirk Whalum is 64. Singer Suzanne Vega is 63. Rock guitarist Richie Sambora (Bon Jovi) is 63. Actor Lisa Rinna is 59. Rock musician Scott Shriner (Weezer) is 57. Actor Debbe (correct) Dunning is 56. Actor Greg Grunberg is 56. Wildlife expert Jeff Corwin is 55. Actor Justin Chambers is 52. Actor Leisha Hailey is 51. Actor Michael Rosenbaum is 50. Pop-rock singer Andrew Bird is 49. Country singer Scotty Emerick is 49. Rapper Lil' Kim is 48. U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona is 47. Actor Jon Wellner is 47. Rapper Lil' Zane is 41. Pop-jazz singer-musician Peter Cincotti is 39. Actor Serinda Swan is 38. Actor Robert Adamson is 37. Actor David Henrie is 33. Actor Connor Paolo is 32. Former tennis player Caroline Wozniacki is 32. R&B/pop singer Alessia Cara is 26.