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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



Groton Daily Independent PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445 Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460 **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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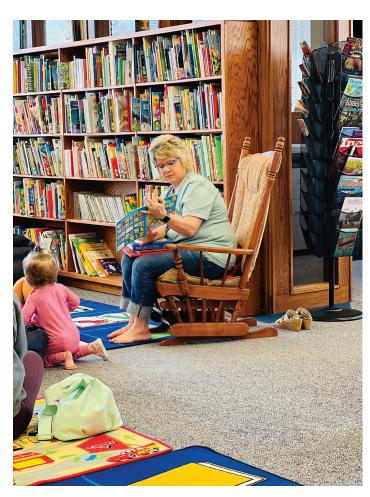
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This neat photo of the Super Moon rising Friday night was taken by Kelly Abeln. You can see the wind turbines in the background, and the old fashioned windmill is featured in front.

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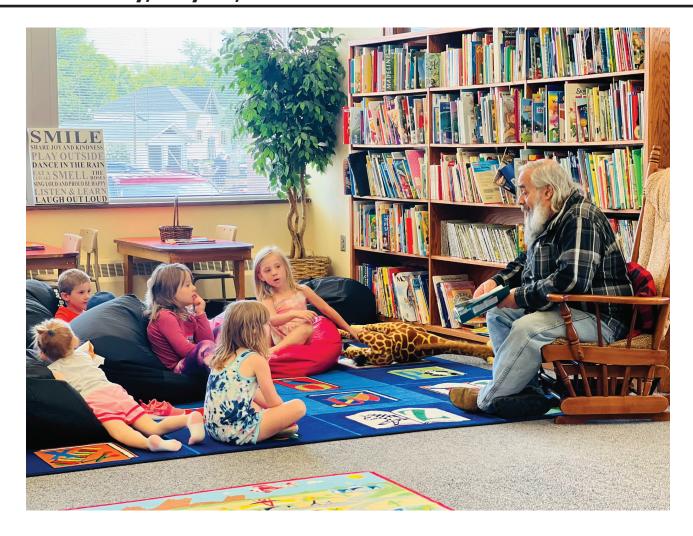
Story Time is held every Thursday during the Summer at 10 a.m. at Wage Memorial Library



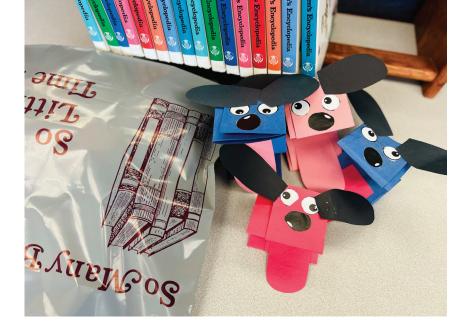


Jerrie Vedvei reads about teddy bears and manners; and helps children make their own construction paper bear. (Photos Courtesy April Abeln)

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Jerry Peltier reads about dogs and children enjoy making puppy dog puppets. (Photos Courtesy April Abeln)



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Heath & Katelyn Giedt entertains children with a petting zoo consisting of a puppy, kitties, baby pig, lamb and calf. Barnyard stories were shared inside the library with fun farm themed snacks. (Photos Courtesy April Abeln)





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Ashley Dunham, story time reader helps children make fun bookmarks.

(Photos Courtesy April Abeln)



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Becah Fliehs, Love to Travel, teaches children about the ocean and children enjoy fun ocean themed activities and snacks. (Photos Courtesy April Abeln)



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Brent Wienk, SD Army National Guard reads stories on heroes, lets the children explore an Army Humvee and shows them how MRE's are eaten by soldiers.

(Photos Courtesy April Abeln)



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Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

South Dakota churches suffering decline in affiliation and attendance

Bart Pfankuch South Dakota News Watch

Anyone who attends church in South Dakota is probably already aware of a troubling trend afflicting religious organizations and churches across the state and nation: the slow but steady decline in church membership and attendance.

It may be fewer cars in the parking lot, fewer people in the pews or fewer volunteers at charitable outings. It might be a pastor or priest who serves more than one congregation or is in a temporary post as a fill-in. It could also be the closure of a local church or growing concerns that closure could be imminent.

Those are some of the outward signs of what religious leaders and experts say is a dramatic decline in religious affiliation and church attendance that began in the late 20th century, picked up pace during the COVID-19 pandemic, and remains a growing cause for concern in the post-pandemic era.

Membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, one of the largest churches in South Dakota, is down 40% over the past 30 years nation-

Even as membership in many churches in South Dakota has fallen, holidays and special events can still fill the pews, including at this Chrism Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Sioux Falls. Photo: Courtesy Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls

ally and has fallen by almost 10% in South Dakota over roughly the past decade. Attendance at Lutheran churches in South Dakota is down about 14% since 2013, and the ELCA recently closed churches in Newell and Bradley, S.D.

Catholic and Methodist churches are also seeing declines.

In the Sioux Falls Catholic Diocese, which serves all of East River South Dakota, records indicate that church attendance in 2022 is down 26% compared with 2010 and that membership has also fallen.

The decrease in church affiliation and attendance follows other patterns that show Americans are turning away from organized religion and many of its tenets. Surveys show that among Americans, belief in God is lower than ever; that trust in religion is way down; and that fewer people believe the Bible to be the true word of God and instead see it as a book of only fables or legends.

Perhaps most worrisome for church leaders in America and South Dakota is that in recent surveys, the people who do not affiliate with any religion, the so-called "nones," are the fastest-growing segment of the national population as indicated in surveys about religion, faith and beliefs.

Religious scholars and church leaders say the decline in church membership and attendance is being fueled by many factors, most of them cultural shifts within society at large. They include demographic changes that are reducing rural populations where churches are a cornerstone; greater political and cultural

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divisions within modern society that are driving people apart; generational changes that have made young people less willing to join groups; and self-inflicted wounds within organized religion in the form of sexual and financial crimes and scandals.

On a practical level, a decline in church membership and attendance reduces church revenues and availability of human capital, and can thus weaken a church's ability to bring people together and perform charity work and other good deeds that help individuals and a community survive and thrive. It can also eliminate or reduce the effectiveness of a long-relied-upon way that people in cities large and small come together to get to know one another, to commune and form lasting personal relationships that strengthen communities.

On a spiritual level, some church leaders feel they are in a fight for the soul of the state, of the nation and of individual human beings.

Zach Kingery, a pastor at two United Methodist Churches in southeastern South Dakota, said it is impossible to overstate

divisions within modern society that are driving people apart; generational changes SYNOD SNAPSHOT: LUTHERAN CHURCH IN S.D AND U.S. IN DECLINE

Here is a look at some key data points from the past seven years for the South Dakota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, or Lutheran church, and below find statistics on the national ELCA Lutheran church system. Other organized religions in the United Stated are seeing similar declines.

South Dakota ELCA

Category	2013	2020	% change
Churches	208	202	— 3%
Members	106,000	96,700	— 9%
Avg attendance	28,480	24,476	— 14%
Member giving	\$47.0 mill	\$42.6 mill	— 9%
Total income	\$56.3 mill	\$49.2 mill	— 13%
Operating costs	\$32.9 mill	\$36.2 mill	+ 10%
National ELCA		·	

1990: 11,100 congregations; 5.24 million baptized members 2020: 8,895 congregations; 3.14 million baptized members 30-year change: congregations down 19%; membership down 40%

Sources/notes: Membership numbers for SD and US are for baptized members; average church attendance shown for South Dakota is for 2013 and 2019; operating costs do not include debt payments, capital improvements or mission support. Source is ELCA reports.

the important role churches play in communities and the lives of individuals. To Kingery, attending church is one important way people learn not only to get closer to God, and to live together in harmony and mutual support, but also to live a more godly life that makes the world a better place.

"Every week we close the service and I tell people that they are sent out into the world to share the word of God and be the light of Christ, to be more like Christ, to reach out to others and to help people," he said. "Peace, patience, joy, love, goodness, kindness, all the fruits of the spirit; those are meant to be shared with people."

Richard Swanson, a religion professor at Augustana University in Sioux Falls, said the drop in religious affiliation and attendance is troubling because now, perhaps more than ever, people need a place to gather, to share in triumphs and tragedies, to commune with other humans and a higher power, and to seek and perhaps find deeper meaning in their lives and in the world.

Swanson said the reduced interest in religion and church attendance in America could have the long-term effect of making individuals and communities more callous to the pain and suffering of others and less willing to help.

"I get up believing that in the universe, it is expected that little kids would not go to bed hungry, or that other basic problems must be solved," he said. "To me, losing a religious community would take away the place where I would learn social responsibility. Church communities have been one of the places where that sense of social responsibility has been fostered."

Religious leaders in South Dakota are well aware of the declining interest in and engagement with churches across the state, and they are taking steps to reverse the trend.

On a national level, the Catholic Church just kicked off a three-year effort that will trickle down to the diocese and parish levels and include a detailed look at attendance and membership trends while also

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seeking local solutions to increase church membership that can be duplicated across the country. The Sioux Falls diocese recently created a new position to foster growth of churches and to more assertively seek new church members.

The ELCA in South Dakota recently created a rural liaison position to aid small towns in protecting the church populations they have, but also to listen closely to the needs of rural churchgoers or potential members and respond to any desires or concerns to spur greater membership.

Church leaders in various denominations across the state are acknowledging they must adapt to the cultural changes happening outside the church. While still sharing

the scripture and promoting the virtues of Christianity, church leaders say they must be more welcoming and upbeat, listen more to the needs of individuals and communities, and foster an environment of encouragement and support within the church.

"As the world keeps turning and changing around us, we expect the church to always be the same ... well, nowhere in scripture does it say the church will be the same," said Constanze Hagmaier, bishop of the ELCA



"Without soul searching and without honesty, the church has no future at all."

-- Richard Swanson, professor of religion at Augustana University

South Dakota Synod of the Lutheran church. "God will be the same, but nowhere does it say the church must be the same. If we can't hear the voices that are out there and respond with faith, then we're emptying the church on our own; we're just helping them pack and go out the door because we refuse to open ourselves up to actually listen."

Those kinds of changes, Swanson said, will be critical to the future of churches and organized religion. "Without soul searching and without honesty, the church has no future at all," he said.

And the loss of a church, or decline in its reach or influence, can hasten the demise of small towns in South Dakota that are already suffering population loss or languishing economically.

Swanson said the loss of a church, especially in a small town, can be seen as one more reason for some residents to move away.

"Does it matter to the town if there's a grocery store or a church? Well, yes, it matters a great deal," Swanson said. "The town I grew up in lost its last grocery store, and now people say the town is hollowed out and there's nothing left. The loss of a religious community in a small town has that same impact because no longer is there a space where you sit with people, sing with people or think with people and explore spirituality with people."

Survey data reveals depth of decline

The downward slide in church attendance, affiliation with religion and trust in religious organizations are well documented in national Gallup polls taken over the past few decades.

The number of Americans who self-report as having no religious affiliation nearly tripled in the past 20 years. The number of so-called "nones" rose from 8% in 2001 to 21% in 2021. For several years in the 1950s, only 1% of Americans reported no religious affiliation.

The importance of religion in the lives of individuals, and religion's influence on the country as a whole, are also falling. Individuals who said religion is very important in their lives fell from 58% in 2001 to 49% in 2021. Gallup polling in 2001 showed that only 39% of Americans felt the influence of religion was falling in the United States, compared with 78% who said its influence was falling in 2021.

Poll results also show a decline in belief in the Bible, God, angels, heaven and hell.

Those changing beliefs have resulted in lower religious affiliation and reduced church membership and attendance, according to Gallup.

In 2001, 66% of Americans said they were a member of a church or synagogue, but in 2021, only 47% said they were members of a church, falling below a majority for the first time in the 80 years Gallup

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has asked that question. As recently as 1970, church membership was at 70%, where it hovered for more than six decades.

Meanwhile, attendance at churches (either in person or virtually) has also fallen significantly in the past 20 years.

In 2001, 42% of Americans said they attended church weekly or almost weekly and 41% said they had attended church in the past seven days. Only 15% said they never attended church.

Twenty years later, the slide in church attendance was clearly evident. In 2021, only 31% attended regularly only 29% attended in the past week. The number who never attend church services doubled to 31% in 2021.

During that 20-year period, faith in the Bible also fell. In 2001, 20% of respondents considered the Bible to be only fables or legends, but by 2021, that number had risen to 29%.

In addition, satisfaction in the role of religion in America has also declined, with 64% of people satisfied with the role of religion in the country in 2001, compared with only 48% in 2021.

All of these results come against the backdrop that

Americans still believe religion is a generally positive force in the country. In a 2013 poll, Gallup found that 75% of respondents said the country would be better off if more people were religious, and only 17% said greater religious affiliation would be a negative factor for the country.

Recent national polling also provides insight into why fewer people are engaging with religion or attending church. The most common reasons people gave for not attending church were preferring to worship on their own (44%); disliking organized religion (36%); or simply not considering themselves very religious (33%). Other factors leading to non-attendance include not wanting to be asked for money (16%), health problems (10%), and not feeling welcome (9%).

The factors in why people do attend church regularly appear to indicate that the message delivered is far more important than who is delivering it, where it occurs or the communal nature of church gatherings.

According to a 2017 Gallup poll, three-quarters of churchgoers said the top factors were related to the content of sermons, including those that brought them closer to understanding scripture or those that were somehow made relevant to their individual lives. Conversely, vibrant social activities, a dynamic leader or a good band or choir were far less influential in attracting people to a church.

While religious affiliation in South Dakota is higher than the national average, the state is experiencing many of the same declines in church membership and attendance, according to the Pew Research Center.

According to a 2014 national Pew survey broken down by state, almost 60% of poll respondents in South Dakota described themselves as evangelical or mainline Protestant, which includes Lutherans, who make up about 25% of total churchgoers in South Dakota, and roughly 22% said they were Catholics. No other religion had more than 1% affiliation in South Dakota.

Regular weekly church attendance was at 36% in South Dakota in 2014, compared with a national figure of 30% that same year but below the 41% who said they attended every week in 2007.

The percentage of state residents who rarely if ever attend church in South Dakota was 17% in 2007, but had jumped to 27% in 2014.

About 18% of South Dakotans described themselves as "nones," or having no religious affiliation, more



Connecting with children and young adults is seen as an important way to grow church membership in the future. Here, Methodist Pastor Zach Kingery teaches scripture to children at the United Methodist Church of Wessington Springs during a "Young Disciples Moment" in 2022. Photo: Courtesy Laura Kieser, UMC

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than double the percentage from a 2001 survey that showed only 8% of state residents reporting no religious affiliation.

Causes of decline not easily reversed

Swanson said demographic changes, especially in rural areas, are playing a large role in declining church membership and attendance.

As rural populations have shrunk, and young adults have increasingly fled small towns where they grew up to reside in larger cities, churches have suffered a generational break in attendance patterns, Swanson said.

"For people that grew up in small-town South Dakota, going to church was something they just grew up with; going to church was for them simply as ordinary a part of life as going to the grocery store or going bowling," he said. "People have been fleeing rural communities for a century, and when they land in big cities, they discover they don't have the same patterns there, and that population has become significantly disconnected from churches."



George Tsakiridis

Another reason for the declines in organized religion is the influence of politics within individual congregations as well as national religious denominations, said George Tsakiridis, a professor of religion at South Dakota State University.

From strong positions on abortion, sexuality or even the response of governments and individuals to the COVID pandemic, the more that political and cultural views permeate the church, the less likely some people will be to attend regularly, Tsakiridis said.

"You have political emphases within those denominations that then affect people in the pews. It allows people to say, 'Hey, I don't agree with this political stance the church is now taking, so therefore I don't feel comfortable here anymore'," he said.

The decline in church attendance can be traced in part to divisions in American society that have deepened in recent years, whether based on political party, liberal versus conservative thinking or in regard to religious beliefs, said Tsakiridis.

Swanson also sees the divide in politics and culture in America oozing into churches and hurting their ability to appeal to a wide range of people from differing backgrounds or ideologies.

"People have commented on the decreasing ability of Americans to talk to one another with civility," he said. "People in church organizations, just as people in political discussions, have found themselves engaging in vitriol more than in conversation, and that's a piece that has split some congregations, and it drives some people away."

Meanwhile, the sometimes binary approach to good and evil, and worthy and unworthy, that can arise in religious preachings, does not create a welcoming feeling among churchgoers or those who may consider joining a church, Swanson said.

"If people are done with politics, people are also done with religion in the same way because they're tired of the yelling and the blaming and the rigidity that goes with religion," Swanson said.

Swanson said religion, like other social groupings, has historically attracted leaders who are narcissistic or who have the capacity to abuse or disregard others, and he theorized that the church in America has been slow to recognize that fact and to take steps to protect churchgoers or better screen for potentially troubled leaders. The abuse of children and vulnerable adults by priests and others in the Catholic Church, and the cover-up of the abuse and transfer of abusive priests from one place to another, has caused a distrust of religion in general in America that is hard to shake, Swanson said.

Religious organizations are not alone in having abused human beings, Swanson said, noting that sports, education, entertainment and business and industry have all had to face improper behaviors from people in power. But the damage done to the church in such cases creates a deeper sense of pain that has turned some people away from organized religion in a general sense, Swanson said.

"People approach a community of faith, and somewhere deep in their being, they expect it to be a safe place," he said. "When that safety is compromised, and people are assaulted in a religious context, it af-

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fects us deeply, more deeply than if that occurred someplace else."

Meanwhile, the average age of churchgoers is rising, and people who eventually die or become unable to attend church are not being replaced by younger adults, Tsakiridis said.

"You have a lot of older churches. So many of the people in those churches are 60, 70 or 80 years old, and those mid-aged families that are missing often formed the heart of churches," Tsakiridis said.

Some people who never attended church or no longer do so may have a hard time making sense of the role religion is supposed to play in their lives, he added.

"My own theory is that many people shy away from organized religion either because they struggle with the problem of evil ... they wonder why a good God would allow all the bad things we see in the world," he said. "Or they struggle in a personal sense in that they grow up in a church that was very restrictive or hypocritical in their view, so they moved away from it."

Tsakiridis said people who are spiritual may feel that they can do better on their own without the support of a church to tell or guide them how to live.

"They still have some spirituality in that they believe in God or a higher power, and they live their life according to that, but they don't feel the need to attend church as part of that belief," he said. "They think to themselves, 'If I'm focused on just being a good person or helping my fellow human beings, I don't see the need for the church to create that within me."

On a basic level, Tsakiridis said, many people would like to see the church as a place to feel better about themselves and the world around them, and the sometimes didactic approach of religion has turned some of those people away.

"When people go to houses of worship and are made to feel bad about themselves ... they wonder why am I being treated this way," he said. "They're not thinking about whether this church has the proper theology or not, they're going to gauge how they are treated and how they feel in that community."

Swanson and Tsakiridis both said one big danger of the decline in religious affiliation and church attendance is that some people may fill the gap religion once played in their life by joining groups with far less noble motives.

"If people don't feel loved, that's not good for a society because there's suddenly a bunch of people who are not having a key need met in their lives," Tsakiridis said. "Whether it is social gatherings or intimate faith relationships in spiritual life ... something is lacking and is going to create problems for our society."

For example, individuals who have unmet spiritual needs may be more likely to turn to alcohol, drugs, violence or radical political views either to cover up their pain or seek solace with others who feel alone or who think alike, Tsakiridis said.

"Religion is one of the roots of our community that we're losing because we don't have that stable place to go to meet those needs," he said. "That affects the rootedness of individual human beings, and if there's a need that's not being met, that can start to take uglier forms."

Churches react and adapt to reverse declines



Constanze Hagmaier

Hagmaier said declining membership and attendance led to the recent closure of Lutheran churches in Newell, in Meade County, and in Bradley, in Clark County. The pastorship at Grand River Lutheran Church in Buffalo is one of several Lutheran churches without a pastor, she said. In some rural regions of South Dakota, Lutheran pastors have taken on "poly-site" leadership roles for two or more congregations at the same time, Hagmaier said.

The church is also looking at new ways of keeping communities engaged, including using technology to allow for remote attendance or encouraging lay church members to take a more active role in spreading the gospel outside the walls of the church.

Hagmaier said churches of all denominations need to be more flexible in the messages they deliver and how they are shared, and can only do so through a deep examination of what people are seeking in their lives in an ever-changing world.

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Scott Traynor

Hagmaier, elected bishop in 2019, acknowledges that changing the messaging and message delivery in churches will not be easy or quick. In some ways, the church must provide to potential members the sense that religion is a way to help not only oneself but also the community and the world as a whole.

"Oftentimes, when we look at civic resources and civic engagements, it's all about what can I do, it's all about me, me, me, me, me, and how we need to save ourselves, and if we can't do that, we get frustrated and all these things bubble up and we start pointing fingers and conflict arises," Hagmaier said. "But the church, ideally speaking, has this other voice, this countercultural voice, where if we take ourselves out of the picture and put God at the center, and that's part of our message, then we can take our own differences away and look at life from a different lens, and work for communal good."

That new reality — and a subsequent effort to align church messages more closely with the needs and desires of individuals — is true for middle-aged or older people, but is especially true among children and young adults, who may, or may not, form the backbone of churches and religion in the future. Hagmaier said.

Changing and adapting is critical in reaching and attracting the next generation of Americans and South Dakotans, who look at the world and institutions with a more critical eye and demand more payback for the time and energy they invest in a church or any organization, Hagmaier said.

"If we still think we live in the times that we lived in when our forefathers founded the land and the church, and these young people have all the pressing issues that we are not able to talk about, then they won't be interested," she said. "If the church is not relevant in their lives, they won't participate in church or be part of a church. They're very selective in how they engage."

For example, Hagmaier said, trying to use traditional methods to collect offerings at church may not work for children or young adults.

"If all I do is pass a basket ... I'm not sure my kids would make an offering," said Hagmaier, who has three children. "My kids, they never owned a checkbook and I don't know that they even carry cash."

Churches need to adapt and react to changing trends in church attendance very soon due to a breakdown in generational church attendance that could have grave long-term consequences for organized religion, Hagmaier said. "We're coming now to a generation where the parents never went to church," she said. "Right now, 7-year-old children are like, 'Church, what is that?""

Yet Hagmaier added that the church cannot and should not be so reactive to cultural changes in society as to lose focus on the core values and tenets of Christianity and the Lutheran church.

"The church has a clear and profound message at which the true God is at the center and from there we reach out to offer an alternative way of life. But if the church loses the focus we become fear driven and operate from a preservative mindset," she said. "If we believe that in everything God's at the heart of things we are free to engage in our culture and offer an alternative."

Father Scott Traynor holds a new position within the Sioux Falls Catholic Diocese called the Vicar for Lay and Clergy Formation, which puts him at the center of new efforts to invigorate church membership and attendance in the diocese. Traynor said that when Bishop Donald DeGrood took office in 2020, he immediately sought to reduce the trend of declining engagement with the Catholic Church in eastern South Dakota, and Traynor's new position was part of that effort.

Traynor said the Catholic Church throughout its history did not need or desire to be too evangelistic in its approach to attracting new members.

"The bishop put forth a very clear vision statement for the diocese: to build a culture of lifelong Catholic missionary discipleship through God's love," Traynor said. "That is a very clear and organizational focus for the efforts of our diocese to build up that culture precisely to disrupt that culture of decline in attendance and belief."

Traynor said the missionary effort will be based largely on work at the local congregational level in order to show support and take advice from Catholics who know what their communities and individual churches

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need to thrive.

Traynor said the Catholic Church for centuries relied on generational support in which parents attended church with their children, who then attended church with their children and so on. But Traynor said that process has been disrupted by foundational changes in society in which people are less interested in and attuned to the tenets of Christianity.

"We are in not just a generational change, but a change of epochs, from Christian to a newly resecularized culture ... in Western civilization," he said. Forty to 50 years ago, the Catholic parish was really the center of community activities, in that families had their entire social network organized through the parish, and that's just not true today."

Traynor said his role is to learn what existing and potential Catholics want in a church, and to seek out new, innovative ways of connecting people to the church and to God.

"People are drifting along with the mainstream culture today; they're going to tend to go further and further away from the church," he said. "If parents desire to pass on their faith to their children and their children's children, it takes a very focused, intense and sustained effort to make headway because it is not occurring naturally. It's not enough to just have a church building and expect that people will show up."



Two boys help out at Bethel Church in Edgemont, S.D., in 2020. Small-town churches across the state are working to remain viable by encouraging youth involvement and also by trying to attract priests and pastors to rural areas. Photo: News Watch file

Traynor said that in South Dakota, about 30% to 40% of people who identify as Catholic attend mass weekly, which is 10% to 15% higher than the rest of the country but still not a number to be celebrated. One goal of the church's new missionary efforts will be to encourage churchgoers to share their passion for God and scripture with Catholics who have stopped attending in order for them to return to the church.

Traynor said the Catholic Church in the United States in June launched a 3-year growth effort called the Eucharistic Revival, which is aimed at renewing the church through personal encounters with Jesus. The program invites creative initiatives first at the diocesan level, then at the parish level, finally culminating in a National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis in July 2024.

In the Sioux Falls Diocese, officials have gathered data on births, first communions, confirmations and marriages within the church and are comparing it to demographic data to look for places where the church might be weak or strong, and then adapt missionary strategies accordingly.

When it comes to the sexual-abuse scandal and cover-ups that have rocked the worldwide Catholic Church, Traynor said the church has embarked on a major effort to enact safeguards that will prevent such abuse in the future.

"The church has become a very proactive and exemplary leader in creating safeguards for children and vulnerable adults," Traynor said. "The church can never do too much to ensure the safety of children, so I would never say the church has done enough. But I would also say that in the world today, the Catholic church or school or parish is probably the safest environment of any public organization for any child."

And yet, Traynor acknowledges that the stain of abuse may not have yet been cleared in the minds of many Americans, and that it may have led in part to reduced Catholic Church membership and attendance.

"We're very focused and aware of this problem, and when it comes to that group of 'nones,' the person who may have lost that basic trust in either God or organized religion or the church, if they have lost that,

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there's been a rupture of trust and the best thing you can do to evangelize or help them take another step closer to Jesus and the church, is just to be a good human being to them and show that you are there to serve people's real needs, and share that the Catholic Church has a rich tradition of feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, caring for the sick, educating people and giving them health care, and visiting the imprisoned and marginalized."

Priest and pastor shortage a concern

Some religions, the Catholic and Lutheran churches among them, are also seeing a decline in the number of new priests and pastors who can run churches, and the shortage is more acute in rural areas. Officials from both churches told News Watch, however, that while recruiting and preparing new priests and pastors is a concern, the nationwide shortage of new church leaders has not yet become a major factor in church declines in South Dakota.

And yet, recruitment of new leaders and church employees overall is an ongoing part of efforts to

stabilize religious organizations. Hagmaier said the South Dakota Lutheran church offers new employees who move to the state an incentive in which the church pays off their student loans.

But finding pastors to commit to churches in sparsely populated rural areas remains a challenge, Hagmaier said.

Hagmaier said working as a pastor provides solid if not spectacular pay and benefits; starting pastors receive a salary and benefit package ranging from \$40,000 to \$60,000 a year in value, she said.

Rural positions become less attractive if pastors have to worry about the viability of a small-town congregation, she said.

"If your rural area is emptying out, with just a few people there, it's hard to support a pastor's salary, and if there's nothing left for ministry, that's a concern," she said.

Hagmaier said 75% of the ELCA congregations in South Dakota are considered rural, which creates challenges in filling open pastor positions or meeting unique needs of rural residents who want to attend church.

That problem led the synod recently to create the new rural liaison position to work with small communities, to keep the local Lutheran church viable and to learn what residents want and need from their church.

In communities where the church doesn't have a pastor or faces some other type of uncertainty, the liaison visits the town for two weeks to talk to church members and others in the community to stabilize the church and also find solutions to local problems, Hagmaier said.

The liaison recently visited the towns of Trent and Revillo in East River, and Hot Springs and Edgemont in West River, to help those churches maintain stability while they search for new pastors. In Edgemont, where there is no pastor, the rural liaison stepped in to aid in the burial of a church member and provide support to the community after the death.

The new approach to strengthening rural congregations, which Hagmaier refers to as "presence and accompaniment," is an example of how the Lutheran church is trying to respond to declining church membership and attendance in a collaborative rather than heavy-handed way.



Wessington Springs United Methodist Church Pastor Zach Kingery, at left, plays bass with the Praise Band during a community event at Shakespeare Garden in 2019. With Kingery are band members, left to right, Kirk Luymes, Lila Hoffman, Jessie Baker, Jessica Kingery and Lisa Edwards. Photo: Courtesy Lynda

Luymes, UMC

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Zach Kingery

"I don't even like my kids to tell me what to do, so why would I want a bishop to tell me or my community what to do?" she said.

Hagmaier remains optimistic that with some innovation and new focus on listening and adapting to the needs of rural communities, the Lutheran church can continue to thrive in South Dakota.

"I'm very excited about the future of the church and rural ministry, but it most certainly will look different than it did before," she said.

Young pastor takes positive approach

Kingery, 34, is a Kansas native who has been the pastor of two United Methodist churches in Jerauld County in east-central South Dakota for nearly six years.

Throughout his tenure as pastor, Kingery has been aware of the declining church membership and attendance across the country, but he has taken numerous steps to grow his congregations in Alpena and Wessington Springs.

"Going to church just for the sake of to going to church, that cultural obligation to go to church isn't present anymore," Kingery said. "There is a cultural decline in attending church, and it's easier to walk away from church when it's seen just as an institution, something we're just supposed to do when it doesn't really fit into your daily life and there's no connection with it."

Kingery said he has tried to create an atmosphere of positivity and encouragement in his congregations; he has developed close personal relationships with churchgoers; he has adapted sermons to be relevant to the small-town, rural congregations he serves; and he has taken the approach that Sunday sermons are a chance to put people on a path to living and spreading the word and ways of God after church services end.

"There is an increase in attendance at a life-giving church, those that are very present in their community, and very active. We're trying to shift the narrative from a church you just go to once a week to being a place you come to that encourages you for the week ahead."

Kingery said he knows that people come to church in part to feel more upbeat and more supported in their lives, even in times of pain or sorrow, and also to gain insight into the word of God that can help them live better, more complete lives.

While he often challenges church members to change and improve their lives, even if it takes conviction and hard work, he knows churchgoers do not sit in pews and listen to sermons to be made to feel quilty or bad about themselves.

"Church isn't a place for condemnation, but is a place for conviction and encouragement," he said. "If I stand up and tell you you're a sinner and scream at you, you're not going to be encouraged to change your life."

Instead, Kingery uses scripture as a conduit to share the word of God in a way that encourages church members to think deeply about problems and challenges in their lives, and to find a path toward improvement. And, he said, he asks them to share their positive religious experiences and belief in God with others, which can hopefully lead to greater church membership and attendance.

Kingery said that at the roughly 240 Methodist churches in South Dakota and North Dakota, the average weekly attendance is about 40 people. Even in two towns with small populations, Kingery said he has seen an increase in attendance during his six years as pastor, to about 45 people a week in Alpena and 65 to 70 each week in Wessington Springs. At Christmas and Easter services, he sometimes counts more than 200 people in attendance.

Kingery said he was encouraged this year to confirm 13 youths into the Methodist church in Alpena and another seven in Wessington Springs.

In order for churches to thrive and grow attendance long-term, Kingery said, church leaders must do more to engage with youth and make religion a larger, more integral and valued part of their lives.

"There was this movement that if we serve pizza and play games, that young people will come to church."

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Then they get older," Kingery said.

Instead, Kingery said he invests his time and energy in creating deeper, most honest connections with youth in order to show them the power of God but also to provide an opportunity to listen and work through the difficult questions young people have about their lives and the world around them.

"The teenagers I'm seeing be more invested in church are asking important questions and I'm doing my best to give them answers, even if sometimes the answer is that I don't know," Kingery said. "The ones that are responding the most are those who are finding connections and community through church. They ask hard, tough questions, and when you work with them through it and try to find answers together, then they want to be there."

Kingery refused to be daunted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges it created in enabling people to gather safely. Starting in March 2020, he watched as church attendance fell by more than half, and then dwindled even further as the virus spread.

In response, Kingery bought an FM transmitter and began offering weekly sermons over the radio. In an unusual take on the drive-in movie concept, as many as 85 church members would pull up to the church, remain in their cars, and listen to the sermons on the radio together while safely separated.

"They parked like how they sat in church, a few feet apart, and everybody turned their radio on," Kingery said. "They got to wave at each other and say hello from a distance."

Kingery also offered his sermons through online video platforms such as YouTube and on Facebook, a practice he continues to use in the post-pandemic period. The online sermons allow people to hear his preaching even if they cannot attend in person, and enable former church members who have moved to tune in from other states or from outside his pastoral area in South Dakota.

Kingery said turning the tide back toward greater church participation and attendance — and a stronger connection to God — will require pastors and other leaders to be more mindful of what people are seeking in their lives, and to deliver important messages in a way that inspires and encourages others to join.

"That's what the churches are kind of catching onto. Are we inviting people to church, am I being the church outside of these doors, how am I connecting with God during the week and connecting with others?" Kingery asks himself. "It has become more of an inviting process where other people in the community are catching on and being involved."

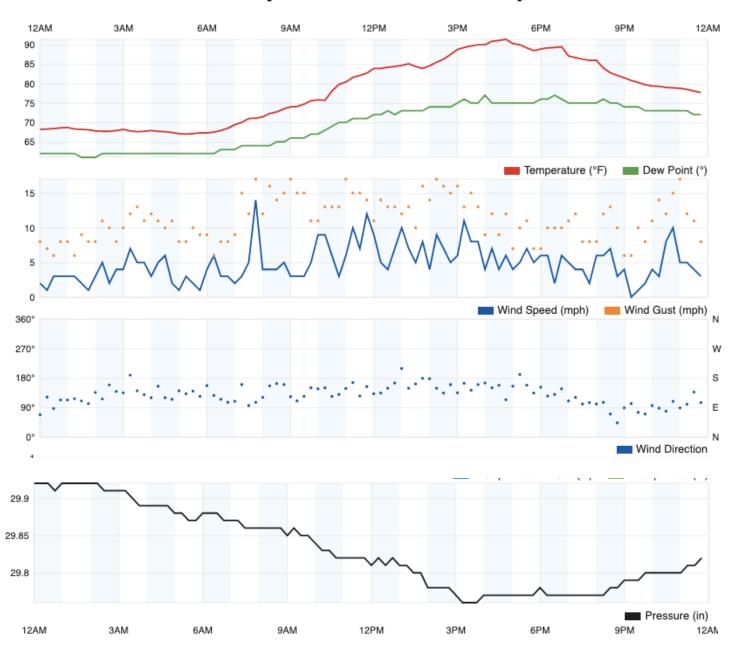
ABOUT BART PFANKUCH



Bart Pfankuch, Rapid City, S.D., is the content director for South Dakota News Watch. A Wisconsin native, he is a former editor of the Rapid City Journal and also worked at newspapers in Florida. Bart has spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and writing coach.

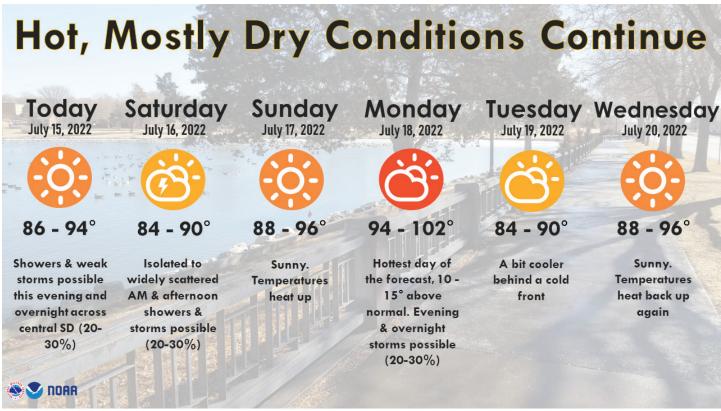
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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High pressure will lead to sunny skies today. Very warm to hot temperatures along with muggy conditions at times will continue through the 7 days, with only limited opportunities for precipitation (a fairly typical weather pattern for July across the Northern Plains).

Broton Pailr Independent

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Hottest week of the year on average (not a forecast)

Sisseton

July 15-21

Watertown

July 16-22

Aberdeen

July 17-23

Pierre

July 22-28

Mobridge

July 23-29

Average high: 84° Average low: 60° Average: 72° Highest all-time temperature: 113° July 6th, 1936 & May 30th, 1934

Average high: 83° Average low: 60° Average: 71° Highest all-time temperature: 110° July 21st, 1934

Average high: 85° Average low: 60° Average: 73° Highest all-time temperature: 115° July 6th & 9th, 1936

Average high: 89° Average low: 62° Average: 76° Highest all-time temperature: 117° July 15th, 2006

Average high: 89° Average low: 63° Average: 76° Highest all-time temperature: 116° July 15th, 2006 & July 16th, 1936



Heat Exhaustion

Heat Stroke

ACT FAST

- Move to a cooler area
- Loosen clothing
- Sip cool water
- Seek medical help if symptoms don't improve

Dizziness

Thirst

Heavy Sweating

Nausea

Weakness







Becomes Unconscious

ACT FAST

- Move person to a cooler area
- Loosen clothing and remove extra layers
- Cool with water or ice

Heat exhaustion can lead to heat stroke.

Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not given.







Stay Cool, Stay Hydrated, Stay Informed!



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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 91.4 °F at 4:30 PM Low Temp: 67.0 °F at 5:15 AM Wind: 17 mph at 11:00 PM

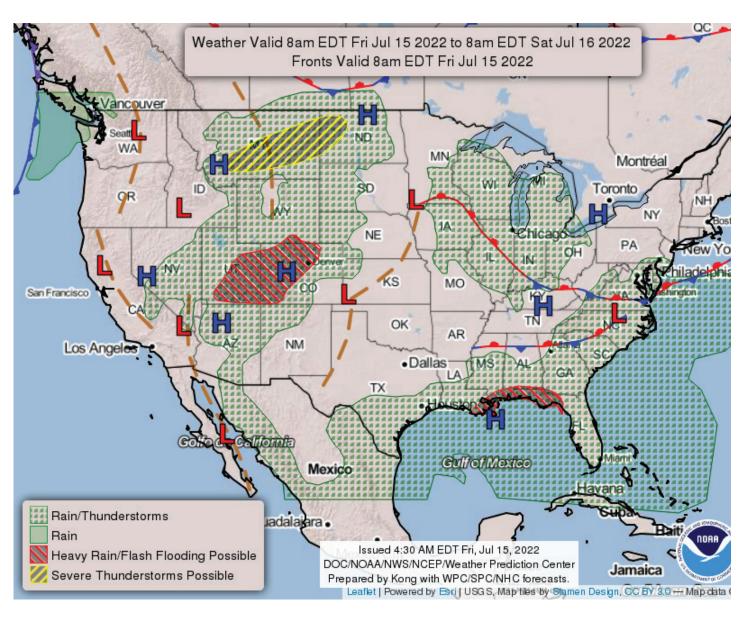
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 22 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 114 in 1931 Record Low: 41 in 1912 Average High: 85°F Average Low: 60°F

Average Precip in July.: 1.69 Precip to date in July.: 2.25 Average Precip to date: 12.70 Precip Year to Date: 13.83 Sunset Tonight: 9:19:47 PM Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:58:01 AM



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Today in Weather History

July 15, 1885: The first of three damaging tornadoes hit 7 miles NNÉ of Highmore, Hyde County, and moved to the northeast. Two small homes were destroyed before the funnel turned to the east, then northeast and north before lifting. This tornado was estimated to have an F2 strength and was seen in all directions for 20 miles. The second tornado appeared to be motionless 3 miles east of Harrold, and then moved east to Holabird, in Hyde County, where it destroyed two homes and dissipated. A third tornado, this one with an estimated F3 strength, formed to the west of Highmore and moved east into town, then lifted about 4 miles east of town. Three homes were destroyed, and about 20 other buildings were damaged at Highmore. A farmer was killed 2 miles east of town. Losses totaled about \$55,000, which included many new buildings, including a church and a skating rink.

July 15, 1986: Thunderstorms brought locally heavy rainfall to portions of Walworth to Marshall Counties. Three inches of rain in an hour and a half was reported in extreme northwest Marshall County. The highest rainfall amount was seven inches southeast of Bowdle. The rains caused lowland flooding, with water over several roads in Marshall County, including Highway 10, two miles east of Britton. In Britton, 3.86 inches of rain was reported.

July 15, 2006: Record heat occurred across central and north central South Dakota and into parts of northeast South Dakota. Afternoon high temperatures ranged from 105 to as high as 120 degrees. Record highs were set at Pierre, Mobridge, Kennebec, and Timber Lake. Pierre set a new all-time record high of 117 degrees, and Mobridge tied their all-time record high of 116 degrees. Kennebec and Timber Lake both hit a record high temperature of 112 degrees. The coop observer station 17 miles west-southwest of Fort Pierre tied the state record high temperature with 120 degrees. Other high temperatures for the day were 116 degrees at Onida and Mission Ridge, 114 degrees at Murdo, 112 degrees at Redfield and Blunt, 111 degrees at Stephan, 110 degrees at Conde and Gann Valley, and 109 degrees at Aberdeen.

July 15, 2011: A large upper-level high-pressure area built over the region bringing sweltering and humid conditions. This heat was the worst to hit the area since July 2006. Beginning on Friday, July 15th and persisting through Wednesday, July 20th, many locations experienced high temperatures in the 90s to lower 100s, with low temperatures in the 70s at night. Also, humidity levels rose to extreme levels. Surface dew point temperatures in the 70s and lower 80s brought extreme heat index values of up to 110 to 125 degrees. The dew points were some of the highest ever recorded in the region on July 17th. The dew point at Aberdeen tied the previous record with 82 degrees. Sisseton also tied their record with 83 degrees. Watertown came a degree shy of matching their record with 80 degrees.

The prolonged heat took its toll on livestock with fifteen hundred cattle perishing during the heat. Numerous sports and outdoor activities were canceled. Some of the highest heat index values included; 110 degrees at Mobridge; 111 degrees at Watertown; 113 degrees at Miller and Gettysburg; 114 degrees at Wheaton and Faulkton; 116 degrees at Pierre; 118 degrees at Sisseton; and 121 degrees at Aberdeen. The highest heat index value occurred at Leola with a temperature of 98 degrees and a dewpoint of 82 degrees, and the heat index hit 125 degrees. Click HERE for more information.

1888: The Bandai volcano erupts on the Japanese island of Honshu on this day in 1888, killing hundreds and burying many nearby villages in ash. Click HERE for more information from the History Channel.

1901: The city of Marquette, Michigan set their all-time record high temperature with 108-degree reading. 1916 - A dying South Atlantic Coast storm produced torrential rains in the southern Appalachian Mountains. Altapass, NC, was drenched with more than 22 inches of rain, a 24 hour rainfall record for the state. Flooding resulted in considerable damage, particularly to railroads. (David Ludlum)

1954 - The temperature at Balcony Falls, VA, soared to 110 degrees to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - The Big Thompson Creek in Colorado flooded for the second time in seven years, claiming three lives, and filling the town of Estes Park with eight to ten feet of water. (The Weather Channel)

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NO BIG THING!

A famous watchmaker finished what he considered to be his masterpiece. Carefully, he placed it between two clocks that were much older, yet accurate, timekeepers.

The one on the left turned to it and said, "I'm sorry for you," it sighed. "You're ticking bravely now. But you'll be exhausted when you get through thirty-three million ticks this year."

"Thirty-three million ticks?" gasped the frightened clock. "I can't do that!" And it shook violently and stopped.

"Don't listen to such trash," said the clock on the right. "You've only got to take one tick at a time. There, now, isn't that better? Now, take another tick. And one more. Easy now. Again. Isn't that better?"

"Is that all?" asked the new clock. "That's easy. OK. Here I go!" And it started bravely once again - one tick at a time. At the end of the year, it had made thirty-three million ticks with not one problem.

We do not need to worry about the next hour or day or week. Our Lord asks that we trust Him moment by moment - like a clock: one tick at a time.

The Psalmist talks about giving "understanding to the simple." Often, we complicate our lives and become overwhelmed and depressed by looking at "thirty-three million ticks" rather than "one tick." We awaken in the morning and before we realize it have scheduled a month's worth of activities into those few morning hours.

Dwight Eisenhower once said, "We need to do things that are important, not urgent. Life can be simple." Prayer: Help us, Father, to carefully separate the "need to dos" from the "want to dos" and live Godquided lives. Guide us step by step. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: It gives understanding to the simple. Psalm 119:130b

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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

No Date Set: 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)

No Date Set: 6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm

09/11/2022 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10 a.m.

09/02-04: 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

No Date Set: 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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News from the App Associated Press

US solicits help as it defines old growth and mature forests

Associated Press undefined

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — U.S. officials on Thursday solicited outside help as they craft definitions of old growth and mature forests under an executive order from President Joe Biden.

The U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management issued a notice seeking public input for a "universal definition framework" to identify older forests needing protection.

Biden in April directed his administration to devise ways to preserve older forests as part of the government's efforts to combat climate change. Older trees release large volumes of global warming carbon when they burn.

Biden's order called for the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management over the next year to define and inventory all mature and old growth forests on federal land. After that, the agencies must identify the biggest threats those forests face and come up with ways to save them.

There's disagreement over which trees to count. Environmentalists have said millions of acres of public lands should qualify. The timber industry and its allies have cautioned against a broad definition over concerns that could put new areas off limits to logging.

The Forest Service manages 209,000 square miles (541,000 square kilometers) of forested land, including about 87,500 square miles (226,000 square kilometers) where trees are older than 100 years.

The Bureau of Land Management oversees about 90,600 square miles (233,000 square kilometers) of forests.

GOP governors mulling 2024 run aren't rushing abortion laws

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem had pledged to "immediately" call a special legislative session to "guarantee that every unborn child has a right to life in South Dakota" if the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade. But nearly three weeks after that ruling, the first-term Republican remains unusually quiet about exactly what she wants lawmakers to pass.

Noem, widely considered a potential 2024 presidential candidate, isn't the only GOP governor with national ambitions who followed up calls for swift action with hesitance when justices ended the constitutional right to abortion that had been in place for nearly 50 years.

In Arkansas, which like South Dakota had an abortion ban immediately triggered by the court's ruling, Gov. Asa Hutchinson has said he does not plan to put abortion on the agenda of next month's special session focused on tax cuts. And in Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis, a top potential White House contender also running for reelection, has shied away from detailing whether he will push to completely ban abortions despite a pledge to "expand pro-life protections."

Noem has given no indication of the date, proposals or whether a special session will even happen to anyone beyond a small group of Statehouse leaders. When asked whether the governor still plans to call lawmakers back to the Capitol, her office this week referred to a June statement that indicated it was being planned for "later this year."

It's a change of tack from when the Supreme Court's decision first leaked in May and the governor fired off a tweet saying she would "immediately call for a special session to save lives" if Roe was overturned. The enthusiasm placed Noem, the first woman to hold the governor's office in South Dakota, in a prominent spot in the anti-abortion movement.

However, as the abortion ban became reality last month, Noem kept her plans a secret besides saying "there is more work to do" and pledging "to help mothers in crisis."

Some conservatives in the South Dakota Legislature wanted to take aggressive action, including trying to stop organizations or companies from paying for women to travel out of state for an abortion, changing

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the criminal punishment for performing an abortion and possibly clarifying state law to ensure the ban didn't affect other medical procedures.

Republican state Sen. Brock Greenfield said many South Dakota lawmakers attending the state party's convention on June 24, the same day as the Supreme Court ruling, expected Noem would call them back to Pierre this week for a special session, but "obviously that hasn't come to fruition."

"It might not be a bad idea to just let the dust settle and proceed very carefully, very strategically as we go forward," said Greenfield, a former executive director of the state's most influential anti-abortion group, South Dakota Right to Life.

The caution reflects the evolving landscape of abortion politics, as Republicans navigate an issue that threatens to divide the party while giving Democrats a potential election-year boost.

Nationwide polling conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research before the Supreme Court ruling to overturn Roe showed it was unpopular, with a majority of Americans wanting to see the court leave the precedent intact. Subsequent polling since the ruling showed that a growing number of Americans, particularly Democrats, cited abortion or women's rights as priorities at the ballot box.

In political battleground states, some other prominent GOP governors — including possible White House contenders — haven't charged to enact abortion bans.

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan has said he considers the abortion question settled in his state, pointing to a 1991 law that protects abortion rights. However, he has resisted efforts by the Democratic-controlled legislature to expand abortion access.

Virginia's Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin, also considered a potential presidential contender, wants lawmakers in the politically divided General Assembly to take up legislation next year, saying he personally would favor banning most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

During an online forum with abortion opponents he said he would "gleefully" sign any bill "to protect life" but acknowledged that Virginia's political reality might require compromise.

"My goal is that we ... in fact get a bill to sign," he said. "It won't be the bill that we all want."

In the wake of South Dakota banning abortions, Noem took a softer approach on the issue by launching a website for pregnant women. She even seemed warm to the idea of pushing for state-backed paid family leave.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who is in a closely watched gubernatorial race with Democrat Beto O'Rourke, took a similar approach to the high court ruling that could make it the most populous state to ban abortions. He issued a statement saying Texas "prioritized supporting women's healthcare and expectant mothers" and pointed to efforts to expand programs for women's health as well as fund organizations that dissuade women from having an abortion.

States with the nation's strictest abortion laws, such as Texas and South Dakota, also have some of the worst rates of first-trimester prenatal care, as well as uninsured children in poverty, according to an AP analysis of federal data.

South Dakota Right to Life's current executive director Dale Bartscher suggested Noem's action in a special session could be part of a turn in strategy: "An entirely new pro-life movement has just begun — we stand ready to serve women, the unborn and families."

He said he had been communicating with the governor's office on her plans but declined to detail them. But Noem in recent weeks has faced questioning for her stance that the only exception to the state's abortion ban should be to save the life of a mother, even if she has been raped, became pregnant through incest or is a child.

It's also not clear where she stands on some conservative lawmakers' desire to target organizations and companies that are helping women leave the state to access abortion services — a proposition that could undermine Noem's efforts to attract businesses to the state.

Brockfield warned that a special legislative session could result in "a whole lot of arguments over whether we're going too far, or whether we haven't gone far enough."

At the same time, abortion rights protesters have shown up at Noem's campaign office and named her in chants decrying the state's ban. They see momentum growing for an effort to restore some abortion

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rights in the state through a 2024 ballot measure, pointing out that South Dakota voters in 2006 and 2008 rejected Republican state lawmakers' efforts to ban the procedure.

"I've lived in this state my whole life and I've never seen people show up to protest for this issue like they have in recent weeks," said Kim Floren, who helps run an abortion access fund called Justice Empowerment Network.

The fund has also been strategizing for a special session, including hiring legal representation and planning protests in Pierre, Floren said.

Their desires may be dismissed in South Dakota's Statehouse, where Republicans hold 90% of seats, but abortion rights advocates say there is a fresh urgency in alerting voters to the potential impact of the state abortion ban.

"We're going to see people die," said Callan Baxter, president of the South Dakota chapter of the National Organization for Women. "We're going to see some real life consequences and the exposure is going to have a big impact legislatively going forward."

South Dakota identifies first monkeypox case

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Health officials said Thursday a man from the eastern part of the state has contracted the state's first assumed case of monkeypox, a disease that has emerged in more than 50 countries and 41 U.S. states.

The state public health lab identified the infection and forwarded the case to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for confirmation.

"The number of monkeypox cases has grown substantially over the past two months in the U.S. and globally," said Dr. Josh Clayton, state epidemiologist, adding that it was important to quickly identify the characteristics of monkeypox rash to curb the spread of infections.

Common symptoms include fever, fatigue, headaches, muscle aches, swollen lymph nodes, and a rash. Some people in the current outbreak have only reported rashes, which typically are found on the hands, feet, face or genitals.

The CDC only recommends the monkeypox vaccine in advance of exposure to health care workers and researchers who work with the virus.

The World Health Organization has said the escalating monkeypox outbreak in more than 50 countries should be closely monitored but does not warrant being declared a global health emergency.

Life sentence for man who fatally struck grandfather

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A South Dakota man was been sentenced to life without the possibility of parole for intentionally running down a North Dakota man who was picking up his granddaughter from practice at a sports complex.

Wade Bison pleaded guilty to murder in the March 21 death of Erwin Geigle. The 77-year-old man was repeatedly struck in the parking lot of the All Seasons Arena complex in Mandan.

Prosecutors say Bison, 39, was angry that he had to slam on his brakes when Geigle walked in front of his pickup truck, so he accelerated and repeatedly ran over Geigle.

"This never should have happened," Assistant Morton County State's Attorney Gabrielle Goter said Wednesday, referring to Bison's criminal history of 54 prior convictions. He was offered "opportunity after opportunity" through probation and programs, the Bismarck Tribune reported.

"And yet here we are. An innocent man lost his life just for walking across the street to pick up his granddaughter," Goter said.

Bison, at an April court appearance, told South Central District Judge Douglas Bahr he got upset because Geigle walked in front of him. He said he put his foot on the accelerator "just to rev the engine," but struck Geigle.

When he saw the extent of Geigle's injuries "I figured there was nothing I could do, nothing I could do. I freaked out," Bison said. "I just closed my eyes and hoped that I gave him mercy."

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Bahr at that hearing asked Bison, of Wakpala, if he intentionally ran over Geigle to make sure he was dead. "I did," Bison said.

"I don't think we can emphasize enough the serious nature of this situation," the judge said at sentencing, calling it "horrific, unprovoked and random."

Italy enters into political uncertainty after 5-Stars balk

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Italy entered into days of political and financial uncertainty Friday as Premier Mario Draghi weighed his options and political leaders considered theirs after coalition ally the 5-Star Movement sparked a crisis by withholding support on a government-sponsored bill.

On the immediate horizon are behind-the-scenes consultations through mid-week to see if Draghi still commands enough support to govern — which the Italian president and key parties clearly want — or preparations for snap elections as early as September.

Milan's FTSE Mib was trading 1.08% higher Friday though the spread on Italian debt verses the benchmark German bund widened to 220 points, up 1.12% from Thursday's close.

Draghi immediately offered to resign Thursday after 5-Star senators boycotted the vote, arguing that the conditions that created his government of national unity, which grouped parties on the right, left and the populist 5-Stars, no longer exist. But President Sergio Mattarella rejected his offer and told Draghi to go back to Parliament on Wednesday to see if he still had the support to govern.

The turmoil couldn't have come at a worse time for the eurozone's third-largest economy. Italy is facing soaring inflation and energy costs as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine, a prolonged drought that is threatening crops in the country's most productive regions and the ongoing implementation of its EU-financed program to recover economically from the coronavirus pandemic.

While Draghi might still have the numbers and the support of key allies to continue leading the government, some on the right are already gunning for an early election since they would stand to do well based on recent local election results and polls.

"With Draghi's resignation, this legislature is over for the Brothers of Italy," said Georgia Meloni, head of the right-wing party that is polling around 22%, nearly the same as the center-left Democratic Party. "We'll fight until the Italian people are given back a right that citizens of every other democracy have: the freedom to choose their own representatives," she said, with the hashtag #electionsnow.

Her frequent ally, former Premier Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, has urged Draghi to stay on, but has ruled out a newly composed coalition with the 5-Stars, blasting the party as a joke for having withheld support, in the end, over a new garbage incinerator for Rome.

"I have no words," Forza Italia's Antonio Tajani said Friday.

Friday thus opened days of back-room discussions among party leaders to decide what position to take on Wednesday, and if a new confidence vote is put before Parliament. Already, there were reports that the 5-Stars could vote in favor of a revamped Draghi program, but it's not at all clear that other coalition parties would want them back in the fold.

Guido Cozzi, professor of macroeconmoics at the University of St. Gallen, said international markets are alarmed at the instability and that Mattarella did well to try to keep Draghi in place since he is widely seen as a "vital pillar in guaranteeing the stability of Italian public finances."

"His coalition government was an unprecedented miracle in Italian political history," Cozzi said in a statement. "However, Draghi lacks an independent political force behind him, and his government will always depend on antagonist party leaders."

The 5-Star Movement, which was the biggest vote-getter in the 2018 national election, has seen its support tank in the ensuing years and would have everything to lose if Italy went to an early election.

Giuseppe Conte, the 5-Star leader, blamed others for forcing the Movement to boycott the confidence motion that was tied to some 26 billion euros in new financing to help Italians withstand soaring inflation and energy costs.

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The tipping point, Conte said, was the inclusion in the bill giving Rome's mayor extraordinary powers to manage the capital's garbage crisis before the 2025 Jubilee — powers that Conte bitterly said had been denied the 5-Stars' Virginia Raggi when she was mayor.

Ex-Premier Matteo Renzi, whose own power play made Conte's government fall last year, blasted the 5-Stars' "irresponsibility" this time around. He suggested the 5-Star play was essentially a gift to Russia, a reference to the 5-Star criticism of the government's military support to Ukraine to help defend itself against Moscow's war.

As if on cue, Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council headed by President Vladimir Putin, posted the pictures of ousted British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Draghi followed by a black box with a question mark, as if asking "who's next?"

Medvedev's post on his messaging app channel follows a stream of comments from other Russian officials who have attributed Johnson's downfall to his focus on spearheading Western efforts to punish Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. The political crisis in Italy has drawn similar sarcastic comments in the Russian media and social networks.

Renzi alluded to the Russian sarcasm, telling Parliament that Draghi must continue on as premier because "if today there is a crisis, in other nondemocratic capitals, there will be someone who is celebrating tonight or tomorrow."

"I'd like Italians to be celebrating, not others," Renzi said.

The Latest: Biden says US wants more on Abu Akleh's death

By The Associated Press undefined

The Latest on U.S. President Joe Biden's trip to the Mideast:

BETHLEHEM, West Bank — President Joe Biden says the death of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was an "enormous loss to the essential work of sharing with the world the story of the Palestinian people."

Speaking in Bethlehem alongside Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Biden said the U.S. "will continue to insist on a full and transparent accounting of her death and will continue to stand up for media freedom everywhere in the world."

Biden, struggling to pronounce her name, said Abu Akleh "was performing very vital work" when she was killed in May.

The U.S. State Department concluded earlier this month that Abu Akleh was likely killed by Israeli fire as she reported on a military raid on the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank. The report said it found no reason to suggest her killing was intentional.

Palestinian leaders, including Abbas, as well as Abu Akleh's family, have rejected the State Department report and called for accountability for the Israeli military.

Speaking before Biden, Abbas said, "the killers of the martyr journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, they need to be held accountable."

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

Biden heads to West Bank with little to offer Palestinians

As Biden visits, a look at those targeted in Saudi Arabia

Israeli politics a backdrop to Biden's visit to the Mideast

BETHLEHEM, West Bank — President Joe Biden says he remains supportive of an independent Palestinian state but says the "ground is not ripe" for restarting peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Biden delivered the assessment at a news conference with the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, in the occupied West Bank.

The comments were likely to disappoint the Palestinians, who are looking to the U.S. to press Israel into restarting peace talks. The last substantive talks collapsed over a decade ago.

Biden said the world "cannot wait" for a peace agreement and said that steps need to be taken to im-

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prove the lives of Palestinian people.

Abbas said "the key to peace" in the region "begins with ending the Israeli occupation of our land."

China's Foreign Ministry said Friday it won't take a backseat to the U.S. in the Middle East, as President Joe Biden visits the region to reassert American leadership and "not create a vacuum."

"The Middle East is not the backyard of any other country and there is no such thing as vacuum in the region," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told reporters in Beijing on Friday.

"We have made relentless efforts and played a key role in safeguarding peace, promoting development, and bringing a fair and equitable resolution on hotspot issues in the region," Wang added. "China is ready to work with the international community to continue to play a positive role in realizing peace and development in the Middle East."

Biden is using his trip to Israel, the West Bank and Saudi Arabia to shore up ties with regional partners.

BETHLEHEM, West Bank -- President Joe Biden has arrived in the biblical town of Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank for talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Biden was given a bouquet of flowers by a pair of Palestinian children as he arrived. He held his hand over his heart as a Palestinian band played the U.S. national anthem before he entered Abbas' office.

The brief meeting with the Palestinian leader comes after two days of nonstop talks with Israeli leaders. Biden is then to continue to Saudi Arabia for talks with Arab leaders.

In the West Bank, Biden is expected to announce some \$200 million in additional assistance to the Palestinians, after pledging \$100 million to hospitals that serve Palestinians in east Jerusalem earlier Friday.

While voicing support for a Palestinian state, Biden is not expected to float any new diplomatic initiatives during his visit.

Palestinian officials have expressed disappointment over the U.S. inability to restart peace talks.

On his way from Jerusalem, Biden's motorcade passed by a billboard posted by an Israeli human rights group saying, "Mr. President, this is apartheid." Human rights groups say Israel's treatment amounts to apartheid. Israel rejects the allegation as an attack on its legitimacy.

BETHLEHEM, West Bank — Palestinian journalists covering President Joe Biden's visit to the occupied West Bank are wearing black T-shirts bearing the image of slain Palestinian-American correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh.

The popular Al-Jazeera correspondent was killed in May while covering an Israeli military raid in the West Bank.

The Palestinians, including colleagues who were with her, say that Israeli soldiers intentionally killed her. Israel says its troops were in a battle with Palestinian gunmen, and it's not clear who fired the deadly bullet.

U.S. experts who inspected the bullet recently determined that Israeli fire likely killed her. But without providing evidence, they said there was no reason to believe the shooting was intentional. The findings have infuriated the Palestinians, including Abu Akleh's family. The black T-shirts worn by journalists in Bethlehem, saying "Justice for Shireen," were meant as a sign of solidarity with their slain colleague.

Biden was headed to the biblical town of Bethlehem to meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Biden has announced hundreds of millions of dollars of assistance to the Palestinians. But Palestinians are disappointed that there are no plans for a diplomatic initiative to promote the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

JERUSALEM — President Joe Biden has announced \$100 million in U.S. assistance for east Jerusalem hospitals that serve as "the backbone" of health care for Palestinians.

He spoke Friday during a visit to the Augusta Victoria Hospital, which provides advanced medical care, including radiation treatment for cancer patients and pediatric kidney dialysis, to Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

The funding is subject to approval by the U.S. Congress and would pay out over several years.

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Biden called the six hospitals "the backbone of the Palestinian health care system."

The aid came after the Trump administration slashed \$25 million to the hospitals in 2018 as part of a larger suspension of aid to the Palestinians. Biden has restored much of that assistance since assuming office, but has made no progress in resuming the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which collapsed more than a decade ago.

Dr. Fadi Atrash, the hospital's CEO, called Biden's visit a "courageous statement of support for the Palestinian people."

Biden was set to meet with Palestinian leaders in the occupied West Bank later on Friday.

Israel captured east Jerusalem, along with the West Bank and Gaza, in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three for their future state.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move not recognized internationally and views the entire city as its capital. The Palestinians want east Jerusalem to be the capital of their future state, and its fate is at the heart of the century-old conflict.

The six east Jerusalem hospitals, which symbolize the Palestinian presence in the city, have faced a funding crisis in recent years, as the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority has struggled to pay for advanced treatment for Palestinians.

Augusta Victoria Hospital, which is operated by the Lutheran World Federation, ended 2021 in severe debt, with more than \$70 million owed by the PA, according to a letter sent to U.S. lawmakers in May.

JERUSALEM — About two dozen pro-Palestinian demonstrators have gathered in east Jerusalem ahead of U.S. President Joe Biden's visit to a local hospital.

The protesters on Friday are holding Palestinian flags and posters of Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American journalist who was killed in May while covering an Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank. After two days of nonstop meetings with Israeli leaders, Biden is visiting the Augusta Victoria Hospital,

which serves local Palestinians, before heading to Bethlehem to meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The demonstration is several hundred meters (yards) from the hospital, with Israeli police standing at a distance outside the building. It was not clear if Biden's motorcade would pass by the crowd.

Biden is expected to announce over \$300 million in assistance for the Palestinians on Friday. While Biden has voiced support for a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians, there are no plans for any diplomatic initiative to resolve the decades-old conflict.

Friday's visit marks a tacit acknowledgement of Palestinian claims to east Jerusalem.

Israel captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war and considers the entire city its capital. But its annexation of the eastern sector, home to the city's most important religious sites, is not internationally recognized. The Palestinians seek east Jerusalem as the capital of a future state.

JERUSALEM — Saudi Arabia on Friday opened its airspace to "all air carriers," signaling the end of its longstanding ban on Israeli flights overflying its territory — a key step toward normalization between the two nations as President Joe Biden visits the region.

In a statement posted to Twitter hours before Biden is set to become the first U.S. leader to fly directly from Israel to the kingdom, Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation said it was announcing "the decision to open the Kingdom's airspace for all air carriers that meet the requirements of the Authority for overflying."

The announcement is an incremental step toward the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel and builds on the strong but informal ties the erstwhile foes have developed recent years over their shared concerns about Iran's growing influence in the region.

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has allowed flights between Israel and Gulf states to cross through its airspace. In 2020, then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly flew to Saudi Arabia for a meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and last week several Israeli defense reporters visited the kingdom and published news reports about their welcome.

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In West Bank, Biden embraces 'two states for two peoples'

By AAMER MADHANI, JOSEPH KRAUSS and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (AP) — President Joe Biden acknowledged Friday that an independent state for Palestinians "can seem so far away" as he confronted hopelessness about the stagnant peace process during a visit to the West Bank.

"The Palestinian people are hurting now," he said. "You can just feel it. Your grief and frustration. In the United States, we can feel it."

Biden commented during a joint appearance in Bethlehem with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. Although he's announced \$316 million in financial assistance for the Palestinians during his visit, there's no clear path to getting peace talks back on track.

"Even if the ground is not ripe at this moment to restart negotiations, the United States and my administration will not give up on bringing the Palestinians and the Israelis, both sides, closer together," he said.

Biden said the "Palestinian people deserve a state of their own that's independent, sovereign, viable and contiguous. Two states for two peoples, both of whom have deep and ancient roots in this land, living side by side in peace and security."

Abbas, in his own remarks, said it was time to "turn the page on the Israeli occupation on our land." He also said Israel "cannot continue to act as a state above law."

Biden was welcomed to Bethlehem by a pair of Palestinian children, who gave him a bouquet of flowers, and a band that played the U.S. national anthem.

Earlier in the day, he appeared at the East Jerusalem Hospital Network, which serves Palestinians, to discuss financial assistance for local healthcare. He's proposed \$100 million, which requires U.S. congressional approval, in addition to \$201 million for the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, plus smaller amounts for other assorted programs.

Israel has also committed to upgrading wireless networks in the West Bank and Gaza, part of a broader effort to improve economic conditions.

"Palestinians and Israelis deserve equal measures of freedom, security, prosperity and dignity," he said. "And access to healthcare, when you need it, is essential to living a life of dignity for all of us."

When Biden finished speaking at the hospital, a woman who identified herself as a pediatric nurse at another healthcare facility thanked him for the financial assistance but said "we need more justice, more dignity."

Biden's trip to the West Bank is being met with skepticism and bitterness among Palestinians who believe Biden has taken too few steps toward rejuvenating peace talks, especially after President Donald Trump sidelined them while heavily favoring Israel.

The last serious round of negotiations aimed at creating an independent Palestinian state broke down more than a decade ago, leaving millions of Palestinians living under Israeli military rule.

Israel's outgoing government has taken steps to improve economic conditions in the occupied West Bank and Gaza. But Yair Lapid, the caretaker prime minister, does not have a mandate to hold peace negotiations, and Nov. 1 elections could bring to power a right-wing government that is opposed to Palestinian statehood.

Meanwhile, the 86-year-old Abbas, whose Palestinian Authority administers parts of the occupied West Bank and cooperates with Israel on security, is more representative of the status quo than Palestinian aspirations.

His Fatah party lost an election, and control of Gaza, to the Islamic militant group Hamas more than 15 years ago. He called off the first national elections since then last year — blaming Israel — when Fatah appeared to be heading for another crushing defeat. Polls over the past year have consistently found that nearly 80% of Palestinians want him to resign.

Biden acknowledged this week that while he supports a two-state solution, it won't happen "in the near-term." The U.S. also appears to have accepted defeat in its more modest push to reopen a Jerusalem

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consulate serving the Palestinians that was closed when Trump recognized the contested city as Israel's capital.

Palestinian leaders also fear being further undermined by the Abraham Accords, a diplomatic vehicle for Arab nations to normalize relations with Israel despite the continuing occupation. Biden, who heads next to Saudi Arabia to attend a summit of Arab leaders, hopes to broaden that process, which began under Trump.

Hours before Biden was set to become the first U.S. leader to fly directly from Israel to the kingdom, Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation announced early Friday "the decision to open the Kingdom's airspace for all air carriers that meet the requirements of the Authority for overflying."

It signaled the end of its longstanding ban on Israeli flights overflying its territory — an incremental step toward the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel that builds on the strong, but informal ties the erstwhile foes have developed in recent years over their shared concerns about Iran's growing influence in the region.

Biden hailed the decision in a statement Friday as an important step to "help build momentum toward Israel's further integration into the region."

There's been hardly any mention of the Palestinians over the past two days, as Biden has showered Israel with praise, holding it up as a democracy that shares American values. At a news conference with Biden, Lapid evoked the U.S. civil rights movement to portray Israel as a bastion of freedom.

It all reeked of hypocrisy to Palestinians, who have endured 55 years of military occupation with no end in sight.

"The idea of shared values actually makes me sick to my stomach," said Diana Buttu, a Palestinian lawyer and political analyst. "I don't think Israeli values are anything that people should be striving towards." Both Biden and Lapid said they supported an eventual two-state solution in order to ensure that Israel

remains a Jewish-majority state. But their approach, often referred to as "economic peace," has limitations. "Mr. Biden is trying to marginalize the Palestinian issue," said Mustafa Barghouti, a veteran Palestinian activist. "If he does not allow Palestinians to have their rights, then he is helping Israel kill and end the very last possibility of peace."

At this point, the Palestinian goal of an independent state in east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza — territories Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war — appears more distant than ever.

Israel is expanding settlements in annexed east Jerusalem and the West Bank, which are now home to some 700,000 Jewish settlers. The Palestinian view the settlements — many of which resemble sprawling suburbs — as the main obstacle to peace, because they carve up the land on which a Palestinian state would be established. Most of the world considers them illegal.

Well-known human rights groups have concluded that Israel's seemingly permanent control over millions of Palestinians amounts to apartheid. One of those groups, Israel's own B'Tselem, hung banners in the West Bank that were visible from the presidential motorcade.

Israel rejects that label as an attack on its very existence, even though two former Israeli prime ministers warned years ago that their country would be seen that way if it did not reach a two-state agreement with the Palestinians. The U.S. also rejects the apartheid allegations.

Other banners along the motorcade route called for justice for Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was killed during an Israeli military raid in the West Bank in May. Israel says she might have been struck by Palestinian gunfire, while investigations by The Associated Press and other media outlets support Palestinian witnesses who say she was shot by Israeli forces.

The U.S. says she was likely killed unintentionally by Israeli troops, without saying how it reached those conclusions. That angered many Palestinians, including Abu Akleh's family, who accused the U.S. of trying to help Israel evade responsibility for her death.

In Bethlehem, Palestinian journalists covering Biden's visit wore black T-shirts with Abu Akleh's image on the front in solidarity with their slain colleague.

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Ukrainian rescue teams hunt for survivors in Vinnytsia

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

VİNNYTSIA, Ukraine (AP) — Rescue teams with sniffer dogs combed through debris in a central Ukrainian city on Friday looking for people still missing after a Russian missile strike a day earlier that killed at least 23 people.

Russian forces, meanwhile, pounded other sites in a painstaking push to wrest territory from Ukraine and try to soften unbending morale of its leaders, civilians and troops as the war nears the five-month mark.

The cruise missile strikes on Vinnytsia launched by a Russian submarine on Thursday were the latest incidents to take civilian lives and fan international outrage since President Vladimir Putin launched the invasion on Feb. 24. The campaign now has been focusing on Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, but Russian forces regularly fire upon targets in many parts of the country too.

Ukraine's Interior Ministry claimed Friday that Russian forces had conducted more than 17,000 strikes on civilian targets during the war, driving millions from their homes, killing thousands of fighters and civilians and rippling through the world economy by hiking prices and crimping exports of key Ukrainian and Russian products like foodstuffs, fuel and fertilizer.

More than 73 people — including four children — remained hospitalized and 18 people were missing after Thursday's strike, said Oleksandr Kutovyi, spokesman for the emergency service in the Vinnytsia region. Search teams were poring over two sites on Friday — an office building with a medical center inside, and a concert hall near an outdoor recreation area and park, where mothers with children often stroll.

Vinnytsia Gov. Serhiy Borzov said only 10 people among the nearly two dozen killed had been identified so far.

"Russia deliberately hit civilians and all those responsible for the crime must be brought to account," he said, denouncing the "barbaric behavior by Russia that tramples on international humanitarian law."

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, a deputy head of the president's office, said three missiles were used.

"There is no answer to the question why yesterday, and why in Vinnytsia," Tymoshenko said. "We expect every second and minute that this could happen in any corner of Ukraine."

After initial silence after the strikes on Vinnytsia, Russia's Defense Ministry said Friday that its forces had struck an officers' club — which the concert hall was known for back in Soviet times.

Ministry spokesman Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said the Kalibr cruise missiles landed as "that military facility hosted a meeting between Ukrainian air force command and representatives of foreign weapons suppliers." He said attendees of the meeting were discussing prospective supplies of warplanes and weapons as well as work to repair Ukrainian aircraft.

"Participants of the meeting were eliminated in the strike," Konashenkov said.

His claim couldn't be independently verified. Ukrainian authorities insisted the site had nothing to do with the military.

Overall, Ukraine's presidential office said on Friday morning that 26 civilians were killed and another 190 were wounded by Russian shelling over the past 24 hours. That included three other victims in the Donetsk region, which along with neighboring Luhansk — nearly totally controlled by Russian forces — makes up the broader Donbas region.

"The situation in the Donetsk region is exacerbating every day, and civilians must leave because the Russian army is using scorched earth tactics," Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said. It appeared that the cities of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk were next in line for Russian forces, but it wasn't at all clear how soon such a push could begin in earnest.

Elsewhere, authorities in Mykolayiv said there were at least 10 explosions in the southern city overnight, accusing Russian fire of hitting universities. Vitaliy Kim, the head of Mykolaiv's military administration, posted on social media a video of smoke rising over the strikes.

Separately, the Russian news agency Tass, citing Russian-backed separatists, reported Friday that two civilians were killed and six others were injured after Ukrainian forces allegedly shelled a bus terminal in the Voroshilovsky district of the city of Donetsk a day earlier.

Also Friday, Daria Morozova, the human rights ombudsperson for the Moscow-backed separatist lead-

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ership in Donetsk, said a British "mercenary" died in captivity on Sunday. She said the man, whom she identified as Paul Urey, had died of chronic illnesses and stress.

"From our side, he was given the necessary medical assistance despite the grave crimes he committed," she said.

British Open | 1989 champion Mark Calcavecchia bids farewell

ST. ANDREWS, Scotland (AP) — The Latest on the British Open (all times local):

11:45 a.m.

Mark Calcavecchia followed a time-honored tradition and stood on the Swilcan Bridge on the 18th hole to wave farewell at his last British Open.

The 1989 champion at Royal Troon felt the emotions.

"Got a little choked up," Calcavecchia said after his second round of 10-over 82, which will ensure he will not make the weekend at St. Andrews.

The American's exemption as a past champion ran out in 2020, the year the British Open was canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic. He couldn't play last year at Royal St. George's because of injury and was invited by the R&A to close his Open career at the home of golf, at the age of 62.

His kids were there to watch him Friday as Calcavecchia went out in the first group.

"Forget about my golf," Calcavecchia said. "It wouldn't have mattered if I shot a pair of 75s or a pair of 85s, which I nearly did. It was about playing one more, my last one here at the home of golf, which is really cool to be able to end it here."

11:20 a.m.

Not for the first time, Tyrrell Hatton is on the charge at St. Andrews.

The English player holed a long-range putt at No. 10 for a fourth birdie of his second round and moved to 6 under, two shots off the lead held by Cameron Young — an afternoon starter.

Hatton is a two-time winner of the Dunhill Links Championship, a European tour event in Scotland that is partly staged at St. Andrews.

The umbrellas are down and sweaters have come off as the weather improves at the home of golf. So should the scoring, with the fairways made softer by morning rain.

Talor Gooch birdied the par-5 14th hole and was one off the lead on 7 under. Dustin Johnson, the former No. 1 who also plays on the LIV Golf series, birdied Nos. 9 and 11 to join Hatton on 6 under.

10:20 a.m.

Tiger Woods is out on the course for his second round at the British Open. He played it safe on the first hole this time.

Woods found the middle of the fairway, the middle of the green and two-putted for par.

That's a whole lot better than in the first round, where he hit a wedge into the Swilcan Burn from out of a fresh divot and ran up a double-bogey.

The two biggest movers early in the second round at St. Andrews were players who have signed up for LIV Golf, the Saudi-funded breakaway series.

Talor Gooch birdied two of his first three holes and was tied for second place at 6 under, two shots off the lead.

Paul Casey, the latest player to join LIV, was 3 under for his round after eight holes and at 4 under overall.

7:30 a m

Tiger Woods arrived at St. Andrews in shorts and a hoodie. He might also need an umbrella.

The second round of the British Open began under a light rain. That is likely to take some of the fire out of an Old Course that was so fast that it make the rounds go atrociously slow on Thursday.

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Of greater concern to Woods is making up ground. His 78 in the first round was good to beat only seven other players. Three of them were past champions in their 50s. Woods figures he needs a 66 or better to make it to the weekend.

Cameron Young leads Rory McIlroy by two. They don't tee off until the afternoon.

EXPLAINER: The Unification Church's ties to Japan's politics

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has unearthed long-suspected, little-talked-of links between him and a religious group that started in South Korea but has spread its influence around the world.

Police and Japanese media have suggested that the alleged attacker, Tetsuya Yamagami, who was arrested on the spot, was furious about Abe's reported ties to the Unification Church, which has pursued relationships with politically conservative groups and leaders in the United States, Japan and Europe. The suspect reportedly was upset because his mother's massive donations to the church bankrupted the family.

Many Japanese have been surprised as revelations emerged this week of the ties between the church and Japan's top leaders, which have their roots in shared anti-communism efforts during the Cold War. Analysts say it could lead people to examine more closely how powerfully the ruling party's conservative worldviews have steered the policies of modern Japan.

A look at the church and its deep ties to Japan's governing party and Abe's own family:

WHAT'S THE UNIFICATION CHURCH?

The church was founded in Seoul in 1954, a year after the end of the Korean War, by the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the self-proclaimed messiah who preached new interpretations of the Bible and conservative, family-oriented value systems.

The church championed anti-communism and the unification of the Korean Peninsula, which has been split between the totalitarian North and democratic South.

The church is perhaps best known for mass weddings where it paired off couples, often from different countries, and renewed the vows of those already married, at big, open places such as stadiums and gymnasiums. The group is said to have a global membership of millions, including hundreds of thousands in Japan.

The church faced accusations in the 1970s and '80s of using devious recruitment tactics and brainwashing adherents into turning over huge portions of their salaries to Moon. The church has denied such allegations, saying many new religious movements faced similar accusations in their early years.

In Japan, the group has faced lawsuits for offering "spiritual merchandise" that allegedly caused members to buy expensive art and jewelry or sell their real estate to raise donations for the church.

WHAT'S THE CHURCH'S LINK TO WORLD LEADERS?

Throughout his life, Moon worked to transform his church into a worldwide religious movement and expand its business and charitable activities. Moon was convicted of tax evasion in 1982 and served a prison term in New York. He died in 2012.

The church has developed relations with conservative world leaders including U.S. presidents Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush and more recently Donald Trump.

Moon also had ties with North Korea's founder Kim Il Sung, the late grandfather of current ruler Kim Jong Un.

Moon said in his autobiography that he asked Kim to give up his nuclear ambitions, and that Kim responded that his atomic program was for peaceful purposes and he had no intention to use it to "kill (Korean) compatriots."

WHAT WAS ABE'S LINK TO THE CHURCH?

Abe was known for his arch-conservative views on security and history issues and also was backed by

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powerful lobbies such as the Nippon Kaigi. He appeared in events organized by church affiliates, including one in September 2021.

In a video shown on a big screen at the meeting of church-related Universal Peace Federation, or UPF, Abe praised its work toward peace on the Korean Peninsula and the group's focus on family values. An emphasis on traditional, paternalistic family systems was one of Abe's key positions.

"I appreciate UPF's focus on family values," he said in the video. "Let's be aware of so-called social

revolutionary movements with narrow-minded values."

Reports of his appearance in the 2021 event drew criticisms from the Japanese Communist Party and cult watchers, including a group of lawyers who have watched the Unification Church activities and supported its alleged victims.

In a news conference Monday after the church's connection to Abe's assassination was revealed, the church's leader in Japan, Tomohiro Tanaka, said Abe supported UPF's peace movement but that he was not a member.

Police still have not publicly identified the group cited by the suspect, presumably to avoid inciting violence.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR JAPAN'S GOVERNING PARTY?

The ties between the church and Japan's governing party go back to Abe's grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, who served as prime minister and shared worries with Washington over the spread of communism in Japan in the 1960s as labor union activists gained strength.

Kishi, who was arrested as a war criminal but never charged, was known for his right-wing political views, and the Unification Church's anti-communist stance matched his views of Japan's national interests, experts say.

Kishi's close relationship with the church was publicly known. The church headquarters at one point was housed in a building next to Kishi's Tokyo residence, and he was seen with Moon in photos taken at the church and published in group publications. Media reports say the suspect believed that Kishi brought the church to Japan.

"Japanese leaders at the time saw the church as a tool to promote anti-communist views in Japan," said Masaki Kito, a lawyer and expert on religious businesses. For the group, showcasing close ties with prominent politicians was a way to get endorsement for its activity.

Ties between church-affiliated organizations and LDP lawmakers developed over decades since the church expanded, providing solid political support and votes for the governing party, experts say, though the group denied it.

A survey of 128 lawmakers obtained from police and published in the Weekly Gendai magazine in 1999 showed most attended events organized by the Unification Church's anti-communism affiliate, the International Federation for Victory Over Communism, also funded by Moon, and more than 20 LDP lawmakers had at least one church member in their offices as a volunteer.

WHAT IS BEING SAID BY THE CHURCH AND ITS CRITICS?

The church denied any favorable treatment by Kishi when it opened a Japan branch. Tanaka said Abe supported current leader Hak Ja Han Moon's peace movement, but denied any movement of money between the group and the LDP.

The church said Monday it had no records showing that Yamagami was a member. The church said it had had no direct relationship with Abe, although it interacted with other lawmakers through an affiliated organization.

Members of the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales, who watch the church, say they have repeatedly asked Abe and other LDP lawmakers to stop appearing or sending messages to the events organized by the Unification Church or affiliates while ignoring the long-standing church-related problems.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE PARTY?

"The assassination is shedding a light on the Unification Church," said Koichi Nakano, an international

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politics professor at Sophia University in Tokyo. "The church's relationship with the LDP's right-wing factions and its ultra-right-wing policies could come under close scrutiny," and lead to a reevaluation of Abe's legacy.

It could lead to revelations of how the party's views have distorted postwar Japanese society, while stalling progress of gender equality and sexual diversity issues, Nakano said.

Takuya Tasso, the governor of Iwate in northern Japan, said Friday that as a former bureaucrat and national lawmaker he knew about the LDP's links to the church and he said its alleged influence on voting and government policies should be thoroughly investigated.

Kansas City struggles with Missouri over police funding

By MARGARET STAFFORD and SUMMER BALLENTINE Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Leaders in largely Democratic Kansas City, Missouri, don't control the city's police department, hire the police chief or determine how the department spends its tax dollars. A 1930s-era law gives that power to a five-member board largely appointed by the Missouri governor, who since 2017 has been a Republican.

A longstanding dispute over that arrangement is erupting this summer. The two sides are preparing for a statewide vote in November on a constitutional amendment that would give the Republican-majority Legislature even more authority to set police funding.

A key legislative backer says Kansas City police need the support because some Democrats want to defund the force — a charge city leaders vehemently deny.

A local civil rights leader sued on behalf of city taxpayers, arguing that allowing the state to control the city's police force amounts to "taxation without representation" and discriminates against Kansas City's large Black population, which experiences much of its violent crime.

Mayor Quinton Lucas, who is the only person on the Board of Police Commissioners not appointed by the governor, has indicated the proposal will be challenged in court.

The debate echoes recent confrontations between Republican state officials and Democratic leaders of larger cities elsewhere over issues including voting rights, mask mandates and recognition of the Juneteenth holiday. And it comes as the nation continues to wrestle with racial injustice in policing.

Last year, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas and Gov. Brian Kemp of Georgia signed restrictive election laws that opponents claimed targeted Democratic strongholds. And school boards in largely Democratic areas defied governors in Florida, Texas and Arizona who sought to ban mask mandates during the height of the pandemic.

Kansas City, with a population of about 508,000, about 28% Black, is the only Missouri city without local control of its police force. It's believed to be the largest city in the U.S. in that situation, the mayor's office said.

After racial injustice protests in 2020 sparked calls for more police accountability, Lucas and some City Council members passed two ordinances that would have given city officials some control over how \$42.5 million of the police department's \$239 million budget for 2021-2022 fiscal year would be spent. The money would have been used to emphasize social service and crime prevention programs.

Critics, including the police union and former police chief, said the proposal was a roundabout way of defunding the department and would leave it with insufficient money to make it through the year.

Shortly after the ordinances passed, the state-appointed police board sued the city to undo them and won. The judge said state law gives the board exclusive authority over the police budget.

The fight prompted legislators to pass a bill requiring the city to increase police funding from 20% of its general revenue budget to 25%. Republican Gov. Mike Parson signed the bill June 27.

But there was concern the move would run afoul of a state constitutional ban on unfunded state mandates for cities. So lawmakers put an amendment to address that on the November general election ballot.

Lucas tweeted that "the bill represents the raw exercise of power by state lawmakers over the people of Kansas City," and would be challenged in court. He and other officials have noted the city already routinely funds the police department above the 20% requirement.

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State Sen. Tony Luetkemeyer, a Republican who represents counties in suburban Kansas City, said he sponsored the legislation to stand with law enforcement during a time of "radical attempts across the country by city councils to defund the police."

Melissa Robinson, a Democratic Kansas City Council member, said the current arrangement disenfranchises Kansas City taxpayers by allowing outsiders to decide how their tax dollars are spent.

She said supporters are strategizing how to persuade residents outside the city that the issue on the November ballot is centered on local control, a principle frequently lauded by Republicans.

"This is not about divisive conversations about blue lives and Black lives," she said. "It's the basic question of how government should work ... We never said we wanted to decrease funding, we just wanted to separate out some money and ask questions about better ways to address crime."

Luetkemeyer said all Missourians should care about how the Kansas City police department operates because the city is one of the main economic drivers in the state.

"If Kansas City sees a dramatic increase in crime because police are defunded, that's going to have a ripple effect across the entire economy in the state of Missouri," he said.

According to police department crime statistics, reports of the most serious crimes, such as homicides, sex assaults, robbery, fraud and weapons violations decreased 6% from 2020 to 2021.

Homicides in the city have fluctuated between 151 in 2017 to 157 in 2021, with a high of 179 in 2020. The statistics show 78% of homicide victims in the city in 2021 were Black men and women.

Gwen Grant, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Kansas City and the civil rights leader who filed a lawsuit over the funding issue, said the current arrangement is steeped in racism.

During the Civil War, Missouri was sharply divided between Union and Confederate supporters, with much of the Union support centered in St. Louis and Kansas City, which had larger Black populations than elsewhere in the state.

In 1861, Missouri Gov. Claiborne Fox Jackson, who supported the Confederacy, persuaded the Legislature to pass a law giving the state control over the police department in St. Louis. Missouri voters in 2013 approved a constitutional amendment returning that department to local control.

The state took over the new Kansas City Police Department in 1874. That changed in 1932, when the Missouri Supreme Court ruled the appointed board's control of the agency was unconstitutional.

But the state took back control in 1939 at the urging of another segregationist governor, Lloyd Crow Stark, in part because of corruption under highly influential political organizer Tom Pendergast. In 1943, a new law limited the amount a city could be required to appropriate to a police board to 20% of its general revenue in any fiscal year.

Grant said she did not expect supporters of state control to acknowledge the racist elements of the situation.

"You can't sidestep that," she said. "That's the big elephant in the room ... We are the only city of our size in the country that does not have control of its police department. If state control is so great, why is it that we are the only people with it?"

Wickremesinghe becomes interim Sri Lankan president

By KRUTIKA PATHI, KRISHAN FRANCIS and BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was sworn in as Sri Lanka's interim president Friday until Parliament elects a successor to Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who resigned after mass protests over the country's economic collapse forced him from office.

The speaker of Sri Lanka's Parliament said lawmakers will convene Saturday to choose a new leader after Rajapaksa resigned effective Thursday. Their choice would serve out the remainder of Rajapaksa's term ending in 2024, said Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana.

He promised a swift and transparent process that should be done within a week.

The new president could appoint a new prime minister, who would then have to be approved by Parliament. With Rajapaksa out, pressure on Wickremesinghe was rising.

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In a televised statement, Wickremesinghe said he would initiate steps to change the constitution to curb presidential powers and strengthen Parliament, restore law and order and take legal action against "insurgents."

Referring to clashes near Parliament on Wednesday night when many soldiers were reportedly injured, Wickremesinghe said true protesters will not get involved in such actions.

"There is a big difference between protesters and insurgents. We will take legal action against insurgents," he said.

Wickremesinghe became the acting president after Rajapaksa fled Sri Lanka on Wednesday, flying first to the Maldives and then to Singapore. The prime minister's office said Wickremesinghe was sworn in Friday as interim president before Chief Justice Jayantha Jayasuriya.

Sri Lanka has run short of money to pay for imports of basic necessities such as food, fertilizer, medicine and fuel, to the despair of its 22 million people. Its rapid economic decline has been all the more shocking because, before this crisis, the economy had been expanding, with a growing, comfortable middle class.

Protest leader Jeewantha Peiris, a Catholic priest, said they are "happy because we have come through a hard journey."

"We are happy, as a collective effort because this struggle of Sri Lanka was participated by all the citizens of Sri Lanka, even diaspora of Sri Lanka," he said.

Protesters cooked and distributed milk rice — a food Sri Lankans enjoy to celebrate victories — after Rajapaksa's resignation. At the main protest site in front of the president's office in Colombo, people welcomed his resignation but insisted Wickremesinghe also should step aside.

"I am happy that Gotabaya has finally left. He should have resigned earlier, without causing much problems," Velayuthan Pillai, 73, a retired bank employee, said as patriotic songs were blaring from loudspeakers.

But he added that "Ranil is a supporter of Gotabaya and other Rajapaksas. He was helping them. He also must go."

The capital regained a tenuous calm after protesters who had occupied government buildings retreated Thursday. But with the political opposition in Parliament fractured, a solution to Sri Lanka's many woes seemed no closer.

The country remains a powder keg, and the military warned Thursday that it had powers to respond in case of chaos — a message some found ominous.

Abeywardana, the speaker of Parliament, urged the public to "create a peaceful atmosphere in order to implement the proper Parliamentary democratic process and enable all members of Parliament to participate in the meetings and function freely and conscientiously."

Sri Lanka is seeking help from the International Monetary Fund and other creditors, but its finances are so poor that even obtaining a bailout has proven difficult, Wickremesinghe recently said.

The protesters accuse Rajapaksa and his powerful political family of siphoning money from government coffers and of hastening the country's collapse by mismanaging the economy. The family has denied the corruption allegations, but Rajapaksa acknowledged that some of his policies contributed to Sri Lanka's meltdown.

Maduka Iroshan, 26, a university student and protester, said he was "thrilled" that Rajapaksa had quit, because he "ruined the dreams of the young generation."

Months of protests reached a frenzied peak last weekend when demonstrators stormed the president's home and office and Wickremesinghe's official residence. On Wednesday, they seized his office.

Images of protesters inside the buildings — lounging on elegant sofas and beds, posing at officials' desks and touring the opulent settings — captured the world's attention.

The demonstrators initially vowed to stay until a new government was in place, but they shifted tactics Thursday, apparently concerned that an escalation in violence could undermine their message following clashes outside the Parliament that left dozens injured.

Protester Mirak Raheem noted that the lack of violence was important, though their work was far from over.

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"This is really something amazing, the fact that it happened on the back of largely peaceful protest," Raheem said. "But obviously this is just a beginning, that there is a longer journey in terms of the kind of work that has to be done, not just to rebuild the economy but to create public confidence in this political system."

The protests underscored the dramatic fall of the Rajapaksa political clan that has ruled Sri Lanka for most of the past two decades.

Rajapaksa and his wife slipped away in the night aboard a military plane early Wednesday. On Thursday, he went to Singapore, according to the city-state's Foreign Ministry. It said he had not requested asylum and it was unclear if he would stay or move on. He previously has obtained medical services there, including undergoing heart surgery.

Since Sri Lankan presidents are protected from arrest while in power, Rajapaksa likely wanted to leave while he still had constitutional immunity and access to the plane.

A military strategist whose brutal campaign helped end the country's 26-year civil war, Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother, who was president at the time, were hailed by the island's Buddhist Sinhalese majority. Despite accusations of wartime atrocities, including ordering military attacks on ethnic Tamil civilians and abducting journalists, Rajapaksa remained popular among many Sri Lankans. He has continually denied the allegations.

China leader Xi visits Xinjiang amid human rights concerns

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese leader Xi Jinping visited the northwestern Xinjiang region this week amid concerns over China's detention of a million or more members of primarily Muslim ethnic native minorities.

Xi called Xinjiang a "core area and a hub" in China's program of building ports, railways and power stations connecting it to economies reaching from Central Asia to Eastern Europe, the official Xinhua News Agency reported Thursday.

Under Xi, authorities have carried out a sweeping crackdown on Xinjiang's native Uygur and Kazakh communities following an outburst of deadly separatist violence.

Critics have described the crackdown that placed thousands in prison-like indoctrination camps as cultural genocide. The U.S. and others have placed officials responsible under visa bans for their part in extra-legal detentions, separation of families and incarcerating people for studying abroad or having foreign contacts.

Xi met with leaders of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, a supra-governmental body that operates its own courts, schools and health system under the military system imposed on the region after the Communist Party's rise to power in 1949.

Xi "learned about the history of the XPCC in cultivating and guarding the frontier areas," Xinhua reported. Xinjiang borders Russia, Afghanistan and volatile Central Asia, which China has sought to draw within its orbit through economic incentives and security alliances.

As Biden visits, a look at those targeted in Saudi Arabia

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reputation as a brazen leader who has ruthlessly silenced critics and dissent will cast a shadow over his meeting on Friday with U.S. President Joe Biden.

The royal has sidelined top princes who could pose a threat and overseen Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen. The 2018 killing of Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul still looms large — though the prince is credited with pushing through once-unthinkable changes, allowing women to drive and travel freely, permitting concerts, opening movie theaters and de-fanging the once-feared religious police.

Biden initially adopted a tough line with Saudi Arabia, describing it as a "pariah" on the campaign trail. After becoming president, he refused to speak directly with the crown prince and ordered the release of a U.S. intelligence report that implicated Prince Mohammed in Khashoggi's slaying.

He's changed his tone since, with the administration now focused on isolating Russia, hedging against

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China and grappling with high oil prices.

"I always bring up human rights," Biden told reporters on the eve of his Saudi visit but stressed the purpose of his trip is "broader" and designed to "reassert" U.S. influence in the Middle East.

Khashoggi's fiancee, Hatice Cengiz, said Biden's decision to visit Saudi Arabia is "heartbreaking" and accused the U.S. president in an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday of backing down from his pledge of prioritizing human rights.

Even after the harsh international criticism over the Khashoggi killing, the prince did not change course. Despite legal reforms to curb the death penalty, only four months ago the kingdom carried out its largest mass execution in recent memory of 81 men convicted on broad terrorism charges, around half of whom were minority Shiites.

"It's never been a country where you can speak freely, but what we've seen in the past five years is a total shutdown of the space for any public criticism or any hint that you might disagree with the authorities," said Adam Coogle, deputy director for the region at Human Rights Watch.

Here's a look at some of the people targeted in the prince's sustained clampdown:

MOTHER AND SON

Aziza al-Yousef, a mother of five, grandmother and former professor, is a women's rights activist who often hosted Saudi intellectuals at her home.

She was arrested in mid-2018 with other women's rights activists, including Loujain al-Hathloul, just weeks before the kingdom lifted its ban on women driving. They were branded traitors by state-linked media and faced vague charges connected to their rights work.

Some of the women said they were abused while in detention by masked interrogators, beaten, forcibly groped and threatened with rape. Al-Yousef and several others were released after 10 months but they face travel bans. Her husband and several grandchildren reside in the United States.

Her son, Salah al-Haidar, is a dual Saudi-U.S. national who lobbied for his mother's release during her imprisonment. He was arrested in 2019 with a group of writers who quietly supported greater social reforms and had ties to the women's rights activists. He was released only after Biden took office, but remains under travel ban.

CHILDREN OF AN EX-SECURITY OFFICIAL

Omar and Sarah al-Jabri, both in their early 20s, were detained in March 2020. Their father, former senior security official Saad al-Jabri helped oversee joint counter-terrorism efforts with the U.S. and now lives in exile in Canada. He has sued the prince in a U.S. federal lawsuit and accuses the royal of trying to kidnap, trap and kill him.

Omar was sentenced to nine years and Sarah to six-and-a-half for money laundering and unlawfully attempting to flee Saudi Arabia. The family also says al-Jabri's son-in-law, Salem al-Muzaini, was abducted from a third country, forcibly returned to Saudi Arabia, tortured and detained.

Rights groups say the arrests are aimed at pressuring al-Jabri to return to the kingdom, where his former boss, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, apparently remains under some form of detention.

Al-Jabri told "60 Minutes" last year that Prince Mohammed will not rest until "he sees me dead" and described him as "a psychopath, killer."

Al-Jabri's son Khalid, who resides in North America, says Biden's trip to Saudi Arabia reflects "an incoherent, no-consequence policy that is unlikely to yield any practical wins for the United States."

AID WORKER WHO TWEETED CRITICISM

In March 2018, plain clothes officers snatched Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, who had recently graduated from college in the U.S., from his work at the Red Crescent office. It would be two full years before his family would hear from him. During that period, his family claims he was subjected to beatings, electrocution, sleep deprivation, verbal and sexual assault.

He's serving a 20-year prison sentence followed by a 20-year travel ban for satirical tweets he had posted critical of the Saudi government.

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His sister, Areej al-Sadhan, an American citizen living in California, says he was not an activist but was keenly aware as an aid worker of the economic challenges facing young Saudis.

The case against him may have roots in an elaborate ploy that sparked a federal case against two Twitter employees accused of spying for Saudi Arabia. The men allegedly accessed the user data of thousands of Twitter accounts, including nearly three dozen usernames the kingdom had wanted disclosed.

POPULAR RELIGIOUS FIGURE

In September 2017, another Saudi wave of arrests targeted moderate clerics, academics and writers, including Salman al-Odah, an influential religious figure who was once a leader of the Islamist Sahwa Movement.

Al-Odah, also a former TV show host with 13 million followers on Twitter, had long called on the public to focus less on issues such as beards and dress length, and more on fighting corruption and misuse of power.

He has been in detention for nearly five years, and has yet to be convicted. His family says he faces 37 charges, some connected to his alleged ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Arab Spring uprisings. The prosecutor is seeking the death penalty.

His brother, Khaled, was sentenced to five years on charges that rights groups say include "sympathizing with his brother."

Still, al-Odah remains respected among religious Saudis because he's not been "paid out" by the government, said his son, Abdullah Alaoudh, a leading figure at DAWN rights group in the U.S.

"For the government he's dangerous because he has that religious authority ... that religious background," Alaoudh said. "He educated generations of scholars and students."

THE REFORMER

Abdulziz al-Shubaily, 38, is among a group of intellectuals and activists imprisoned for belonging to the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights, known by its Arabic acronym HASEM. They have been convicted on charges such as "incitement against public order," "insulting the judiciary" and "participating in an unlicensed association."

Al-Shubaily is serving an eight-year prison sentence and has an equally long travel ban upon release. He was sentenced in mid-2016 by the Specialized Criminal Court, which was established to try terrorism cases but has been used to try rights activists deemed a national security risk.

In 2013, prominent founding HASEM activists, Mohammed al-Qahtani and Abdullah al-Hamid, were sentenced to 10 and 11 years, respectively. Around a dozen members of the group are serving prison terms.

German climate activists aim to stir friction with blockades

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — "It's absolutely crazy to stick yourself to the road with superglue," admits Lina Schinkoethe. And yet, the 19-year-old recently landed in jail for doing just that, in protest at what she believes is the German government's failure to act against climate change.

Schinkoethe is part of a group called Uprising of the Last Generation that claims the world has only a few years left to turn the wheel around and avoid catastrophic levels of global warming.

Like-minded activists elsewhere in Europe have interrupted major sporting events such as the Tour de France and the Formula One Grand Prix in Silverstone in recent weeks, while others glued themselves to the frame of a painting at London's Royal Academy of Arts Tuesday. But Schinkoethe's group has mainly targeted ordinary commuters in cities such as Berlin who, on any given day this summer, might find themselves in an hours-long tailback caused by a handful of activists gluing themselves to the asphalt.

Their actions have prompted outrage and threats from inconvenienced motorists. Tabloid media and some politicians have accused them of sowing chaos and harming ordinary folk just trying to go about their business. Some have branded them dangerous radicals.

Schinkoethe says the escalation in tactics is justified.

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"If we wanted people to like us then we'd do something else but we've tried everything else," she told The Associated Press. "We've asked nicely. We've demonstrated calmly."

She recalls joining the Fridays for Future protests led by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg which saw hundreds of thousands of students worldwide skip school and rally for a better world.

"I really hoped something would change, that politicians would react and finally take us and the science of climate change seriously," she said. "But we're still heading for a world that's 3 to 4 degrees Celsius (5.4 to 7.2 Fahrenheit) warmer."

Such a rise in global temperatures is more than twice the 1.5-C (2.7-F) limit countries agreed to in the 2015 Paris climate accord. While progress has been made in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, experts agree the goal is still far out of reach.

Scientists agree that the world has no time to waste in cutting emissions, but have tried to counter 'doomism' by arguing that the world isn't heading for one single cliff edge so much as a long, steep slope with several precipitous drops.

"Each tenth of a degree matters," said Ricarda Winkelmann, a scientist at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research near Berlin.

"If we really start acting now and reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, chances are that we can limit some of the most severe climate impacts," she said.

Such messages are lost on many of those caught up in the blockades.

At two protests witnessed by The AP in June and July, several truckers got out of their cabs to berate the activists. One physically hauled two protesters off the road.

Other drivers, some of whom weren't affected by the blockade, also hurled abuse at the activists. A few expressed support for the climate cause but questioned the way the protests were conducted.

"They need to find a different way to do this than to block other people," said one driver on his way to work, who would only give his name as Stefan.

Berlin's mayor has called the street blockades "crimes," while the city's top security official is demanding that prosecutors and courts mete out swift convictions. So far, no cases have gone to trial.

Still, Schinkoethe believes she has no choice but to keep going.

"We need to generate friction, peaceful friction, so that there's an honest debate and we can act accordingly," she said.

That sentiment was echoed by Ernst Hoermann, a retired railway engineer and grandfather of eight who has been traveling to Berlin from Bavaria regularly to take part in the protests.

"We basically have to cause a nuisance until it hurts," he said as a police officer tried to unstick him from the road with the help of cooking oil.

Similar protests have resulted in weeks-long prison sentences in Britain, where the government has sought court injunctions to preemptively stop road blockades by the group Insulate Britain.

Hoermann, 72, said he isn't afraid of fines or the prospect of prison.

"Not compared to the fear I have for my children," he said.

Last Generation has recently tried to focus attention on Germany's plans to drill for oil and gas in the North Sea.

Despite having the most ambitious climate target of any major industrialized nation, Germany's centerleft government is scrambling like other European countries to replace its Russian energy imports and avoid painful fuel shortages in the coming years.

Schinkoethe says the number of people participating in the group's actions has grown from 30 to 200 in six months, and argues that the blockades follow the tradition of civil disobedience seen during the U.S. civil rights movement and the fight for women's suffrage.

"What we're doing is illegal," she said. "At the same time it's legitimate."

Manuel Ostermann, a senior member of one of Germany's police unions, accused the group of committing crimes while portraying themselves as victims.

"Where the process of radicalization gets going, extremism isn't far off," he wrote on Twitter.

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Members of Last Generation have tried to counter that, citing U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres who earlier this year said that "the truly dangerous radicals are the countries that are increasing the production of fossil fuels."

"I'm going to keep going until the government locks me and the other activists up for their peaceful protests, or gives in to our demands," said Schinkoethe.

Fetterman absence raises stakes for Dems in key Senate race

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Democrat John Fetterman posted a massive \$11 million fundraising haul during the second quarter. He's on an advertising spree that's made him a near-constant presence on television in Pennsylvania. And he grabs attention with snarky, irreverent social media posts.

The only thing missing from one of the most competitive U.S. Senate races this year is the candidate himself.

Fetterman, 52, has yet to return to the campaign trail in a significant way since a May 13 stroke required surgery to implant a pacemaker with a defibrillator and prompted a revelation that he had a serious heart condition.

The advertisements currently on the air were recorded before the stroke. He hasn't fielded questions from the press. And when the hoodie- and shorts-wearing Fetterman did make a campaign appearance, it was under tightly controlled circumstances and without advance notice to reporters.

Democratic hopes to maintain — or even expand — their fragile Senate majority hinge on the party's ability to capture the seat being vacated by the retiring Republican Sen. Pat Toomey. And with barely two months until voters can begin casting mail-in ballots, Fetterman is absent from traditional retail campaigning.

But in an otherwise anxiety-provoking election year for Democrats, party officials in Pennsylvania say they're no longer worried about Fetterman's campaign and that they are being told repeatedly that he'll be fine.

"The campaign told me they figured mid-July he'd start getting out," said Joe Foster, who recently retired as party chair in heavily populated Montgomery County.

Fetterman's campaign has provided little detail about Fetterman's health since early June, though it acknowledges he has not completely recovered from the stroke and sometimes struggles to speak smoothly. But they don't intend to wait for a full recovery and say Fetterman will be on the campaign trail soon.

Next up may be a July 21 fundraiser scheduled with Democratic Jewish Outreach Pennsylvania. Fetterman, the state's lieutenant governor, had been expected to speak there, though his campaign hasn't said whether those remarks will be delivered virtually or in person at the event in suburban Philadelphia.

Meanwhile, Democrats are taking some comfort from what they perceive as a relatively quiet campaign by Fetterman's Republican opponent, Dr. Mehmet Oz.

Since narrowly winning the GOP nomination, the celebrity heart surgeon has campaigned in 40-some — by his campaign's account — largely low-key affairs, such as drop-ins at businesses, diners and fairs.

He also took time out to attend Michael Rubin's party in Long Island's ritzy Hamptons on July 4 and delivered keynote remarks at May's annual meeting in Boca Raton, Florida, for the Direct Selling Association — a trade group for "multilevel marketing" companies such as Amway.

Then there was the campaign video he recorded — at his sprawling home in Cliffside Park, New Jersey, just across the Hudson River from Manhattan where he practiced medicine, filmed his daytime TV talk show "The Dr. Oz Show" and lived for more than two decades before seeking Pennsylvania's Senate seat.

That played neatly into the hands of the Fetterman campaign, which had already been attacking Oz as a fabulously wealthy carpetbagging New Jerseyan who is out of touch with regular Pennsylvanians.

"Pro tip: don't film an ad for your PA senate campaign from your mansion in New Jersey," Fetterman's campaign tweeted.

A Fetterman TV ad now on the air — recorded before his stroke in May — shows Fetterman calling the race a "fundamental choice" between himself who got into politics to be a mayor in Pennsylvania versus

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Oz who "just moved here to run for office."

It references a news report on Oz's financial disclosure that his assets are worth at least \$104 million and shows footage of Oz in February laying and kissing his new star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

"Hey, Doc Hollywood, save your money, Pennsylvania's not for sale," Fetterman says.

Then Fetterman flew a plane over weekend beachgoers on the New Jersey shore trailing a sign that said, "HEY DR. OZ, WELCOME HOME TO NJ! ☐ JOHN."

In perhaps the biggest trolling yet, Fetterman's campaign on Thursday released a video featuring Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi — star of the infamous MTV show "Jersey Shore" — telling Oz that she heard he moved to Pennsylvania to look for a job and reassured him not to worry "because you'll be back home in Jersey soon. This is only temporary, so good luck, you got this and Jersey loves you."

She then blew him a kiss.

In any case, Oz may have bigger tasks than proving his roots in Pennsylvania.

He's coming off a hotly contested primary campaign in which he absorbed more than \$20 million in attack ads questioning his devotion to conservative principles on things like guns and abortion.

Even with former President Donald Trump's endorsement, Oz endured three weeks of counting and recounting before declaring victory by fewer than 1,000 votes, or less than one-tenth of one percentage point, over former hedge fund CEO David McCormick.

That's raised questions about whether Oz can unify Republicans heading into the general election.

For now, Oz is centering his campaign on core GOP messaging, particularly blaming rising inflation on President Joe Biden's policies and trying to paint Fetterman as extreme.

On Thursday, Oz posted a 60-second campaign video online that showed him going for a jog in a park and welcoming Fetterman back to the campaign trail

"I'm glad Fetterman's healthy," Oz says, "so we can worry less about his heart and his hoodie and more about the crazy leftist ideas in his head."

GOP officials say they are confident in Oz's ability to appeal to moderates who are critical to victory in the swing state and Oz is getting help from the Koch-backed grassroots organization Americans for Prosperity and the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

The NRSC also has worked to raise questions in voters' minds about Fetterman's health.

Last week, it created a fake "Have You Seen This Person?" poster online, showing Fetterman's face beneath that ominous question and, in the bio, this piece of information: "Last Seen: 05/13/2022."

That was the day of Fetterman's stroke, just before a campaign event in Millersville.

While he's largely out of the public eye, Fetterman is still making fundraising calls and holding meetings with campaign staff, according to a campaign spokesperson.

He is living a relatively normal domestic life, doing chores like picking up his children and running to the grocery store, going out to dinner and taking day trips to Erie and Johnstown and a vacation to the Jersey shore.

An avid walker, Fetterman is getting his miles in, including nearly five miles on Tuesday, the campaign spokesperson said.

The campaign has released edited video clips of Fetterman, including an impromptu appearance last Saturday at a volunteer training session where he briefly addressed volunteers.

"I am feeling so great, and we will be back out on the trail soon," Fetterman told volunteers, somewhat haltingly. "We're almost at 100%."

Argentina: Import blocks usher in fears of looming shortages

By DANIEL POLITI and DEBORA REY Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Raul Amil has been in the auto parts business in Argentina for more than 25 years. He has lived through numerous economic crises in a country infamous for its seemingly constant crashes. But he says that what Argentina is living through now is unprecedented.

Amil is hardly alone.

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Business leaders across Argentina are scrambling, trying to deal with a fresh rash of import restrictions at a time when the government is trying to hold onto precious few hard currency reserves. The government is making it difficult to buy products from abroad and complicating life for companies trying to keep supplies stocked, which some warn could lead to shortages.

"Seeing the problems that exist today, you don't have to be a genius to realize that sooner or later there will be issues," Amil, who heads Ventalum, a manufacturer of aluminum auto parts that has 180 employees.

Juan Pablo Ravazzano, who heads the Argentine Chamber of Animal Nutrition Companies (CAENA), is one of the many business leaders in Argentina counting down the days until he says shortages will start becoming a reality.

"If it continues this way, in 45 to 60 days we will have shortages of raw materials," including amino acids, vitamins and minerals needed to manufacture animal feed and pet food, Ravazzano warned.

Import restrictions are nothing new in Argentina, a country that has long suffered from a chronic shortage of hard currency, which has only worsened in recent months as pressure on the local peso currency rises amid high inflation and soaring energy import costs.

Yet the government of President Alberto Fernández has tightened the screws on imports even further recently as it struggles to meet Central Bank reserve requirements that are part of a recent deal with the International Monetary Fund to restructure \$44 billion in debt.

The increased controls on imports was one of the last official acts of Martín Guzmán before he resigned as economy minister on July 2 as tensions within the governing alliance burst out in the open.

His successor, Silvina Batakis, has vowed to continue with the government's economic plan as she faces numerous challenges, including trying to tame one of the world's highest inflation rates that is running at more than 60 percent, while the peso continues to depreciate in the financial market amid stringent capital controls.

"The Central Bank doesn't have dollars. It doesn't have them now because it has an exchange rate system that is unsustainable," Marcelo Elizondo, an economic analyst who specializes in international trade and runs the DNI consultancy, said.

Argentines are so distrustful of their currency that they save in dollars but the government has placed strict restrictions on access to the U.S. currency. The official exchange rate is running at around half of what it costs to obtain dollars through operations in the financial market.

"The restrictions are basically a way to prevent the increase in the exchange rate so that it does not affect the inflation rate," Elizondo said. "Clearly, the economy is very affected."

That means companies must rely on the Central Bank to obtain permission to buy supplies that are critical to their operation.

"The Central Bank has the power to decide who will import and who will not ... and that isn't normal," said Daniel Rosato, the president of Rosato, which manufactures toilet paper and paper towels in Buenos Aires province. "If that isn't resolved quickly it will generate shortages, problems with productivity, companies that will have to stop because of a lack of supplies."

The government has vehemently denied shortages are a widespread problem even as it recognized that there may be cases where some products are difficult to obtain.

"There may be isolated cases of products missing from some shelves," Gabriela Cerruti, the presidential spokeswoman, said Thursday in a news conference. "But there are no huge situations of missing products anywhere nor any circumstance that would lead us to think ... of shortages."

Business leaders often find the import blocks particularly frustrating because they can prevent manufacturers from operating at full capacity and generating just the kind of dollars and jobs that the country needs.

"The manufacturing sector exited the pandemic in a good position, with a growth of 10%. But these restrictive measures due to a lack of hard currency can lead to a decline in growth," said Alejandro Bartalini, the owner of Metalcrom, which manufactures parts for the farm and oil sectors. "Today we're operating at 80, 90% of our productive capacity."

Amil, who runs the autoparts company, says that "the sad thing about this situation is that demand ex-

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ists" and the sector exports a majority of its production.

"This year we thought we were going to grow 20%, but now there is a large question mark due to these restrictions," he said. "This is a crisis of supply, not demand."

Martín Cabrales, vice president of coffee company Cabrales, says he has never seen this level of restrictions on imports in the more than 20 years he has been involved in the family business that has long relied on buying material from abroad because Argentina is not a coffee producer.

"The serious thing here is that they are limiting the raw material, coffee is a raw material," he said. "We think the government needs to prioritize raw materials so manufacturing does not stop."

Cabrales says that with its restrictions, the government fails to take into account global dynamics in the market because it provides quotas to access the official dollar market based on what a company imported last year in dollar terms. But the international price of coffee more than doubled in the last year and a half.

Cabrales is optimistic the issue "will be resolved" eventually "but in the meantime there could be short-ages."

Amid the worries about supplies, some are trying to see the positive side of the restrictions.

Sergio Asato, who owns the Japanese restaurant Social Sushi Izkaya, said that with prices of imported salmon, which is by far the most popular fish for sushi here, almost doubling recently, it is the perfect opportunity for Argentines to expand their palates.

"We're trying to help people get to know all the varieties that we have in the Argentine sea," Asato said. "This is an opportunity, if there's no salmon we can start to work on publicizing other species."

House making 1st attempt to protect abortion in post-Roe era

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House on Friday is expected to vote on two bills that would restore and guarantee abortion access nationwide as Democrats make their first attempt at responding legislatively to the Supreme Court's landmark decision overturning Roe v. Wade.

The legislation stands almost no chance of becoming law, with the necessary support lacking in the 50-50 Senate. Yet voting marks the beginning of a new era in the abortion debate as lawmakers, governors and legislatures grapple with the impact of the court's decision. By overturning Roe, the court has allowed states to enact strict abortion limits, including many that had previously been deemed unconstitutional. The ruling is expected to lead to abortion bans in roughly half the states.

Already, a number of GOP-controlled states have moved quickly to curtail or outlaw abortion, while states controlled by Democrats have sought to champion access. Voters now rank abortion as among the most pressing issues facing the country, a shift in priorities that Democrats hope will reshape the political landscape in their favor for the midterm elections.

Ahead of House voting, Democrats highlighted the case of a 10-year-old girl who had to cross state lines into Indiana to get an abortion after being raped, calling it an example of how the court's decision is already having severe consequences.

"We don't have to imagine why this might matter. We don't need to conjure up hypotheticals. We already know what's happened," Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar said Thursday on the Senate floor.

"Should the next little 10-year-old's right or 12-year-old's right or 14-year-old's right to get the care that she desperately needs be put in jeopardy?"

In the House, Democrats are bringing two abortion bills to the floor on Friday, one of which would prohibit punishment for a woman or child who decides to travel to another state to get an abortion. It specifies that doctors can't be punished for providing reproductive care outside their home state.

The Constitution doesn't explicitly say travel between states is a right, though the Supreme Court has said it is a right that "has been firmly established and repeatedly recognized." Yet the court has never said exactly where the right to travel comes from and that could leave it open to challenge or elimination, as the right to an abortion was.

Lawmakers in Missouri earlier this year, for example, considered making it illegal to "aid or abet" abortions that violate Missouri law, even if they occur out of state. The proposal was ultimately shelved.

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The second House bill, which first passed in September but stalled in the Senate, would enshrine abortion access as protected under federal law. It would also expand on the protections Roe had previously provided by banning what supporters say are medically unnecessary restrictions that block access to safe and accessible abortions.

"The bill takes Roe v. Wade into the law of the land and protects it from some of the assaults that have occurred since it became overturned by the Supreme Court," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said Thursday.

It would prevent abortion bans earlier than 24 weeks, which is when fetal viability, the ability of a human fetus to survive outside the uterus, is generally thought to begin. The bill allows exceptions for abortions after fetal viability when a provider determines the life or health of the mother is at risk.

The Democrats' proposal would also prevent states from requiring providers to share "medically inaccurate" information, or from requiring additional tests or waiting periods, often aimed at dissuading a patient from having an abortion.

Republicans have celebrated the end of Roe v. Wade and are expected to overwhelmingly oppose both bills, denouncing them as extreme. GOP Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma, who supports instituting a nationwide ban on abortion, accused his colleagues across the aisle Thursday of seeking to "inflame" the issue of abortion. He said proponents of the travel bill should ask themselves, "Does the child in the womb have the right to travel in their future?"

Only two Senate Republicans, Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Susan Collins, have been supportive of abortion rights, but they do not support the Democrats' proposal, calling it too far-reaching. They have introduced alternative legislation that would bar states from placing an "undue burden" on a woman's ability to obtain an abortion before fetal viability, among other provisions.

When pressed Thursday on whether Democrats should work with the two senators, Pelosi pushed back, "We're not going to negotiate a woman's right to choose."

Since the court's ruling last month, some activists have accused President Joe Biden and other top Democrats of failing to respond forcefully enough to the decision. Biden, who denounced the court's ruling as "extreme," last week issued an executive order intended to head off some potential penalties that women seeking abortion may face. His administration has also warned medical providers that they must offer abortion if the life of the mother is at risk.

Meanwhile, the Democratic National Committee has already launched a digital ad campaign to energize voters on the issue, warning that Republicans' ultimate goal is to outlaw abortion nationwide.

"We have to elect a couple more Democratic senators so that we can get around the filibuster so that we can pass legislation that truly impacts a woman's right to choose," she said. "There's no halfway measure."

Emmett Till accuser, in memoir, denies wanting teen killed

By JAY REEVES and ALLEN G. BREED Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. (AP) — The white woman who accused Black teenager Emmett Till of making improper advances before he was lynched in Mississippi in 1955 says she neither identified him to the killers nor wanted him murdered.

In an unpublished memoir obtained by The Associated Press, Carolyn Bryant Donham says she was unaware of what would happen to the 14-year-old Till, who lived in Chicago and was visiting relatives in Mississippi when he was abducted, killed and tossed in a river. Now 87, Donham was only 21 at the time. Her then-husband Roy Bryant and his half-brother J.W. Milam were acquitted of murder charges but later confessed in a magazine interview.

The contents of the 99-page manuscript, titled "I am More Than A Wolf Whistle," were first reported by the Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting. Historian and author Timothy Tyson of Durham, who said he obtained a copy from Donham while interviewing her in 2008, provided a copy to the AP on Thursday.

Tyson had placed the manuscript in an archive at the University of North Carolina with the agreement that it not be made public for decades, though he said he gave it to the FBI during an investigation the agency concluded last year. He said he decided to make it public now following the recent discovery of an

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arrest warrant on kidnapping charges that was issued for Donham in 1955 but never served.

"The potential for an investigation was more important than the archival agreements, though those are important things," Tyson said. "But this is probably the last chance for an indictment in this case."

A cousin of Till who leads the Emmett Till Legacy Foundation, Deborah Watts, said the memoir is new evidence that shows Donham's involvement in the case and is particularly important when combined with the arrest warrant.

"I truly believe these developments cannot be ignored by the authorities in Mississippi," she said.

In the memoir, Donham says she attempted to help Till once he'd been located by her husband and brother-in-law and brought to her in the middle of the night for identification.

"I did not wish Emmett any harm and could not stop harm from coming to him, since I didn't know what was planned for him," Donham says in the manuscript compiled by her daughter-in-law. "I tried to protect him by telling Roy that 'He's not the one. That's not him. Please take him home." She claims in the manuscript that Till, who had been dragged from a family home at gunpoint in the middle of the night, spoke up and identified himself.

Donham adds that she "always felt like a victim as well as Emmett" and "paid dearly with an altered life" for what happened to him.

"I have always prayed that God would bless Emmett's family. I am truly sorry for the pain his family was caused," she says at the end of the manuscript, which is signed "Carolyn" but indicates that it was written by her daughter-in-law Marsha Bryant.

The memoir is remarkable not only because it's the most extensive account of the sensational episode ever recorded by Donham, but also because it contains contradictions that raise questions about her truthfulness through the years, said Dale Killinger, a retired FBI agent who investigated the case more than 15 years ago.

For instance, Donham claims in the memoir to have yelled for help after being confronted by Till inside the family grocery store in Money, Mississippi, yet no one ever reported hearing her screams, Killinger said. Also, Donham never previously mentioned that she and Roy Bryant chatted about the abduction. In the manuscript, she says they did.

"That seems ludicrous," Killinger said. "How would you have a major event in your life and not talk about it?"

The Justice Department closed its most recent investigation into the case in December and Mississippi authorities haven't given any indication they plan to pursue the kidnapping warrant or other charges against Donham. But the Till family is pushing authorities to act.

Keith Beauchamp, a filmmaker whose documentary preceded the Justice Department probe in which Killinger was involved and that ended without charges in 2007, said the memoir shows that Donham "is culpable in the kidnapping and murder of Emmett Louis Till and to not hold her accountable for her actions, is an injustice to us all."

"Our fight will continue until justice is finally served," Beauchamp said.

It was Beauchamp, along with two of Till's relatives, who discovered the arrest warrant with Donham's name on it earlier this month in the basement of a Mississippi courthouse.

Tyson, the historian who provided the roughly 35,000-word manuscript to the AP, helped spur the government's most recent investigation into the killing by publishing a book in 2017 in which he quoted Donham as saying she lied when she claimed Till grabbed her, whistled and made sexual advances. In the memoir, however, she claims Till did do those things. During the most recent investigation, Donham told the FBI she had never recanted, the Justice Department said.

Tyson said Donham's statements in the memoir exonerating herself of wrongdoing need to be taken with "a good-sized shovel full of salt," particularly her claim that Till identified himself to the men who took him from the family home and later admitted killing him.

"Two big white men with guns came and dragged him out of his aunt and great-uncle's house at 2 o'clock in the morning in the Mississippi Delta in 1955. I do not believe for one minute that he identified

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himself," Tyson said.

Neither Donham nor any of her relatives have responded to messages and phone calls from the AP seeking comment. It is unclear where Donham currently lives or if she has an attorney. Her last known address was in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Russian missiles kill at least 23 in Ukraine, wound over 100

By MARIA GRAZIA MURRU and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

VİNNYTSIA, Ukraine (AP) — Russian missiles struck a city in central Ukraine on Thursday, killing at least 23 people and wounding more than 100 others far from the front lines, Ukrainian authorities said. Ukraine's president accused Russia of deliberately targeting civilians in locations without military value.

Officials said Kalibr cruise missiles fired from a Russian ship in the Black Sea damaged a medical clinic, offices, stores and residential buildings in Vinnytsia, a city 268 kilometers (167 miles) southwest of the capital, Kyiv. Vinnytsia region Gov. Serhiy Borzov said Ukrainian air defenses downed two of the four incoming Russian missiles.

National Police Chief Ihor Klymenko said only six bodies had been identified so far, while 39 people were still missing. Three children younger than 10 where among the dead. Of the 66 people hospitalized, five remained in critical condition while 34 sustained severe injuries, Ukraine's State Emergency Service said.

"It was a building of a medical organization. When the first rocket hit it, glass fell from my windows," said Vinnytsia resident Svitlana Kubas, 74. "And when the second wave came, it was so deafening that my head is still buzzing. It tore out the very outermost door, tore it right through the holes."

Borzov said 36 apartment buildings were damaged and residents have been evacuated. Along with hitting buildings, the missiles ignited a fire that spread to 50 cars in a parking lot, officials said.

"These are quite high-precision missiles. ... They knew where they were hitting," Borzov told the AP. Russia denied targeting civilians.

"Russia only strikes at military targets in Ukraine. The strike on Vinnytsia targeted an officers' residence, where preparations by Ukrainian armed forces were underway," Evgeny Varganov, a member of Russia's permanent U.N. mission, said in an address to the chamber.

Among the buildings damaged in the strike was the House of Officers, a Soviet-era concert hall.

Margarita Simonyan, head of the state-controlled Russian television network RT, said on her messaging app channel that military officials told her a building in Vinnytsia was targeted because it housed Ukrainian "Nazis."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy repeated his call for Russia to be declared a state sponsor of terrorism. The strike happened as government officials from about 40 countries met in The Hague, Netherlands, to discuss coordinating investigations and prosecutions of potential war crimes committed in Ukraine.

"No other country in the world represents such a terrorist threat as Russia," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address. "No other country in the world allows itself every day to use cruise missiles and rocket artillery to destroy cities and ordinary human life."

Zelenskyy said that among those killed was a 4-year-old girl named Liza, whose mother was badly wounded. A video of the little girl, twirling in a lavender dress in a field of lavender, was widely shared on social media.

"Today, our hearts are bleeding, and our eyes are full of tears because our family of many thousands has lost one of our own," the charity Down Syndrome wrote. It said: "They were just on their way from a speech therapy class, and they just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Zelenskyy's wife later posted that she had met this "wonderful girl" while filming a Christmas video with a group of children, who were given oversized ornaments to paint.

"The little mischievous girl then managed in a half an hour to paint not only herself, her holiday dress, but also all the other children, me, the cameramen and the director ... Look at her alive, please," Olena Zelenska wrote in a note accompanying the video.

Zelenskyy called for creating a mechanism for confiscating Russian assets around the world and using

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them to compensate the victims of "Russian terror."

Ukrainian Interior Minister Denys Monastyrsky echoed Zelenskyy, calling the missile attack a "war crime" intended to intimidate Ukrainians while the country's forces hold out in the east.

He said several dozen people were detained for questioning on suspicion that the Russian forces had received targeting assistance from someone on the ground.

The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv issued a security alert late Thursday urging all U.S. citizens remaining in Ukraine to leave immediately. The alert, which appeared to be in response to the Vinnytsia attack, asserted that large gatherings and organized events "may serve as Russian military targets anywhere in Ukraine, including its western regions."

Vinnytsia is one of Ukraine's largest cities, with a prewar population of 370,000. Thousands of people from eastern Ukraine, where Russia has concentrated its offensive, have fled there since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Kateryna Popova said she saw many injured people lying on the street after the missiles struck. Popova had fled from Kharkiv in March in search of safety in "quiet" Vinnytsia. But the missile attack changed all that.

"We did not expect this. Now we feel like we don't have a home again," she said.

Ukrainian military analyst Oleh Zhdanov said the attack mirrors previous ones on residential areas that Moscow has launched "to try to pressure Kyiv to make some concessions."

"Russia has used the same tactics when it hit the Odesa region, Kremenchuk, Chasiv Yar and other areas," Zhdanov said. "The Kremlin wants to show that it will keep using unconventional methods of war and kill civilians in defiance of Kyiv and the entire international community."

Before the missiles hit Vinnytsia, the president's office reported the deaths of five civilians and the wounding of eight more in Russian attacks over the past day. One person was wounded when a missile damaged several buildings in the southern city of Mykolaiv early Thursday. A missile attack on Wednesday killed at least five people in the city.

Russian forces also continued artillery and missile attacks in eastern Ukraine, primarily in the Donetsk region after overtaking the adjacent Luhansk region. The two regions make up the Donbas, a mostly Russian-speaking area of steel factories, mines and other industries that powered Ukraine's economy.

Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko, meanwhile, urged residents to evacuate as "quickly as possible."

"We are urging civilians to leave the region, where electricity, water and gas are in short supply after the Russian shelling," Kyrylenko said in televised remarks. "The fighting is intensifying, and people should stop risking their lives and leave the region."

On the battlefront, Russian and Ukrainian militaries are seeking to replenish their depleted stocks of unmanned aerial vehicles to pinpoint enemy positions and guide artillery strikes.

Both sides are looking to procure jamming-resistant, advanced drones that could offer a decisive edge in battle. Ukrainian officials say the demand for such technology is "immense" with crowdfunding efforts underway to raise the necessary cash.

In other developments:

- Russian-installed officials in southeastern Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region announced that they planned to hold an early September referendum on incorporating the region into Russia. Large parts of Zaporizhzhia are under Russian control now, as is most of neighboring Kherson. Kremlin-backed administrations in both areas have declared their intentions to become part of Russia. Separatist leaders in the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk "republics" have also announced similar plans.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday signed into law a bill banning the dissemination of information on Russian companies and individuals who could face international sanctions. The law explicitly bans from internet or media publication without written permission any information about transactions made or planned by Russian individuals or legal entities participating in foreign economic activity. It also suspends for three years the obligatory publication of key financial and governance information by major Russian state corporations.

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Ohio rape shows how a story can spread faster than facts

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It took only four paragraphs in a regional newspaper to ignite a media conflagration over abortion that in two weeks engulfed President Joe Biden, the partisan press and some of the country's top news organizations.

In the center of it all: a 10-year-old rape victim, identity unknown, suddenly thrown into a political fight on one of the country's most contentious issues.

The Wall Street Journal and Washington Post both clarified or corrected stories after an Ohio man was charged on Wednesday with raping the girl, who traveled to Indiana for an abortion last month.

The case first came to light in a July 1 article in The Indianapolis Star about patients heading to Indiana for abortion services because of more restrictive laws in surrounding states, following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on Roe v. Wade. The piece began with an anecdote about an Indianapolis doctor asked by an Ohio colleague to help the girl, who was past the stage of pregnancy where she could get a legal abortion in Ohio.

The story was seized upon by Biden during a July 8 news conference to announce an executive order to try to protect access to abortion services.

"A 10-year-old should be forced to give birth to a rapist's child?" Biden asked. "I can't think of anything more extreme."

By then, there were already questions raised about the Star's story, notably in a series of tweets and a July 8 story in PJ Media by conservative columnist Megan Fox, under the headline "Viral 'pregnant 10-year-old rape victim' abortion horror story deserves a deeper look."

Fox wondered why the only apparent source for the story about the girl was the Indiana doctor, Caitlin Bernard, and whether she was credible because she performs abortions and has protested restrictions placed on the service.

The Washington Post's fact checker, Glenn Kessler, wrote last Saturday about those questions, noting that an abortion performed on a 10-year-old girl is rare.

"This is a very difficult story to check," Kessler wrote. "Bernard is on the record, but obtaining documents or other confirmation is all but impossible without details that would identify the locality where the rape occurred."

The Star's story did not identify the Ohio doctor who had called Bernard. The newspaper's executive editor, Bro Krift, has not discussed what steps the paper took to corroborate Bernard's story, and declined comment to The Associated Press on Thursday.

A named source like Bernard is a good start, said Kathleen Culver, director of the Center for Journalism Ethics at the University of Wisconsin. If the Star had other sources, it may not have wanted to provide them at the risk of identifying the victim, she said.

Indiana's attorney general, Republican Todd Rokita, said Thursday his office was investigating whether Bernard violated medical privacy laws by talking about the victim to the Star, or failed to notify authorities about suspected child abuse. The prosecutor for Indianapolis, Democrat Ryan Mears, said his office had the sole authority to pursue any such charges and that Bernard was being subjected to "intimidation and bullying."

Bernard's lawyer issued a statement Thursday that said the doctor provided proper treatment and did not violate any patient privacy laws or other rules. Bernard is also considering legal action against "those who have smeared my client," including Rokita.

Bernard reported a June 30 medication abortion for a 10-year-old patient to the state health department on July 2, within the three-day requirement set in state law for a girl younger than 16, according to the report obtained by The Indianapolis Star and WXIN-TV of Indianapolis.

In conservative media circles, questions raised about the sourcing quickly shifted to claims that the story was a lie.

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"The idea that you would have politicians in America try to exploit a story like this and make up a story like this in order to advance their own sick agenda tells you they are not serious about the issue," Fox News analyst Charlie Hurt said on Tuesday.

The Wall Street Journal, in an editorial on Tuesday, called it "an abortion story too good to confirm." The Journal wrote that "all kinds of fanciful tales travel far on social media these days, but you don't expect them to get a hearing at the White House."

Under the headline "Correcting the Record on a Rape Case" Thursday, the Journal wrote that "it appears President Biden was accurate."

"The country needs to find a rough consensus on abortion now that it has returned to the states and the political process," the Journal wrote. "One way to help is to make sure the stories about abortion, from either side of the debate, can be readily confirmed. Passions are already heated enough."

Kessler attached a note to his column updating with the arrest, and said it was a test case on whether journalists should rely on one source for an impactful story.

He faced intense heat online, both because of his original story and his explanations. U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York tweeted that "this column is horrifying." Waiting for law enforcement confirmation is questionable when many women don't report rape to authorities, she said.

Shani George, a Washington Post spokesperson, said, "The intent of the piece was to spotlight the need for careful reporting in a time when information spreads rapidly."

PJ Media's Fox said journalists should always question reporting and do their own digging, since media hoaxes are so prevalent today.

"I would ask every single question I asked in my original reporting again," she told the AP.

PJ Media quickly pivoted on Thursday to a story headlined, "Illegal alien arrested in rape of 10-year-old abortion patient but questions remain."

A Columbus police detective testified in a court hearing Wednesday that there was no evidence the suspect was in the country legally. In court documents filed the same day, a prosecutor said the suspect is not a U.S. citizen and is subject to potential deportation. The Associated Press is not identifying the suspect because there are questions about whether his reported name was real, and on the chance he's a relative of the girl involved.

The incident shows how political punditry often moves faster than journalism, and that journalists are caught responding to the punditry, said Wisconsin's Culver.

"The most important issue here is it appears that a 10-year-old was sexually assaulted," she said, "and that is a tragedy."

Biden, Lapid agree to stop Iran nuke program, differ on how

By AAMER MADHANI, JOSH BOAK, and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — U.S. President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid stood side-by-side Thursday and declared they would not allow Iran to become a nuclear power. They parted ways, though, on how to get there.

Biden, in a joint news conference after a one-on-one meeting with the Israeli leader, said he still wants to give diplomacy a chance. Moments earlier, Lapid insisted that words alone won't thwart Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

While Biden suggested his patience with Iran was running low, he held out hope that Iran can be persuaded to rejoin a dormant deal intended to prevent it from building a nuclear weapon.

"I continue to believe that diplomacy is the best way to achieve this outcome," Biden said on the second day of a four-day visit to Israel and Saudi Arabia. He also stressed on his first trip to the Middle East as president the importance of furthering ties between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Hours before Biden was set to become the first U.S. leader to fly directly from Israel to the kingdom, Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation announced early Friday "the decision to open the Kingdom's airspace for all air carriers that meet the requirements of the Authority for overflying."

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It signaled the end of its longstanding ban on Israeli airliners overflying its territory — an incremental step toward the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel that builds on the strong but informal ties the erstwhile foes have developed in recent years over their shared concerns about Iran's growing influence in the region.

"President Biden welcomes and commends the historic decision by the leadership of Saudi Arabia to open Saudi airspace to all civilian carriers without discrimination, a decision that includes flights to and from Israel," U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said in a statement early Friday.

Biden's emphasis on a diplomatic solution on Iran's nuclear program contrasted with Lapid, who said Iran must face a real threat of force before it will agree to give up on its nuclear ambitions.

"Words will not stop them, Mr. President. Diplomacy will not stop them," Lapid said. "The only thing that will stop Iran is knowing that if they continue to develop their nuclear program the free world will use force."

Lapid suggested be and Riden were in agreement, despite his tougher rhetoric toward Iran.

Lapid suggested he and Biden were in agreement, despite his tougher rhetoric toward Iran. "I don't think there's a light between us," he said. "We cannot allow Iran to become nuclear."

Biden, too, said, "We will not, let me say it again, we will not allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon." Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi lashed out at the U.S. and "its regional allies" for stoking instability in the region, state-run IRNA news agency reported.

"Any mistake by the Americans and their allies in the region and the world will be met with a harsh and regrettable response," Raisi said.

Biden warned that his patience is wearing thin for Iran to rejoin the nuclear deal, a day after saying he'd be willing to use force against Tehran as a last resort. The president said the U.S. had laid out for the Iranian leadership a path to return to the nuclear deal and was still waiting for a response.

"When that will come, I'm not certain," Biden said. "But we're not going to wait forever."

Resurrecting the Iran nuclear deal brokered by Barack Obama's administration and abandoned by Donald Trump in 2018 was a key priority for Biden as he entered office. But administration officials have become increasingly pessimistic about the chances of getting Tehran back into compliance.

Israeli officials have sought to use Biden's first visit to the Middle East as president to underscore that Iran's nuclear program has progressed too far and encourage the Biden administration to scuttle efforts to revive the deal.

Israel opposed the original nuclear deal because its limitations on Iran's nuclear enrichment would expire and the agreement didn't address Iran's ballistic missile program or military activities in the region.

Instead of the U.S. reentering the deal, Israel would prefer strict sanctions in hopes of leading to a more sweeping accord.

The one-on-one talks between Biden and Lapid marked the centerpiece of a 48-hour visit by Biden aimed at strengthening already tight relations between the U.S and Israel. The leaders issued a joint declaration emphasizing military cooperation and a commitment to keeping Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

In the joint statement, the United States said it is ready to use "all elements of its national power" to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb.

Iran announced last week that it has enriched uranium to 60% purity, a technical step away from weapons-grade quality.

The joint declaration could hold important symbolic importance for Biden's upcoming meeting with Arab leaders in Saudi Arabia as he seeks to strengthen a regionwide alliance against Iran.

The U.S. president, who is set to arrive in Saudi Arabia on Friday, said he also stressed to Lapid the importance of Israel becoming "totally integrated" in the region.

Israel during the Trump administration signed on to the Abraham Accords, declarations of diplomatic and economic normalization signed by Israel, Bahrain, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates that were signature foreign policy achievement for the Republican president. For Israel to come to such an agreement with the Saudis, an economic and Islamic epicenter in the Mideast, would be even more significant.

Lapid asked Biden to deliver a message on behalf of Israel to the Arab leaders he'll meet with in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: "Our hand is outstretched for peace."

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"Your visit to Saudi Arabia is important for Israel and for the region," Lapid added. "For our security and for the future prosperity of the Middle East."

The president will visit Saudi Arabia after calling the kingdom a "pariah" nation as a presidential candidate and releasing a U.S. intelligence finding last year that showed the kingdom's de facto leader, Mohammed bin Salman, likely approved the 2018 killing of Jamal Khashoggi, a U.S.-based writer.

Biden declined to commit to mentioning Khashoggi's murder when he meets with the crown prince.

"I always bring up human rights," Biden said at the news conference. "But my position on Khashoggi has been so clear. If anyone doesn't understand it, in Saudi Arabia or anywhere else, then they haven't been around for a while." He did not reiterate his position.

Thursday's appearances with Lapid could provide a boost to Israeli prime minister, who is serving in an interim capacity until elections in November, the fifth in less than four years. His main opponent is former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Lapid's joint appearance with Biden could help burnish his credentials as a statesman and leader. Biden met briefly behind closed doors with Netanyahu, with whom who he's had a rocky relationship.

Biden didn't mention Israel's upcoming election during the public portion of Thursday's meeting with Lapid, but told reporters "we had a good beginning of a long, God willing, relationship."

Biden and Lapid also participated in a virtual summit with India and the United Arab Emirates, a collection of countries called the I2U2. The United Arab Emirates announced it will help finance a \$2 billion project supporting agriculture in India.

The president was also honored with Israel's top civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Honor, from President Isaac Herzog.

Biden finished his day with a stop at Jerusalem's Teddy Stadium to greet U.S. athletes competing in the Maccabiah Games. Also known as the "Jewish Olympics," it's the country's largest sporting event and held every four years for Israeli and Jewish athletes from all over world.

25 million kids missed routine vaccinations because of COVID

GENEVA (AP) — About 25 million children worldwide have missed out on routine immunizations against common diseases like diptheria, largely because the coronavirus pandemic disrupted regular health services or triggered misinformation about vaccines, according to the U.N.

In a new report published Friday, the World Health Organization and UNICEF said their figures show 25 million children last year failed to get vaccinated against diptheria, tetanus and pertussis, a marker for childhood immunization coverage, continuing a downward trend that began in 2019.

"This is a red alert for child health," said Catherine Russell, UNICEF's Executive Director.

"We are witnessing the largest sustained drop in childhood immunization in a generation," she said, adding that the consequences would be measured in lives lost.

Data showed the vast majority of the children who failed to get immunized were living in developing countries, namely Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and the Philippines. While vaccine coverage fell in every world region, the worst effects were seen in East Asia and the Pacific.

Experts said this "historic backsliding" in vaccination coverage was especially disturbing since it was occurring as rates of severe malnutrition were rising. Malnourished children typically have weaker immune systems and infections like measles can often prove fatal to them.

"The convergence of a hunger crisis with a growing immunization gap threatens to create the conditions for a child survival crisis," the U.N. said.

Scientists said low vaccine coverage rates had already resulted in preventable outbreaks of diseases like measles and polio. In March 2020, WHO and partners asked countries to suspend their polio eradication efforts amid the accelerating COVID-19 pandemic. There have since been dozens of polio epidemics in more than 30 countries.

"This is particularly tragic as tremendous progress was made in the two decades before the COVID pandemic to improve childhood vaccination rates globally," said Helen Bedford, a professor of children's

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health at University College London, who was not connected to the U.N. report. She said the news was shocking but not surprising, noting that immunization services are frequently an "early casualty" of major social or economic disasters.

Dr. David Elliman, a consultant pediatrician at Britain's Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, said it was critical to reverse the declining vaccination trend among children.

"The effects of what happens in one part of the world can ripple out to affect the whole globe," he said in a statement, noting the rapid spread of COVID-19 and more recently, monkeypox. "Whether we act on the basis of ethics or 'enlightened self interest', we must put (children) top of our list of priorities."

Ivana Trump, first wife of former president, dies at 73

By JILL COLVIN and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Ivana Trump, a skier-turned-businesswoman who formed half of a publicity power couple in the 1980s as the first wife of former President Donald Trump and mother of his oldest children, has died in New York City, her family announced Thursday. She was 73.

The former president posted on his social media app that she died at her Manhattan home.

"She was a wonderful, beautiful, and amazing woman, who led a great and inspirational life," he wrote on Truth Social. The couple shared three children, Donald Jr., Ivanka and Eric.

"She was so proud of them, as we were all so proud of her," he wrote. "Rest In Peace, Ivana!"

Two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press that police are investigating whether Ivana Trump fell down the stairs and believe her death was accidental.

She was found unconscious near a staircase in the home, the people said. The people could not discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity. The medical examiner's office will determine an official cause of death.

"It's been a very sad day, a very sad day," Eric Trump said as he left his mother's home near Central Park. In a statement, he and his siblings called her "an incredible woman — a force in business, a world-class athlete, a radiant beauty and caring mother and friend."

"She fled from communism and embraced this country," the three said. "She taught her children about grit and toughness, compassion and determination."

Ivanka Trump posted childhood photos of herself laughing and smiling with her mother, who she described as "brilliant, charming, passionate and wickedly funny."

A Czech-born ski racer and sometime model, she met the future president in the 1970s and quickly perceived him as "smart and funny — an all-America good guy," as she wrote in a 2017 book. The couple married in 1977.

She became an icon in her own right, dripping with '80s style and glamor, complete with her signature blonde updo. She influenced the look of the over-the-top Patsy Stone in the classic British sitcom "Absolutely Fabulous," with the character extolling Ivana as "tremendous" in one episode.

Trump herself would eventually appear in the 1996 hit film "The First Wives Club" with the now-famous line, "Ladies, you have to be strong and independent, and remember, don't get mad, get everything."

The Trumps became partners in love and business. She managed one of his Atlantic City casinos and helped make Trump Tower an image of '80s success (or excess, to some).

She overruled the architects to get a 60-foot waterfall installed in Trump Tower's atrium, and she went to an Italian quarry to pick out the rosy-beige Breccia Pernice marble that famously lines its floors and walls, according to a biography of Donald Trump by Wayne Barrett.

Barbara Res, a former Trump Organization executive who was in charge of the skyscraper's construction, recalled Ivana helping the decorator and taking a strong interest in such details as the doormen's uniforms.

"She did all that to impress Donald, to win his approval," Res said. "She was traveling back and forth all the time, and leaving her kids. She had a tremendous work ethic."

The two were fixtures of New York's see-and-be-seen scene before their equally public, and messy, 1992 divorce. Donald Trump had met his next wife, Marla Maples.

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"I couldn't turn on the television without hearing my name," Ivana Trump wrote in her book.

During the split, Ivana Trump accused him of rape in a sworn statement in the early 1990s. She later said she didn't mean it literally, but rather that she felt violated.

Donald Trump would say at times that he regretted having Ivana join him in business and blamed it for the unraveling of their marriage.

"I think that putting a wife to work is a very dangerous thing," he told ABC News in the early '90s. "If you're in business for yourself, I really think it's a bad idea to put your wife working for you," he said, complaining that when she turned into a businessperson, "a softness disappeared."

Nevertheless, Ivana ultimately remained friendly with her ex-husband, whom she famously called "The Donald." She enthusiastically backed his 2016 White House run, saying he would "make big changes" in the United States, and told the New York Post that she was giving him suggestions on his campaign.

"We speak before and after the appearances and he asks me what I thought," she said. She said she advised him to "be more calm."

"But Donald cannot be calm," she added. "He's very outspoken. He just says it as it is."

However supportive, she occasionally ruffled feathers.

In 2017, while promoting her book, she told "Good Morning America" that she spoke with the thenpresident about every two weeks and had his direct White House number, but didn't want to call too frequently because of then-first lady Melania Trump's presence.

"I don't want to cause any kind of jealousy or something like that because I'm basically first Trump wife, OK?" Ivana said with a laugh. "I'm first lady, OK?"

Melania Trump's spokesperson at the time responded, saying there was "clearly no substance to this statement from an ex, this is unfortunately only attention-seeking and self-serving noise."

Ivana Trump had continued her business ventures in recent years, promoting an Italian weight-loss diet plan in 2018.

"Health is the most important thing we have. Let's keep it that way," she said at the time.

Her death came during a fraught week for the Trump family. Two of her children, Donald Jr. and Ivanka, and the former president are due to appear in coming days for questioning in the New York attorney general's civil investigation into the family's business practices.

Ivana Trump was born Ivana Zelnickova in 1949 in the Czechoslovak city of Gottwaldov, formerly Zlin, which had just been renamed by the Communists who took over the country in 1948.

She was married four times, most recently to Italian actor Rossano Rubicondi. The two divorced in 2009 after a year of marriage but continued to see each other off and on until 2019, when she told the New York Post the relationship had run its course. He died last year of cancer at 49.

Governor: Uvalde video 'shocking' account of police response

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas Gov. Greg Abbott on Thursday again said he was initially misled about the police response to the Uvalde school massacre, calling newly leaked video of officers hesitating for more than an hour "shocking" and not what he had been told when he originally lauded officers for a swift and brave confrontation.

"None of the information in that video was shared with me on that day," Abbott told reporters in Houston when asked about his reaction to the video published this week. "And so it was shocking."

Multiple inaccurate and conflicting statements given by officials since the May 24 tragedy at Robb Elementary School have compounded the grief and anger over a gunman killing 19 children and two teachers. Seven weeks later, there remains an incomplete account of why heavily armed police officers waited so long to take action and who was in charge.

A nearly 80-minute school surveillance video published this week by the Austin American-Statesman put in full view the bewildering inaction by law enforcement as the massacre unfolded. Abbott said Thursday it was "disgusting to see what happened."

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A day after the attack, Abbott had commended police, saying at the time that officers "showed amazing courage by running toward gunfire" and that it was "a fact that because of their quick response" lives were saved. Two days later, Abbott said he had been misled during an initial briefing and was "livid."

Abbott has not said who provided the misinformation. Renae Eze, an Abbott spokeswoman, said in an email Thursday that it came from a briefing in which "different accounts were spun" by a room of law enforcement and public officials. His office has not provided names.

At a Uvalde City Council meeting in June, Mayor Don McLaughlin said the briefing that preceded Abbott's inaccurate remarks was given by Victor Escalon, a regional commander with the Texas Department of Public Safety. McLaughlin has been increasingly critical of state police since the shooting, accusing DPS leaders of minimizing the involvement of their own troopers and deflecting blame on local officers.

The department's officials do not dispute that Escalon led the briefing but said it was based on information provided by local law enforcement. Agency spokesman Travis Considine said those in the room included McLaughlin, Uvalde School District police Chief Pete Arredondo and officials from Uvalde police, the local sheriff's department and the Border Patrol. All "were present at the briefing and had the opportunity to clarify anything they deemed inaccurate," Considine said in an email Thursday.

Considine said it was not until Texas Rangers, a division of the Department of Public Safety, began their investigation that discrepancies emerged.

An investigative committee led by Texas lawmakers is expected to release findings Sunday about the slow law enforcement response after interviewing more than 40 witnesses over the past several weeks. The U.S. Justice Department and Texas Rangers also have launched separate investigations that are ongoing.

"The families of the victims deserve to know what happened. And they will know what happened," Abbott said.

Alex Murdaugh charged with murder in deaths of wife, son

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — More than 13 months after disgraced South Carolina attorney Alex Murdaugh called 911 and said he found his wife and son shot outside their home, a grand jury indicted him Thursday on murder charges in their killings.

But the legal documents shed little light on the ongoing mystery over the deaths that captivated the public, who have clicked on hundreds of stories and podcasts detailing the dozens of other criminal charges that have piled up in the months since Murdaugh's wife Maggie, 52, and their 22-year-old son, Paul, were killed on June 7, 2021.

Murdaugh, 54, has repeatedly denied any role in the deaths, saying he was visiting his mother and ailing father and discovered his son and wife slain when he returned to their estate.

"Alex wants his family, friends and everyone to know that he did not have anything to do with the murders of Maggie and Paul. He loved them more than anything in the world," Murdaugh defense attorneys Jim Griffin and Dick Harpootlian said in a statement.

Each murder indictment was one paragraph with exactly one new detail, accusing Murdaugh of killing his wife with a rifle and his son with a shotgun. They include no details on how police linked Murdaugh to the deaths after 13 months of investigation or why a man who had no criminal history and was part of a wealthy, well-connected family that dominated the legal community in tiny Hampton County might have wanted to kill his own family members.

More information may be released in a bond hearing for the new charges Wednesday at the Colleton County courthouse. Murdaugh is already in jail unable to pay a \$7 million bond on the dozens of other charges.

Murdaugh also was charged Thursday with two counts of possession of a weapon during a violent crime, according to the indictments from a grand jury in Colleton County, site of the Murdaugh hunting estate where the killings happened.

Murdaugh's family has dominated the legal scene in tiny, neighboring Hampton County for nearly a cen-

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tury. Murdaugh's father, grandfather and great-grandfather were the area's elected prosecutors for 87 years straight. Murdaugh once worked for the century-old, family-founded law firm, which said in September that he was stealing money.

Throughout the investigation, state police have released few details about the case, even fighting a lawsuit in which The Post and Courier newspaper accused the agency of refusing to release information required by state law. Thursday's indictments were no exception. A joint statement from State Law Enforcement Division Chief Mark Keel and state Attorney General Alan Wilson said they wouldn't comment on specific evidence because the investigation remains active and a court case is pending.

"Over the last 13 months, SLED agents and our partners have worked day in and day out to build a case against the person responsible for the murders of Maggie and Paul and to exclude those who were not. At no point did agents lose focus on this investigation," Keel said in the statement.

Murdaugh's lawyers said "it was very clear from day one" that law enforcement was focusing on Murdaugh and no one else. They said they want his trial held in the next three months.

"We know that Alex did not have any motive whatsoever to murder them," the defense attorneys said. If convicted of murder, Murdaugh would face 30 years to life in prison without parole. Prosecutors could also choose to seek the death penalty under state law because more than one person was killed.

The June 2021 deaths prompted authorities to look into all corners of Murdaugh's life. At least a half-dozen investigations resulted in charges that he stole \$8.5 million from people who hired him and that he lied to police by saying he was shot by a stranger on a roadside when, officials say, he actually asked a friend to kill him so his surviving son could collect a \$10 million life insurance policy just days after the family firm determined he was stealing money. The friend said the gun went off as he tried to wrestle it from a suicidal Murdaugh's grip.

State police said information they gathered in the Murdaugh investigations also led them to review what was initially reported as the hit-and-run death of 19-year-old Stephen Smith in Hampton County in July 2015, although they didn't provide more details.

Agents also said they plan to exhume the body of the Murdaugh's housekeeper, Gloria Satterfield, who the family said died in the hospital several days after a fall in 2018. Prosecutors said Murdaugh got his home insurers to pay more than \$4 million in wrongful-death claims in Satterfield's case by saying he was negotiating for her family but didn't give them any of the money.

In June, Murdaugh was indicted in what prosecutors said was an eight-year money laundering and painkiller ring that also involved that same friend and former client charged with trying to help him commit suicide.

Murdaugh wrote 437 checks worth \$2.4 million that his friend cashed over eight years, keeping some of the money for himself and giving the rest for wide-ranging illegal activities, according to the indictments unsealed last month.

The South Carolina Supreme Court disbarred Murdaugh on Tuesday, confirming the inevitable after Murdaugh's attorneys declined to contest arguments at a June disbarment hearing.

EXPLAINER: How gestational age plays a role in abortion laws

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The abortion bans taking effect after the nation's highest court overturned Roe v. Wade vary greatly in how they define when a pregnancy can be ended.

Some laws prohibit abortion at the point of the "first detectable heartbeat" while others restrict abortion at 15, 22 or 24 weeks of pregnancy. This means determining how far along someone is in pregnancy — gestational age — has become more important, because there is a smaller window of time to secure the procedure in about half of the states in the U.S.

Here's a look at how gestational age is determined and how states use that metric to restrict abortion: WHAT IS GESTATIONAL AGE?

Gestational age is the term used to describe how far along a pregnancy is.

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Pregnancy begins when the fertilized egg implants itself into the uterus, but the timing for any individual pregnancy can't be precisely determined.

The most common method for determining gestational age: how much time has passed since the first day of the last menstrual period.

For those who have irregular menstrual periods or can't remember, determining gestational age can sometimes be difficult. Doctors can use ultrasounds to estimate gestational age.

HOW DOES GESTATIONAL AGE APPLY TO ABORTION BANS?

Republican-led states have attempted to chip away at abortion access for decades, but a renewed push to ban abortion at various gestational ages began to take hold in 2019. Many of those laws are just now being allowed to go into effect now that the Supreme Court has ended the constitutional right to abortion.

To date, more than 40 states limit some abortions after a certain point in pregnancy, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights. These statutes generally require a doctor to determine the gestational age in order to determine if they can perform an abortion.

States including Ohio, South Carolina and Tennessee have outlawed abortions once cardiac activity is detected, which can happen around six weeks into pregnancy — leading to the measures to be commonly called "six-week abortion bans."

Meanwhile, states such as Florida and Arizona ban abortion at 15 weeks gestational age, though Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich has since declared that a 1901 law that bans all abortions may now be enforceable.

Other states have enacted abortion bans relying on the estimated date of fertilization. The exact day of fertilization is often unknown, but it's generally considered to happen around two weeks into the last menstrual cycle. For example, states such as Indiana, Iowa and Georgia specifically ban abortion at 20 weeks probable postfertilization — which is 22 weeks gestational age.

GESTATIONAL AGE ISN'T A FACTOR IN SOME STATES

Currently, 13 states have enacted so-called trigger laws that immediately banned abortion when Roe was overturned. Since the Supreme Court ruled last month, states including Kentucky, Ohio and West Virginia have said they were beginning work on trigger bans.

These laws generally ban all abortions at any point in the pregnancy, with limited exceptions that vary state to state.

Italian Premier Draghi's resignation is rebuffed -- for now

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Italian Premier Mario Draghi offered to step down Thursday after a populist coalition partner refused to vote for a key bill in Parliament, but the nation's president quickly rebuffed him, leaving one of Western Europe's main leaders at the helm for now.

The rejection of the tendered resignation left in limbo the future of Draghi's 17-month-old government, officially known as a national unity coalition, but with its survival sorely tested by increasingly sharp divergences within the coalition.

Draghi's broad coalition government — which includes parties from the right, the left, the center and the populist 5-Star Movement — was designed to help Italy recover from the coronavirus pandemic.

Hours earlier Thursday, Draghi and his government won a confidence vote, 172-39, in the Senate despite the refusal by the 5-Star Movement to back the bill, which earmarked 26 billion euros (dollars) to help consumers and industries struggling with soaring energy prices. But the dramatic snub, orchestrated by 5-Star leader Giuseppe Conte, Draghi's predecessor, did its damage.

Shortly before heading to the Quirinal presidential palace to tender his resignation, Draghi declared: "The majority of national unity that has sustained this government from its creation doesn't exist any more."

But President Sergio Mattarella told Draghi to instead go back to Parliament and see if he can still garner solid support, a palace statement said.

The next showdown in Parliament is set for July 20, when Draghi will formally pitch for support ahead of a confidence vote — this time not on a specific bill but on his government's very viability.

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"Now there are five days to work so that Parliament confirms its confidence in the Draghi government and Italy emerges as rapidly as possible from the dramatic unraveling" of the last hours, tweeted Enrico Letta, the head of the Democratic Party, a Draghi ally and a former premier.

In Brussels, the European Union's finance commissioner, Paolo Gentiloni, a former Italian premier, said officials there were "following with worried astonishment" the potential unraveling of Draghi's coalition.

The uncertainty over Draghi's staying power also appeared to rattle the markets. The Milan stock exchange lost 3.44% on Thursday.

If Draghi can't solidly stitch back together a durable coalition, Mattarella could pull the plug on Parliament, setting the stage for an early election as soon as late September. Currently, Parliament's term expires in spring 2023.

Mattarella had tapped the former European Central Bank chief — who was known as "Super Mario" for his "whatever it takes" rescue of the euro — to pull Italy out of the pandemic and lay the groundwork to make use of billions in European Union pandemic recovery funds.

The 5-Stars, who have lost significant support in recent local elections and have slumped in opinion polls, are in disarray.

In the measure Thursday, the 5-Stars opposed a provision to allow Rome to operate a garbage incinerator on the outskirts of the chronically trash-choked Italian capital.

In the debate, some senators praised Draghi as a pivotal figure in Europe as Russia wages war against Ukraine, especially with the impending departure of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Center-right Sen. Antonio Saccone thundered that the 5-Stars were "doing a favor" to Russian President Vladimir Putin by causing political instability.

Recently, Conte had waffled for a while over whether to keep supporting military aid for Ukraine, but eventually backed Draghi on pledging fresh assistance.

Being in a government "is not like picking up a menu and deciding, antipasto, no, gelato, yes," said Emma Bonino, who leads a tiny pro-Europe party.

Draghi has governed with the support of virtually all of Italy's main parties, with the exception of the fast-rising far-right Brothers of Italy party. The potential implosion of Draghi's coalition triggered fresh demands by the party's leader, Giorgia Meloni, for an early election that she hopes will be her springboard to becoming Italy's first woman premier.

Giovanni Orsina, a history professor and director of the school of government at Rome's LUISS university, correctly predicted that Mattarella would ask Draghi to find a new, workable majority.

"We've got the pandemic, we got the war, we have inflation, we have the energy crisis. So certainly this is not a good moment," Orsina said. "Mattarella believes, rightly, that his mission is to safeguard stability."

Among Draghi's achievements has been keeping Italy on track with reforms that the EU has made a condition for the country to receive 200 billion euros (dollars) in pandemic recovery assistance. Much of that EU funding is already allocated, suggesting it won't be lost even amid government instability.

The AP Interview: Khashoggi fiancee criticizes Biden visit

By AYSE WIETING and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

IŚTANBUL (AP) — Hatice Cengiz, the fiancee of murdered Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, described Joe Biden's decision to visit Saudi Arabia as "heartbreaking," accusing the U.S. president of backing down from his pledge of prioritizing human rights.

In an interview with The Associated Press in Istanbul a day before Biden travels to Saudi Arabia on Friday to meet with the crown prince, Cengiz said Biden should press Saudi Arabia — a country that she described as a "terrible ally" — to embrace a human rights agenda. She also wants Biden to seek more answers from Saudi authorities over what happened to Khashoggi's remains.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has long denied any knowledge or involvement in Khashoggi's killing, which was carried out inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul by agents who worked for the young heir to the throne. A U.S. intelligence report that Biden declassified after coming to office said Khashoggi's

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killing could not have happened without Prince Mohammed's knowledge.

Cengiz had gone with Khashoggi to the Saudi Consulate for an appointment to pick up documents needed to marry her. While she waited outside, he went in — and never reappeared.

"That day destroyed my life. And I don't want to remember any part of that day," Cengiz said Thursday, recalling that they'd planned to choose new furniture for their home after his consulate visit and meet with friends.

At the time of his murder, Khashoggi was a U.S. resident and contributing columnist for The Washington Post who had written articles critical of the crown prince's widening crackdown on activists. He had previously held positions in the Saudi government, but had turned into a critic at a time when the crown prince was being hailed in Western capitals for ushering in social reforms inside the kingdom.

The October 2018 killing and attempts to cover it up drew international condemnation, and the reputation of Prince Mohammed has never fully recovered.

The prince has, however, begun to lure back big name Western investors who initially shied away from the kingdom after the killing. He's also reset ties with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as Turkey seeks Gulf investments to buoy the strained economy.

The kingdom tried and found some people guilty for the operation that killed Khashoggi, but no senior officials or anyone responsible for overseeing it was ever convicted.

Biden came to office a sharp critic of the crown prince, pivoting away from the warm relationship cultivated under President Donald Trump. Biden said during his campaign that he believed Khashoggi was killed on orders of Prince Mohammed, describing the kingdom as a "pariah" and stating "there's very little social redeeming value in the present government in Saudi Arabia."

"It's a very huge backing down actually," Cengiz said of Biden's decision now to reset diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia now. "It's heartbreaking and disappointing. And Biden will lose his moral authority by putting oil and expediency over principles and values."

Oil prices have been steadily climbing for months, but increased even more after Russia's war in Ukraine. Energy prices, inflation and the economy are on voters' minds as Americans prepare to head to the polls this November.

Members of Biden's Democratic Party have urged the president to make human rights a key part of his discussions with the crown prince during his meeting Friday while acknowledging that Saudi Arabia is an important U.S. ally and oil producer.

Biden on Thursday declined to commit to mentioning Khashoggi's murder when he meets the prince.

"I always bring up human rights," Biden said during a joint news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid. "But my position on Khashoggi has been so clear. If anyone doesn't understand it, in Saudi Arabia or anywhere else, then they haven't been around for a while."

Biden said the purpose of his trip to Saudi Arabia is "broader" and designed to "reassert" U.S. influence in the Middle East. He's scheduled to attend a summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which includes several Arab nations.

Cengiz expressed profound disappointment with Biden's stance.

"One of Biden's promises (was) being different. It was a very big hope to me to believe, again, that Biden will do something for me and for Jamal," she said. "Instead of being different now, he's doing the same and embracing dictators in the region right now. So it's a very disappointing for me."

"He has to ask what happened to his body? Where is his body? Still we do not have any answer," she added. "And people need to get the truth in this case. And we cannot forget."

"We cannot forget what happened to Jamal."

WNBA's Griner gets support at trial from character witnesses

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

KHIMKI, Russia (AP) — Brittney Griner's drug possession trial resumed Thursday with the head of the Russian club she plays for in the offseason and a teammate from that squad testifying in support of her

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character and what the WNBA star has meant for women's basketball in the country.

Griner, who pleaded guilty last week, did not testify as expected at the third day of the trial. She has been detained in Russia since February, and the U.S. government is under pressure at home to do more to secure her freedom. Her guilty plea could be an effort to expedite the court proceedings so any negotiations about a prisoner exchange could move forward.

Griner was arrested at the Russian capital's Sheremetyevo Airport when customs officials said they found vape canisters with cannabis oil in her luggage. She acknowledged in court that she possessed the canisters, but said she had no criminal intent and said their presence in her luggage was due to hasty packing. She is facing up to 10 years in prison.

In Russia's judicial system, admitting guilt doesn't automatically end a trial

Most journalists were denied access to Thursday's session, but the director of UMMC Ekaterinburg, for which she plays during the WNBA offseason, told reporters afterward that he testified as a character witness.

"Our task today was to tell the court about her characteristics as an athlete, as a person — tell about how she played a big role in the success of the Ekaterinburg club and Russian women's basketball as a whole," club director Maxim Rybakov.

"Today is the first day when we have seen our basketball player since February. Thank God, she feels well, looks good," Rybakov said outside the courthouse in the Moscow suburb of Khimki, where the airport is located.

Player Evgenia Belyakova said she testified that "Brittney has always been a very good teammate, so my role here is just to be with her, to support her."

"We miss her very much, we miss her energy," Belyakova added. "I was very happy to see her, and I hope this trial will be over soon and with a positive outcome."

Also in court were Elizabeth Rood, charge d'affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, and other consular officials, and they were able to speak to Griner, who told them she appreciated their presence, the U.S. State Department said.

The trial's next session is set for Friday.

Griner is one of the most prominent female athletes in the U.S., a standout for the Phoenix Mercury and a two-time Olympic gold medalist.

U.S. President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken have said they were doing all they could to win her release, as well as that of other Americans the U.S. considers "wrongly detained" by Russia, including former Marine Paul Whelan.

Washington may have little leverage with Moscow, though, because of strong animosity over its military operation in Ukraine.

Russian media have speculated that Griner could be swapped for Russian arms trader Viktor Bout, nicknamed "the Merchant of Death," who is serving a 25-year sentence in the U.S. after being convicted of conspiracy to kill U.S. citizens and providing aid to a terrorist organization.

Russia has agitated for Bout's release for years. But the wide discrepancy in the seriousness of their cases could make such a trade unpalatable to Washington. Others have suggested that Griner could be traded along with Whelan, who is serving 16 years in Russia on an espionage conviction that the U.S. has described as a setup.

The State Department's designation of Griner as wrongfully detained moves her case under the supervision of its special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, effectively the government's chief hostage negotiator. The classification has irritated Russia.

Asked about the possibility of Griner being swapped for a Russian jailed in the U.S., Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, the senior Russian diplomat, has noted that until her trial is over "there are no formal or procedural reasons to talk about any further steps."

Ryabkov warned that U.S. criticism, including the description of Griner as wrongfully detained and dismissive comments about the Russian judicial system, "makes it difficult to engage in detailed discussion of any possible exchanges."

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Griner's detention has been authorized through Dec. 20, suggesting the trial could last months. Griner's lawyers, however, said they expect it to conclude around the beginning of August.

NTSB: Dad, not boy, was driving truck that hit golfers' van

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — A Texas man, not his 13-year-old son, was driving the pickup truck that crossed into the oncoming lane and struck a van carrying New Mexico college golfers, killing nine people, and he had methamphetamine in his system, investigators said Thursday.

The National Transportation Safety Board said two days after the March 15 collision in rural West Texas that its early findings suggested that the 13-year-old was driving the pickup that struck the van carrying University of the Southwest students and their coach back to Hobbs, New Mexico, from a golf tournament in Midland. But the NTSB said in a preliminary report released Thursday that DNA testing confirmed that the father, 38-year-old Henrich Siemens, was driving and that toxicological testing showed the presence of methamphetamine in Siemens' blood.

"This was a very difficult investigation to determine some of the facts based on the catastrophic nature of the damage and the post-crash fire," Robert Molloy, the NTSB's director of highway safety, said at a news conference.

Siemens and his son died in the crash along with six members of the men's and women's golf teams and their coach, who was driving the van, which was towing a cargo trailer.

Molloy said they are still analyzing the toxicological report and that although they know methamphetamine can affect driver performance, it's too early to say whether it was a contributing factor in the crash.

Investigators are still working to determine the probable cause of the crash, and Molloy said he didn't expect a final report until next year.

The collision happened at about 8:17 p.m. in Andrews County, which is roughly 30 miles (50 kilometers) east of Texas' border with New Mexico.

In the days after the crash, the NTSB had said that the truck's left front tire blew before impact. But it said Thursday that so far, investigators haven't found evidence of a loss in tire pressure or any other indicators that the tire failed.

The NTSB said the road they were traveling on consisted of a northbound lane and southbound lane. Near the crash site, the roadway was straight but there was no highway lighting.

The speed limit on the road was 75 mph (120 kph), but Molloy said they have not yet determined the vehicles' speeds at the time of the crash.

Those killed in the van were coach Tyler James, 26, of Hobbs, New Mexico; and golfers Mauricio Sanchez, 19, of Mexico; Travis Garcia, 19, of Pleasanton, Texas; Jackson Zinn, 22, of Westminster, Colorado; Karisa Raines, 21, of Fort Stockton, Texas; Laci Stone, 18, of Nocona, Texas; and Tiago Sousa, 18, of Portugal.

Two other students who were in the van were seriously injured.

Most of the students were freshman who were getting their first taste of life away from home at the private Christian university with enrollment numbering in the hundreds. Those who knew James, the coach, said it had been his goal to be a head coach, and he was excited to be there.

The crash was the latest tragedy for the Siemens family, who lived in Seminole, Texas, a rural community of around 7,500 people, some of whom first relocated to the area in the 1970s with other Mennonite families who started farming and ranching operations. Community members had rallied around Siemens and his wife months earlier when a fire that started in the kitchen destroyed the home where they had lived for a decade.

Congress honors WWII hero of Iwo Jima with ultimate salute

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress gave its ultimate final salute Thursday to Hershel W. "Woody" Williams,

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a 5-foot-6 "force of nature" in the battle of Iwo Jima and the last remaining Medal of Honor recipient from World War II.

Seventy-seven years after his wartime heroism, Williams, who died last month at 98, lay in honor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, a tribute reserved for the nation's most distinguished private citizens. Only six others have received the honor: civil rights icon Rosa Parks, the Rev. Billy Graham and four Capitol police officers.

Just 21, Williams was a Marine corporal when U.S. forces came ashore on the strategic Japanese island in early 1945. Williams moved ahead of his unit and eliminated a series of Japanese machine gun positions. Facing small-arms fire, he fought for four hours, repeatedly returning to prepare demolition charges and obtain flamethrowers. President Harry Truman awarded him the Medal of Honor, the military's highest decoration, later that year.

But the new tribute to Williams was about more than his bravery in combat service. It served as recognition for a generation of heroes, now dwindling in numbers, who fought in World War II. House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy said Williams wanted Thursday's ceremony as a way to recognize every Medal of Honor recipient from that war.

"With Woody's passing, we have lost a deeply selfless American and a vital link to our nation's greatest generation," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said during the ceremony.

Pelosi said Williams was far from the biggest Marine, standing only 5-foot-6 and weighing in at 130 pounds, "yet he was a force of nature on the battlefield." She said he singlehandedly destroyed seven enemy positions, and that Truman said he acted with "unyielding determination and extraordinary heroism."

Lawmakers have lauded Williams throughout the week, marveling at his youth during his actions at Iwo Jima. They also hailed his public service following his military career, which included establishing a foundation that works with local stakeholders to create monuments for Gold Star families of the fallen throughout the country.

Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., recalled meeting Williams at one such ceremony in Owensboro, Ky.

"By that point, he'd been giving back to his beloved country for 77 years," McConnell said. "So, needless to say, Woody's service leaves us a rich legacy."

Williams was well known in his native West Virginia. In 2018, a Huntington, Va., medical center was renamed in his honor, and the Navy commissioned a mobile base sea vessel in his name in 2020.

The state's two senators took the Senate floor Wednesday to remember him. Democrat Joe Manchin called him the "greatest of the greatest generation." Republican Shelley Moore Capito recalled his humility, saying that when Truman presented him with the Medal of Honor, Williams remembered asking himself why he was selected for the nation's highest military honor when Marines right beside him did not make it home.

"That shows you the kind of man that Woody Williams was, always putting his country and his comrades first and never concerned with who got the credit," Capito said.

Long lines are back at US food banks as inflation hits high

By ANITA SNOW and EUGENE GARCIA Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Long lines are back at food banks around the U.S. as working Americans overwhelmed by inflation turn to handouts to help feed their families.

With gas prices soaring along with grocery costs, many people are seeking charitable food for the first time, and more are arriving on foot.

Inflation in the U.S. is at a 40-year high and gas prices have been surging since April 2020, with the average cost nationwide briefly hitting \$5 a gallon in June. Rapidly rising rents and an end to federal COVID-19 relief have also taken a financial toll.

The food banks, which had started to see some relief as people returned to work after pandemic shut-downs, are struggling to meet the latest need even as federal programs provide less food to distribute, grocery store donations wane and cash gifts don't go nearly as far.

Tomasina John was among hundreds of families lined up in several lanes of cars that went around the block one recent day outside St. Mary's Food Bank in Phoenix. John said her family had never visited a

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food bank before because her husband had easily supported her and their four children with his construction work.

"But it's really impossible to get by now without some help," said John, who traveled with a neighbor to share gas costs as they idled under a scorching desert sun. "The prices are way too high."

Jesus Pascual was also in the queue.

"It's a real struggle," said Pascual, a janitor who estimated he spends several hundred dollars a month on groceries for him, his wife and their five children aged 11 to 19.

The same scene is repeated across the nation, where food bank workers predict a rough summer keeping ahead of demand.

The surge in food prices comes after state governments ended COVID-19 disaster declarations that temporarily allowed increased benefits under SNAP, the federal food stamp program covering some 40 million Americans .

"It does not look like it's going to get better overnight," said Katie Fitzgerald, president and chief operating officer for the national food bank network Feeding America. "Demand is really making the supply challenges complex."

Charitable food distribution has remained far above amounts given away before the coronavirus pandemic, even though demand tapered off somewhat late last year.

Feeding America officials say second quarter data won't be ready until August, but they are hearing anecdotally from food banks nationwide that demand is soaring.

The Phoenix food bank's main distribution center doled out food packages to 4,271 families during the third week in June, a 78% increase over the 2,396 families served during the same week last year, said St. Mary's spokesman Jerry Brown.

More than 900 families line up at the distribution center every weekday for an emergency government food box stuffed with goods such as canned beans, peanut butter and rice, said Brown. St. Mary's adds products purchased with cash donations, as well as food provided by local supermarkets like bread, carrots and pork chops for a combined package worth about \$75.

Distribution by the Alameda County Community Food Bank in Northern California has ticked up since hitting a pandemic low at the beginning of this year, increasing from 890 households served on the third Friday in January to 1,410 households on the third Friday in June, said marketing director Michael Altfest.

At the Houston Food Bank, the largest food bank in the U.S. where food distribution levels earlier in the pandemic briefly peaked at a staggering 1 million pounds a day, an average of 610,000 pounds is now being given out daily.

That's up from about 500,000 pounds a day before the pandemic, said spokeswoman Paula Murphy said. Murphy said cash donations have not eased, but inflation ensures they don't go as far.

Food bank executives said the sudden surge in demand caught them off quard.

"Last year, we had expected a decrease in demand for 2022 because the economy had been doing so well," said Michael Flood, CEO for the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank. "This issue with inflation came on pretty suddenly."

"A lot of these are people who are working and did OK during the pandemic and maybe even saw their wages go up," said Flood. "But they have also seen food prices go up beyond their budgets."

The Los Angeles bank gave away about 30 million pounds of food during the first three months of this year, slightly less than the previous quarter but still far more than the 22 million pounds given away during the first quarter of 2020.

Feeding America's Fitzgerald is calling on USDA and Congress to find a way to restore hundreds of millions of dollars worth of commodities recently lost with the end of several temporary programs to provide food to people in need. USDA commodities, which generally can represent as much as 30% of the food the banks disperse, accounted for more than 40% of all food distributed in fiscal year 2021 by the Feeding America network.

"There is a critical need for the public sector to purchase more food now," said Fitzgerald.

During the Trump administration, USDA bought several billions of dollars in pork, apples, dairy, potatoes

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and other products in a program that gave most of it to food banks. The "Food Purchase & Distribution Program" designed to help American farmers harmed by tariffs and other practices of U.S. trade partners has since ended. There was \$1.2 billion authorized for the 2019 fiscal year and another \$1.4 billion authorized for fiscal 2020.

Another temporary USDA "Farmers to Families" program that provided emergency relief provided more than 155 million food boxes for families in need across the U.S. during the height of the pandemic before ending May 31, 2021.

A USDA spokesperson noted the agency is using \$400 million from the Build Back Better initiative to establish agreements with states, territories and tribal governments t o buy food from local, regional and underserved producers that can be given to food banks, schools and other feeding programs.

For now, there's enough food, but there might not be in the future, said Michael G. Manning, president and CEO at Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank in Louisiana. He said high fuel costs also make it far more expensive to collect and distribute food.

The USDA's Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, which included Farmers to Families, was "a boon" for the Alameda County Community Food Bank, providing 5 billion pounds of commodities over a single year, said spokesman Altfest.

"So losing that was a big hit," he said.

Altfest said as many as 10% of the people now seeking food are first timers, and a growing number are showing up on foot rather than in cars to save gas.

"The food they get from us is helping them save already-stretched budgets for other expenses like gas, rent, diapers and baby formula," he said.

Meanwhile, food purchases by the bank have jumped from a monthly average of \$250,000 before the pandemic to as high as \$1.5 million now because of food prices. Rocketing gasoline costs forced the bank to increase its fuel budget by 66%, Altfest said.

Supply chain issues are also a problem, requiring the food bank to become more aggressive with procurement.

"We used to reorder when our inventory dropped to three weeks' worth, now we reorder up to six weeks out," said Altfest.

He said the food bank has already ordered and paid for whole chickens, stuffing, cranberries and other holiday feast items it will distribute for Thanksgiving, the busiest time of the year.

At the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation in Montebello east of Los Angeles, workers say they are seeing many families along with older people like Diane Martinez, who lined up one recent morning on foot.

Some of the hundreds of mostly Spanish-speaking recipients had cars parked nearby. They carried cloth bags, cardboard boxes or shoved pushcarts to pick up their food packages from the distribution site the Los Angeles bank serves.

"The prices of food are so high and they're going up higher every day," said Martinez, who expressed gratitude for the bags of black beans, ground beef and other groceries. "I'm so glad that they're able to help us."

Outbreaks from animals in Africa surge by 60% in last decade

LONDON (AP) — The number of outbreaks of diseases that jumped from animals to humans in Africa has surged by more than 60% in the last decade, the World Health Organization said, a worrying sign the planet could face increased animal-borne diseases like monkeypox, Ebola and coronavirus in the future.

There has been a 63% rise in the number of animal diseases breaching the species barrier from 2012 to 2022, as compared to the decade before, the U.N. health agency said in a statement on Thursday.

There was a particular spike from 2019 to 2020, when diseases originating in animals that later infected humans, made up half of all significant public health events in Africa, said WHO. Diseases like Ebola and other hemorrhagic fevers were responsible for 70% of those outbreaks, in addition to illnesses like mon-

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keypox, dengue, anthrax and plague.

"We must act now to contain zoonotic diseases before they can cause widespread infections and stop Africa from becoming a hotspot for emerging infectious diseases," WHO's Africa director, Dr. Matshidiso Moeti said in a statement.

While diseases in animals had infected people for centuries in Africa, recent developments like quicker travel across the continent have made it easier for viruses to cross borders, she said.

WHO also noted that Africa has the world's fastest-growing population, which increases urbanization and reduces roaming areas for wild animals. Scientists also fear that outbreaks that may have once been contained to distant, rural areas can now spread more quickly to Africa's large cities with international travel links, that might then carry the diseases around the world.

During the West Africa Ebola outbreak that began in 2014, it was not until the disease arrived in capital cities that its spread became explosive, ultimately killing more than 10,000 people and arriving in several cities in Europe and the U.S.

Until May, monkeypox had not been known to cause significant outbreaks beyond central and West Africa, where it has sickened people for decades. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are now more than 11,000 cases worldwide in 65 countries, the majority of which had not previously reported monkeypox.

WHO announced that it will hold an emergency meeting next week to assess if monkeypox should be declared a global emergency. Last month, the agency said the outbreak did not yet warrant the declaration but said it would review issues such as the possibility that monkeypox might be infecting more vulnerable populations like children, and whether the virus is causing more severe disease.

Capitol riot hearings raise questions of presidential power

By GARY FIELDS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Jan. 6 committee's investigation of the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election and the events leading up to the U.S. Capitol insurrection is raising questions about former President Donald Trump's role and whether he committed crimes.

The various schemes and talking points that witnesses have revealed also highlight what a president has the authority to do.

Government and legal experts say the bigger question is: Can further limits be put on presidential authority to make sure there are no repeats of 2020 in future administrations?

WHAT LAWS FORM THE BASIS FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL POWERS IN QUESTION?

There are two primary ones: the Insurrection Act, first enacted in 1792, and the National Emergencies Act of 1976.

The Insurrection Act is a long-standing presidential power that gives the president wide latitude to use military forces to stop a rebellion or domestic violence. Military forces are normally barred by the Posse Comitatus Act from joining in civilian law enforcement actions.

Elizabeth Goitein, senior director of the liberty and national security program at the Brennan Center for Justice, said the insurrection "in my opinion" could have been the catalyst for the president to invoke the act and bring in the military to escort congressional lawmakers out of the proceedings for their safety. "That doesn't mean Donald Trump would have been the president, but it would have thrown a wrench in the works," she said.

Under the NEA, dozens of statutory authorities become available to any president when national emergencies are declared. They include everything from severe weather responses to civil disorder. Congress can vote to terminate the declaration, but if the president vetoes, a two-thirds supermajority is required to overcome the veto.

"The statute itself doesn't say what an emergency is. It leaves it up to the president," said Chris Edelson, assistant professor of government at American University. "That means an unscrupulous president can use it" for ill purposes. It is up to Congress to rein in the president, he said.

WHAT ISSUES WERE RAISED AT THE LAST HEARING?

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In the most recent hearing, former White House counsel Pat Cipillone discussed a rancorous meeting in which Trump's outside legal team brought a draft executive order to seize the states' voting machines. In his testimony Cipollone said the plan was a terrible idea. It had been floated before.

"You can't preemptively seize voting machines. If there was a reason to do so, you need a court order," Edelson said.

At the same meeting, there were a range of theories pushed, including invoking martial law. It was an idea Trump adviser Michael Flynn had floated before, along with seizing the voting machines.

WHAT ABOUT MARTIAL LAW?

Under the Insurrection Act the president can call on the military in certain circumstances, but they are intended to support civilian law enforcement. One example was the use of the military during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Under martial law the military takes over the function of the civilian government.

Martial law, said Goitein, "gives me nightmares" because the law is unsettled. "The whole concept of martial law, there's not even an agreed upon definition of what it is," she said.

ARE THERE GUARDRAILS TO PREVENT FUTURE PRESIDENTS FROM ABUSING POWER?

The House passed the Protecting Our Democracy bill last year and sent it to the Senate. The legislation would prevent presidents from pardoning themselves, strengthen reporting requirements for campaigns, and clarify and enhance criminal penalties for campaigns that accept foreign information sought or obtained for political advantage.

The Senate has taken no action on the proposal. Without congressional action, the questions over presidential power and its expansiveness remain open. "The Constitution assumes that checks and balances work. If the president goes too far, Congress will rein him in," said Edelson.

In Trump's case, Congress has not shown an appetite for doing that.

Wildfire threat becomes tool to fight home builders

By MICHAEL PHILLIS and SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

Preston Brown knows the risk of wildfire that comes with living in the rural, chaparral-lined hills of San Diego County. He's lived there for 21 years and evacuated twice.

That's why he fiercely opposed a plan to build more than 1,100 homes in a fire-prone area he said would be difficult to evacuate safely. Brown sits on the local planning commission, and he said the additional people would clog the road out.

"It's a very rough area," Brown said. "We have fires all the time now."

Opponents like Brown, a member of the Sierra Club and California Native Plant Society, scored a win last year. A California court sided with a coalition of environmental groups and blocked a developer's plan called Otay Village 14 that included single-family homes and commercial space. The groups argued the county didn't adequately consider fire escape routes, and the judge agreed.

That's not the only time California's escalating cycle of fire has been used as a basis to refuse development. Environmental groups are seeing increased success in California courts arguing that wildfire risk wasn't fully considered in proposals to build homes in fire-prone areas that sit at the edge of forests and brush, called the wildland-urban interface. Experts say such litigation could become more common.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta has backed a handful of the lawsuits, putting developers on notice. "You can't keep doing things the way we've been doing when the world is changing around us," Bonta said in an interview, adding that he supports more housing. His office has, for example, questioned the increased fire risk of a 16,000-acre (6,475-hectare) project that includes a luxury resort and 385 residential lots in Lake County, roughly 130 miles (209 kilometers) north of San Francisco in an area that has already seen significant fire.

Bonta said his office is working on a policy that will help developers and local officials avoid future opposition from his office. It will provide guidance on evacuation routes, planning for population growth and minimizing fire risk, he said.

Developers say they already consider wildfire risks in their plans, comply with strict fire codes and adhere

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to state environmental policies, all while trying to ease another one of the state's most pressing problems: the need for more housing.

Builders also say communities sometimes unfairly wield wildfire risk as a tool to stop development. The AG's office has weighed in on this side, too. Last year, the city of Encinitas denied permits to an apartment complex citing the possibility of choked outgoing traffic if there were a fire.

Encinitas — a city with a median home price of \$1.67 million — was thwarting the state's affordable housing goals, Bonta's office wrote. Months later, the commission approved the developer's plan with some changes.

FIRE AND LAWSUITS

California is withering under a megadrought that is increasing the risk of fire, with 12 of the 20 largest wildfires in its history taking place in the past five years. UC Berkeley researchers estimate 1.4 million homes in California are located in high or very high-risk areas. Activists say the public is increasingly aware of fires.

The result is more lawsuits.

Opponents of the developments are employing the often-hated California Environmental Quality Act against local governments in these lawsuits. That law ensures there's enough information about projects like Otay Village 14 for officials to make informed decisions and address problems. In 2018, the state strengthened requirements for disclosing wildfire risk, leaving developers more vulnerable to this kind of litigation.

Peter Broderick, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, said environmental groups are challenging "the worst of the worst," large projects in undeveloped, high fire-prone areas that cater to wealthy buyers.

"We're talking about sprawl," Broderick said.

Pro-housing advocates have said the state's policies encourage sprawl.

MAJOR HOUSING NEED

But by fighting big developments, environmental groups are holding up thousands of homes, said Mark Dillon, an attorney who represented the Otay Village 14 builders. New developments take fire risk seriously, employing techniques for fire-resistance and complying with building codes, he said. Otay Village 14 would build its own fire station.

California shouldn't just focus on building in city centers, Dillon countered.

"We shouldn't be outlawing the single family home," he said.

Jennifer Hernandez heads the West Coast Land Use and Environmental Group at Holland & Knight LLP. She said developers are adjusting to changes in the environmental review law but that the attorney general's office should issue a public policy.

"The ad hoc nature of unexpected interventions by the AG's office does a policy disservice to California housing needs," she said.

Hernandez represents an industry group that sued Calabasas, an affluent community of over 20,000 northwest of Los Angeles, arguing that it improperly cited wildfire risk to deny a 180-unit development.

"It's on the main street of an existing community," she said. "And why is this a problem?"

Calabasas City Manager Kindon Meik said the project would violate open space rules and was in a highrisk area that had recently burned, adding the city has plans to meet its new housing needs.

California's housing shortage has made homes unaffordable for many moderate and low-income residents. Researchers, housing policy experts, and others say development at the edge of the forest has been driven in part by these punishing home costs in cities like Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco and their suburbs.

In recent years, the state passed measures aimed at ensuring cities build enough new homes, but a recent statewide housing plan said 2.5 million new homes are still needed over the next eight years.

Greg Pierce, a professor of urban environmental policy at the University of California, Los Angeles, said there's very little land left in California that is undeveloped, cheap and at low risk of fire.

Meanwhile, activists have more projects in their crosshairs.

NeySa Ely of Escondido has a list of items like medicine and dog supplies to grab the next time she has

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to flee a fire. She had to evacuate in 2003 and 2007. The first time, she remembers driving away and seeing flames in the rearview mirror.

"At that point, I just started sobbing," Ely said.

Her house survived that blaze, but the memory stuck. So when she heard about plans for Harvest Hills, a roughly 550-home development proposed about a mile from her house, she worked to block it, concerned that more residents and buildings in the area would clog the roads out and increase the chance of fire.

The project hasn't been approved yet, but if it is, Ely said, "I think it will be heavily litigated."

Kevin Spacey pleads not guilty to UK sexual assault charges

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LÓNDON (AP) — Actor Kevin Spacey pleaded not guilty on Thursday to charges of sexually assaulting three men a decade or more ago, and was told he would face trial next year.

Spacey, 62, stood in the dock and spoke clearly as he replied "not guilty" to each of the five charges during a hearing at London's Central Criminal Court, commonly known as the Old Bailey.

Judge Mark Wall set a date of June 6, 2023, for the trial to start and said it would last three to four weeks. It is likely to be at the Old Bailey, the venue for Britain's highest-profile criminal trials.

The former "House of Cards" star, who ran London's Old Vic theater between 2004 and 2015, denied four counts of sexual assault and one count of causing a person to engage in penetrative sexual activity without consent.

The incidents allegedly took place in London between March 2005 and August 2008, and one in western England in April 2013. The victims are now in their 30s and 40s.

Space's lawyer previously said the actor "strenuously denies" the allegations.

Spacey, who has addresses in London and the U.S., was granted bail and allowed to return to the United States after a preliminary hearing last month. The judge continued the actor's unconditional bail on Thursday, and said another pretrial hearing would be held early in 2023.

Spacey thanked the judge at the end of the 15-minute hearing. He made no comment as he left court and was ushered through a crowd of photographers and camera crews into a chauffeur-driven car.

Spacey won a best supporting actor Academy Award for the 1995 film "The Usual Suspects" and a lead actor Oscar for the 1999 movie "American Beauty."

But his celebrated career came to an abrupt halt in 2017 when actor Anthony Rapp accused the star of assaulting him at a party in the 1980s, when Rapp was a teenager. Spacey denies the allegations.

Spacey faces a separate civil sex-assault lawsuit from Rapp in U.S. federal court in New York.

What does 'plead the Fifth' mean? Will the Trumps do it?

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump and two of his children — Donald Jr. and Ivanka — are due, in the coming days, to face questioning under oath in New York's civil investigation into their business practices. But will the Trumps answer?

The ex-president's lawyer has indicated that he will advise Trump to stay mum and invoke the Fifth Amendment's protection against self-incrimination. It's a constitutional right that gets high-profile exposure in settings from Congress to TV crime shows, but there are nuances. Here's what it means — and doesn't — to "plead (or 'take') the Fifth."

WHAT IS 'THE FIFTH'?

The Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution establishes a number of rights related to legal proceedings, including that no one "shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself."

In the most direct sense, that means criminal defendants don't have to give damning testimony in their own cases. But it has come to apply in non-criminal contexts, too.

WHAT'S THE THINKING BEHIND IT?

"It reflects many of our fundamental values and most noble aspirations," the Supreme Court wrote in

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1964.

Among those ideals: preventing people from being tortured into confessing or being shoehorned into a "cruel trilemma of self-accusation, perjury or contempt" of court.

Many decades earlier, the court also questioned the reliability of confessions made under duress.

THE AMENDMENT SPECIFICALLY REFERS TO CRIMINAL CASES. HOW CAN IT APPLY TO A CIVIL IN-VESTIGATION?

Over time, the Fifth Amendment's protections have been understood to cover witnesses — not just defendants — in criminal and civil courts and other government settings. The Supreme Court has even held that Fifth Amendment rights protected the jobs of public employees who were fired after refusing to testify in investigations unless they got immunity from prosecution.

The Fifth Amendment also underpins the famous Miranda warning about the right to remain silent and have an attorney on hand while being questioned in police custody.

SO ARE THERE ANY LIMITATIONS?

Under what has become the legal standard, the witness has to be facing a genuine risk of criminal prosecution, said Paul Cassell, a criminal law professor at the University of Utah. That means prosecution on any charge in any U.S. court.

There are sometimes disputes over whether the right is being invoked inappropriately. The questioning side can ask a judge to declare that someone needs to answer or face contempt of court and possible penalties.

But "the courts have generally thought that they should give the benefit of the doubt to someone who might be criminally prosecuted, rather than force someone to testify and then learn: "Whoops!" Cassell said. OK. CAN SOMEONE WHO TAKES THE FIFTH DECIDE TO ANSWER SOME QUESTIONS, BUT NOT OTHERS?

Yes, it's not necessarily all-or-nothing. But even deciding to answer selectively could be risky: Responding to one question can enable the other side to argue that the witness can't refuse to answer other, related questions. Another concern: seemingly safe questions could be meant to build evidence about an allegation that's not on the witness' radar yet.

HMMMM. IF YOU INVOKE THE PROTECTION, DOES THAT WORK AGAINST YOU?

Legally, it depends. In a criminal case, prosecutors can't comment on a defendant's refusal to testify, and a jury can't be advised that it's OK to take defendants' silence as a sign of guilt. The Supreme Court has said that allowing that inference penalizes defendants for simply availing themselves of a constitutional protection.

But in civil cases, jurors generally are allowed to hold silence against a defendant or witness.

Then there's the court of public opinion.

"Does it look bad? In the general public's understanding, yes," says Howard University criminal law professor Lenese Herbert. "But that's just a result of poor civics education."

The former federal prosecutor often reminds her students that while jurors might want to hear a defendant's side of the story, it's a defense attorney's job to make sure the jury understands that the client has the right not to take the stand.

CAN WE GET BACK TO TRUMP? HE'S BEING QUESTIONED IN A CIVIL INVESTIGATION. CAN HE CLAIM THERE'S POTENTIAL FOR CRIMINAL PROSECUTION?

Indeed, his lawyers have already asserted that New York Attorney General Letitia James' civil inquiry is essentially a fact-finding mission for Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's parallel criminal probe.

James has said her investigation found evidence that the company puffed up the value of real estate assets to snag loans, insurance and tax breaks for land donations. Trump has denied the allegations, and the Republican has slammed the investigation as a political "witch hunt" by Democratic officials.

Meanwhile, other fruits of James' probe led the DA's office to bring criminal tax fraud charges against the businessman-turned-politician's company, called the Trump Organization, and its finance chief. The defendants have pleaded not guilty in that case, which involves claims of off-the-books compensation.

WHAT HAS TEAM TRUMP SAID ABOUT ALL THIS?

Trump lawyer Ronald Fischetti has said that unless legal immunity is granted for the ex-president's up-

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coming deposition — a term for sworn pretrial questioning out of court — he'd advise invoking the Fifth Amendment "because that's what the law provides." Still, he maintained that publicity surrounding such a choice now could harm Trump's defense if there's a criminal charge down the road.

"How can I possibly pick a jury in that case?" Fischetti said in trying, unsuccessfully, to block the deposition. Trump himself, years ago, repeatedly suggested that only people with something to hide avail themselves of the protection.

"The mob takes the Fifth," he declared once.

Is Twitter down? Service appears to return after outage

By The Associated Press undefined

Twitter appears to be returning for some users after experiencing an hourlong outage that affected both its app and website on Thursday.

Individuals attempting to use the social media platform were met with a message saying "Tweets aren't loading right now. Try again." According to Downdetector, users began reporting the outage around 8 a.m. EDT. About an hour later, the service began to return.

Twitter's own status page offered no information during the outage, showing only the message "All Systems Operational."

Internet monitoring group NetBlocks, which tracks attempts to intentionally block internet access, says Twitter was "experiencing major international outages" but it was "not related to country-level internet disruptions or filtering."

The global outage came at a tumultuous time for Twitter, which has sued billionaire Elon Musk in an attempt to force him to complete his \$44 billion purchase of the company.

Twitter was infamous for outages in its early days but as it grew the problems became less common. Still, it suffered outages earlier this year, in February.

Wholesale inflation in June surged 11.3% from a year ago

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation at the wholesale level climbed 11.3% in June compared with a year earlier, the latest painful reminder that inflation is running hot through the American economy.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that the U.S. producer price index — which measures inflation before it hits consumers — rose at the fastest pace since hitting a record 11.6% in March.

Last month's jump in wholesale inflation was led by energy prices, which soared 54% from a year earlier. But even excluding food and energy prices, which can swing wildly from month to month, producer prices in June jumped 8.2% from June 2021. On a month-to-month basis, wholesale inflation rose 1.1% from May to June, also the biggest jump since March.

Thursday's report on wholesale prices came a day after the Labor Department reported that surging prices for gas, food and rent catapulted consumer inflation to a new four-decade peak in June, further pressuring households and likely sealing the case for another large interest rate hike by the Federal Reserve. Consumer prices soared 9.1% compared with a year earlier, the biggest yearly increase since 1981.

Producer prices have surged nearly 18% for goods and nearly 8% for services compared with June 2021. And the Labor Department said wholesale transportation and warehousing prices shot up 23% and food prices nearly 13% from a year ago.

The persistence of high inflation has eroded incomes, intensified price pressures on companies large and small and raised the risk of an economic downturn as a result of ever-higher borrowing costs. It has also diminished the public's approval of President Joe Biden and dimmed Democratic prospects in the November congressional elections.

The Fed has embarked on an aggressive series of rate hikes that are intended to tame high inflation without causing a recession — a notoriously difficult challenge.

The U.S. inflation surge erupted from the swift rebound from the 2020 pandemic recession, and it steadily

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accelerated as spending outstripped the availability of labor and supplies. Generous government aid and super-low rates engineered by the Fed sent consumers on a spending spree that surprised businesses. Factories, ports and freight yards were overwhelmed, leading to shortages, delays and higher prices. Russia's war against Ukraine magnified energy and food inflation.

Some economists have held out hope that inflation might be reaching a short-term peak. Gas prices have been falling. Shipping costs and commodity prices have moderated. Pay increases have slowed. And surveys show that Americans' expectations for inflation over the long run have eased — a trend that often points to more moderate price increases ahead.

But this week's reports showing persistently high consumer and wholesale inflation pressures indicate that the Fed will remain under pressure to continue raising rates sharply in the coming months. The strength of the U.S. job market, with robust hiring and unemployment at a near-half-century low, means that more people have paychecks to spend, which will keep upward pressure on prices.

"Despite a modest improvement in supply conditions, price pressures will remain uncomfortable in the near term and bolster the Fed's resolve to prevent inflation from becoming entrenched in the economy," Mahir Rasheed, U.S. economist at Oxford Economics, said in a research note.

He added, "Higher production costs will sustain upside risks to consumer prices as businesses tease out how much additional pass-through consumers will tolerate."

Today in History: July 15, designer Gianni Versace shot dead

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, July 15, the 196th day of 2022. There are 169 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 15, 1916, Boeing Co., originally known as Pacific Aero Products Co., was founded in Seattle. On this date:

In 1834, the Spanish Inquisition was abolished more than 3 1/2 centuries after its creation.

In 1870, Georgia became the last Confederate state to be readmitted to the Union.

In 1913, Democrat Augustus Bacon of Georgia became the first person elected to the U.S. Senate under the terms of the recently ratified 17th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, providing for popular election of senators.

In 1975, three American astronauts blasted off aboard an Apollo spaceship hours after two Soviet cosmonauts were launched aboard a Soyuz spacecraft for a mission that included a linkup of the two ships in orbit.

In 1976, a 36-hour kidnap ordeal began for 26 schoolchildren and their bus driver as they were abducted near Chowchilla, California, by three gunmen and imprisoned in an underground cell. (The captives escaped unharmed; the kidnappers were caught.)

In 1996, MSNBC, a 24-hour all-news network, made its debut on cable and the internet.

In 1997, fashion designer Gianni Versace (ver-SAH'-chay), 50, was shot dead outside his Miami Beach home; suspected gunman Andrew Phillip Cunanan (koo-NAN'-an), 27, was found dead eight days later, a suicide. (Investigators believed Cunanan killed four other people before Versace in a cross-country rampage that began the previous March.)

In 2002, John Walker Lindh, an American who'd fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan, pleaded guilty in federal court in Alexandria, Virginia, to two felonies in a deal sparing him life in prison.

In 2016, Donald Trump chose Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, an experienced politician with deep Washington connections, as his running mate.

In 2018, President Donald Trump arrived in Finland for a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Earlier, in an interview with CBS News, Trump named the European Union as a top adversary of the United States.

In 2019, avowed white supremacist James Alex Fields Jr. was sentenced to life in prison plus 419 years

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for killing one and injuring dozens of others when he deliberately drove his car into a crowd of anti-racism protesters during a rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

In 2020, George Floyd's family filed a lawsuit against the city of Minneapolis and the four police officers charged in his death, alleging the officers violated Floyd's rights when they restrained him and that the city allowed a culture of excessive force, racism and impunity to flourish in its police force. (The city would agree to pay \$27 million to settle the lawsuit in March 2021.)

Ten years ago: Syria's 16-month bloodbath crossed an important symbolic threshold as the international Red Cross formally declared the conflict a civil war, a status with implications for potential war crimes prosecutions. A Russian Soyuz craft launched into the morning skies over Kazakhstan, carrying three space travelers, including NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, to the International Space Station. Oscar-winning actor Celeste Holm, 95, died in New York.

Five years ago: After twice being rejected for U.S. visas, an all-girl robotics team from Afghanistan arrived in Washington for an international competition after President Donald Trump used a rare "parole" mechanism to sidestep the visa system; the case had become a flashpoint in the debate about Trump's efforts to tighten entrance to the U.S. Two former high-ranking Penn State administrators surrendered to serve jail sentences for how they responded to a 2001 complaint about assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky showering with a boy. Garbine Muguruza (GAHR'-been moo-gah-ROO'-thuh) beat Venus Williams 7-5, 6-0 to win the Wimbledon title. Oscar-winning actor Martin Landau died at the age of 89.

One year ago: A jury found gunman Jarrod Ramos criminally responsible for killing five people in the newsroom of the Capital Gazette newspaper in Annapolis, Maryland in 2018. (Ramos would be sentenced to more than five life sentences without the possibility of parole.) Amid a sharp increase in coronavirus cases, officials in Los Angeles County said masks would again be required indoors, even for people who'd been vaccinated.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Patrick Wayne is 83. R&B singer Millie Jackson is 78. Rock singer-musician Peter Lewis (Moby Grape) is 77. Singer Linda Ronstadt is 76. Rock musician Artimus Pyle is 74. Arianna Huffington, co-founder of The Huffington Post, is 72. Actor Celia Imrie is 70. Actor Terry O'Quinn is 70. Rock singer-musician David Pack is 70. Rock musician Marky Ramone is 70. Rock musician Joe Satriani is 66. Country singer-songwriter Mac McAnally is 65. Model Kim Alexis is 62. Actor Willie Aames is 62. Actor-director Forest Whitaker is 61. Actor Lolita Davidovich is 61. Actor Shari Headley is 59. Actor Brigitte Nielsen is 59. Rock musician Jason Bonham is 56. Actor Amanda Foreman is 56. R&B singer Stokley (Mint Condition) is 55. Actor-comedian Eddie Griffin is 54. Actor Reggie Hayes is 53. Actor-screenwriter Jim Rash is 51. Rock musician John Dolmayan is 50. Actor Scott Foley is 50. Actor Brian Austin Green is 49. Rapper Jim Jones is 46. Actor Diane Kruger is 46. Actor Lana Parrilla (LAH'-nuh pa-REE'-uh) is 45. Rock musician Ray Toro (My Chemical Romance) is 45. Actor Laura Benanti is 43. Actor Travis Fimmel is 43. Actor Taylor Kinney is 41. Actor-singer Tristan "Mack" Wilds is 33. Actor Medalion Rahimi is 30. Actor Iain Armitage (TV: "Big Little Lies" "Young Sheldon") is 14.