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July 23-24
Jr. Legion Region

July 29-Aug. 2
State Legion at Gregory

August 5-7: State Jr. Legion at Clark

Thursday, Aug. 4
First allowable day of football practice

Monday, Aug. 8
First allowable day of boys golf practice

Thursday, Aug. 11
First allowable day of volleyball and cross country practice



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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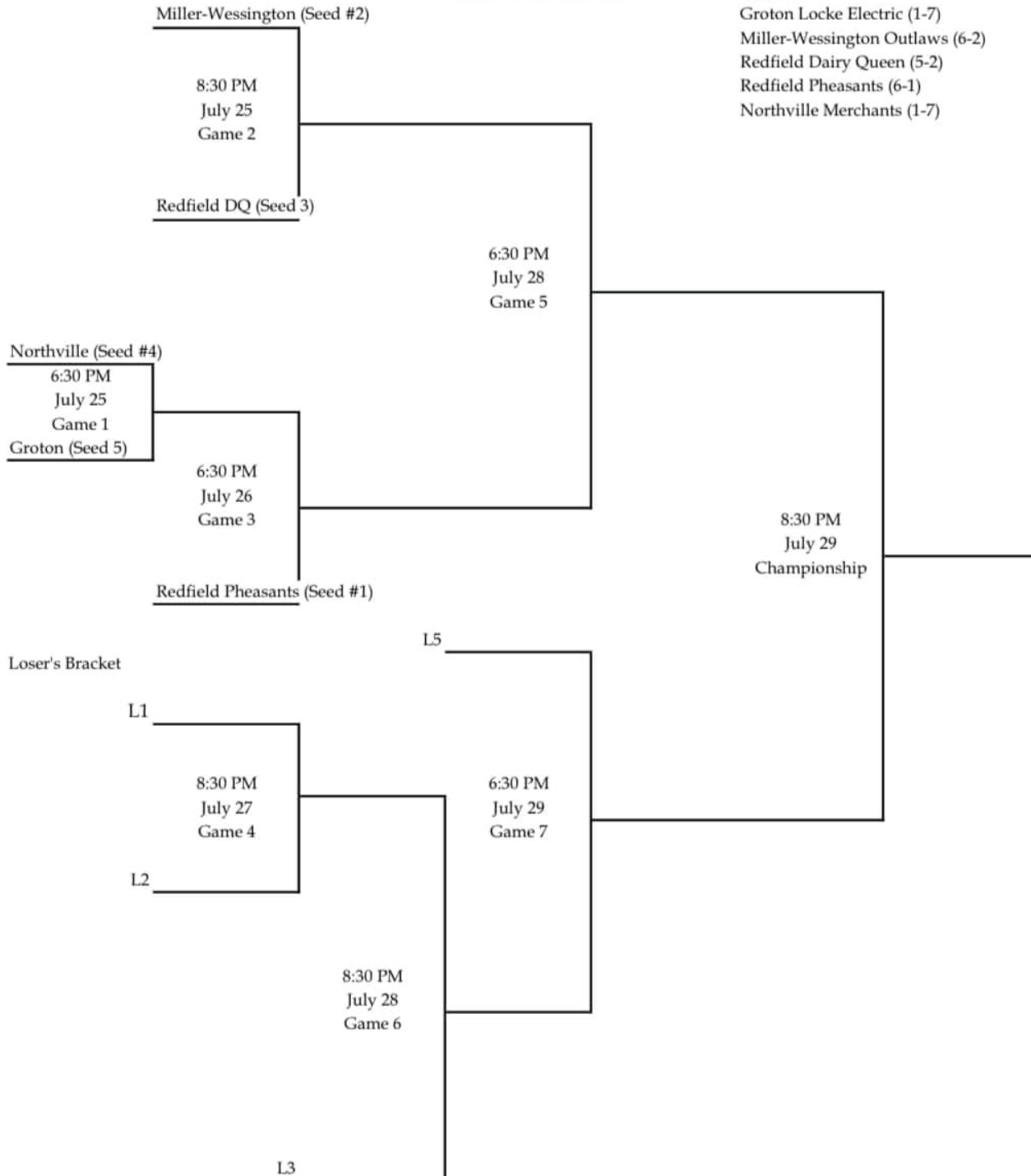
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Amateur Region start today in Groton

District 2B Schedule

July 25, 26, 28 & 29
Groton, South Dakota
Adults \$5 - Students \$3

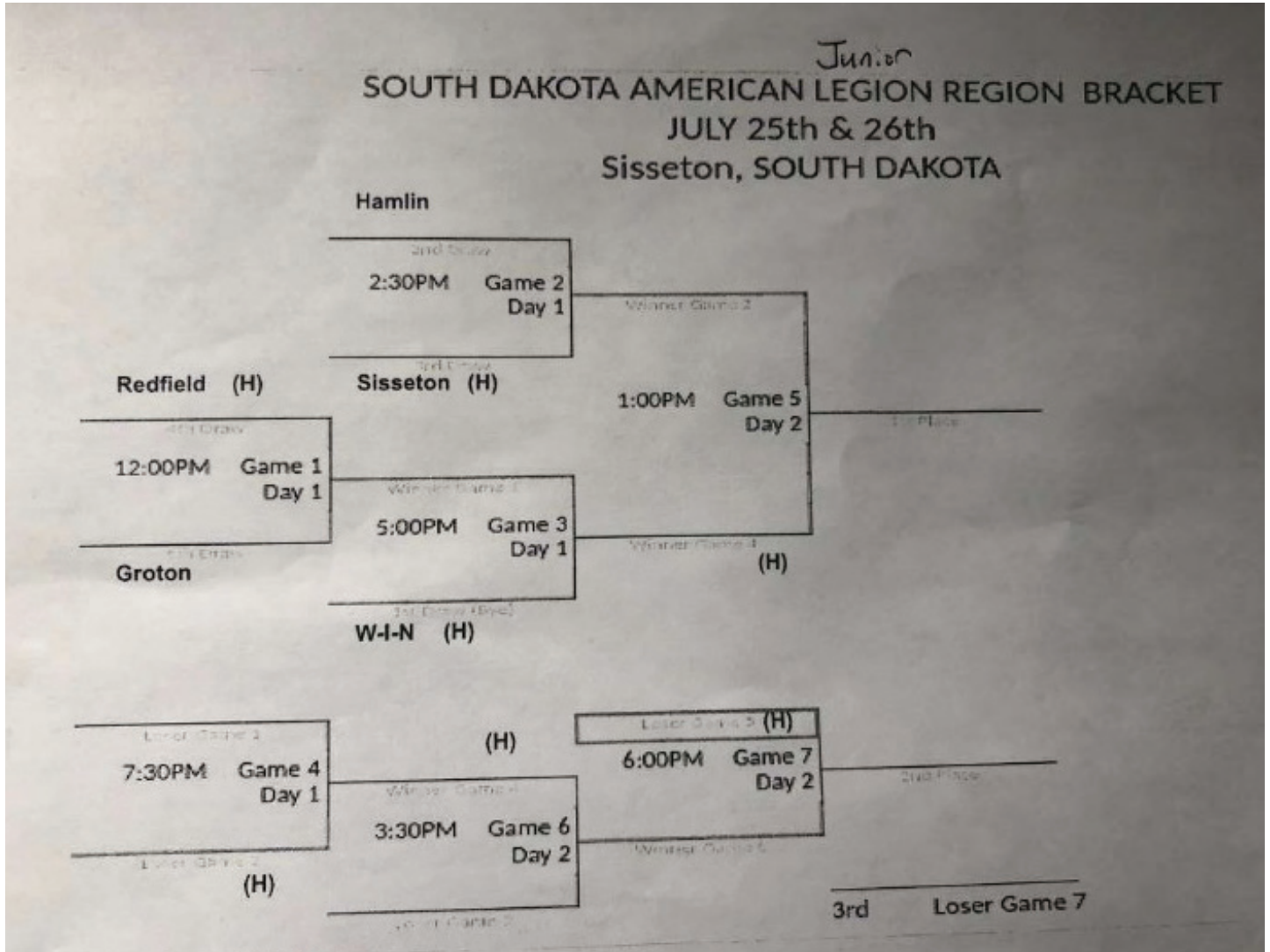
Teams:
Groton Locke Electric (1-7)
Miller-Wessington Outlaws (6-2)
Redfield Dairy Queen (5-2)
Redfield Pheasants (6-1)
Northville Merchants (1-7)



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Jr. Legion Region starts today in Sisseton



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That's Life by Tony Bender

Maybe we should go easier on the athletes

I was delighted to see my friend walk into my office last week looking good after a rare stroke that usually takes out lesser men. The doctors were amazed, he said, that his speech and cognitive abilities remained intact. "Well, if anything was affected," I responded, "I hope it has something to do with your judgement in fantasy football." That's what passes for compassion in Ashley, ND, especially in a league swimming with sharks.

Through a series of miracles, I emerged champion last year after an extended and humbling hiatus. Now, they're all gunning for me, so I've already been contemplating quarterbacks, the most important position in our touchdown league.

I've been thinking, too, about how hard on them we as fans can be—specifically North Dakota's own Carson Wentz and Baker Mayfield who was unceremoniously exiled to Carolina, as if playing in Cleveland hadn't been exile enough.

Maybe I have a soft spot for Wentz because he's a local kid—and that's really what most of them are, kids, with the weight and the scrutiny of the world on their sore shoulders—but also because a few years ago, 'the big ginger,' as India called him, was her seatmate on a flight back from Pennsylvania. He was wearing an NDSU jersey. And he was nice. North Dakota nice.

After being bounced out of Philadelphia, one of the toughest places in the world to play with a rabid fan base, he spent a year in Indianapolis before being traded to Washington. He's got a lot to prove. A career on the line. Statistically, he had fine year for the Colts, but the rap on him is he's stubborn. North Dakota stubborn, and not beloved in the locker room. And, frankly, I was disappointed that he shunned the COVID vaccine, and that cost him playing time and hurt the team. Maybe it was founded on religious beliefs or suspicion borne of a thousand misplaced conspiracy theories. But he's still young. Aaron Rodgers did the same thing, but when you win, all is forgiven. So, I'm pulling for him. He's got immense talent and inadvisably sometimes, the mentality of a linebacker. Carson, if your reading this, it's okay to step out of bounds.

Mayfield is another guy I appreciate. He's got charisma and a gutty attitude. He played the season with a torn labrum and fractured humerus in his non-throwing shoulder, a knee injury, and the usual brutal bruises that come from as sport that amounts to a series of car wrecks every week. You might not perform well, either, if you were crazy enough to play as wounded as he was. Geez, does he get no credit for putting his body on the line? Isn't that the guy you want next you in a foxhole? Like Wentz, there were whispers about locker room issues. But he's young. You learn. Or you don't. But I think he will. And has. To replace him, the Browns brought in DeShaun Watson who claims innocence in 24 civil cases against him from massage therapists. If he is, it's the biggest conspiracy since COVID. He's going to be your locker room leader? What message does that send?

Fans send messages, too, and not always good ones. I've walked high school sidelines for decades and I still cringe at some of the critical fan behavior, often from the parents themselves. Sure, they make mistakes, but they're teenagers. It's easy, with the benefit of experience and time, to better understand the game and the situation, but man, things are moving pretty fast when you're 15.

It didn't dawn on me for years why my baseball coach was upset when I tried to steal third with two outs in a tight tournament game and our weakest hitter at the plate. My logic was that I'd score with a passed ball, which was not uncommon in those games. His was that we didn't want to start the last inning with our weakest batter. I was out by an inch by a perfect throw. And we lost.

We had a South Border football team last year that rebounded from years of losing to have a remarkable season—one of the years when the kids, coaches, and the stars align—and the poise they showed was exceptional. In retrospect, I think they taught some would-be critics about grace under pressure. Quite an achievement for those so young.

Mistakes, fumbles, interceptions, missed tackles, happen at every level. But, by God, they're trying. It's hard work. I think we, as fans, have some work to do, too, involving understanding and compassion. Okay?

Now, let the games begin.

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Weekly Vikings Recap

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

As we enter the last week of the offseason for the Vikings, we finish up our analysis of the different position groups. We'll look at any competition that might occur, as well as make our predictions for who will make the final 53-man roster. For the last week, we will look at the cornerbacks.

Cornerbacks:

Lock to make the 53-man roster: Patrick Peterson, Cam Dantzler, Chandon Sullivan, Andrew Booth, Akayleb Evans, and Kris Boyd

Slowly, but surely, the Vikings have started to rebuild their cornerback room. Although it is not what it was in 2017, the cornerback room is much better than it was over the past two seasons in Minnesota.

The Vikings brought back veteran Patrick Peterson for another season. Despite not being what he was in his Arizona days, Peterson is still a solid cornerback. Moreover, he provides the veteran leadership in the cornerback room filled with many young cornerbacks.

After Peterson, the rest of the starting cornerback spots are open to competition. The leaders in the clubhouse are probably Cameron Dantzler and Chandon Sullivan, merely because of their experience. Dantzler, who lacks the typical high-end speed of a cornerback, has been decent in his first two seasons in Minnesota. However, some experts think Dantzler has real potential to be a good cornerback, while others are unsure if his lack of speed will allow him to cover the elite wide receivers in the NFL.

Sullivan will likely be the starting slot cornerback for the Vikings. Sullivan, who played three seasons in Green Bay, is an average cornerback at best. However, given the youth and inexperience in this cornerback room, having a guy who can be a reliable player at the cornerback position might be something the Vikings need at the start of the season.

As for the remaining players on this list, Andrew Booth is probably the best bet to crack the starting lineup this season. Booth was a good cornerback at Clemson and was projected by some experts to be good enough to be a first-round pick in this past year's draft. However, Booth fell to the second-round, and the Vikings traded up to grab him. Booth has stated that he played hurt through most of his years at Clemson. That might concern some people, but it also might show that Booth has the potential to be very good once he gets fully healthy.

Akayleb Evans was the favorite draft pick of Vikings' GM, Kwesi Adofo-Mensah. There is some potential there with Evans, but I do think he is still a very raw player who will need time to develop into a reliable starting cornerback.

And, despite what others think, I believe Kris Boyd will likely make the Vikings' final roster because he is continuing to develop into a solid cornerback. Furthermore, Boyd is entering the final season of his rookie contract and might have extra motivation to make an impact in order to ensure a new contract next season.

Players competing for the final spot on the cornerback group: Harrison Hand and Parry Nickerson

Harrison Hand is entering his third season with the Vikings and has yet to really break out into anything more than a depth cornerback. Perhaps if he excels during training camp, he could jump a guy like Kris Boyd on the depth chart. However, I think there are too many guys in front of him to make the Vikings' final roster.

The same can be said for Parry Nickerson. Nickerson has found himself to be an NFL journeyman, playing for five teams in five seasons. Maybe he will decide to play on the Vikings' practice squad if he gets cut to provide depth in case of injury.

Likely to be cut or placed on the practice squad: Tye Smith and Nate Hairston

53-man roster predictions:

Jack Kolsrud's prediction

Patrick Peterson, Cam Dantzler, Chandon Sullivan, Andrew Booth, Akayleb Evans, and Kris Boyd

Duane Kolsrud's prediction

Patrick Peterson, Cam Dantzler, Chandon Sullivan, Andrew Booth, Akayleb Evans, and Kris Boyd

Cancer screening saved my life - Twice

As a physician with 45 years of practice, I've seen my share of diseases. I have usually been on the physician side of the diagnosis-treatment paradigm. However, knowing the rationale for diagnostic screening tests, I fortunately did not shirk my own.

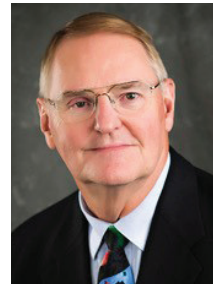
Testing too much or too frequently leads to insignificant findings that may have no long-term consequences yet create worry and further testing. Too often, this can lead to surgery that does not save lives but carries pain, disability, unnecessary expense, and sometimes post-op infection that occasionally is fatal. Knowing what and when to test is a crucial conversation to have with your doctor.

Although annual prostate-specific antigen, or PSA testing is no longer recommended, periodic testing may raise suspicion if a rising pattern is seen. As luck would have it, this turned out to be my dilemma, so I retested six months later, and when my PSA continued to climb, I went in for a biopsy. The biopsy showed a very aggressive type of cancer, the type that metastasizes very quickly to bone. Surgery was scheduled and computed tomography or CT scans ordered to help with staging my surgery.

Even though I had had three colonoscopies in the preceding 25 years, the CT scan showed a tumor inside my colon that was only about one millimeter from breaking through the wall and spreading to other organs. An extra year of procrastinating would almost certainly have found me with two cancers that would have already spread. Catching them early, surgery was curative, and I was one of the lucky ones who did not have to undergo months of radiation or chemotherapy.

So, please, have this discussion with your doctor, and review the American Cancer Society's screening guidelines, as these vary with age, family history, and your unique set of risk factors. Go to www.cancer.org and be proactive. Catch it early and you too can go on enjoying life with your family for years to come.

Kenneth A. Bartholomew, M.D. is a contributing Prairie Doc® columnist. He lives in Fort Pierre, South Dakota and serves on the Healing Words Foundation Board of Directors, a 501c3 which provides funding for Prairie Doc® programs. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Kenneth A. Bartholomew, M.D.



South Dakota 24/7 alcohol-testing program could go national

Stu Whitney

South Dakota News Watch

A zero-tolerance testing approach to reducing drunken driving and other alcohol-related crimes that started in South Dakota could broaden its reach nationally, despite concerns from critics that it restricts the constitutional rights of some participants.

The 24/7 Sobriety program, pioneered by former South Dakota Attorney General Larry Long, requires offenders to submit to twice-a-day breathalyzer tests or remote monitoring as a condition of pre-trial bond or sentencing agreement. Failure to remain sober means the participant is sent to jail, a no-nonsense doctrine that has coincided with a decrease in DUI and other alcohol-related offenses, according to independent studies.

"That's why it works," Long said of 24/7 Sobriety, which is used in South Dakota, North Dakota and Montana and is in place in four other states as pilot programs. "These people know that if they show up and blow hot, they're going to jail."

South Dakota is a testing ground for lawmakers and policy analysts seeking to reduce the effects of alcohol abuse, which kills more than 140,000 individuals nationally each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, with an annual cost of nearly \$250 billion due to lost work productivity and health care expenses. Since 24/7 Sobriety started in 2005, there have been more than 39,000 participants in South Dakota and nearly 12.5 million tests administered, with a pass rate of 98.8%, according to the attorney general's office.

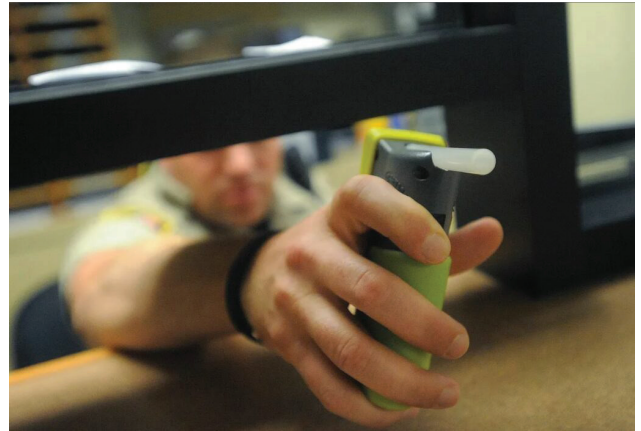
All but four South Dakota counties (Buffalo, Jones, Oglala Lakota and Todd) utilize the program, which focuses on repeat offenders and is largely self-funded because the cost of testing is passed on to participants. The original system, which targeted convicted drunken drivers, has expanded to include other cases involving alcohol or drugs, including cases involving abused or neglected children, and as a stipulation for maintaining a work permit.

In most counties, the first time the participant fails a test or doesn't show up, he or she is jailed for 12 hours, followed by 24 hours for a second violation and 48 hours for a third. Any further violations are sent to a judge, who can revoke bond or the sentencing agreement and put the offender behind bars for an extended period.

The next test for the program is to see if 24/7 Sobriety can catch on nationally. U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, is co-sponsoring bipartisan legislation to offer federal grants for states to adopt the intervention model, while also encouraging further study on its effects on drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

The SOBER Act (Supporting Opportunities to Build Everyday Responsibility) would help defray administrative costs for equipment that includes not just breathalyzers but also for urinalysis, drug patches, monitoring bracelets and ignition interlock devices, which prevent a vehicle from starting unless the driver passes a breath test.

Johnson noted that those awaiting trial or serving a suspended sentence can maintain employment and be with family if they stay away from alcohol and drugs, which in many cases was a factor in their



An officer gets ready to administer a breathalyzer test at the Minnehaha County Building in 2016. Tests are given twice a day to those in the 24/7 Sobriety program. Photo: Courtesy of Argus Leader

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criminal behavior. Ideally, mental health counseling and other services are part of the recovery process, rather than expecting offenders to “clean up” behind bars.

“I’m amazed at how ahead of its time South Dakota was,” said Johnson, who didn’t offer a timetable for when the bill might reach the House Judiciary Committee. “Now, most Americans understand that the best way to deal with addiction is not simply to throw someone in prison. Treatment and day-to-day accountability need to be a part of that journey. We’re talking about that every day in (Washington D.C.) now, but South Dakota was talking about it decades ago, and put together a pretty robust program with pretty good outcomes.”

Opponents point to civil rights issues

Critics claim those outcomes have come at the cost of constitutional protections for participants, many of whom are awaiting trial and have not been convicted of a crime. There are also questions about passing the cost of the program on to participants who might not be able to afford it in addition to having to pay for attorney fees, fines, mandatory counseling and other costs associated with their case.

The breathalyzer tests cost \$2 a day, while more expensive options – remote breath testing for \$5 and SCRAM (Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitoring) bracelets at \$6 a day – allow participants to avoid the twice-daily trip to the county jail or sheriff’s office for testing.

“That’s a luxury that many of our clients can’t afford,” said Traci Smith, who heads the Minnehaha County Public Defender’s Office. Though the program works in some cases to keep people out of jail, Smith said, she’s concerned that expanded use of 24/7 Sobriety makes it a catch-all that supersedes more suitable forms of rehabilitation.

“I do think it’s a good tool, but I don’t know that it’s a universal tool that should replace everything else in the toolbox,” said Smith, who started as a deputy public defender in 1999. “It’s not the same as treatment, and I think sometimes people outside of the treatment world forget that. Everything can’t always fall back on the jail or law enforcement to fix our problems.”

Smith has seen enough cases to know that the program’s positive effects are often temporary, and sometimes based on participants getting around the rules.

“What clients tell me is that once they get their schedule, they drink just enough to know when they get around the hours and they don’t get held,” Smith said. “Rather than addressing the real issue, which is the trauma behind the addiction, they’re just learning to play the game.”

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a federal lawsuit earlier this year challenging the 24/7 Sobriety program in Teton County, Wyoming, claiming twice-daily breath tests amount to “warrantless search” and violate the Fourth Amendment. The complaint also alleged Eighth Amendment violations for excessive bail due to fees that disproportionately impact indigent participants.

In April, a district judge denied the motion for a preliminary injunction to temporarily halt the program in Teton County, which the ACLU targeted because it included first-time defendants rather than just repeat offenders. Stephanie Amiotte, the ACLU’s legal director for South Dakota, North Dakota and Wyoming, said the 24/7 Sobriety case is “pending and active” and that her organization could pursue similar lawsuits in other states.

“Treatment programs are typically the best indicator of whether somebody is going to have a relapse or whether they’re going to contribute to their sobriety,” said Amiotte. “Throwing people in jail, causing them to lose their job, making them pay money that they don’t have, really isn’t the best way to effect change when somebody has a substance-abuse issue.”



A participant downloads information through an ankle monitor bracelet as part of the 24/7 Sobriety Program at the Minnehaha County Building. Photo: Courtesy of

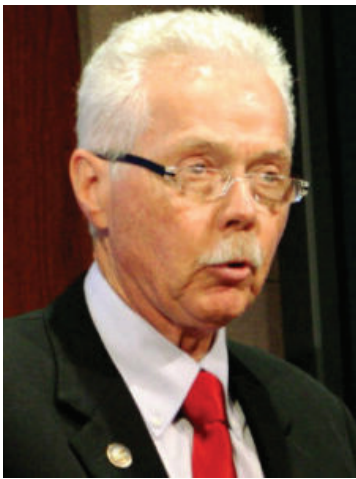
Argus Leader

Supporters, however, point to encouraging data from groups such as the RAND Corporation, a California-based policy think tank, which found a reduction in DUI arrests and domestic violence arrests in states that adopted the model.

A 2020 study by the Journal of Policy Analysis and Management published by RAND found that the probability of a 24/7 participant being re-arrested or having probation revoked within 12 months of being arrested for DUI was nearly 50 percent lower than that of non-participants.

"These findings provide support for 'swift-certain-fair' approaches to applying sanctions in community supervision," the study's authors concluded. "They also provide policymakers with evidence for a new approach to reduce criminal activity among those whose alcohol use leads them to repeatedly threaten public health and safety."

Vision for new approach takes shape



Larry Long

Larry Long grew up in Bennett County and spent 18 years as a prosecutor there in the 1970s and 80s, dealing with a steady tide of alcohol-related infractions, many involving repeat offenders.

Those caught drinking while out on bond faced penalties such as losing their driver's license, their vehicle or entering mandatory treatment, but that failed to deter the most chronic abusers of alcohol from landing back in custody.

"The sheriff and I were sitting around one day trying to figure out how we can make some room in our jail," Long told News Watch. "We hit upon the idea of testing people twice a day to enforce one standard rule, which is you don't drink while you're out on bond. The jail was across from the sheriff's office, so we would march them literally across the hall and put them behind bars."

Long likened the experience to touching an electric fence: "You never touch it purposefully a second time," he said. "What we discovered was that we could keep hardcore drinkers sober for two to three months at a time, allowing for better habits to take hold."

He moved to Pierre to become deputy attorney general under Mark Barnett in 1991 and took the Attorney General position in 2003, with fellow Republican Mike Rounds as governor. When Rounds formed a corrections working group to deal with rising incarceration rates, Long saw a chance to test the 24/7 Sobriety program with a broader scope. In 2005, he introduced the concept as a pilot program in three counties – Minnehaha, Pennington and Tripp – to see if the success in Bennett County could translate statewide.

Byron Nogelmeier, now the state 24/7 Sobriety coordinator, served as Turner County Sheriff at the time and recalled being skeptical of Long's vision.

"He came to a conference of the South Dakota Sheriffs' Association and brought it to the table, explaining how it had worked in Bennett County," said Nogelmeier. "Most of us walked out of there, thinking, 'Wow, how's this going to work?' But the more information he fed us and the more we saw of the pilot program, the more we became believers."

Long enlisted Bill Mickelson of the South Dakota Highway Patrol to run the program, which involved raising money for equipment and compiling data on alcohol-related convictions. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that South Dakota traffic fatalities involving alcohol impairment dropped from 71 in 2004 to 34 in 2008.

By then, the Legislature had passed a law to offer the program statewide, providing \$350,000 in state funds in 2007 and \$400,000 in 2008 to target chronic drunken drivers who ignored pre-trial provisions and consumed alcohol while out on bond. Costs for the program were soon passed on to participants, and counties were given the option of implementing the system.

"We limited it to (second offense) DUIs or higher, focusing on people who had been arrested for DUI and had a prior conviction within 10 years," said Long. "Judges started to see what we had seen in Bennett County, and more and more of them got on board."

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'It probably saved my life'

By the time David Whitesock moved from North Dakota to South Dakota and started working at a Winner radio station in 2005, he already had four DUI arrests, three failed college stints, an eviction from his apartment and a pink slip from his last job. He struggled with anxiety and depression that fueled his addiction to alcohol.

When he picked up his fifth drunken driving arrest three months after arriving in Winner, he expected to post bail like he had in the past and show up for his next appearance.

"They said, 'No, we have a new plan here,'" Whitesock told News Watch. "They told me that I could leave when I blew zero and as long as I continued to blow zero two times a day, I could keep working until I was sentenced. That sort of opened my eyes."

For three months, while working as a broadcaster, he would head to the police station, which was right across the alley from the radio station at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. to blow into a tube.

"I'd put on a six-minute song, something by Led Zeppelin, run out the back door and the (officers) knew I was coming," he said. The one time he forgot, he tried to talk his way out of it but was thrown behind bars until his sentencing date.

When that day arrived, in September of 2005, he entered the Tripp County courtroom of Judge Kathleen Trandahl wearing an orange jumpsuit, feeling out of sorts and out of chances.

"I will never forget that day," said Trandahl, who retired as a judge in 2016. "He looked like a tomcat that had been pulled behind a pickup for two weeks. He was markedly in trouble, just by looking at him."

Trandahl was familiar with the 24/7 Sobriety Program because her circuit included Bennett County, and she had lobbied to become part of Long's pilot program. She saw the zero-tolerance doctrine as well-suited for Whitesock, who despite his struggles had strong family support and was educated enough to understand the weight of the court's expectations.

"It was glaringly obvious that the criminal justice system had failed him in North Dakota," said Trandahl, noting that the state did not have 24/7 Sobriety at that time. "He had somehow managed to amass four DUI convictions, plus other crimes, and had been in and out of jail. And yet with all of that, he had never been to treatment, he had never been on probation, and there had been no court supervision. He was offered no help whatsoever, and I just felt that he was owed that opportunity by the court."

She handed Whitesock a 5-year sentence of supervised probation and two years of prison suspended. He received in-patient treatment at the Human Services Center in Yankton for 147 days until he found a spot at a sober house in Sioux Falls that the judge signed off on, within the framework of the 24/7 Sobriety system.

For the next 947 days, he rode his bike twice a day to the Minnehaha County Building for his breath tests while working a job and attending 12-step meetings. As the toxins left his body and his head cleared, he charted a path to enroll at the University of South Dakota with the judge's blessing.

"When you get up every morning at 6 a.m. and ride 26 blocks, then ride your bike back and do the same over again that night, it creates a certain level of discipline," said Whitesock. "That structure, given what my life was like before, was a game-changer for me."

He met his future wife at USD and worked his way into law school, weaning himself off 24/7 Sobriety into a more conventional form of probation. On Aug. 3, 2013, along with his family, he returned to the courtroom in Winner, this time for his Oath of Attorney after passing the bar, and Trandahl administered



David Whitesock, shown in this 2006 photo taking a breathalyzer test, was tested twice a day for 947 days after receiving his fifth DUI. He now runs his own business assisting in addiction recovery.

Photo: Courtesy of Argus Leader

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David Whitesock

the oath.

He worked as a data analyst for Face It Together, a Sioux Falls nonprofit that works to combat drug and alcohol addiction, and in 2020 founded his own New York-based company using data surveys to “measure wellbeing and quality of life relative to the effects of addiction.”

Whitesock sees 24/7 Sobriety as a shock to the system but not the only answer for chronic offenders. He and Trandahl both admit that 947 days of twice-daily tests became too much of a crutch, and he needed to test his sobriety while still having the safety net of probation and random tests.

But Whitesock also considers it a twist of fate that he happened to be in one of the counties that was part of Larry Long’s pilot program when his fifth DUI occurred after moving to Winner from North Dakota.

“Tripp County became part of the program because of Judge Trandahl in February of 2005, and I showed up in June,” he said. “It was in the two largest counties in South Dakota and then one little county, squished between Native American reservations, and that’s where I ended up, after a decade of personal

destruction. It probably saved my life.”

Different paths to achieving sobriety

Rep. Johnson supports South Dakota’s 24/7 Sobriety model but concedes that other states might need to find other ways to implement the program. The SOBER Act would provide \$250 million to states over five years to “create, sustain and expand” their programs and gather data, with a common goal of avoiding crowded jails and decreasing the amount recidivism with DUIs and other offenses.

“I’ve got pretty strong opinions on this issue, but I don’t think all of the wisdom resides in D.C.,” said Johnson. “So rather than impose my opinion on the states, we wanted to give them the flexibility to chart their own course. Maybe we’ll all do it a bunch of different ways and we’ll be able to learn which is best through time and data.”

Johnson’s bill is supported by the National Sheriffs’ Association and the Niskanen Center, a Libertarian-leaning think tank in Washington. But other groups have been a tougher sell. MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) has criticized the 24/7 Sobriety system for focusing not on just impaired driving but alcoholism in general, which they consider too broad a scope.

“Their focus is different,” said Long, who served two terms as attorney general and later became a circuit court judge before retiring in 2018. “Their primary tool is the interlock device that’s designed to prevent a drunk person from driving a car. Our goal is different. We want this person to quit drinking so he’s no longer in the criminal justice system at any level. We don’t want him to drive a car drunk, we don’t want to him to beat his wife, we don’t want him to abuse his kids, we don’t want him to pee on the sidewalk, we don’t want to have to appoint a lawyer for him, and we don’t want to have to pick a jury for him. That’s our focus, and it’s cheaper.”

In addition to the states that have adopted 24/7 Sobriety statewide, there are pilot programs either implemented or authorized in Alaska, Florida, Idaho, Nebraska, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

The Wyoming Legislature passed a 24/7 Sobriety law in 2014 but sparked controversy with a 2019 amendment that broadened the scope of the program to include first-time offenders, which made the breath tests “daily warrantless searches,” according to the ACLU.

A district judge dismissed some of the ACLU’s arguments in denying the motion for a preliminary injunction, writing in his opinion that the plaintiffs “have thrown much due-process spaghetti at the wall in this proceeding, and none of it has stuck.”

What happens next with that case will be watched closely as Johnson builds support for his bill and tries to get it to the House floor, which might become more realistic after the November mid-term elections. What started as an outside-the-box experiment in Bennett County could gain a national foothold if the GOP retakes the majority.

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"There's been a bit of a transformation in thinking, particularly among Republicans," said Johnson. "Thirty years ago, the dominant thought among Republican policymakers was that the severity of the punishment was enough to deter crime. We now know that it's the certainty and swiftness of sanctions that change behavior, and this is a positive step."

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit news organization online at sdnewswatch.org.

ABOUT STU WHITNEY

Stu Whitney is an investigative reporter for South Dakota News Watch. A resident of Sioux Falls, Whitney is an award-winning reporter, editor and novelist with more than 30 years of experience in journalism.



In South Dakota, the 24/7 Sobriety program requires offenders to submit to twice-a-day breathalyzer tests or remote monitoring as a condition of pre-trial bond or sentence agreement. Photo: Courtesy of Argus Leader

Weekend winners highlight SD Lottery drawings

PIERRE, S.D. – The third highest Mega Millions jackpot ever was only part of the buzz this weekend for South Dakota Lottery players.

The Mount Rushmore State was home to multiple big winners as a result of this weekend's drawings. The winners were highlighted by South Dakota's seventh Lucky for Life second prize winner.

The winning ticket was purchased at Ken's Superfair Foods, located at 2105 6th Ave. SE in Aberdeen. The ticket matched all five numbers and was just the Lucky Ball away from claiming the top prize.

The second-tier prize gives the winning player a choice of \$25,000 a year for life or the cash option of \$390,000. The South Dakota Lottery advises the winner to consult with a financial advisor before claiming the prize.

South Dakota's exclusive lotto game, Dakota Cash, also had some weekend excitement with its \$126,442 jackpot split among two winning tickets. One of the winning tickets was purchased at Maverik, Inc. located at 1624 Haines Ave. in Rapid City, while the other was purchased at Cowboy Country Store located at 504 9th Ave. SE in Watertown.

Friday's excitement proved to be just a precursor for Saturday's drawings. While the third highest Mega Millions jackpot was not won, the drawing featured a \$10,000 winner in South Dakota. The winning ticket was purchased at Gold Dust C Store in Deadwood.

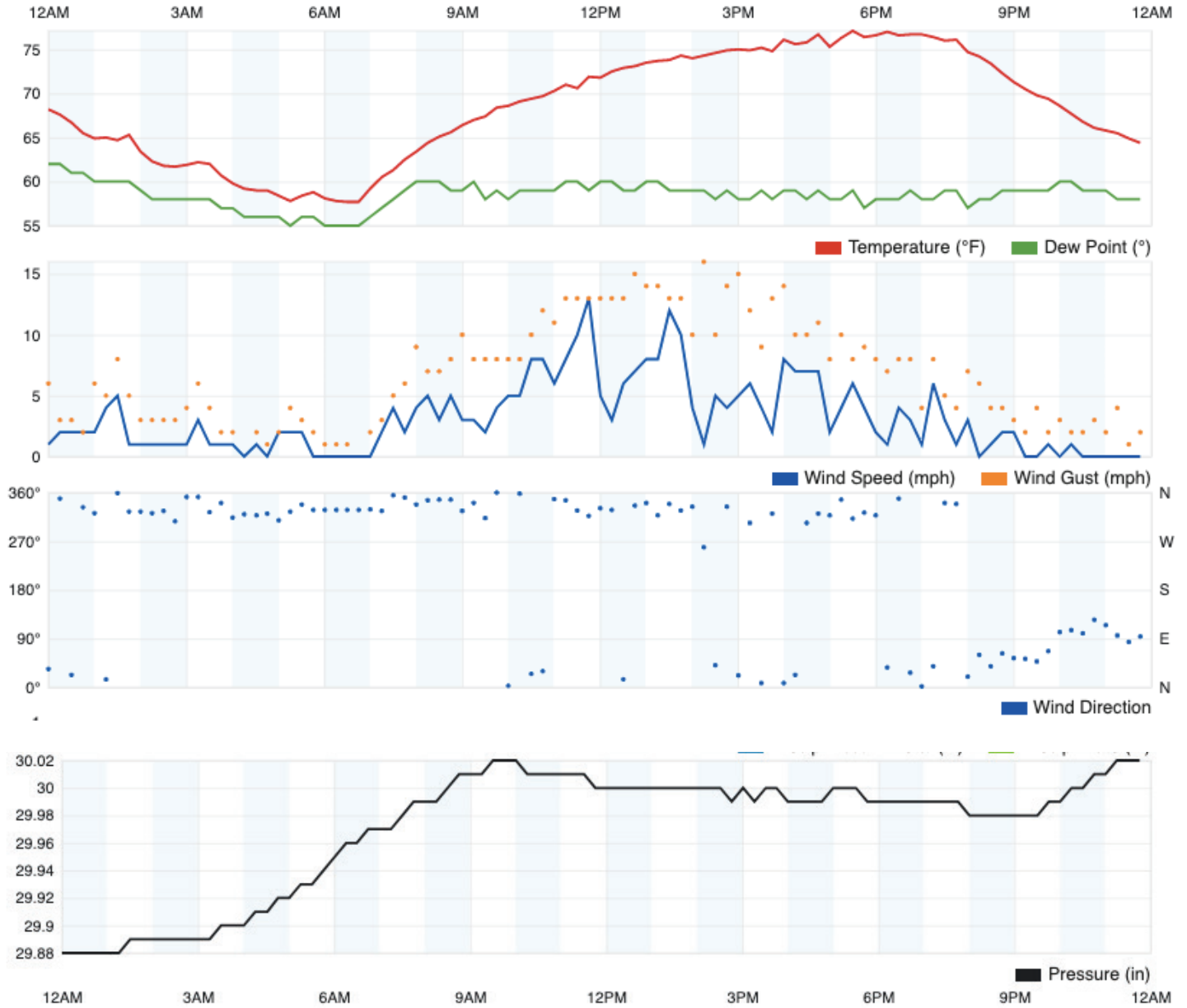
The Mega Millions jackpot continued its ascension over the weekend as Tuesday's jackpot currently sits at \$790 million.

The South Dakota Lottery advises all of its big winners to sign the back of their tickets immediately before visiting a South Dakota Lottery validation center to claim their prize. The Lottery reminds all players to please play responsibly and that it only takes one ticket to win.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
				
Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny
High: 74 °F	Low: 62 °F	High: 78 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 78 °F

NWS ABERDEEN  WEATHER.GOV/ABR 7/25/2022 3:15 AM

Scattered Showers and Thunderstorms Today and Tuesday

Today	Tuesday
73 to 80°	75 to 80°

Scattered showers and thunderstorms will affect much of the region today through the day Tuesday. No severe weather is expected. High temperatures will be in the mid 70s to low 80s today.

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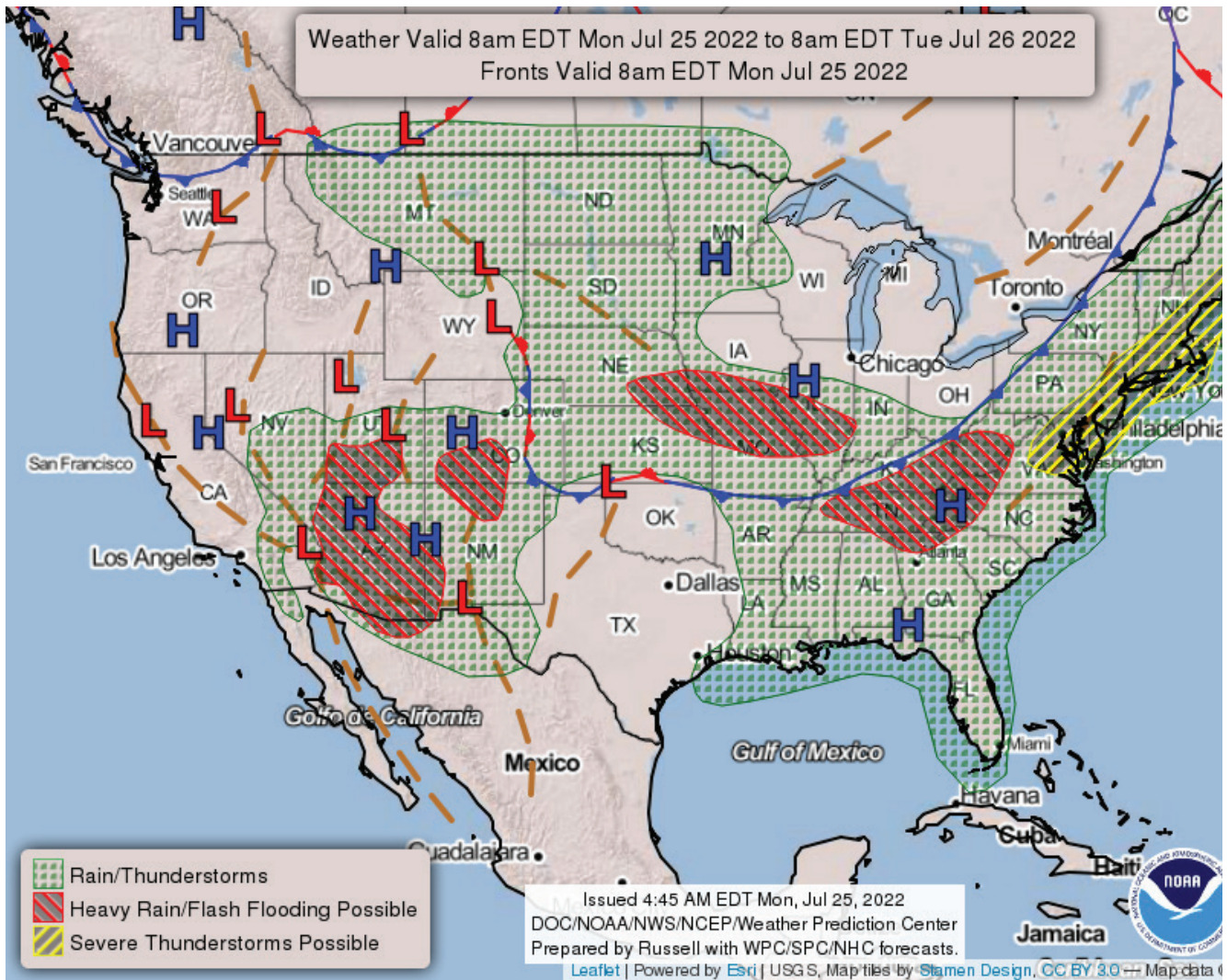
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 77 °F at 6:16 PM
Low Temp: 58 °F at 6:24 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 2:11 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 3 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 111 in 1931
Record Low: 44 in 1911
Average High: 85°F
Average Low: 60°F
Average Precip in July.: 2.60
Precip to date in July.: 2.80
Average Precip to date: 13.61
Precip Year to Date: 14.38
Sunset Tonight: 9:10:34 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:08:26 AM



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Today in Weather History

July 25, 1961: A thunderstorm started late in the evening on the 25th and went into the early morning hours of the 26th. A sizeable area suffered 50 to 100 percent loss of crops resulting from hail over the following counties, Bison, Perkins, Faulk, Sully, and western Hand. Corn was stripped of leaves and broken off. Oats and wheat were flattened. High winds with recorded gusts of 75 to 80 miles per hour cause numerous power failures and damaged trees in Pierre.

July 25, 1972: Unofficial rainfall amounts of 8 inches caused flash flooding in Ferney and surrounding area in Brown County. Water, over two feet depth was reported in a parking area. Basements were flooded, and foundations were damaged. The torrential rains caused extensive damage to crops in the area.

July 25, 1984: Severe thunderstorms caused considerable damage to the Pierre area. Winds were gusting to 83 mph at the Pierre airport, where thirteen planes, as well as several hangars, were destroyed. In town, a home and three businesses lost their roofs, and a trailer home was destroyed. Rains of four inches in thirty minutes produced flash flooding with some streets closed for some time. Some basements were reported to have 6 to 8 inches of water in them. At Dupree, high winds caused extensive damage to the grandstand roof at the fairgrounds. Along the entire path of the thunderstorms, hail and high winds broke windows, damaged cars, downed trees, damaged crops, and caused power outages.

July 25, 1993: Lake Kampeska, near Watertown, reached near record level at 37 inches over full mark due to runoff from heavy rains in previous days. Dozens of homes and two businesses were flooded out. About 100,000 sandbags were distributed to help prevent more flood damage to lakeside property owners.

July 25, 2000: A powerful F4 tornado hit the city of Granite Falls in Minnesota. The tornado first touched down in rural parts of the county west-northwest of Granite Falls. The tornado struck the city at 6:10 pm. After tearing through the residential sections of town, the tornado lifted at approximately 6:25 PM after being on the ground for over nine miles. The tornado caused one fatality and injured more than a dozen.

1891 - The mercury hit 109 degrees at Los Angeles, CA, marking the peak of a torrid heat wave. (David Ludlum)

1936: Lincoln, Nebraska saw an all-time high temperature of 115 degrees. The low only dropped to 91 degrees and the average temperature was 103. Many people spent the night sleeping outside to escape the heat.

1956: The Andrea Doria sank in dense fog near Nantucket Lightship, Massachusetts. The Swedish-American liner, Stockholm, hit the ship forty-five miles off the coast of Massachusetts. Fifty-two persons drowned or were killed by the impact.

1986 - Tremendous hailstones pounded parts of South Dakota damaging crops, buildings and vehicles. Hail piled two feet deep at Black Hawk and northern Rapid City. Hail an inch and a quarter in diameter fell for 85 minutes near Miller and Huron, piling up to depths of two feet. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Sixteen cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Beckley, WV, equalled their all-time record high of 91 degrees, established just the previous day. It marked their fourth day in a row of 90 degree heat, after hitting 90 degrees just twice in the previous 25 years of records. The water temperature of Lake Erie at Buffalo, NY, reached 79 degrees, the warmest reading in 52 years of records. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from central Kansas to western Kentucky and southern Illinois during the day. Thunderstorms produced tennis ball size hail at Union, MO, and winds gusts to 65 mph at Sedalia, MO. Five cities in Washington and Oregon reported record high temperatures for the date. Medford, OR, hit 107 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Early afternoon thunderstorms over west central Missouri drenched the town of Ferguson with four inches of rain. Early evening thunderstorms in Pennsylvania produced more than two inches of rain north of Avella in one hour. (The National Weather Summary)

2005: The citizens of Sand Point, Alaska saw a rare tornado touchdown on two uninhabited islands. Sand Point is part of the Aleutian Chain and is located about 570 miles southwest of Anchorage.

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MONEY MATTERS

One day Winston Churchill was informed that he was to address the United Kingdom in one hour. He called a taxi and said to the driver, "Drive me to the British Broadcasting Corporation just as fast as you can."

"Sorry, sir," he responded, "I can't do that. Sir Winston is to broadcast at six o'clock. I want to get home to hear him, and if I drive you to the BBC, I'll miss him. I cannot do that!"

The answer thrilled Churchill so much that he reached in his pocket and gave him a large sum of money.

"The devil with Churchill," said the driver. "Hop in!" and off they rode.

There is nothing wrong with having money or enjoying the things that money can buy. But there is something wrong if wanting money causes us to do the wrong things, do things poorly, or if we compromise our values, to get money.

Jesus said that if power or possessions, position or priorities have first place in our lives they will become worthless and ultimately destroy us. What we have in this world will be left in this world – we cannot take anything from this world into the next. Everything we have now is temporary and cannot be exchanged for anything eternal. The "things" of this world cannot purchase salvation or eternal life. As Christians, we are obligated to make the pursuit of God and building His Kingdom on earth the most important goals of our lives.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to live lives that demonstrate to others that You are Lord of our lives. May we seek first Your righteousness and then Your Kingdom. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Mark 6:36-37 But Jesus said, "You feed them."

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2022-23 Community Events

- 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
07/24/2022: 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
12/10/2022: Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm
01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
07/04/2023 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start (4th of July)
07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)

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News from the Associated Press

'The money is gone': Evacuated Ukrainians forced to return

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

POKROVSK, Ukraine (AP) — The missile's impact flung the young woman against the fence so hard it splintered. Her mother found her dying on the bench beneath the pear tree where she'd enjoyed the afternoon. By the time her father arrived, she was gone.

Anna Protsenko was killed two days after returning home. The 35-year-old had done what authorities wanted: She evacuated eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region as Russian forces move closer. But starting a new life elsewhere had been uncomfortable and expensive.

Like Protsenko, tens of thousands of people have returned to rural or industrial communities close to the region's front line at considerable risk because they can't afford to live in safer places.

Protsenko had tried it for two months, then came home to take a job in the small city of Pokrovsk. On Monday, friends and family caressed her face and wept before her casket was hammered shut beside her grave.

"We cannot win. They don't hire us elsewhere and you still have to pay rent," said a friend and neighbor, Anastasia Rusanova. There's nowhere to go, she said, but here in the Donetsk region, "everything is ours."

The Pokrovsk mayor's office estimated that 70% of those who evacuated have come home. In the larger city of Kramatorsk, an hour's drive closer to the front line, officials said the population had dropped to about 50,000 from the normal 220,000 in the weeks following Russia's invasion but has since risen to 68,000.

It's frustrating for Ukrainian authorities as some civilians remain in the path of war, but residents of the Donetsk region are frustrated, too. Some described feeling unwelcome as Russian speakers among Ukrainian speakers in some parts of the country.

But more often, lack of money was the problem. In Kramatorsk, some people in line waiting for boxes of humanitarian aid said they were too poor to evacuate at all. The Donetsk region and its economy have been dragged down by conflict since 2014, when Russian-backed separatists began fighting Ukraine's government.

"Who will take care of us?" asked Karina Smulska, who returned to Pokrovsk a month after evacuating. Now, at age 18, she is her family's main money-earner as a waitress.

Volunteers have been driving around the Donetsk region for months since Russia's invasion helping vulnerable people evacuate, but such efforts can end quietly in failure.

In a dank home in the village of Malotaranivka on the outskirts of Kramatorsk, speckled twists of flypaper hung from the living room ceiling. Pieces of cloth were stuffed into window cracks to keep out the draft.

Tamara Markova, 82, and her son Mykola Riaskov said they spent only five days as evacuees in the central city of Dnipro this month before deciding to take their chances back home.

"We would have been separated," Markova said.

The temporary shelter where they stayed said she would be moved to a nursing home and her son, his left side immobilized after a stroke, would go to a home for the disabled. They found that unacceptable. In their hurry to leave, they left his wheelchair behind. It was too big to take on the bus.

Now they make do. If the air raid siren sounds, Markova goes to shelter with neighbors "until the bombing stops." Humanitarian aid is delivered once a month. Markova calls it good enough. When winter comes, the neighbors will cover their windows with plastic film for basic insulation and clean the fireplace of soot. Maybe they'll have gas for heat, maybe not.

"It was much easier under the Soviet Union," she said of their lack of support from the state, but she was even unhappier with Russian President Vladimir Putin and what his soldiers are doing to the communities around her.

"He's old," she said of Putin. "He has to be retired."

Homesickness and uncertainty also drive returns. A daily evacuation train leaves Pokrovsk for relatively

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safer western Ukraine, but another train also arrives daily with people who have decided to come home. While the evacuation train is free, the return one is not.

Oksana Tserkovnyi took the train home with her 10-year-old daughter two days after the deadly attack on July 15 in Dnipro, where they had stayed for more than two months. While the attack was the spark to return, Tserkovnyi had found it difficult to find work. Now she plans to return to her previous job in a coal mine.

Costs in Dnipro, already full of evacuees, were another concern. "We stayed with relatives, but if we needed to rent it would have been a lot more," Tserkovnyi said. "It starts at 6,000 hryvnia (\$200) a month for a studio, and you won't be able to find it."

Taxi drivers who wait in Pokrovsk for the arriving train said many people give up on trying to resettle elsewhere.

"Half my work for sure is taking these people," said one driver, Vitalii Anikieiev. "Because the money is gone."

In mid-July, he said, he picked up a woman who was coming home from Poland after feeling out of place there. When they reached her village near the front line, there was a crater where her house had been.

"She cried," Anikieiev said. "But she decided to stay."

Police: 2 killed, 5 injured in shooting at Los Angeles park

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Two people were killed and at least five others were injured after gunfire erupted Sunday at a Los Angeles park where a car show was being held.

The LA Police Department said the shooting occurred around 3:50 p.m. at Peck Park in LA's San Pedro neighborhood. The LAPD tweeted it was not an active shooter situation but provided no more information.

LAPD Capt. Kelly Muniz said during a news conference that the casualties were reported at the baseball diamond. Police have not identified the victims.

"The original call came out as having multiple shooting victims on the baseball diamond at Peck Park. As we speak here, this is an ongoing, active crime scene, and we are continuing to clear the park for evidence and potentially additional victims," Muniz said. "We don't know exactly how many shooters we have at this point."

The LA Fire Department said the incident occurred at or near the car show and that at least three people suffered gunshot wounds and two of them were in critical condition. Seven people overall, four men and three women, were injured and taken to hospitals, according to the fire department.

Police have not offered a motive. No arrests have been made.

Peck Park is about 20 miles (32 kilometers) south of downtown Los Angeles.

AP-NORC poll: 2 in 3 in US favor term limits for justices

By JESSICA GRESKO and EMILY SWANSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — About 2 in 3 Americans say they favor term limits or a mandatory retirement age for Supreme Court justices, according to a new poll that finds a sharp increase in the percentage of Americans saying they have "hardly any" confidence in the court.

The poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds 67% of Americans support a proposal to set a specific number of years that justices serve instead of life terms, including 82% of Democrats and 57% of Republicans. Views are similar about a requirement that justices retire by a specific age.

The poll was conducted just weeks after the high court issued high-profile rulings including stripping away women's constitutional protections for abortion and expanding gun rights. The poll also shows more Americans disapprove than approve of the court's abortion decision, with just over half saying the decision made them "angry" or "sad."

The court, which is now taking a summer break, will return to hearing cases in October with diminished confidence among Americans. Now 43% say they have hardly any confidence in the court, up from 27%

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three months ago.

Inez Parker of Currie, North Carolina, said she's among those who strongly favor limits on justices' service. "I think some of those people have been up there too long. They don't have new ideas. When you get a certain age and everything you get set in your ways just like I'm set in my ways," said the 84-year-old Democrat.

Parker said retired justices can "work in their garden, sit on the porch and fan flies or whatever they want to do."

The Constitution gives federal judges including Supreme Court justices life tenure, but there have been recent calls for change. A commission tasked by President Joe Biden with examining potential changes to the Supreme Court studied term limits among other issues. The commission finished its work last year and its members were ultimately divided over whether they believed Congress has the power to pass a law creating the equivalent of term limits.

Phil Boller, 90, of LaFollette, Tennessee, said he's not totally opposed to setting a limit on years of service for justices. The Republican who worked in broadcasting and later owned his own lawn care business said that "basically it's worked the way it's been going and I see no reason to change that."

The oldest member of the current court is Justice Clarence Thomas, 74, followed by Justice Samuel Alito, 72. But recent justices have served into their 80s. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg served until her death in 2020 at age 87. Justice Anthony Kennedy retired in 2018 at 81. And Justice Stephen Breyer just retired at age 83.

Ginsburg served for 27 years, Kennedy 30 years and Breyer nearly 28 years.

Four new members have joined the court in the last five years, bringing down the average age of the court's members. Three justices are in their 60s: Chief Justice John Roberts, 67, and Justices Sonia Sotomayor, 68, and Elena Kagan, 62. The remaining justices are in their 50s. Neil Gorsuch is 54, Brett Kavanaugh 57, Amy Coney Barrett 50 and Ketanji Brown Jackson 51.

Another proposal Biden's committee studied was increasing the number of justices on the court, and the poll shows that proposal evenly dividing Americans. Overall, 34% say they're in favor, while 34% are opposed and 32% say they hold neither opinion. Democrats are more in favor than opposed, 52% to 14%, while Republicans are more opposed than in favor, 61% to 14%.

The poll also found increased dissatisfaction with the court since three months ago, before the court overturned the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision guaranteeing a right to abortion.

In the April poll, conducted before a draft of the court's decision was leaked, 18% said they had a great deal of confidence, 54% said they had only some and 27% said they had hardly any. Now, 17% say they have a great deal of confidence, 39% only some and 43% hardly any.

Patrick Allen, a Democrat from Logan, Utah, is one of those with hardly any confidence in the court. Allen, 33, said he feels as though justices generally vote on issues based on the party of the president that appointed them. "They're sticking more to their guns along the lines of their party instead of the Constitution," he said.

The poll shows the drop in confidence is concentrated among Democrats, adding to evidence that the court's decision on abortion worsened and polarized already tenuous opinions of the court. A large partisan gap in views of the court that did not exist before the decision emerged; 64% of Democrats say they have hardly any confidence, up from 27% in April. Another 31% have only some and just 4% have a great deal of confidence — down from 17%.

Among Republicans, however, views of the court have improved. Now, 34% say they have a great deal of confidence, up from 21% in the earlier poll. An additional 47% have only some confidence and 18% hardly any.

Overall, more Americans disapprove than approve of the decision to overturn Roe, 53% to 30%; an additional 16% say they hold neither opinion. On that decision, too, there's a large divide along party lines — 63% of Republicans approve, while 80% of Democrats disapprove.

Myanmar executes ex-lawmaker, 3 other political prisoners

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Myanmar's government confirmed Monday it had carried out its first executions in nearly 50 years, hanging a former lawmaker, a democracy activist and two other political prisoners who had been accused of a targeted killing after the country's military takeover last year.

The executions, first announced in the state-run Mirror Daily newspaper, were carried out despite world-wide pleas for clemency for the four men, including from United Nations experts and Cambodia, which holds the rotating chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The four were executed "in accordance with legal procedures" for directing and organizing "violent and inhuman accomplice acts of terrorist killings," the newspaper reported. It did not say when they were hanged.

The military government later issued a brief statement about the executions, while the prison where the men had been held and the prison department refused comment.

Aung Myo Min, human rights minister for the National Unity Government, a shadow civilian administration established outside Myanmar after the military seized power in February 2021, rejected the allegations the men were involved in violence.

"Punishing them with death is a way to rule the public through fear," he told The Associated Press.

Among those executed was Phyo Zeya Thaw, a former lawmaker from ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party. Also known as Maung Kyaw, he was convicted in January by a closed military court of offenses involving possession of explosives, bombings and financing terrorism.

His wife, Thazin Nyunt Aung, told the AP the world needs to hold the military accountable for the executions. "They have to pay," she said.

The U.S. Embassy in Myanmar said it mourned the loss of the four men and offered condolences to their families while decriing the decision to execute them.

"We condemn the military regime's execution of pro-democracy leaders and elected officials for exercising their fundamental freedoms," the embassy said.

In China, a longtime ally of Myanmar's military, Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian refused to comment on the executions, saying Beijing "always upholds the principle of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs."

Phyo Zeya Thaw, 41, was arrested last November based on information from people detained for shooting security personnel, state media said at the time. He was also accused of being a key figure in a network that carried out what the military described as terrorist attacks in Yangon, the country's biggest city.

Phyo Zeya Thaw had been a hip-hop musician before becoming a member of the Generation Wave political movement formed in 2007. He was jailed in 2008 under a previous military government after being accused of illegal association and possession of foreign currency.

Also executed was Kyaw Min Yu, a 53-year-old democracy activist better known as Ko Jimmy, for violating the counterterrorism law. He was one of the leaders of the 88 Generation Students Group, veterans of a failed 1988 popular uprising against military rule.

He already had spent more than a dozen years behind bars for political activism before his arrest in Yangon last October. He had been put on a wanted list for social media postings that allegedly incited unrest, and state media said he was accused of terrorist acts including mine attacks and of heading a group called Moon Light Operation to carry out urban guerrilla attacks.

The other two, Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw, were convicted of torturing and killing a woman in March 2021 who they allegedly believed was a military informer.

Elaine Pearson, acting Asia director of Human Rights Watch, said the legal proceedings against the four had been "grossly unjust and politically motivated military trials."

"The junta's barbarity and callous disregard for human life aims to chill the anti-coup protest movement," she said following the announcement of the executions.

Thomas Andrews, an independent U.N.-appointed expert on human rights who had condemned the deci-

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sion to go ahead with the executions when they were announced in June, called for a strong international response.

"I am outraged and devastated at the news of the junta's execution of Myanmar patriots and champions of human rights and decency," he said in a statement. "These individuals were tried, convicted and sentenced by a military tribunal without the right of appeal and reportedly without legal counsel, in violation of international human rights law."

Myanmar's Foreign Ministry had rejected the wave of criticism that followed its announcement in June, declaring that its judicial system is fair and that Phyo Zeya Thaw and Kyaw Min Yu were "proven to be masterminds of orchestrating full-scale terrorist attacks against innocent civilians to instill fear and disrupt peace and stability."

"They killed at least 50 people," military spokesperson Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun said at a televised news conference last month. He said the decision to hang the prisoners conformed with the rule of law and the purpose was to prevent similar incidents in the future.

The military's seizure of power from Suu Kyi's elected government triggered peaceful protests that soon escalated to armed resistance and then to widespread fighting that some U.N. experts characterize as a civil war.

Some resistance groups have engaged in assassinations, drive-by shootings and bombings in urban areas. Mainstream opposition organizations generally disavow such activities, while supporting armed resistance in rural areas that are more often subject to brutal military attacks.

The last judicial execution to be carried out in Myanmar is generally believed to have been of another political offender, student leader Salai Tin Maung Oo, in 1976 under a previous military government led by dictator Ne Win.

In 2014, the sentences of prisoners on death row were commuted to life imprisonment, but several dozen convicts received death sentences between then and last year's takeover.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a non-governmental organization that tracks killing and arrests, said Friday that 2,114 civilians have been killed by security forces since the military takeover. It said 115 other people had been sentenced to death.

Young Ukrainians use techno parties to rebuild villages

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

YAHIDNE, Ukraine (AP) — In a village in northern Ukraine that was devastated by Russian occupation only months ago, a techno party is in full swing.

In a bombed-out building, more than 200 young people have found a novel way to help rebuild their country.

The daytime "clean-up rave" in Yahidne was organized by young Ukrainians who have been using dance parties as a way to contribute to recovery efforts in the country's north, which has suffered major damage from Russian bombardment.

Shovels in hand, the volunteers tackle the remnants of a village cultural center that was destroyed in March by a Russian rocket strike, tossing piles of debris onto a tractor's loader. A DJ, his turntables mounted on a stack of ammunition boxes, spins techno and house dance music as the volunteers work. Some even take a break from their labor to dance.

"Volunteering is my lifestyle now," said Tania Burianova, an organizer with the Repair Together initiative. "I like electronic music and I used to party. But now it's wartime and we want to help, and we're doing it with music."

Ukraine's vibrant club scene was brought to an abrupt halt with the Russian invasion on Feb. 24. Now, with a nighttime curfew in effect in Kyiv, the capital, and the threat of more Russian rocket attacks ever present, adherents of Ukraine's party culture have sought to combine the fun and freedom of a music festival with rebuilding the country they love.

Burianova said the clean-up raves bring together those who had lost their nightclub community during

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the war, helping them regain a sense of normalcy and fun while contributing to the recovery of damaged towns.

"We miss (parties) and we want to come back to normal life, but our normal life now is volunteering," Burianova, 26, told The Associated Press.

The damaged cultural center sits on the edge of Yahidne, where nearly all of the just over 300 people in the village were confined to a basement for weeks by Russian forces during the occupation of the northern Chernihiv province.

Local resident Nina, 68, said she spent those awful weeks in the basement before the Russian troops withdrew, and that 11 people died there as a result of the poor conditions. She was grateful to see young people coming together to help the village recover.

"They already repaired our windows, doors and entrances," Nina said of the volunteers. "We couldn't do it ourselves with our salaries or pensions. I'm thankful that they helped us."

Most of the volunteers were in their 20s and 30s and came from Kyiv, about two hours' drive away. But others have come from the western city of Lviv and also nearby Chernihiv, while some foreign volunteers arrived from Portugal, the United States, Germany and elsewhere.

The clean-up at the cultural center was the group's eighth project so far, and they have already helped repair 15 damaged homes in the village. They plan to expand and hold a building camp event in the nearby town of Lukashivka, where they will construct 12 houses for people whose homes have been destroyed, Burianova said.

After finishing a set, DJ Oleksandr Buchinskiy said all of the volunteers were connected by a sense of optimism and responsibility.

"These are all young people that still have a passion for life, but they feel pain and are very sad and angry because of the war," Buchinskiy said. "But they feel a need to take part in this historical moment, and help people, and make Ukraine a better place with a smile on their faces."

Tunisians vote on proposal to give president more power

By BOUAZZA BEN BOUAZZA and FRANCESCA EBEL Associated Press

TUNIS, Tunisia (AP) — Tunisians head to the polls Monday to vote on a new constitution — a controversial initiative spearheaded by Tunisian President Kais Saied that critics say will formalize his power grab and reverse hard-won democratic gains in the North African nation.

Monday's referendum marks one year to the day that Saied froze Tunisia's parliament and dismissed his government — a move derided by critics as "a coup" but celebrated by Tunisians who had grown exasperated with the country's political elites and years of economic stagnation. In the year since then, Saied has given himself the power to rule by decree and has fired dozens of judges, decisions that have provoked a series of protests.

The new constitution gives the office of the president all executive powers and removes key checks and balances. The power of Tunisia's judiciary and parliament would be greatly reduced.

Critics warn that Saied's new political structure could pave the way to a new autocracy in the country that rose up against former autocratic strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011 and kicked off the Arab Spring pro-democracy protests. Tunisia is the only nation to emerge with a democracy from those protests.

Saied says the changes are needed to eliminate corruption and "return the nation to the revolutionary path."

The drafting and organization of Monday's referendum has been marred by controversy. Sadok Belaid, a constitutional law professor Saied brought in to head the committee drafting the new constitution, has denounced the result — which was extensively revised by the president — saying it "contains considerable risks and shortcomings" that could pave the way for "a disgraceful dictatorial regime."

Saied has urged Tunisians to back the proposal, despite electoral standards requiring that he remain neutral. The vote will be supervised by the Independent High Authority for Elections, whose members he appointed.

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A former constitutional law professor, Saied ran for the presidency on a populist, anti-corruption platform in 2019, winning with over 70% of the votes in the second round.

Supporters of Saied believe the new constitution will put an end to years of political deadlock.

Fatma Ben Salah, a pro-Saied civil society activist, says it's "abnormal" that the 2014 constitution grants limited powers to a president elected with a large majority but gives more power to the prime minister. Ben Salah says Tunisia became ungovernable due to years of conflict between the three branches of government, accentuating the country's economic and social crisis.

Former Minister Hatem El Euchii believes the unification of executive power could ensure stability, revive the economy and investment and create jobs. Tunisia's National Institute of Statistics say the unemployment rate stands at more than 16% while inflation has risen to 8.1%.

But for Tunisian magistrate Ahmed Souab, the constitution represents a "serious danger for democracy" because it does not guarantee a clear balance of powers and gives more prerogatives to Saied than those held by previous Tunisian strongmen.

Numerous civil society groups have rejected the new constitution. The Tunisian non-governmental group Al Bawsala says the new constitution would lead to a monopolization of power that would threaten every citizen's rights and freedoms.

"(This) does not provide any control mechanism, even in the event of a flagrant violation of the constitution by the president," Al Bawsala communications officer Haythem Benzid told The Associated Press.

Benzid believes Saied is relying on the widespread discontent caused by the mismanagement of public affairs in the decade since Tunisia's revolution.

The proposed constitution has split Tunisia's opposition. Only one party, Afek Tounes, has said it will vote against the proposal. Most political parties, including Tunisia's influential Islamist party Ennahdha, say they plan to boycott Monday's referendum so as not to legitimize the process.

"We refuse to go to the funeral of democracy," said Republican Party leader Issam Chebbi, adding that he considers "the absolute personal power" that Saied wants to grant himself "worse than that of Ben Ali."

Tunisian activist Henda Fellaoui tweeted Sunday that she had decided to boycott the vote, saying the text is built on a flawed foundation and that its violations of electoral law were "countless."

"This would be the first time I'm not voting since 2011," Fellaoui said.

Many observers expect low voter turnout for the referendum, highlighting Tunisians' disenchantment with politics and their daily struggles coping with rising inflation.

The preliminary results are expected to be announced by Wednesday, with a final result on Aug. 28.

Mideast nations wake up to damage from climate change

By LEE KEATH Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Temperatures in the Middle East have risen far faster than the world's average in the past three decades. Precipitation has been decreasing, and experts predict droughts will come with greater frequency and severity.

The Middle East is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to the impact of climate change — and already the effects are being seen.

In Iraq, intensified sandstorms have repeatedly smothered cities this year, shutting down commerce and sending thousands to hospitals. Rising soil salinity in Egypt's Nile Delta is eating away at crucial farmland. In Afghanistan, drought has helped fuel the migration of young people from their villages, searching for jobs. In recent weeks, temperatures in some parts of the region have topped 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit).

This year's annual U.N. climate change conference, known as COP27, is being held in Egypt in November, throwing a spotlight on the region. Governments across the Middle East have awakened to the dangers of climate change, particularly to the damage it is already inflicting on their economies.

"We're literally seeing the effects right in front of us. ... These impacts are not something that will hit us nine or 10 years down the line," said Lama El Hatow, an environmental climate change consultant who

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has worked with the World Bank and specializes on the Middle East and North Africa.

"More and more states are starting to understand that it's necessary" to act, she said.

Egypt, Morocco and other countries in the region have been stepping up initiatives for clean energy. But a top priority for them at COP-27 is to push for more international funding to help them deal with the dangers they are already facing from climate change.

One reason for the Middle East's vulnerability is that there is simply no margin to cushion the blow on millions of people as the rise in temperatures accelerates: The region already has high temperatures and limited water resources even in normal circumstances.

Middle East governments also have a limited ability to adapt, the International Monetary Fund noted in a report earlier this year. Economies and infrastructure are weak, and regulations are often unenforced. Poverty is widespread, making job creation a priority over climate protection. Autocratic governments like Egypt's severely restrict civil society, hampering an important tool in engaging the public on environmental and climate issues.

At the same time, developing nations are pressuring countries in the Mideast and elsewhere to make emissions cuts, even as they themselves backslide on promises.

The threats are dire.

As the region grows hotter and drier, the United Nations has warned that the Mideast's crop production could drop 30% by 2025. The region is expected to lose 6%-14% of its GDP by 2050 because of water scarcity, according to the World Bank.

In Egypt, precipitation has fallen 22% in the past 30 years, according to the World Bank.

Droughts are expected to become more frequent and severe. The Eastern Mediterranean recently saw its worst drought in 900 years, according to NASA, a heavy blow to countries like Syria and Lebanon where agriculture relies on rainfall. Demand for water in Jordan and the Persian Gulf countries is putting unsustainable pressure on underground water aquifers. In Iraq, the increased aridity has caused an increase in sandstorms.

At the same time, warming waters and air make extreme and often destructive weather events more frequent, like deadly floods that have repeatedly hit Sudan and Afghanistan.

The climate damage has potentially dangerous social repercussions.

Many of those who lose the livelihoods they once made in agriculture or tourism will move to the cities in search of jobs, said Karim Elgendy, an associate fellow at Chatham House. That will likely increase urban unemployment, strain social services and could raise social tensions and affect security, said Elgendy, who is also a non-resident scholar with the Middle East Institute.

Adapting infrastructure and economies to weather the damage will be enormously expensive: the equivalent of 3.3% of the region's GDP every year for the next 10 years, the IMF estimates. The spending needs to go toward everything from creating more efficient water use systems and new agricultural methods to building coastal protections, beefing up social safety nets and improving awareness campaigns.

So one of top priorities for Mideast and other developing nations at this year's COP is to press the United States, Europe and other wealthier nations to follow through on long-time promises to provide them with billions in climate financing.

So far, developed nations have fallen short on those promises. Also, most of the money they have provided has gone to helping poorer countries pay for reducing greenhouse gas emissions — for "mitigation," in U.N. terminology, as opposed to "adaptation."

For this year's COP, the top theme repeated by U.N. officials, the Egyptian hosts and climate activists is the implementation of commitments. The gathering aims to push countries to spell out how they will reach promised emission reduction targets — and to come up with even deeper cuts, since experts say the targets as they are now will still lead to disastrous levels of warming.

Developing nations will also want richer countries to show how they will carry out a promise from the last COP to provide \$500 billion in climate financing over the next five years — and to ensure at least half that funding is for adaptation, not mitigation.

World events, however, threaten to undercut the momentum from COP26. On emissions cuts, the spike

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in world energy prices and the war in Ukraine have prompted some European countries to turn back to coal for power generation — though they insist it's only a temporary step. The Middle East also has several countries whose economies rely on their fossil fuel resources — Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf most obviously, but also Egypt, with its increasing natural gas production.

Persistent inflation and the possibility of recession could make top nations hesitant on making climate financing commitments.

With international officials often emphasizing emission reduction, El Hatow said it should be remembered the countries of Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere in the developing world have not contributed substantially to climate change, yet are bearing the brunt of it.

"We need to talk about financing for adaptation," she said, "to adapt to a problem they did not cause."

AP exposes the Tuskegee Syphilis Study: The 50th Anniversary

By JEAN HELLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — EDITOR'S NOTE — On July 25, 1972, Jean Heller, a reporter on The Associated Press investigative team, then called the Special Assignment Team, broke news that rocked the nation. Based on documents leaked by Peter Buxtun, a whistleblower at the U.S. Public Health Service, the then 29-year-old journalist and the only woman on the team, reported that the federal government let hundreds of Black men in rural Alabama go untreated for syphilis for 40 years in order to study the impact of the disease on the human body. Most of the men were denied access to penicillin, even when it became widely available as a cure. A public outcry ensued, and nearly four months later, the "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male" came to an end. The investigation would have far-reaching implications: The men in the study filed a lawsuit that resulted in a \$10 million settlement, Congress passed laws governing how subjects in research studies were treated, and more than two decades later President Bill Clinton formally apologized for the study, calling it "shameful."

Today, the effects of the study still linger — it is often blamed for the unwillingness of some African Americans to participate in medical research.

In observance of the 50th anniversary of Heller's groundbreaking investigation, the AP is republishing the original report and a recent interview with her and others on how the story came together.

For 40 years the U.S. Public Health Service has conducted a study in which human guinea pigs, denied proper medical treatment, have died of syphilis and its side effects.

The study was conducted to determine from autopsies what the disease does to the human body.

PHS officials responsible for initiating the experiment have long since retired. Current PHS officials, who say they have serious doubts about the morality of the study, also say that it is too late to treat syphilis in any of the study's surviving participants.

But PHS doctors say they are rendering whatever other medical services they can now give to the survivors while the study of the disease's effects continues.

The experiment, called the Tuskegee Study began in 1932 with about 600 black men mostly poor and uneducated, from Tuskegee, Ala., an area that had the highest syphilis rate in the nation at the time.

One-third of the group was free of syphilis; two-thirds showed evidence of the disease. In the syphilitic group, half were given the best treatment known at the time, but the other half, about 200 men, received no treatment at all for syphilis, PHS officials say.

As incentives to enter the program, the men were promised free transportation to and from hospitals, free hot lunches, free medicine for any disease other than syphilis and free burial after autopsies were performed.

The Tuskegee Study began 10 years before penicillin was discovered to be a cure for syphilis and 15 years before the drug became widely available. Yet, even after penicillin became common, and while its use probably could have helped or saved a number of the experiment subjects, the drug was denied

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them, Dr. J.D. Millar says.

He is chief of the venereal disease branch of the PHS's Center for Disease Control in Atlanta and is now in charge of what remains of the Tuskegee Study. Dr. Millar said in an interview that he has serious doubts about the program.

"I think a definite serious moral problem existed when the study was undertaken, a more serious moral problem was overlooked in the post-war years when penicillin became available but was not given to these men and a moral problem still exists," Dr. Millar said.

"But the study began when attitudes were much different on treatment and experimentation. At this point in time, with our current knowledge of treatment and the disease and the revolutionary change in approach to human experimentation, I don't believe the program would be undertaken," he said.

Syphilis, a highly contagious infection spread by sexual contact, can cause if untreated, bone and dental deformations, deafness, blindness, heart disease and central nervous system deterioration.

No figures were available on when the last death occurred in the program. And one official said that apparently no conscious effort was made to halt the program after it got under way.

A 1969 CDC study of 276 treated and untreated syphilitics who participated in the Tuskegee Study showed that seven had died as a direct result of syphilis. Another 154 died of heart disease.

CDC officials say they cannot determine at this late date how many of the heart disease deaths were caused by syphilis or how many additional deaths could be linked to the disease.

However, several years ago an American Medical Association study determined that untreated syphilis reduces life expectancy by 17 per cent in black men between the ages of 25 and 50, a precise description of the Tuskegee Study subjects.

Don Prince, another official in the venereal disease branch of CDC, said the Tuskegee Study had contributed some knowledge about syphilis, particularly that the morbidity and mortality rate among untreated syphilitics were not as high as previously believed.

Like Dr. Millar, Prince said he thought the study should have been halted with penicillin treatment for participants after World War II.

"I don't know why the decision was made in 1946 not to stop the program," Prince said. "I was unpleasantly surprised when I first came here and found out about it. It really puzzles me."

At the beginning of 1972, according to CDC data, 74 of the untreated syphilitics were still living. All of them, Dr. Millar said, were men who did not suffer any potentially fatal side effects from their bouts with the disease.

Some of them received penicillin and antibiotics in past years for other ailments, Prince said, but none has ever received treatment for syphilis. Now, both men agree, it's too late.

Recent reviews of the Tuskegee Study by the CDC indicate that treatment now for survivors is medically questionable, Dr. Millar said. Their average age is 74 and massive penicillin therapy, with possible ill side effects, is deemed too great a risk to individuals, particularly for those whose syphilis is now dormant.

However, Dr. Millar, added there was a point in time when survivors could have been treated with at least some measure of success.

"The most critical moral issue about this experiment arises in the post-war era, the years after the end of World War II when penicillin became widely available.

"I know some were treated with penicillin for other diseases and then dropped from the program because the drug had some positive effect on the primary disease (syphilis). Looking at it now, one cannot see any reason they could not have been treated at that time."

How an AP reporter broke the Tuskegee syphilis story

By ALLEN G. BREED AP National Writer

SOUTHPORT, N.C. (AP) — Jean Heller was toiling away on the floor of the Miami Beach Convention Center when an Associated Press colleague from the opposite end of the country walked into her workspace behind the event stage and handed her a thin manila envelope.

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"I'm not an investigative reporter," Edith Lederer told the 29-year-old Heller as competitors typed away beyond the thick grey hangings separating news outlets covering the 1972 Democratic National Convention. "But I think there might be something here."

Inside were documents telling a tale that, even today, staggers the imagination: For four decades, the U.S. government had denied hundreds of poor, Black men treatment for syphilis so researchers could study its ravages on the human body.

The U.S. Public Health Service called it "The Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male." The world would soon come to know it simply as the "Tuskegee Study" — one of the biggest medical scandals in U.S. history, an atrocity that continues to fuel mistrust of government and health care among Black Americans.

"I thought, 'It couldn't be,'" Heller recalls of that moment, 50 years ago. "The ghastliness of this."

The story of how the study came to light began four years earlier, at a party in San Francisco.

Lederer was working at the AP bureau there in 1968 when she met Peter Buxtun. Three years earlier, while pursuing graduate work in history, Buxtun had taken a job at the local Public Health Service office in 1965; he was tasked with tracking venereal disease cases in the Bay Area.

In 1966, Buxtun had overheard colleagues talking about a syphilis study going on in Alabama. He called the Communicable Disease Center, now the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and asked if they had any documents they could share. He received a manila envelope containing 10 reports, he told *The American Scholar* magazine in a story published in 2017.

He knew immediately that the study was unethical, he said, and sent reports to his superiors telling them so, twice. The reply was essentially: Tend to your own work and forget about Tuskegee.

He eventually left the agency, but he couldn't leave Tuskegee.

So, Buxtun turned to his journalist friend, "Edie," who demurred.

"I knew that I could not do this," Lederer said during a recent interview. "AP, in 1972, was not going to put a young reporter from San Francisco on a plane to Tuskegee, Alabama, to go and do an investigative story."

But she told Buxtun she knew someone who could.

At the time, Heller was the only woman on the AP's fledgling Special Assignment Team, a rarity in the industry. Still, she was not spared the casual sexism of the era. A 1968 story on the team for AP World, the wire service's employee newsletter, described the squad as "10 men and one cute gal."

A caption under the 5-foot-2 Heller's photo called the "pixie-like" reporter "lovely and competent."

Lederer knew Heller from their days together at AP's New York headquarters, then at 50 Rockefeller Plaza, where Heller started out on the radio desk.

"I knew she was a terrific reporter," Lederer says.

During a trip to visit her parents in Florida, Lederer made a short detour to Miami Beach, where Heller was part of a team covering the convention — from which U.S. Sens. George McGovern of South Dakota and Thomas Eagleton of Missouri would emerge as the Democratic presidential and vice presidential nominees.

During a recent interview at her North Carolina home, Heller recalled putting the leaked PHS documents in her briefcase. She says she didn't get around to reading the contents until the flight back to Washington.

Seated next to her was Ray Stephens, head of the investigative team. She showed him the documents. Stephens realized the government wasn't denying the study's existence, just refusing to talk about it.

Heller recalls Stephens saying: "When we get back to Washington, I want you to drop everything else you're doing and focus on this."

The government stonewalled her and refused to talk about the study. So, Heller began making the rounds elsewhere, starting with colleges, universities and medical schools.

She even reached out to her mother's gynecologist, a "straight down the line, middle of the road, superior doctor."

"I asked him if he'd ever heard about this, and he said, 'That's not going on. I just don't believe it.'"

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Finally, one of her sources recalled seeing something about the syphilis study in a small medical publication. She headed to the D.C. public library.

"I asked them if they had any kind of documents, books, magazines, whatever ... that would fit a, what today we would call a profile or a search engine search, for 'Tuskegee,' 'farmers,' 'Public Health Service,' 'syphilis,'" Heller says.

They found an obscure medical journal — Heller can't recall the title — that had been chronicling the study's "progress."

"Every couple of years, they would write something about it," she says. "Mostly it was about the findings — none of the morality was ever questioned."

Normally, reporters celebrate these "Eureka" moments. But Heller felt no such elation.

"I knew that people had died, and I was about to tell the world who they were and what they had," she says, her voice dropping. "And finding any joy in that ... would have been unseemly."

Armed with the journal, Heller went back to the PHS. They caved.

She says the lede of the story — the first paragraph or sentence of a news article — came to her quickly.

"Marv Arrowsmith, the bureau chief, walked by my desk and, I said, 'Hey, Marv. Will you publish this?'" she recalls. "And he read it and he looked at me and he said, 'Can you prove it?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'You got it.'"

An AP medical writer helped interview doctors for the story. Within just a few short weeks, the team felt they had enough to publish.

Arrowsmith suggested they offer the story first to the now-defunct Washington Star, if it promised to run it on the front page.

"The Star was a highly respected PM (afternoon) newspaper, and if they took it seriously, others might follow," Heller says.

The story ran on July 25, 1972, a Tuesday. It was a harrowing tale.

Starting in 1932, the Public Health Service — working with the famed Tuskegee Institute — began recruiting Black men in Macon County, Alabama. Researchers told them they were to be treated for "bad blood," a catch-all term used to describe several ailments, including anemia, fatigue and syphilis. Treatment at the time consisted primarily of doses of arsenic and mercury.

In exchange for their participation, the men would get free medical exams, free meals and burial insurance — provided the government was allowed to perform an autopsy.

Eventually, more than 600 men were enrolled. What they were not told was that about a third would receive no treatment at all — even after penicillin became available in the 1940s.

By the time Heller's story was published, at least seven of the men in the study had died as a direct result of the affliction, and another 154 from heart disease.

"As much injustice as there was for Black Americans back in 1932, when the study began, I could not BELIEVE that an agency of the federal government, as much of a mistake as it was initially, could let this continue for 40 years," says Heller. "It just made me furious."

Nearly four months after the story ran, the study was halted.

The government established the Tuskegee Health Benefit Program to begin treating the men, eventually expanding it to the participants' wives, widows and children. A class-action lawsuit filed in 1973 resulted in a \$10 million settlement.

The last participant died in 2004, but the study still casts a long shadow over the nation. Many African Americans cited Tuskegee in refusing to seek medical treatment or participate in clinical trials. It was even cited more recently as a reason not to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

At 79, Heller is still haunted by her story and the effects it had on the men and women of rural Alabama, and the nation as a whole.

For the story, Heller would win some of journalism's highest honors — the Robert F. Kennedy, George Polk and Raymond Clapper Memorial awards. (Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of The Washington Post,

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writing about the Watergate scandal, finished in second place for the Clapper Award.)

Hanging in her office is a copy of the front-page byline she got in The New York Times, exceedingly rare for an AP staffer. But the hype surrounding Tuskegee would play a big role in Heller's decision to leave the AP in 1974.

"I felt after all of the brouhaha over ... Tuskegee, and what came after it, that I should move on," she says. She went on to a three-decade career that would take her from the hills of Wyoming to the beaches of South Florida.

These days, Heller spends her time cranking out fiction. She's five books into a mystery series featuring Deuce Mora, a hard-driving female reporter who is a very un-pixie-like 6 feet tall.

Despite her distress over the state of the news business, she has never thought about returning to journalism.

"You can't go home again; I firmly believe that," she says. "And I don't want to be competing against myself or against expectations."

When asked if she regretted giving up what is arguably one of the great scoops in American journalism, Lederer replied: "Possibly, you know, a little bit." But she knew the story was bigger than her or Heller or any individual reporter.

"What I cared about most was that this seemed to be a horrible and deadly injustice to innocent Black men," says Lederer, who was the first woman assigned full time to cover the Vietnam War for the AP and remains its chief U.N. correspondent.

"And for me, the important thing was to verify it and to see that it got out to the broader American public — and that something was done to prevent any such experiments from happening again."

Heller agrees.

"The story isn't about me anyway," she says. "It's about them."

Chinatown fears community, business loss in 76ers arena plan

By CLAUDIA LAUER The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Wei Chen wants people who visit Philadelphia's Chinatown to see past the amber-colored roast ducks hanging in a restaurant window and notice the two older women chatting in Mandarin on the steps to the apartments above.

"These apartments are full of people who are low-income, who are elderly people, and people who are new immigrants," said Chen, the community engagement director for Asian Americans United. "You have to think about how Chinatown was created. We weren't welcome in other neighborhoods."

Chen, along with other organizers and members of Chinatown, said they were surprised by the Philadelphia 76ers' announcement Thursday of a proposal to build a \$1.3 billion arena just a block from the community's gateway arch. They said neither the organization nor the property owner reached out for community input before the announcement.

A spokesperson for 76 Devcorp, the development company behind the arena, said in an emailed statement that the process is in its early stages — years from "anything changing" — and that the company planned to work with the community to help shape the project and ensure it's "done right."

"We are very sensitive to the Chinatown community's concern in light of prior Center City proposals and are committed to listening to and working with the community in a way that hasn't happened before," the statement read.

But those are promises many in Chinatown have heard before. After decades of developments — like the Pennsylvania Convention Center, which took homes from 200 families; Interstate 676, also known as the Vine Street Expressway, which threatened to cut off parts of the community; and proposals for a jail, a casino and another sports facility — that all were beaten back by the community, residents have a deep playbook of their own to choose from.

Across the country, there are fewer than 50 Chinatowns, some more vibrant and larger than others. Many took root in areas of cities that were thought of as red light districts. And as cities grew and changed

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around those communities, many Chinatowns have been under threat from gentrification or development.

Like others, the community in Philadelphia is just bouncing back after losing business during the pandemic, when Chinatown's restaurants were shuttered for dining-in. Much of the senior population didn't want to leave the neighborhood because of the fourfold increase since 2019 in hate crimes against people of Asian descent.

"This is an ongoing struggle for Chinatowns and other downtown communities of color and of low income," said historian John Kuo Wei Tchen, director of Rutgers University's Clement Price Institute on Ethnicity, Culture and the Modern Experience. "In the case of Chinatowns that play important symbolic roles for the cosmopolitan claims of the city, sport authority interests often trump such roles."

The 76ers' current home is in south Philadelphia, a few miles from downtown, along with most of the city's other pro sports teams.

Many Chinatown residents and business owners are concerned that if a new arena is built, affordable street parking will disappear, traffic will increase, and holding traditional celebrations and festivals could become more difficult. But they are also worried that already-increasing property values could spike and force many who depend on the community to leave.

Debbie Wei is a founding member of Asian Americans United, started in Philadelphia in the 1980s to unite people of Asian ancestry to build the community and fight oppression. She was also an organizer of the protests against a proposed Phillies baseball stadium that city officials wanted to place at Chinatown's door in 2000.

"If it's not a stadium, it's a highway or a convention center. Seattle ... Detroit ... Chicago, Boston, and then Washington, D.C. I have friends who grew up in Chinatown in D.C. and it's just been decimated," Wei said.

The home of the Washington Capitals hockey team and the Wizards basketball team moved to D.C.'s Chinatown community in 1997. Economic development experts say the increased foot traffic and more desirable real estate brought revitalization, but for the Chinatown community it meant rising rents and chain restaurants forcing them out.

Census numbers show that in 1990, about 66% of the people who lived in the D.C. Chinatown area identified as Asian American. That dwindled to 21% in 2010. And as of the 2020 census, that had dropped to about 18% in the two tracts that make up parts of Chinatown.

Wei described signs for chains like CVS and Starbucks appearing with Chinese translations beside them, calling it a "cosmetic illusion." Chen fears the changes to D.C.'s Chinatown could happen to Philadelphia.

"If you go inside a restaurant or a business, the workers aren't Asian anymore. The owner isn't Asian. And a lot of the customers aren't Asian," he said. "So where is the Chinatown? It's not there anymore."

But in Philadelphia, Chinese-speaking households have been one of the fastest-growing populations, according to the census. The community passed the 5% threshold recently, meaning Chinese languages became official ballot languages. Asian and other immigrant communities contributed to the city reversing a decades-long trend of losing population in recent censuses.

Helen Gym, the first Asian American woman to serve on Philadelphia City Council and an at-large member, held up two T-shirts from previous fights against potentially detrimental developments wanting to come to Chinatown. The first says, "No stadium in Chinatown," and the second crossed out the word stadium and replaces it with "casino," for the 2008 proposal that hoped to put a casino near the current proposal for the arena.

Gym previously joined the fight against the stadium and said that now, as a council member, she is "extremely skeptical" of the 76ers proposal.

"To us, this is one of the most vital parts and neighborhoods and communities in the city of Philadelphia," Gym said. "This side has been a community that has continued to invest in itself, in its people, in small businesses. And in fact, this side is the one that has grown the health and well-being of the city."

After the stadium failed in 2000, Gym said, the community developed the nearby space north of the expressway to add a public charter school, a community center, extensions of the Chinese Christian Church, the first Cambodian arts center and other cultural organizations.

Wei was the first principal of that school, the Folk Arts Cultural Treasures charter school. She said the

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building's owner turned down offers from developers who wanted to build condos.

"People don't understand what Chinatown means to the people of this community, people all over the area who consider this their home," Wei said.

"There are precious few communities, real communities, left in Philadelphia. They are not just geographic; they are about relationships and memories. They are a place-based core that has been systematically destroyed not just in Philadelphia and the U.S.; but around the world," Wei said. "And once Chinatown is gone, it's gone. You can't rebuild it."

Trump v. DeSantis: Young conservatives debate GOP's future

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — When former President Donald Trump took the stage before a crowd of more than 5,000 young conservative activists in Tampa this weekend, he received the rock star's welcome he's grown accustomed to over the seven years in which he's reshaped the Republican Party.

One night earlier, it was Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis who had the crowd on its feet as he headlined the day's program at Turning Point USA's annual Student Action Summit.

"To be honest, it's like choosing between your favorite child," said Leo Milik, 19, who lives in Barrington, Illinois, when asked whom he'd like to see as the party's next nominee.

Milik, wearing a "Trump was Right" baseball cap, said both Republicans "have their pros, they have their cons." For now, he said, he's leaning toward Trump.

That sentiment reflects the soul searching underway inside the GOP as an invisible primary for the 2024 presidential nomination begins to take shape, dominated at least for the moment by Trump and DeSantis.

There's little doubt that Trump is moving closer to announcing a third presidential campaign. But there's genuine debate over whether he's the party's best candidate to take on President Joe Biden, who is otherwise seen as a vulnerable incumbent heading into the next campaign, weighed down by soaring inflation, sinking popularity and questions about his capacity to manage the U.S. into his 80s.

This summer's hearings by the House committee investigating the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection have only amplified the GOP's anxiety about Trump. A pair of weekend editorials in the New York Post and Wall Street Journal — publications owned by the often Trump-friendly Rupert Murdoch — underscored the impact, castigating the former president for refusing to call off the mob of his supporters as they stormed the U.S. Capitol to halt the peaceful transfer of power.

"As a matter of principle, as a matter of character, Trump has proven himself unworthy to be this country's chief executive again," wrote the New York Post.

But inside the Tampa Convention Center, mentions of Jan. 6 elicited cheers as a who's who of Trump's "MAGA movement" took the stage in a room that had the feel of a Las Vegas nightclub.

Young attendees dressed in sparkly heels and candy-colored cowboy boots danced under laser lights to a DJ before the program began. Speakers were introduced with WWE-style videos, elaborate pyrotechnics and smoke displays. Throughout the venue, ring lights were placed strategically in front of logoed backdrops for flattering photo ops. Outside, a small group of neo-Nazis briefly waved swastika flags.

The top draw was Trump, who again teased his future plans.

"I ran twice. I won twice and did much better the second time ... and now we may just have to do it again," he said to thundering cheers and chants of "Take it back!"

During his speech, Trump appeared intent to address criticism from some corners of the party that he is too focused on relitigating the 2020 election, telling the crowd he wanted to talk about "some of the really big issues." But he quickly returned to familiar grievances, labeling himself the most persecuted politician in the nation's history as he inched ever closer to announcing a run.

"If I renounced my beliefs, if I agreed to stay silent, if I stayed home, if I announced that I was not going to run for office, the persecution of Donald Trump would immediately stop," he said. "But that's what they want me to do. And you know what? There's no chance I do that."

DeSantis, who often insists he is focused solely on reelection as governor, headlined Friday night's pro-

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gram in an appearance that strongly suggested his ambitions extend beyond the state.

He welcomed the crowd to the "free state of Florida" and highlighted the anti-COVID mitigation policies that made him a conservative hero during the height of the pandemic. And he bragged about his efforts to bar discussions of race and sexual orientation in Florida classrooms, as well as his battles with Disney.

"We've accomplished an awful lot in the state of Florida. But we have only begun to fight," he said. "Because we are on a mission to keep the state of Florida free and to save our great country."

An unscientific straw poll of attendees at the event found that 78.7% would vote for Trump in a GOP primary, with DeSantis coming in second with 19%. No other potential candidate came in above 1 percent. And many were indeed all in on a Trump 2024 run.

"I love the idea, I absolutely do," said Ryan Malone, 33, who recently moved from New York to Florida. While he is a big fan of DeSantis, he argued that Trump is best positioned to turn the country around from what he sees as Biden's litany of failures.

"I think that he would get more done," he said. "Again, I love DeSantis, he's my 1A, right? But I do think that if we're going to get out of this miserable period that we're in, Trump is the guy to get us out of this hole."

Still, he worried about what might happen if the two were to run against each other in a GOP primary.

"I wouldn't want to see there be bad blood between the person who's, like, the true leader of our party and then the person who's, you know, the second coming," he said.

But his wife, Dr. Mariuxi Viteri Malone, 33, is eager for DeSantis to run. As an immigrant from Ecuador, she said she was offended by Trump's rhetoric toward Hispanics.

"Be nice!" he said. "That's all you need to do."

Others were more strategic in their thinking.

Cameron Lilly, 29, said that he personally likes DeSantis better than Trump, but nonetheless thinks another Trump run makes sense for the party.

"I think Ron DeSantis right now is wasting the one more chance that Trump has," said Lilly, who works for a defense contractor in Annapolis, Maryland. "I like DeSantis even a little bit more. But I think if we want to have consistent conservatives in the White House, one more Trump term, DeSantis as vice president, and then potentially one or two more terms. That's the way to keep conservatives in the White House for more years."

Steven Dykstra, 22, had another reason.

"As much as I want DeSantis to be the president — he would make a great president — I want him to stay in Florida," said Dykstra, who attends Pasco-Hernando State College. "If he were to run in 2024, he wouldn't be our governor. He's been a great governor. I think he should stay."

Orlando sisters Sydney and Janae Kinne, who go by "The Patriot Sisters" online, said they were fans of both Trump and DeSantis, but don't expect either to run in 2024.

"I would still vote for him. We're still there. But I would like to see him in a different seat this year," said Janae, 23, of Trump. "If he runs, I mean, we're going to be on the street rooting for him anyways. But we'd like to see him start to raise up other people who have the same mentality."

Sydney, 21, said she was looking for an alternative, but wasn't sure who.

"That's the question of the hour," she said. "Right now what we need is someone that, yes, is strong, they're strong-willed, but someone that's a little more kind of rallying everyone together."

But Zachary Roberson, 22, said that, if he ever had to choose between Trump and DeSantis, he'd pick the Florida governor.

"He seems like a more refined version of Trump. So I'm hoping he runs for president," said Roberson, a student at Florida Gulf Coast University.

As for Trump, Roberson suggested: "You can run for governor here in Florida."

US conservatives embracing controversial Hungarian leader

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

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When heads of state visit the U.S., the top item on their itinerary is usually a White House visit. For Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban next month, it will be addressing a conference of conservative activists in Dallas.

Orban's appearance at the Conservative Political Action Conference, where he'll be joined by former President Donald Trump and right-wing icons such as Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., is the most dramatic indication yet of how a leader criticized for pushing anti-democratic principles has become a hero to segments of the Republican Party.

Orban has curbed immigration and stymied those who envision a more middle-of-the-road European democracy for their country. He's done so by seizing control of Hungary's judiciary and media, leading many international analysts to label him as the face of a new wave of authoritarianism. He also is accused of enabling widespread corruption and nepotism, using state resources to enrich a tight circle of political allies.

The U.S. conservative movement's embrace of Orban comes as it echoes Trump's lies that he did not lose the 2020 presidential election, punishes Republicans who tried to hold him accountable for the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, and embrace new voting restrictions. Many experts on Hungarian politics fear the GOP might aspire to Orban's tactics.

"The Trumpist side of the Republican Party is coming for the rhetoric, but staying for the autocracy," said Kim L. Schepple, a sociologist at Princeton University who has studied Orban. "I'm worried the attraction to Orban is only superficially the culture war stuff and more deeply about how to prevent power from ever rotating out of their hands."

Conservatives dismiss that notion — or even the charge that Orban is an authoritarian.

"What we like about him is that he's actually standing up for the freedom of his people against the tyranny of the EU," said Matt Schlapp, head of CPAC, which meets in Dallas starting Aug. 4. "He's captured the attention of a lot of people, including a lot of people in America who are worried about the decline of the family."

CPAC's gatherings are something of a cross between Davos and Woodstock for the conservative movement, a meeting place for activists and luminaries to strategize, inspire and network. Earlier this year, CPAC held its first meeting in Europe, choosing Hungary. While there, Schlapp invited Orban to speak at the Texas gathering. Last year, Fox News star Tucker Carlson broadcast his show from Budapest.

Orban served as prime minister of Hungary between 1998 and 2002, but it's his record since taking office again in 2010 that has drawn controversy. A self-styled champion of what he describes as "illiberal democracy," Orban has depicted himself as a defender of European Christendom against Muslim migrants, progressives and the "LGBTQ lobby."

While Orban's party has backed technocratic initiatives that have captured the imagination of the U.S. right — Schlapp specifically cited a tax cut Hungarian women receive for every child as a way to counter a declining population — he's best known for his aggressive stance on hot-button cultural issues.

Orban's government erected a razor-wire fence along Hungary's southern border in 2015 in response to an influx of refugees fleeing violence and poverty in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Carlson visited the border barrier, praising it as a model for the U.S.

Last year, Orban's right-wing Fidesz party banned the depiction of homosexuality or sex reassignment in media targeting people under 18, a move critics said was an attack on LGBTQ people. Information on homosexuality also was forbidden in school sex education programs, or in films and advertisements accessible to minors.

Those policies have put him on a collision course with the European Union, which has sought to reign in some of his more antidemocratic tendencies. The bloc has launched numerous legal proceedings against Hungary for breaking EU rules, and is now withholding billions in recovery funds and credit over violations of rule-of-law standards and insufficient anti-corruption safeguards.

Those conflicts started early in Orban's tenure. In 2011, the Fidesz party used the two-thirds constitutional majority it gained after a landslide election the previous year to unilaterally rewrite Hungary's constitution. Soon after, it began undermining the country's institutions and took steps to consolidate power.

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Orban's party implemented judicial reforms through constitutional amendment, enabling it to change the composition of the judiciary. It also passed a new law that created a nine-member council to oversee the media and appointed members to all those slots.

Reporters Without Borders declared Orban a "press freedom predator" last year. It said his Fidesz party had "seized de facto control of 80% of the country's media through political-economic maneuvers and the purchase of news organizations by friendly oligarchs."

The Associated Press and other international news organizations were barred from covering the CPAC conference in May, during which Orban called Hungary "the bastion of conservative Christian values in Europe." He also urged conservatives in the U.S. to defeat "the dominance of progressive liberals in public life."

The AP requested an interview with Orban when he visits Dallas next month, but was rebuffed. His communications office cited what it said was the prime minister's "extremely busy" schedule.

Analysts note that Hungary lacks the traditional trappings of autocracies. There are no tanks in the streets and no political dissidents locked up in prisons. Fidesz has continued to win elections — albeit in seats that have been redrawn to make it extremely difficult for their legislators to be defeated. That's similar to the political gerrymandering of congressional and state legislative districts in the U.S., a process that currently favors Republicans because they control more of the state legislatures that create those boundaries.

Still, experts say Orban's near-total control of his country makes him a pioneer of a new approach to anti-democratic rule.

"I've never seen an autocrat consolidate authoritarian rule without spilling a drop of blood or locking someone up," said Steven Levitsky, a Harvard political scientist and co-author of the book "How Democracies Die." He and other scholars said Orban qualifies as an authoritarian because of his use of government to control societal institutions.

Peter Kreko, a Budapest-based analyst for the Center for European Policy Analysis, said Orban's anti-democratic tendencies won't be a big issue in his quest to forge an alliance with U.S. conservatives. His closeness to Russia and China will be much thornier, Kreko argued.

Kreko said Orban's government is increasingly isolated diplomatically but has not even bothered to try to build ties to the Biden administration — instead hoping Trump or his allies will shortly return to power.

"This is his big hope for coming back to the international scene, since there are not so many allies that remain for him," Kreko said of Orban. "It's a remarkable success of Hungarian soft power that Orban has become so popular among American conservatives when his image has declined so much in Europe."

Schlapp scoffed at the notion that Hungary was undemocratic, noting that Orban's party continues to win elections and reminiscing fondly about his trip to Budapest. He recounted how his group got lost in some alleys in the ancient Hungarian capital.

"If we were in Chicago or Los Angeles, I'd have been scared to death," he said.

But not in Hungary: "It's orderly, it works, it's practical, it's clean."

North Korea pushes traditional medicine to fight COVID-19

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

PAJU, South Korea (AP) — As a medical student in North Korea, Lee Gwang-jin said he treated his fevers and other minor ailments with traditional herbal medicine. But bad illness could mean trouble because hospitals in his rural hometown lacked the ambulances, beds, even the electricity at times needed to treat critical or emergency patients.

So Lee was skeptical when he heard recent North Korean state media reports that claimed such so-called Koryo traditional medicine is playing a key role in the nation's fight against COVID-19, which has killed millions around the world.

"North Korea is using Koryo medicine a lot (for COVID-19) ... but it's not a sure remedy," said Lee, who studied Koryo medicine before he fled North Korea in 2018 for a new life in South Korea. "Someone who is destined to survive will survive (with such medicine), but North Korea can't help others who are dying."

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Like many other parts of life in North Korea, the medicine that the state says is curing its sick people is being used as a political symbol. That, experts say, will eventually allow the country to say its leaders have beaten the outbreak, where other nations have repeatedly failed, by providing homegrown remedies, independent of outside help.

As state media churn out stories about the effectiveness of the medicine and the huge production efforts to make more of it, there are questions about whether people suffering from severe disease are getting the treatment they need.

Defectors and experts believe North Korea is mobilizing Koryo medicine simply because it doesn't have enough modern medicine to fight COVID-19.

"Treating mild symptoms with Koryo medicine isn't a bad option. ... But the coronavirus doesn't cause only mild symptoms," said Yi Junhyeok, a traditional doctor and researcher at South Korea's Korea Institute of Oriental Medicine. "When we think about critical and high-risk patients, North Korea needs vaccines, emergency care systems and other medical resources that it can use to" lower fatalities.

More than two months have passed since North Korea admitted its first coronavirus outbreak, and the country has reported an average of 157 fever cases each day in the past seven days, a significant drop from the peak of about 400,000 a day in May. It also maintains a widely disputed claim that only 74 out of about 4.8 million fever patients have died, a fatality rate of 0.002% that would be the world's lowest if true.

Despite widespread outside doubt about the truth of North Korea's reported statistics, there are no signs that the outbreak has caused catastrophe in North Korea. Some outside experts say the North may soon formally declare victory over COVID-19 in an effort to boost internal unity. North Korea may then emphasize the role of Koryo medicine as the reason.

"North Korea calls Koryo medicine 'juche (self-reliant) medicine,' treats it importantly and views it as one of its political symbols," said Kim Dongsu, a professor at the College of Korean Medicine at South Korea's Dongshin University. "North Korea doesn't have many academic and cultural achievements to advertise so it'll likely actively propagate Koryo medicine."

North Korea officially incorporated Koryo medicine — named after an ancient Korean kingdom — in its public healthcare system in the 1950s. Its importance has sharply grown since the mid-1990s, when North Korea began suffering a big shortage of modern medicine during a crippling famine and economic turmoil that killed hundreds of thousands of people.

Koryo medicine refers to herbal concoctions that sometimes include animal parts, acupuncture, cupping, moxibustion and meridian massages. Such ancient remedies are used in many Asian and Western nations, too. But while in those countries traditional and modern medicines operate independently, North Korea has combined them.

Medical students are required to study both modern and traditional medicine at school, regardless of what they major in. So once they become professional doctors, they can practice both. Each hospital in North Korea has a department of Koryo medicine. There are also Koryo medicine-only hospitals.

Kim Jieun, a defector who is a traditional doctor in South Korea, said she majored in Koryo medicine at school in the North but eventually worked as a pediatrician and internal medicine doctor. She said that South Koreans generally use traditional medicine to maintain or improve their health, but North Koreans use it to treat diverse diseases.

"In South Korea, patients with cerebral hemorrhage, hepatocirrhosis, liver cancer, ascites, diabetes and kidney infections don't come to traditional clinics. But in North Korea, traditional doctors treat them," said Kim, who resettled in South Korea in 2002 and now works for Seoul's Well Saem Hospital of Korean Medicine.

North Korea's main Rodong Sinmun newspaper has recently published a slew of articles praising herbal medicine and acupuncture for curing fever patients and reducing the aftereffects of COVID-19 illnesses, including abnormal pains, heart and kidney problems, nausea and coughing.

The newspaper also published calls by leader Kim Jong Un to embrace Koryo medicine. Other state media reports said the production of Koryo medicine has quadrupled since last year, while a vast amount of modern medicine has also been speedily delivered to local medical institutions, a claim that cannot be

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independently verified.

North Korea's nominally free socialist medical system remains in shambles, with defectors testifying that they had to buy their own medicine and pay doctors for surgeries and other treatments. They say North Korea's advanced hospitals are largely concentrated in Pyongyang, the capital, where the ruling elite and upper-class citizens loyal to the Kim family live.

Lee, 29, who attended a medical school in the northern North Korean city of Hyesan, said Koryo doctors reused their acupuncture needles after sterilizing them with alcohol, and hospitals typically charged patients for the use of electricity for a medical examination.

H.K. Yoon, a former North Korean doctor who fled the country in the mid-2010s, said her mid-level hospital in the northeast had no ambulance, no oxygen concentrator and only three to four beds in the emergency room. She said she shared surgical equipment with other doctors, and her monthly salary was the equivalent of 800 grams (1.76 pounds) of rice.

"My heart aches when I recall the lack of surgical equipment," said Yoon, who asked that her first name be identified only by initials because of safety worries about relatives in North Korea. "When my patients were critical, I wanted to perform surgeries quickly. But I couldn't do it because surgical equipment was being used by someone else, and I worried about how soon I could sterilize and use it."

Some experts earlier predicted that the COVID-19 outbreak could cause dire consequences in North Korea because most of its 26 million people are unvaccinated and about 40% of its people are reportedly undernourished. Now, they speculate that North Korea is likely underreporting its death count to prevent political damage to Kim Jong Un.

Lee, the former North Korean medical student, said people in Hyesan didn't go to hospitals unless they were extremely sick.

"When they are moderately ill, they just receive acupuncture or Koryo herbal medicine. They trust Koryo medicine but they also don't make much money and Koryo medicine is cheaper than Western medicine," Lee said.

Pope set for historic apology for school abuses in Canada

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta (AP) — Thousands of Indigenous persons are expected to converge Monday on the small Alberta prairie community of Maskwacis to hear a long-awaited apology from Pope Francis for generations of abuse and cultural suppression at Catholic residential schools across Canada.

Francis is scheduled to arrive in mid-morning at the site of the former Ermineskin Indian Residential School, now largely torn down. He will pause at the sites of the former school and nearby cemetery before speaking in a large open area to school survivors, their relatives and other supporters.

Francis arrived Sunday in Edmonton, where he was greeted by representatives of Canada's three main Indigenous groups — First Nations, Metis and Inuit — along with political and church dignitaries. The pope spent the rest of the day resting at a seminary in the provincial capital.

The Canadian government has admitted that physical and sexual abuse were rampant in the state-funded Christian schools that operated from the 19th century to the 1970s. Some 150,000 Indigenous children were taken from their families and forced to attend in an effort to isolate them from the influence of their homes, Native languages and cultures and assimilate them into Canada's Christian society.

Francis' six-day trip — which will also include other sites in Alberta, Quebec City and Iqaluit, Nunavut, in the far north — follows meetings he held in the spring at the Vatican with delegations from the First Nations, Metis and Inuit. Those meetings culminated with a historic April 1 apology for the "deplorable" abuses committed by some Catholic missionaries in residential schools.

Thousands of children died from disease, fire and other causes. The discoveries of hundreds of potential burial sites at former schools in the past year has drawn international attention to the legacy of the schools in Canada and their counterparts in the United States.

Francis is now following through on a commitment to make that apology on Canadian soil.

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Maskwacis, about an hour south of Edmonton, is the hub of four Cree nations.

Event organizers said they would do everything possible to make sure survivors can attend the event. Many will travel from park-and-ride lots, and organizers acknowledge that many survivors are elderly and will require accessible vehicles, diabetic-friendly snacks and other amenities.

Catholics operated a majority of the Canadian schools, while various Protestant denominations operated others in cooperation with the government.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who last year voiced an apology for the "incredibly harmful government policy" in organizing the residential school system, will also attend the Maskwacis event along with other government officials.

In Maskwacis, the former school where Francis is visiting has been replaced with a school system operated by the four local Cree nations. The curriculum affirms the Indigenous culture that was once suppressed.

Chief Greg Desjarlais of the Frog Lake First Nation in northern Alberta, a school survivor, said after the pope's arrival Sunday that there are "mixed emotions across this country" over his visit.

"I think today of the young people that didn't make it home and are buried around residential schools," he told a news conference after the airport welcome ceremony. But he expressed optimism that the visit can begin to bring reconciliation.

"I do know when two people have apologized we feel better," he said. "But our people have been through a lot. ... Our people have been traumatized. Some of them didn't make it home. Now I hope the world will see why our people are so hurt."

On Monday afternoon, Francis is scheduled to visit Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples, a Catholic parish in Edmonton oriented toward Indigenous people and culture. The church, whose sanctuary was dedicated last week after being restored from a fire, incorporates Indigenous language and customs in liturgy.

"I never in my life thought I would see a pope here at Sacred Heart Church," said Fernie Marty, who holds the title of church elder. "And now we get that opportunity."

When Francis visits, the church will display the clothing, bread and other supplies it regularly provides to the needy, including many of Edmonton's estimated urban Indigenous population of 75,000.

The visit will be an "encounter" that will help "for people to know what we are, who we are," said its pastor, the Rev. Jesu Susai.

Alex Jones' defamation trial finally set to begin in Texas

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Jury selection is set for Monday in a trial that will determine for the first time how much Infowars host Alex Jones must pay Sandy Hook Elementary School parents for falsely telling his audience that the deadliest classroom shooting in U.S. history was a hoax.

The trial in Austin, Texas — where the conspiracy theorist lives and broadcasts his show — follows months of delays. Jones has racked up fines for ignoring court orders and he put Infowars into bankruptcy protection just before the trial was originally set to start in April.

At stake for Jones is another potentially major financial blow that could put his constellation of conspiracy peddling businesses into deeper jeopardy. He has already been banned from YouTube, Facebook and Spotify over violating hate-speech policies.

The trial involving the parents of two Sandy Hook families is only the start for Jones; damages have yet to be awarded in separate defamation cases for other families of the 2012 massacre in Newtown, Connecticut.

The lawsuits do not ask jurors to award a specific dollar amount against Jones.

Courts in Texas and Connecticut have already found Jones liable for defamation for his portrayal of the Sandy Hook massacre as a hoax involving actors aimed at increasing gun control. In both states, judges have issued default judgements against Jones without trials because he failed to respond to court orders and turn over documents.

The 2012 shooting killed 20 first graders and six educators. Families of eight of the victims and an FBI

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agent who responded to the school are suing Jones and his company, Free Speech Systems.

Jones has since acknowledged that the shooting took place. During a deposition in April, Jones insisted he wasn't responsible for the suffering that Sandy Hook parents say they have endured because of the hoax conspiracy, including death threats and harassment by Jones' followers.

"No, I don't (accept) responsibility because I wasn't trying to cause pain and suffering," Jones said, according to the transcripts made public this month. He continued: "They are being used and their children who can't be brought back (are) being used to destroy the First Amendment."

Jones claimed in court records last year that he had a negative net worth of \$20 million, but attorneys for Sandy Hook families have painted a different financial picture.

Court records show that Jones' Infowars store, which sells nutritional supplements and survival gear, made more than \$165 million between 2015 and 2018. Jones has also urged listeners on his Infowars program to donate money.

As heat records fall in Northeast, some city dwellers flee

By JEFF McMILLAN Associated Press

PROMISED LAND, Pa. (AP) — It's not exactly flowing with milk and honey — just ask the area's struggling black bears — but Promised Land offered respite Sunday for city folks in the Northeast trying to escape a nearly weeklong hot spell that only threatened to intensify.

Those with the resources fled to pools, beaches and higher elevations like Promised Land State Park, at 1,800 feet (550 meters) in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains and a drive of about 2 1/2 hours from New York City and Philadelphia.

From the Pacific Northwest to the southern Great Plains to the heavily populated Interstate 95 corridor, more than 85 million Americans were under excessive heat warnings or heat advisories issued by the National Weather Service. The agency warned of "extremely oppressive" conditions from Washington to Boston.

Even in Promised Land, temperatures were forecast to soar above 90 (32 Celsius), but with shade from the forests, cool lake water and mountain breezes, it was more than tolerable, visitors said.

Rosa Chavez, 47, a high school teacher in Manhattan, applied sunscreen at a beach on Promised Land Lake. She and friend Arlene Rodriguez, who accompanied her, had just experienced Europe's own heat wave while vacationing last week in Florence, Italy.

"The heat is following us," said Rodriguez, 47, a real estate agent and property manager.

Numerous record highs were expected to be tied or broken in the Northeast, the weather service said.

Philadelphia hit 99 degrees (37 Celsius) Sunday before even factoring in humidity. Newark, New Jersey, saw its fifth consecutive day of 100 degrees or higher, the longest such streak since records began in 1931. Boston also hit 100 degrees, surpassing the previous daily record high of 98 degrees set in 1933.

At least two heat-related deaths have been reported in the Northeast, with officials warning of the potential for more.

Philadelphia officials extended a heat emergency through Monday evening, sending workers to check on homeless people and knock on the doors of other vulnerable residents. The city also opened cooling centers and stationed air-conditioned buses at four intersections for people to cool off.

Forecasters urged people to wear light clothing, drink lots of water, limit time outside, and check on elderly people and pets.

Boston Mayor Michelle Wu declared a heat emergency through Monday and kept a dozen cooling centers open.

Athletic events were shortened or postponed. Organizers of the New York City Triathlon cut the distances that athletes had to run and bike. This weekend's Boston Triathlon was put off until Aug. 20-21.

On the West Coast, forecasters warned of extreme heat arriving early this week and lingering until the weekend. Temperatures could break daily records in Seattle, Portland and Northern California by Tuesday and climb to the highest level since a heat wave last year that killed hundreds of people across the Pacific

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Northwest.

Many homes in the often-rainy region lack air conditioning, and authorities cautioned that indoor heat is likely to build through the week, increasing the risk of heat-related illnesses, something emergency medical officials in Boston also warned of.

Back in Promised Land, Chavez said she has asthma and needs to keep her inhaler around, especially "when the heat is so thick I can't breathe." The breezes and clearer air in the mountains help, she said.

It was already over 80 degrees at midmorning as Mhamed Moussa Boudjelthia, a 31-year-old Uber driver from Queens, fired up a grill at the beach to make kebabs. He and another friend from Queens had fled the hot chaos of the city for the day.

"There, it's really hot," Boudjelthia said. "There's too much humidity, too."

His friend, Kamel Mahiout, 35, agreed as he stood in a cooling breeze: "It's crazy in New York City."

The heat was withering even less than an hour away, at lower elevations. In Scranton, Pennsylvania, Sunday's high was expected to be 97, and not punching below 70 at night.

"That also leads to the danger. People aren't getting that relief overnight," said weather service forecaster Lily Chapman. "That stress on the body is kind of cumulative over time."

The area also has been drier than usual, she said.

Regular campers and cabin residents in Promised Land attribute unusually numerous bear sightings to the dry conditions. The animals roam neighborhoods and campsites for scraps as streams and berries dry up.

"Today's hot," said Alex Paez, 34, of Scranton, sitting under a shade canopy at the beach in Promised Land. "If you don't need to be outside doing something productive, then stay in."

Pope lands in Canada, set for apologies to Indigenous groups

By NICOLE WINFIELD, ROB GILLIES and PETER SMITH Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta (AP) — Pope Francis began a historic visit to Canada on Sunday to apologize to Indigenous peoples for abuses by missionaries at residential schools, a key step in the Catholic Church's efforts to reconcile with Native communities and help them heal from generations of trauma.

Francis kissed the hand of a residential school survivor as he was greeted at the Edmonton, Alberta, airport by Indigenous representatives, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mary Simon, an Inuk who is Canada's first Indigenous governor general.

The gesture set the tone of what Francis has said is a "penitential pilgrimage" to atone for the role of Catholic missionaries in the forced assimilation of generations of Native children — a visit that has stirred mixed emotions across Canada as survivors and their families cope with the trauma of their losses and receive a long-sought papal apology.

Francis had no official events scheduled Sunday, giving him time to rest before his meeting Monday with survivors near the site of a former residential school in Maskwacis, where he is expected to pray at a cemetery and apologize.

Francis exited the back of his plane with the help of an ambulift, given his strained knee ligaments have forced him to use a wheelchair. The simple welcome ceremony took place in airport hangar, where Indigenous drums and chanting broke the silence. As Trudeau and Simon sat beside Francis, a succession of Indigenous leaders and elders greeted the pope and exchanged gifts. At one point, Francis kissed the hand of residential school survivor Elder Alma Desjarlais of the Frog Lake First Nations as she was introduced to him.

"Right now, many of our people are skeptical and they are hurt," said Grand Chief George Arcand Jr. of the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, who greeted the pope. Yet he expressed hope that with the papal apology, "We could begin our journey of healing .. and change the way things have been for our people for many, many years."

Indigenous groups are seeking more than just words, though, as they press for access to church archives to learn the fate of children who never returned home from the residential schools. They also want justice for the abusers, financial reparations and the return of Indigenous artifacts held by the Vatican Museums.

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Assembly of First Nations National Chief RoseAnne Archibald, one of the country's most prominent Indigenous leaders, said several members of her family attended residential schools, including a sister who died at one in Ontario. She described it as "an institution of assimilation and genocide."

During her fight to Alberta, "I was just so overcome with emotion and there were different times on the plane where I really had to stop myself from breaking into a deep sob," she said. "I realized that I am an intergenerational trauma survivor and there are so many people like me."

Francis' week-long trip — which will take him to Edmonton; Quebec City and finally Iqaluit, Nunavut, in the far north — follows meetings he held in the spring at the Vatican with delegations from the First Nations, Metis and Inuit. Those meetings culminated with a historic April 1 apology for the "deplorable" abuses committed by some Catholic missionaries in residential schools.

The Canadian government has admitted that physical and sexual abuse were rampant in the state-funded Christian schools that operated from the 19th century to the 1970s. Some 150,000 Indigenous children were taken from their families and forced to attend in an effort to isolate them from the influence of their homes, Native languages and cultures and assimilate them into Canada's Christian society.

Then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a formal apology over the residential schools in 2008. As part of a lawsuit settlement involving the government, churches and approximately 90,000 surviving students, Canada paid reparations that amounted to billions of dollars being transferred to Indigenous communities. Canada's Catholic Church says its dioceses and religious orders have provided more than \$50 million in cash and in-kind contributions, and hope to add \$30 million more over the next five years.

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 had called for a papal apology to be delivered on Canadian soil, but it was only after the 2021 discovery of the possible remains of around 200 children at the former Kamloops residential school in British Columbia that the Vatican mobilized to comply with the request.

"I honestly believe that if it wasn't for the discovery ... and all the spotlight that was placed on the Oblates or the Catholic Church as well, I don't think any of this would have happened," said Raymond Frogner, head archivist at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

Frogner just returned from Rome where he spent five days at the headquarters of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, which operated 48 of the 139 Christian-run residential schools, the most of any Catholic order. After the graves were discovered, the Oblates finally offered "complete transparency and accountability" and allowed him into its headquarters to research the names of alleged sex abusers from a single school in the western Canadian province of Saskatchewan, he said.

The Inuit community, for its part, is seeking Vatican assistance to extradite a single Oblate priest, the Rev. Joannes Rivoire, who ministered to Inuit communities until he left in the 1990s and returned to France. Canadian authorities issued an arrest warrant for him in 1998 on accusations of several counts of sexual abuse, but it has never been served.

Inuit leader Natan Obed personally asked Francis for the Vatican's help in extraditing Rivoire, telling The Associated Press in March that it was one specific thing the Vatican could do to bring healing to his many victims.

Asked about the request, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said last week that he had no information on the case.

At a news conference Saturday in Edmonton, organizers said they will do all they can to enable school survivors to attend the papal events, particularly for the Maskwacis apology and the Tuesday gathering at Lac Ste. Anne, long a popular pilgrimage site for Indigenous Catholics.

Both are in rural areas, and organizers are arranging shuttle transport from various park-and-ride lots. They noted that many survivors are now elderly and frail and may need accessible vehicle transport, diabetic-friendly snacks and other services.

The Rev. Cristino Bouvette, national liturgical coordinator for the papal visit, who is partly of Indigenous heritage, said he hopes the visit is healing for those who "have borne a wound, a cross that they have suffered with, in some cases for generations."

Bouvette, a priest in the Diocese of Calgary, said the papal liturgical events will have strong Indigenous

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representation — including prominent roles for Indigenous clergy and the use of Native languages, music and motifs on liturgical vestments.

Bouvette said he's doing this work in honor of his "kokum," the Cree word for grandmother, who spent 12 years at a residential school in Edmonton. She "could have probably never imagined those many years later that her grandson would be involved in this work."

Yellen downplays US recession risk as economic reports loom

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Sunday said the U.S. economy is slowing but pointed to healthy hiring as proof that it is not yet in recession.

Yellen spoke on NBC's "Meet the Press" just before a slew of economic reports will be released this week that will shed light on an economy currently besieged by rampant inflation and threatened by higher interest rates. The data will cover sales of new homes, consumer confidence, incomes, spending, inflation, and overall output.

The highest-profile report will likely be Thursday, when the Commerce Department will release its first estimate of the economy's output in the April-June quarter. Some economists forecast it may show a contraction for the second quarter in a row. The economy shrank 1.6% in the January-March quarter. Two straight negative readings is considered an informal definition of a recession, though in this case economists think that's misleading.

Instead, the National Bureau of Economic Research — a nonprofit group of economists — defines a recession as "a significant decline in economic activity that is spread across the economy and lasts more than a few months."

Yellen argued that much of the economy remains healthy: Consumer spending is growing, Americans' finances, on average, are solid, and the economy has added more than 400,000 jobs a month this year, a robust figure. The unemployment rate is 3.6%, near a half-century low.

"We've got a very strong labor market," Yellen said. "This is not an economy that's in recession."

Still, Yellen acknowledged the economy is "in a period of transition in which growth is slowing," from a historically rapid pace in 2021.

She said that slowdown is "necessary and appropriate," because "we need to be growing at a steady and sustainable pace."

Slower growth could help bring down inflation, which at 9.1% is the highest in two generations.

Still, many economists think a recession is on the horizon, with inflation eating away at Americans' ability to spend and the Federal Reserve rapidly pushing up borrowing costs. Last week, Bank of America's economists became the latest to forecast a "mild recession" later this year.

And Larry Summers, the treasury secretary under President Bill Clinton, said on CNN's "GPS" Sunday that "there's a very high likelihood of recession," as the Fed lifts interest rates to combat inflation. Those higher borrowing costs are intended to reduce consumer spending on homes and cars and slow business borrowing, which can lead to a downturn.

On Wednesday, the Federal Reserve is likely to announce its second 0.75% point increase in its short-term rate in a row, a hefty increase that it hasn't otherwise implemented since 1994. That will put the Fed's benchmark rate in a range of 2.25% to 2.5%, the highest level since 2018. Fed policymakers are expected to keep hiking until its rate reaches about 3.5%, which would be the highest since 2008.

The Fed's hikes have torpedoed the housing market, as mortgage rates have doubled in the past year to 5.5%. Sales of existing homes have fallen for five straight months. On Tuesday, the government is expected to report that sales of new homes dropped in June.

Fewer home sales also means less spending on items that typically come with purchasing a new house, such as furniture, appliances, curtains, and kitchenware.

Many other countries are also grappling with higher inflation, and slower growth overseas could weaken the U.S. economy. Europe is facing the threat of recession, with soaring inflation and a central bank that just last week raised interest rates for the first time in 11 years.

European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde also sought to minimize recession concerns in an news conference last Thursday.

"Under the baseline scenario, there is no recession, neither this year nor next year," Lagarde said. "Is the horizon clouded? Of course it is."

Jonas Vingegaard, king of the mountains, wins Tour de France

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN AP Sports Writer

King of the mountains. Champion on the Champs-Elysees.

Jonas Vingegaard blossomed from a talented rookie to a dominant leader in his own right over three weeks of epic racing to win his first Tour de France title on Sunday.

The former fish factory worker from Denmark dethroned defending champion Tadej Pogacar with memorable performances in the mountains in cycling's biggest race.

The 25-year-old Vingegaard, who was runner-up to Pogacar in his first Tour last year, excelled in the scorching heat that enveloped France this month and came out on top of a thrilling duel with Pogacar, the big favorite at the start of the race.

Jasper Philipsen won Sunday's last stage — a mainly processional ride around Paris to the Champs-Elysees — in a sprint ahead of Dylan Groenewegen and Alexander Kristoff.

Vingegaard competed last year as a replacement for Tom Dumoulin in the Jumbo-Visma squad. It was a revelation for Vingegaard as he realized that he could fight for the overall title after dropping Pogacar in the famed Mont Ventoux climb, but his Slovenian rival was at the top of his game and largely untouchable.

A year later, Vingegaard stood on top of the podium after building his triumph with two phenomenal rides in the Alps and the Pyrenees.

The official overall margin of victory was 2 minutes, 43 seconds but Vingegaard slowed down toward the end of the stage to celebrate with teammates, crossing well after Pogacar. Geraint Thomas, the 2018 Tour champion, was 7:22 off the pace in third.

Three weeks ago in Copenhagen, the Jumbo-Visma team started the race with two leaders — Vingegaard and three-time Spanish Vuelta winner Primoz Roglic. But Roglic's challenge took a blow when he suffered a dislocated shoulder and lost more than two minutes to Pogacar on the cobbled fifth stage of the race, leaving Vingegaard in a sole leader's role.

Vingegaard more than exceeded expectations from that moment.

He made his intentions clear in the first big mountain stage up the Col du Granon to seize the race leader's yellow jersey from Pogacar, who fell more than two minutes behind that day. Having claimed the famed tunic during a stage featuring three monster Alpine climbs, Vingegaard kept it until the end.

With the help of teammates including the versatile Wout Van Aert, Vingegaard responded to the relentless attacks launched by Pogacar day in, day out. His supremacy in the mountains was such that, in addition to his overall win, Vingegaard also claimed the jersey for king of the mountains — not bad for a rider who comes from a country whose highest point is barely 170 meters above sea level.

Vingegaard and Pogacar were clearly in a class of their own this year as their closest rival, Thomas, was reduced to being a mere spectator in the leaders' fight.

Vingegaard delivered his decisive blow in the Pyrenees, posting a second stage win at the Hautacam ski resort. There the Dane responded to a series of attacks from Pogacar and ultimately dropped the Slovenian in the last big mountain stage of this year's race to increase his overall lead to more than three minutes.

Pogacar cracked about four kilometers (2 1/2 miles) from the finish in the final ascent, with his hopes of winning a third consecutive title all but over. He fought until the very end but Vingegaard was again the strongest in Saturday's individual time trial to effectively secure the title.

"The battle between me and Jonas for the yellow jersey has been very special," Pogacar said. "I think we have some very interesting next two or three years ahead of us. Jonas has stepped up his game this year."

The light-framed Vingegaard is not perhaps as naturally gifted as Pogacar, who has shown over the past couple of years that he is capable of winning Grand Tours and the most prestigious one-day classics as well.

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But Vingegaard surely learns fast.

Vingegaard did not experience his first ascent before he was already 16. His climbing skills would not remain unnoticed for long, though.

After he posted a record time on the Coll de Rates climb during a training camp in Spain with his former team ColoQuick, he joined Jumbo-Visma in 2019 and rapidly improved. In his first Tour last year, he showed proper leadership skills after Roglic crashed out of the race, and followed up with a cold-blooded ride to victory this summer.

The growing rivalry between Pogacar and Vingegaard has brought new race scenarios that have delighted fans.

Both men were equipped with strong teams capable of controlling the race in the mountains, an essential element that was a trademark of the mighty Ineos teams in the past decade. But on many occasions, both Pogacar and Vingegaard were left just relying on themselves in high altitude, fighting each other on equal terms.

Pogacar also brought a sense of old-fashioned romanticism with his long-range attacks. At 23, the UAE-Emirates Team has a bright future.

Vingegaard became the first Dane to win the Tour since Bjarne Riis achieved the feat in 1996 during a time when doping was widespread in cycling.

Following his retirement from cycling, Riis admitted in 2007 to using the blood-booster EPO from 1993-98, including during his Tour victory.

Asked whether his team should be trusted, Vingegaard said he and his teammates "are totally clean, every one of us."

"No one of us is taking anything illegal," he added. "I think why we're so good is the preparation that we do. We take altitude camps to the next step."

Crews protect homes as California fire burns near Yosemite

By NOAH BERGER and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

JERSEYDALE, Calif. (AP) — A destructive wildfire near Yosemite National Park burned out of control through tinder-dry forest on Sunday and had grown into one of California's biggest blazes of the year, forcing thousands of residents to flee remote mountain communities.

Some 2,000 firefighters battled the Oak Fire, along with aircraft and bulldozers, facing tough conditions that includes steep terrain, sweltering temperatures and low humidity, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire.

"It's hot out there again today," Cal Fire spokesperson Natasha Fouts said Sunday. "And the fuel moisture levels are critically low."

Crews on the ground protected homes as air tankers dropped retardant on 50-foot (15-meter) flames racing along ridgetops east of the tiny community of Jerseydale.

Light winds blew embers ahead into tree branches "and because it's so dry, it's easy for the spot fires to get established and that's what fuels the growth," Fouts said.

The fire erupted Friday southwest of the park near the town of Midpines in Mariposa County. Officials described "explosive fire behavior" on Saturday as flames made runs through bone-dry vegetation caused by the worst drought in decades.

By Sunday the blaze had consumed more than 22 square miles (56 square km) of forest land, with no containment, Cal Fire said. The cause was under investigation.

Evacuations were in place for over 6,000 people living across a several-mile span of the sparsely populated area in the Sierra Nevada foothills, though a handful of residents defied the orders and stayed behind, said Adrienne Freeman with the U.S. Forest Service.

"We urge people to evacuate when told," she said. "This fire is moving very fast."

Lynda Reynolds-Brown and her husband Aubrey awaited news about the fate of their home from an evacuation center at an elementary school. They fled as ash rained down and the fire descended a hill

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towards their property.

"It just seemed like it was above our house and coming our way really quickly," Reynolds-Brown told KCRA-TV.

Gov. Gavin Newsom proclaimed a state of emergency for Mariposa County due to the fire's effects.

Flames destroyed at least 10 residential and commercial structures and damaged five others, Cal Fire said. Assessment teams were moving through mountain towns to check for additional damage, Fouts said.

Numerous roads were closed, including a stretch of State Route 140 that's one of the main routes into Yosemite.

California has experienced increasingly larger and deadlier wildfires in recent years as climate change has made the West much warmer and drier over the past 30 years. Scientists have said weather will continue to be more extreme and wildfires more frequent, destructive and unpredictable.

Pacific Gas & Electric said on its website that more than 3,100 homes and businesses in the area had lost power as of Sunday and there was no indication when it would be restored. "PG&E is unable to access the affected equipment," the utility said as flames roared Friday.

The Oak Fire was sparked as firefighters made progress against an earlier blaze, the Washburn Fire, that burned to the edge of a grove of giant sequoias in the southernmost part of Yosemite National Park. The 7.5-square-mile (19-square-km) fire was nearly 80% contained after burning for two weeks and moving into the the Sierra National Forest.

Jan. 6 panel deepens probe to Trump Cabinet, awaits Thomas

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Jan. 6 committee said Sunday it will interview more former Cabinet secretaries and is prepared to subpoena conservative activist Virginia "Ginni" Thomas, who's married to Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, as part of its investigation of the Capitol riot and Donald Trump's role.

Lawmakers said they are deepening their inquiry after a series of eight hearings in June and July culminating in a prime-time session Thursday, with plans to interview additional witnesses and reconvene in September to resume laying out their findings to the public.

"We anticipate talking to additional members of the president's Cabinet," said Rep. Liz Cheney, the committee's vice chair. "We anticipate talking to additional members of his campaign. Certainly, we're very focused as well on the Secret Service."

Cheney, R-Wyo., did not identify the Trump administration officials who might come forward, but the committee has previously made clear its interest in speaking with those believed to have considered invoking a constitutional process in the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office after the riot on Jan. 6, 2021, when hundreds of Trump's supporters violently stormed the Capitol and interrupted the certification of Joe Biden's election.

The committee has aired testimony from former Attorney General William Barr, who said he told Trump that widespread voter fraud claims were "bull——" and had "zero basis." In last week's hearing, the committee played testimony from then-Labor Secretary Eugene Scalia, who said he urged Trump to call a Cabinet meeting to discuss an orderly transition of power.

Other Cabinet members have indicated they may have important details to share.

Betsy DeVos, the education secretary at the time, previously told USA Today that she raised with Vice President Mike Pence the question of whether the Cabinet should consider invoking the 25th Amendment, which would have required the vice president and the majority of the Cabinet to agree that the president could no longer fulfill his duties.

DeVos, in her resignation letter on Jan. 7, 2021, blamed Trump for inciting the mob. "There is no mistaking the impact your rhetoric had on the situation, and it is the inflection point for me," she wrote.

On the same day, Elaine Chao quit as transportation secretary. Chao, who is married to Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, said the attack had "deeply troubled me in a way that I simply can-

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not set aside.”

Mike Pompeo, the secretary of state at the time who is considering a 2024 presidential run, and Steven Mnuchin, Trump’s treasury secretary, also were reported to have discussed the possibility of invoking the 25th Amendment, according to Jonathan Karl of ABC News in his book “Betrayal.”

“The floodgates have opened,” said Rep. Elaine Luria, D-Va., regarding the next phase of its investigation. Committee members also hope to learn more about Ginni Thomas’ own effort to keep Trump in office and the potential conflicts of interest for Clarence Thomas as a result on Jan. 6 cases that have come before the Supreme Court. The committee sent a letter to Ginni Thomas last month seeking an interview and hopes she will comply, Cheney said.

Thomas communicated with people in Trump’s orbit ahead of the 2021 attack and also on the day of the insurrection.

“We certainly hope that she will agree to come in voluntarily,” Cheney said. “But the committee is fully prepared to contemplate a subpoena if she does not.”

Cheney also said that while the committee hasn’t decided whether to make a criminal referral regarding Trump to the Justice Department, “that’s absolutely something we’re looking at.”

Added Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill.: “I certainly think there’s evidence of crimes and I think it goes all the way up to Donald Trump.”

While a possible Trump prosecution is a matter for the Justice Department, the committee has used its hearings to try to make a case about his political viability as he mulls running in 2024. Some of the most damning testimony aired by the committee has come from Trump’s own top Republican advisers, military leaders and confidants, who admitted to a loss of confidence in his judgment and dedication to the rule of law in the days leading up to and after the Jan. 6 attack.

The committee also wants to get to the bottom of missing Secret Service texts from Jan. 5-6, 2021, that could have shed further light on Trump’s actions during the insurrection, particularly after earlier testimony about his confrontation with security as he tried to join supporters at the Capitol.

Lawmakers also are interested in hearing from Steve Bannon, a Trump ally who was found guilty last week on criminal contempt of Congress charges for refusing to comply with the House committee’s subpoena.

Cheney spoke on CNN’s “State of the Union” and “Fox News Sunday,” Kinzinger appeared on ABC’s “This Week,” and Luria was on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

Muhammad Ali’s ‘Rumble in the Jungle’ belt sells for \$6.1M

DALLAS (AP) — Muhammad Ali’s championship belt from his 1974 “Rumble in the Jungle” heavyweight title fight was sold at auction on Sunday for \$6.18 million.

The winner of the heated competition for the belt was Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay, according to Heritage Auctions in Dallas.

In a tweet Sunday, Irsay confirmed he acquired the belt for his collection of rock music, American history and pop culture memorabilia that is currently touring the country.

The belt will be displayed on Aug. 2 at Chicago’s Navy Pier and on Sept. 9 in Indianapolis.

“Proud to be the steward!” Irsay tweeted.

“After several hours of watching two bidders go back and forth over this belt, this proved to be a battle worthy of the Rumble itself,” Chris Ivy, Heritage’s director of sports auctions, said in a statement.

The 1974 fight was one of boxing’s most memorable moments. Ali stopped the fearsome George Foreman to recapture the heavyweight title in the African nation of Zaire. Ali won the fight in a knockout in the eighth round.

Attorney wins Ernest Hemingway contest in Key West tradition

KEY WEST, Fla. (AP) — Some came in wool fisherman’s sweaters, and other contestants had sportsmen’s attire. But it was the cream-colored sweater of attorney Jon Auvil that caught the eye of judges who awarded him the title for most resembling author and former Key West resident Ernest Hemingway.

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Auvil triumphed Saturday night over 124 other contestants for the title in the annual Hemingway Look-Alike Contest at Sloppy Joe's Bar, the Key West establishment where the author was a regular patron during his decade-long residence on the island in the 1930s.

The look-a-like contest is a highlight of Key West's annual Hemingway Days celebration, which ended Sunday.

Auvil said he shares Hemingway's passion for fishing, has written some fiction and would like to do more writing.

"Every man wants to write like Hemingway," said Auvil, who lives in Dade City, Florida, northeast of Tampa.

While living in Key West, Hemingway wrote classics, including "For Whom the Bell Tolls" and "To Have and Have Not."

Biden improves 'significantly,' throat still sore from COVID

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden continues to "improve significantly" despite a lingering sore throat from his coronavirus infection, according to an update Sunday from his doctor.

"The president is responding to therapy as expected," wrote Dr. Kevin O'Connor in his latest note. Biden has been taking Paxlovid, an antiviral drug that helps reduce the chance of severe illness.

O'Connor wrote that Biden still has a sore throat, though other symptoms, including a cough, runny nose and body aches, "have diminished considerably."

Biden tested positive for the coronavirus on Thursday morning. O'Connor said Saturday that the president likely became infected with a highly contagious variant, known as BA.5, that is spreading throughout the country, and Dr. Ashish Jha, the White House COVID-19 response coordinator, said Sunday, "It is the BA.5 variant."

"Thank goodness our vaccines and therapeutics work well against it, which is why I think the president's doing well," Jha told CBS' "Face the Nation."

Jha also gave a positive update on the president's health.

"I checked in with his team late last night. He was feeling well. He had a good day yesterday," Jha said.

That variant is an offshoot of the omicron strain that emerged late last year. It is believed responsible for the vast majority of coronavirus cases in the country. He has been isolating in the White House residence since then.

Administration officials have emphasized that his symptoms are mild because he has received four vaccine doses, and he started taking the antiviral drug Paxlovid after becoming infected.

The White House has not released any photos or video of Biden since Friday, when the media watched him participate in a virtual meeting with economic advisers.

Jha pledged that the White House would keep giving updates on the president's condition and whether he might have long-term symptoms.

"We think it's really important for the American people to know how well their president is doing," he said.

"Obviously if he has persistent symptoms, obviously if any of them interfere with his ability to carry out his duties, we will disclose that early and often with the American people. But I suspect that this is going to be a course of COVID that we've seen in many Americans who have been fully vaccinated, double boosted, getting treated with those tools in hand," Jha said. "The president's been doing well and we're going to expect that he's going to continue to do so."

Biden's press secretary has said 17 people, including members of the president's senior staff and at least one member of Congress, were determined to have been in close contact with Biden when he might have been contagious. None has tested positive so far, Jha said on "Fox News Sunday."

Semiconductor bill unites Sanders, the right — in opposition

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bill to boost semiconductor production in the United States has managed to do

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nearly the unthinkable — unite the democratic socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders and the fiscally conservative right.

The bill making its way through the Senate is a top priority of the Biden administration. It would add about \$79 billion to the deficit over 10 years, mostly as a result of new grants and tax breaks that would subsidize the cost that computer chip manufacturers incur when building or expanding chip plants in the United States.

Supporters say that countries all over the world are spending billions of dollars to lure chipmakers. The U.S. must do the same or risk losing a secure supply of the semiconductors that power the nation's automobiles, computers, appliances and some of the military's most advanced weapons systems.

Sanders, I-Vt., and a wide range of conservative lawmakers, think tanks and media outlets have a different take. To them, it's "corporate welfare." It's just the latest example of how spending taxpayer dollars to help the private sector can scramble the usual partisan lines, creating allies on the left and right who agree on little else. They are positioning themselves as defenders of the little guy against powerful interest groups lining up at the public trough.

Sanders said he doesn't hear from people about the need to help the semiconductor industry. Voters talk to him about climate change, gun safety, preserving a woman's right to an abortion and boosting Social Security benefits, to name just a few.

"Not too many people that I can recall — I have been all over this country — say: 'Bernie, you go back there and you get the job done, and you give enormously profitable corporations, which pay outrageous compensation packages to their CEOs, billions and billions of dollars in corporate welfare,'" Sanders said.

Sanders voted against the original semiconductor and research bill that passed the Senate last year. He was the only senator who caucuses with the Democrats to oppose the measure, joining with 31 Republicans.

While Sanders would like to see the spending directed elsewhere, several GOP senators just want the spending stopped, period. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, said the spending would help fuel inflation that is hurting the poor and middle class.

"The poorer you are, the more you suffer. Even people well-entrenched in the middle class get gouged considerably. Why we would want to take money away from them and give it to the wealthy is beyond my ability to fathom," Lee said.

Conservative mainstays such as The Wall Street Journal's editorial board, the Heritage Foundation and the tea party aligned group FreedomWorks have also come out against the bill. "Giving taxpayer money away to rich corporations is not competing with China," said Walter Lohman, director of the Heritage Foundation's Asian Studies Center.

The opposition from the far left and the far right means that Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., will need help from Republicans to get a bill over the finish line. Support from at least 11 Republican senators will be needed to overcome a filibuster. A final vote on the bill is expected in the coming week.

Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, is among the likely Republican supporters. Asked about the Sanders' argument against the bill, Romney said that when other countries subsidize the manufacturing of high technology chips, the U.S. must join the club.

"If you don't play like they play, then you are not going to be manufacturing high technology chips, and they are essential for our national defense as well as our economy," Romney said.

The most common reason that lawmakers give for subsidizing the semiconductor industry is the risk to national security from relying on foreign suppliers, particularly after the supply chain problems of the pandemic. Nearly four-fifths of global fabrication capacity is in Asia, according to the Congressional Research Service, broken down by South Korea at 28%, Taiwan at 22%, Japan, 16%, and China, 12%.

"I wish you didn't have to do this, to be very honest, but France, Germany, Singapore, Japan, all of these other countries are providing incentives for CHIP companies to build there," Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said Sunday on CBS's "Face the Nation."

"We cannot afford to be in this vulnerable position. We need to be able to protect ourselves," she said.

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The window for passing the bill through the House is narrow if some progressives join with Sanders and if most Republicans line up in opposition based on fiscal concerns. The White House says the bill needs to pass by the end of the month because companies are making decisions now about where to build.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., told members of the United Auto Workers in Michigan on Friday that she feels "very confident" the bill will pass the House.

"Before I walked in here, coming from the airport, I was told that we have some important Republican support on the House side," Pelosi said. "We value the bipartisanship of this bill."

Two key congressional groups, the Problem Solvers caucus and the New Democrat Coalition, have endorsed the measure in recent days,

The Problem Solvers caucus is made up members from both parties. Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania, the group's Republican co-chair, said Intel Corp. wants to build its chip capacity in the United States, but much of that capacity will go to Europe if Congress doesn't pass the bill.

"If a semiconductor-related bill is brought to the floor, it will pass," Fitzpatrick said.

Rep. Derek Kilmer, D-Wash., said he believes the legislation checks a lot of boxes for his constituents, including on the front-burner issue of the day, inflation.

"This is about reducing inflation. If you look at inflation, one-third of the inflation in the last quarter was automobiles, and it's because there's a shortage of chips," Kilmer said. "So this is about, one, making sure that we're making things in the United States, and two, about reducing costs."

Average US gasoline price falls 32 cents to \$4.54 per gallon

CAMARILLO, Calif. (AP) — The average U.S. price of regular-grade gasoline plunged 32 cents over the past two weeks to \$4.54 per gallon.

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

"Further drops at the pump are likely as the wholesale gasoline price cuts continue making their way to street level," Lundberg said in a statement.

The average price at the pump is down 55 cents over the past six weeks, but it's \$1.32 higher than it was one year ago.

Nationwide, the highest average price for regular-grade gas was in Los Angeles, at \$5.65 per gallon. The lowest average was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, at \$3.90 per gallon.

According to the survey, the average price of diesel dropped 22 cents over two weeks to \$5.55 a gallon.

Bolsonaro kicks off presidential bid at party convention

By DAVID BILLER and DÉBORA ÁLVARES Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro made official his bid to run for reelection in October, giving him three months to close a double-digit gap to secure victory.

The Liberal Party's formal approval of Bolsonaro's candidacy took place at its convention Sunday in a Rio de Janeiro stadium. Support was widely expected and merely symbolic, given that the far-right president has effectively been campaigning for months, crisscrossing the country to drum up support and remind voters why they shouldn't back his nemesis, leftist former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

"We don't need another ideology that hasn't worked anywhere else in the world. We need to improve what we have," Bolsonaro said on stage, surrounded by ministers, former ministers, family and other allies. "Our life wasn't easy, but one thing comforts me isn't seeing a communist sitting in that chair of mine."

Bolsonaro has sought to characterize the upcoming race as a battle between good and evil, echoing his 2018 campaign that presented him as an outsider crusading to restore law, order and conservative values to a wayward nation. He joined the centrist Liberal Party in November after failing to found his own party.

People snaked through lines to enter the stadium, where the campaign jingle "Captain of the People" played repeatedly. Cheering supporters were decked out in the green-and-yellow national colors, though there were dozens of empty seats in the stadium, which has capacity of about 13,600.

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Several supporters of the president told The Associated Press that if Bolsonaro doesn't win a second term, Brazil will follow the catastrophic lead of Venezuela. And many spoke about how they don't trust polls that show Bolsonaro trailing, and fully expect him to win.

Alexandre Carlos, 52, said he came to the convention to support Bolsonaro's quest to make Brazil better, and that the president didn't waver in his first term.

"It's good versus evil and we're in favor of the good," Carlos said. "Bolsonaro is the only hope we have now to save the country."

Da Silva, leads all polls to return to his former job — as he had in 2018 until his removal from that race due to a corruption conviction. That enabled Bolsonaro, then a seven-term fringe lawmaker, to cruise to victory. Da Silva's conviction was annulled last year by the Supreme Court that ruled the judge overseeing the probe had been biased and colluded with prosecutors.

Bolsonaro faces an uphill battle. His approval ratings have recovered only slightly since declining during the pandemic. A congressional investigation last year recommended he and administration officials face criminal indictments for actions and omissions related to the world's second highest death toll from the disease.

The latest survey by pollster Datafolha, in June, found more than half of respondents said they wouldn't vote for him under any circumstance. And 47% of respondents said they plan to vote for da Silva, versus 28% for Bolsonaro, according to the poll, which had a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

Political analysts expect the race to tighten somewhat in coming months.

Bolsonaro's administration recently limited interstate taxes to reduce gasoline prices for consumers — an effort aided by falling global oil prices — and approved an increased social welfare program that will begin next month and run through year-end. Bolsonaro announced Sunday that, if elected, the program will be extended into 2023.

The unemployment rate has also dipped below double digits for the first time since 2016, and economic prospects for this year have climbed steadily. Analysts surveyed by the central bank expect 1.75% growth, more than triple the level they forecast in April.

"The cumulative impact of a better economy, relief on inflation in July, and a larger cash transfer stipend does move the needle somewhat on the election. But not tremendously," Christopher Garman, Americas managing director for political risk consultancy Eurasia Group wrote in a July 19 note, forecasting the race will ultimately tighten to single digits.

The welfare program will provide a limited bump for Bolsonaro because the social class benefiting is more favorable to da Silva, according to Esther Solano, sociologist at the Federal University of Sao Paulo who has conducted targeted polling of potential Bolsonaro voters.

"There is a very strong attachment of this popular base to Lula. He is recognized as a political leader who actually cared about that base," Solano said.

Bolsonaro is particularly struggling to draw support from female voters, and looking to his wife, an evangelical Christian, for help. Michelle Bolsonaro took the stage Sunday and delivered a speech full of biblical passages, at one point referring to her husband as "God's chosen one."

To help burnish his appeal among women, allies had encouraged him to tap his former agriculture minister, Tereza Cristina, as his vice president. Instead, Bolsonaro chose a fellow military man, Gen. Walter Braga Netto, who served as a special adviser.

With the possibility of a loss looming, Bolsonaro has insisted that the electronic voting system used since 1996 is susceptible to fraud, though never presented any evidence. Many political analysts have expressed fear that Bolsonaro — an outspoken admirer of Donald Trump — is preparing to follow the former U.S. president's lead and reject results.

His unsubstantiated claims have been roundly dismissed, most recently after he called dozens of diplomats to the presidential palace to hold forth on the subject. Associations of prosecutors, judges and Federal Police expressed their faith in the current system, as did members of the Supreme Court and electoral authority, lawmakers include the Senate's president, and the U.S. State Department.

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Bolsonaro made no direct mention of the matter in his speech on Sunday.

Standing outside the stadium, Marcelo Cunha, 57, said he isn't a Bolsonaro fanatic, but that the president is the only one who can prevent da Silva's return to power, which he said would be "terrible."

"It hasn't been a government of great achievements, but I was OK with what was done," Cunha said. "For me, it is the best option at the moment."

Nevada court fights raise caution flags on green energy push

By SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — Opposition from friends, not foes, is creating potential roadblocks to President Joe Biden's green energy agenda on federal lands in the blue-leaning, Western swing state of Nevada.

Two lithium mines and a geothermal power plant in the works in the biggest U.S. gold-mining state are under attack from conservationists, tribes and others who otherwise generally support Biden's efforts to expedite the transition from fossil fuels to renewables.

The conflicts put a spotlight on an emerging reality as the Biden administration tries to meet its goal of having the U.S. power grid run on clean energy by 2035.

Renewable or not, the actual mining of the resources faces many of the same regulatory and environmental hurdles the government has encountered for decades when digging for coal or drilling for oil.

Whether it's tapping hot underground water to generate electricity with steam-powered turbines or extracting lithium to make electric car batteries, the operations still must comply with laws designed to protect wildlife habitat, cultural and historical values, and guard against pollution or other degradation of federal lands.

During a recent failed attempt to overturn a Nevada water permit for a mine near the Oregon line above the biggest known lithium deposit in the nation, opponents raised some of the same concerns leveled four decades ago about some of the largest gold mines in the world.

Specifically, the Great Basin Resource Watch and others say the lithium mine will produce toxic waste. More generally, they still accuse regulators of rubber-stamping industry plans without a thorough review of the potential harms.

"Everything seems to be in the hands of the mining company," Sarah Wochele, a mining justice organizer for the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, said at last month's appeal hearing. "And we just ignorantly praise new technology, new technology."

Ramped up domestic production of lithium is key to Biden's blueprint for a greener future, a critical element for electric vehicle batteries. Worldwide demand for the lightest metal on Earth is projected to increase six-fold by 2030 compared to 2020.

The big deposit bordering Oregon where Lithium Nevada plans to begin construction in December is "vital to our national security and nation's need for lithium to support green energy development and achieve climate change objectives," the company said in recent court filings.

But in addition to concerns about toxic waste, the mine sits on federal land local tribes say is a sacred site where dozens of their ancestors were massacred by the U.S. Cavalry in 1865.

Another big lithium mine still on the drawing board, halfway between Reno and Las Vegas, is home to a rare desert wildflower the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Meanwhile, the geothermal power plant faces both cultural and environmental challenges in a case pending before the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The San Francisco-based appellate court could rule any day on a lawsuit seeking to halt the development in a high-desert oasis 100 miles (161 kilometers) east of Reno where a rare toad currently protected under the Endangered Species Act lives in the same hot springs where Native Americans have worshipped for thousands of years.

The Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management approved Ormat Nevada's geothermal project last November over the objections of another Interior agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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Since then, USFWS has taken the rare step of declaring the Dixie Valley toad endangered on a temporary emergency basis — something it's done only one other time in 20 years.

This month, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe amended their lawsuit against the Reno-based Ormat and the Bureau of Land Management in U.S. District Court in Reno to include the April listing.

The updated version alleges both are in violation of the Endangered Species Act because they've failed to halt construction "despite USFWS's unambiguous finding that the project poses an imminent and existential risk to the Dixie Valley toad."

The government hasn't responded yet, but the case continues in district court on a parallel track with the appellate court. And the ongoing legal battles underscore the difficulty of turning Biden's vision of a cleaner energy future into reality.

Administration officials insist they've known all along that implementing their plans to slow the warming of the Earth wouldn't be easy.

"Catalyzing the clean energy economy and seeing renewable energy projects through to completion is no small task," said Tyler Cherry, press secretary for Interior Secretary Deb Haaland.

"Indeed, these are complex, large-scale projects that require a robust public process," he wrote in an email July 12 to the AP in response to a request for comment.

The three-judge panel at the 9th Circuit that heard oral arguments on the geothermal case in June said they couldn't consider the April listing of the toad because it came after the appeal was filed in January.

But the judges acknowledged USFWS had raised similar objections in earlier opinions, warning about the likelihood the geothermal plant's operations could push the toad to the brink of extinction.

The Justice Department lawyer representing the bureau, Michelle Melton, said federal law required the bureau to consider USFWS's criticisms but it wasn't bound by them.

The emergency listing of the toad doesn't change the bureau's position that the project will have no significant impact on the tribe or the toad, she said.

"Fish and Wildlife has a different opinion," Melton said. "It was not a surprise to BLM that Fish and Wildlife felt that way."

Ormat Vice President Paul Thomsen said the emergency listing overstates the potential impact of the project on the toad partly because it makes false assumptions about underground faults in the geothermal reservoir it intends to tap.

"There are sufficient safeguards in place to avoid endangering the toad," he wrote June 6 in comments to USFWS.

The 9th Circuit judges appeared sympathetic last month to some of the opponents' arguments. But they noted that the lower court judge had weighed the pros and cons and determined the public was best served by allowing the temporary injunction blocking construction to expire 90 days after it was issued in February.

They pointed to Judge Robert C. Jones' conclusion that the electricity produced at the geothermal plant would significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions compared to other energy production facilities and that "depriving the public of a source of carbon-free" electricity is not in the public's best interest.

Scott Lake, a lawyer for the Center for Biological Diversity, said the benefits of renewable energy resources are "something the tribe and the center actually agree with."

"But nothing in the record establishes a public interest in, or a compelling need, for this particular project ... on a tribal sacred site and in such a way that threatens the entire existence of the Dixie Valley toad," he said.

Jordan Peele's 'Nope' debuts at No. 1 with \$44 million

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Jordan Peele's UFO thriller "Nope" topped the North American charts in its first weekend in theaters with an estimated \$44 million in ticket sales, Universal Pictures said Sunday. Though it doesn't come close

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to the \$71 million debut of "Us," it is still significantly impressive for an original, R-rated film — and the biggest of the pandemic for an original screenplay.

"Nope," which opened on 3,785 theaters in the U.S. and Canada, is the most expensive film Peele has made to date with a reported \$68 million production budget, not accounting for marketing and promotion costs. "Us" cost around \$20 million to produce, while "Get Out" was made for only \$4.5 million. Both films ultimately made over \$255 million worldwide.

Critics were largely positive about "Nope," which stars Daniel Kaluuya, Keke Palmer and Steven Yeun and pays homage to UFO films like "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" and "Signs," and is currently resting at 83% on Rotten Tomatoes.

"It's a great number," said Jim Orr, Universal's president of domestic distribution. "It's amazing how broadly it's playing too."

"Jordan Peele crafted an incredible film," Orr added. "And it is absolutely something that should be seen on the big screen."

The film got off to a strong start with \$6.4 million from Thursday previews. By the end of Friday, it had grossed \$19.3 million. About 68% of the opening weekend audience was between the ages of 18 and 34, which is the "sweet spot" for a horror film. Audiences were also quite diverse according to exit polls, reporting 35% Caucasian, 33% Black, 20% Hispanic and 8% Asian.

And many chose to experience "Nope" in IMAX, which accounted for about \$5.2 million of its first weekend earnings.

"It's incredibly gratifying to see a visionary like Jordan Peele, who represents a new generation of filmmakers, use our technology in pioneering ways and create an experience meant to be seen in IMAX," said IMAX CEO Rich Gelfond.

Word of mouth is going to be critical in the coming weeks for "Nope," which begins its international rollout on Aug. 12.

"An opening weekend for a Jordan Peele film is not the right metric. We have to see where it is a month from now," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. "'Nope' could have solid, long-term playability as the word gets out. One need only look at 'Elvis' to see that a film doesn't have to open huge to be a big success."

"Nope" knocked "Thor: Love and Thunder" to second place in its third weekend. The Disney and Marvel blockbuster starring Chris Hemsworth and Natalie Portman added \$22.1 million, bringing its global total to \$598.2 million.

Universal's "Minions: The Rise of Gru" landed in third place with \$17.7 million in its fourth weekend. The animated pic has made \$640.3 million globally.

The Sony-released adaptation of the bestseller "Where the Crawdads Sing," meanwhile, is enjoying a modest second weekend drop. The film starring Daisy Edgar-Jones added an estimated \$10.3 million from 3,650 locations. It's now grossed \$38.3 million domestically.

Paramount's "Top Gun: Maverick" rounded out the top five in its ninth weekend with an additional \$10 million. Earlier this week it surpassed "The Avengers" to become ninth biggest domestic release of all time with its total now sitting at \$635.6 million.

In limited release, "Marcel the Shell with Shoes On" continued its expansion and made \$846,950 from 590 theaters.

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

1. "Nope," \$44 million.
2. "Thor: Love and Thunder," 22.1 million.
3. "Minions: The Rise of Gru," \$17.7 million.
4. "Where the Crawdads Sing," \$10.3 million.
5. "Top Gun: Maverick," \$10 million.
6. "Elvis," \$6.3 million.
7. "Paws of Fury: The Legend of Hank," \$3.9 million.

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8. "The Black Phone," \$3.5 million.
9. "Jurassic World Dominion," \$3 million.
10. "Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris," \$1.4 million.

Russia says strike on Ukrainian port hit military targets

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian defense officials insisted Sunday that an airstrike on the Ukrainian port of Odesa hit only military targets, but the attack tested an agreement on resuming grain shipments that the two countries signed less than a day before the assault.

Long-range missiles destroyed a docked Ukrainian warship and a warehouse holding Harpoon anti-ship missiles supplied by the U.S., Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said at a daily briefing.

Speaking late Saturday in his nightly televised address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the attack on Odesa "destroyed the very possibility" of dialogue with Russia.

Under the grain-shipment agreement obtained by The Associated Press, both Kyiv and Moscow agreed not to target vessels and port facilities involved in the initiative, including the ports of Odesa, Chernomorsk and Yuzhny.

The Ukrainian military said the attack involved four cruise missiles, two of which were shot down by Ukrainian air defenses.

Command spokeswoman Nataliya Humenyuk said no grain storage facilities were hit. Turkey's defense minister, however, said he had had reports from Ukrainian authorities that one missile struck a grain silo while another landed nearby, although neither affected loading at Odesa's docks.

It was not immediately clear how the airstrike would affect plans to resume shipping Ukrainian grain by sea in safe corridors out of the ports.

Russia and Ukraine on Friday signed identical agreements with the United Nations and Turkey in Istanbul aimed at clearing the way for the shipment of millions of tons of desperately needed Ukrainian grain, as well as the export of Russian grain and fertilizer.

Senior U.N. officials voiced hopes that the deal would end a months-long standoff that threatened food security around the globe.

Elsewhere on Sunday, Ukrainian authorities reported that Russian shelling continued to kill and wound civilians in Ukraine's south and east.

The governor of the eastern Donetsk region, one of two that make up Ukraine's industrial heartland of the Donbas and a key focus of Russia's offensive, said two civilians had been killed and two more wounded over the previous 24 hours.

The U.K. military reported Sunday in its daily intelligence update that Russia was making "minimal progress" in its Donbas offensive, which it said remained small-scale and focused on the city of Bakhmut in the eastern Donetsk region.

The Ukrainian military's General Staff confirmed in its regular update that Russia was "conducting military operations to create conditions" for an assault on Bakhmut, while firing on surrounding settlements and battling Ukrainian defenders for control of a nearby thermal plant.

In Ukraine's south, regional officials said that at least five civilians were wounded by Russian shells in the Black Sea port of Mykolaiv on Saturday night and Sunday morning.

"Also, as a result of the scattering of munitions and their fragments, fires occurred in open areas in the city," said Vitaly Kim, governor of the Mykolaiv region.

In other developments:

— A Washington-based think tank said Ukrainian forces are likely preparing to launch or have launched a counteroffensive in the Kherson region.

The Institute for the Study of War quoted Kherson Oblast Administration Adviser Serhiy Khlan as saying Ukrainian forces have seized unspecified settlements in the region, but he called on Ukrainian civilians to remain silent on the progress of the counteroffensive until Ukrainian authorities released official statements.

The ISW noted that open-source information on any progress by Ukrainian troops "will likely be limited

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and lag behind events.”

— Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was in Cairo for talks with Egyptian officials as his country seeks to break diplomatic isolation and sanctions by the West over its invasion of Ukraine.

Lavrov landed in Cairo late Saturday on the first leg of his Africa trip, which will also include stops in Ethiopia, Uganda and Congo, according to Russia’s state-run RT television network.

Speaking at a news conference following bilateral talks with his Egyptian counterpart, Sameh Shukri, on Sunday, Lavrov said that he had “reaffirmed the commitment of Russian grain exporters to fulfill all their obligations” in the wake of the U.N.-backed deal to unblock grain shipments.

— Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said in a speech in Romania that Western sanctions against Russia have failed and that the war in Ukraine will not end “until there is a Russian-U.S. peace negotiation.”

Orban said Saturday in a speech in Baile Tusnad in central Romania that “a new strategy is needed which should focus on peace talks ... instead of winning the war.”

“The situation is that today we are sitting in a car with flat tires on all four wheels,” he said. “It is quite obvious that the war cannot be won this way. Ukrainians will never win a war against Russia with American training officers and weapons.”

The far-right leader went on to say that had Donald Trump and Germany’s Angela Merkel still been in charge in their countries, “then this war would never have broken out.”

Milley: China more aggressive, dangerous to US, allies

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — The Chinese military has become significantly more aggressive and dangerous over the past five years, the top U.S. military officer said during a trip to the Indo-Pacific that included a stop Sunday in Indonesia.

U.S. Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the number of intercepts by Chinese aircraft and ships in the Pacific region with U.S. and other partner forces has increased significantly over that time, and the number of unsafe interactions has risen by similar proportions.

“The message is the Chinese military, in the air and at sea, have become significantly more and noticeably more aggressive in this particular region,” said Milley, who recently asked his staff to compile details about interactions between China and the U.S. and others in the region.

His comments came as the U.S. redoubles efforts to strengthen its relationships with Pacific nations as a counterbalance to China, which is trying to expand its presence and influence in the region. The Biden administration considers China its “pacing threat” and America’s primary long-term security challenge.

Milley’s trip to the region is sharply focused on the China threat. He will attend a meeting of Indo-Pacific chiefs of defense this coming week in Australia, where key topics will be China’s escalating military growth and the need to maintain a free, open and peaceful Pacific.

U.S. military officials have also raised alarms about the possibility that China could invade Taiwan, the democratic, self-ruled island that Beijing views as a breakaway province. China has stepped up its military provocations against Taiwan as it looks to intimidate it into unifying with the communist mainland.

U.S. military officials have said Beijing wants to be ready to make a move on the island by 2027. The U.S. remains Taiwan’s chief ally and supplier of defense weapons. U.S. law requires the government to treat all threats to the island as matters of “grave concern,” but remains ambiguous on whether the U.S. military would defend Taiwan if it were attacked by China.

China’s joint chiefs of staff chairman, Gen. Li Zuocheng, told Milley in a call earlier this month that Beijing had “no room for compromise” on issues such as Taiwan. He said he told Milley that the U.S. must “cease U.S.-Taiwan military collusion and avoid impacting China-U.S. ties and stability in the Taiwan Strait.”

The U.S. and others are also worried that a recent security agreement that Beijing signed in April with the Solomon Islands could lead to the establishment of a Chinese naval base in the South Pacific. The U.S. and Australia have told the Solomon Islands that hosting a Chinese military base would not be tolerated.

“This is an area in which China is trying to do outreach for their own purposes. And again, this is con-

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cerning because China is not doing it just for benign reasons," Milley told reporters traveling with him. "They're trying to expand their influence throughout the region. And that has potential consequences that are not necessarily favorable to our allies and partners in the region."

Milley's visit to Indonesia is the first by a U.S. joint chiefs chairman since Adm. Mike Mullen in 2008. But U.S. leaders have crisscrossed the Asia-Pacific in recent months, including high-profile visits by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The Biden administration has been taking steps to expand its military and security relationship with Indo-Pacific nations as part of a campaign to build a stronger network of alliances in China's backyard and counter China's growing influence.

Milley declined to provide specific numbers of unsafe Chinese interactions with U.S. and allied aircraft and ships. But Austin, in a speech in Singapore last month, referred to an "alarming increase" in the number of unsafe intercepts by People's Liberation Army aircraft and vessels.

Austin specifically pointed to a February incident where a PLA navy ship directed a laser at an Australian P-8 maritime patrol aircraft. But there have been a number of others. A surveillance aircraft controlled by Canada was recently intercepted by a Chinese fighter in international airspace. Also, U.S. ships are routinely dogged by Chinese aircraft and vessels during transits, particularly around manmade islands claimed by Beijing in the South China Sea.

Milley said there have been Chinese intercepts with Japan, Canada, Australia, Philippines and Vietnam. They all, he said, have seen a "statistically significant" increase in intercepts, and the number of unsafe incidents has increased by an "equal proportion."

Milley, who met on Sunday with Gen. Andika Perkasa, chief of the Indonesian National Defence Forces, said Pacific nations like Indonesia want the U.S. military involved and engaged in the region.

"We want to work with them to develop interoperability and modernize our militaries collectively," Milley said, in order to ensure they can "meet whatever challenge that China poses."

He said Indonesia is strategically critical to the region, and has long been a key U.S. partner.

Milley, who spent the afternoon at Andika's military headquarters, was greeted with a massive billboard bearing his photo and name, a military parade and a large television screen that showed a video of his career.

At the end of the visit, Andika told reporters that Indonesia has found China to be more assertive and "a little bit aggressive" with naval vessels in connection with territorial disputes with his country.

Earlier this year, the U.S. approved a \$13.9 billion sale of advanced fighter jets to Indonesia. And in Jakarta last December, Blinken signed agreements for enhanced joint naval exercises between the U.S. and Indonesia.

China has condemned U.S. efforts to expand its outreach in the region, accusing America of trying to build an "Asian NATO." During a speech in Singapore, Austin rejected that claim. "We do not seek a new Cold War, an Asian NATO or a region split into hostile blocs," he said.

Mediterranean ships find 5 dead, rescue over 1,100 migrants

MILAN (AP) — Italian vessels have recovered five bodies and rescued 674 people packed on a fishing boat adrift in the Mediterranean off the Libyan coast, the Italian Coast Guard said Sunday, while European charities reported saving more than 500 more.

Some of the survivors had to be plucked from the sea in the Italian operation Saturday that was carried out 120 miles (190 kilometers) off the coast of Calabria by a Navy mercantile ship, three Coast Guard patrol boats and a financial police boat. All of those rescued were brought to ports in Calabria and Sicily.

The causes of death for the five dead were not immediately known.

The Coast Guard said it was just one in a series of rescues in recent days in the Italian search and rescue area of the central Mediterranean, as desperate people fleeing poverty or oppression seek a better life in Europe. In one case, a helicopter was called to evacuate a woman in need of medical treatment from a migrant boat in a precarious condition, the Coast Guard said.

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In separate operations, the German charity Sea-Watch said it rescued 444 migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean on overcrowded, rickety smugglers' boats. The Sea-Watch 3 vessel carried out the five operations over 24 hours, and said the rescued included a pregnant woman and a man who had suffered severe burns.

The charity is asking for permission to bring the rescued people to a safe port, as the rescue ship is unable to accommodate so many people.

In addition, the European charity SOS Mediteranee said its rescue ship Ocean Viking have saved 87 people, including 57 unaccompanied minors, from an overcrowded rubber boat off the Libyan coast. None had life jackets, the charity said.

Migrant arrivals in Italy are up by nearly one-quarter from 2021, with 34,013 recorded through Friday.

While still notably fewer than the 2015 peak year, the crossings remain deadly, with 1,234 people recorded dead or missing at sea by the U.N. refugee agency this year, 823 of those in the perilous central Mediterranean.

Japan's Sakurajima volcano erupts, triggering evacuation

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A volcano on Japan's main southern island of Kyushu erupted Sunday night, spewing ash and rocks. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries in nearby towns but residents were advised to evacuate.

Japan's Meteorological Agency said Sakurajima volcano erupted at around 8:05 p.m., blowing off large rocks as far as 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) away in the southern prefecture of Kagoshima.

Footage on Japan's NHK public television showed orange flames flashing near the crater and dark smoke of ash billowing from the mountaintop high up into the night sky.

"We will put the people's lives first and do our utmost to assess the situation and respond to any emergency," Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihiko Isozaki told reporters. He called on residents in the area to pay close attention to the latest update from the local authorities to protect their lives.

The agency said it has raised the eruption alert to the highest level of five and about 120 residents in two towns facing the volcano were advised to leave their homes.

The agency warned of falling volcanic rocks in areas within 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) of the crater and possible flow of lava, ash and searing gas within 2 kilometers (1.2 miles).

Sakurajima, about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) southwest of Tokyo, is one of the most active volcanos in Japan and has repeatedly erupted. It used to be an island but became a peninsula following an eruption in 1914.

Man opens fire on Philippine campus, killing 3 people

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A gunman opened fire on university campus in the Philippine capital region on Sunday, killing a former town mayor and two others in a brazen attack ahead of a graduation ceremony, police said.

The suspect was armed with two pistols and a silencer and was captured in a car he commandeered trying to escape the Ateneo de Manila University in suburban Quezon City, police said. He was blocked by witnesses and authorities outside the university gates.

The sprawling university was put under lockdown and the graduation rite at the law school on campus was canceled, police said.

Investigators were trying to determine a motive for the attack, but Quezon City police chief Brig. Gen. Remus Medina said the suspect, apparently a medical doctor, had a long-running feud with Rosita Furigay, a former mayor of Lamitan town in southern Basilan province.

She died in the attack together with her aide and a university guard. Furigay's daughter, who was supposed to attend the graduation, was wounded and taken to a hospital, a police report said.

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Video of the aftermath of the shooting showed students and officials in graduation gowns screaming and running away in panic in the lobby of the school building while others tended to the victims who were sprawled on the ground in the driveway.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo, who was supposed to be a speaker at the ceremony, was advised to turn back en route to the event, officials said.

Newly elected President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. promised to have the attack swiftly investigated and those behind the killings brought to justice. He is scheduled to address a joint session of Congress at the House of Representatives on Monday also in Quezon city, where police and other law enforcers had imposed a gun ban and heightened security before the shooting.

"We are shocked and saddened by the events at the Ateneo graduation today," Marcos Jr. said. "We mourn with the bereaved, the wounded and those whose scars from this experience will run deep."

One thing voters agree on: Fresh voices needed in politics

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As he campaigns for a Manhattan congressional seat against fellow Democrats twice his age, 38-year-old Suraj Patel harnesses the frustration of his generation toward those who have held office for decades.

In his telling, Reps. Jerry Nadler, 75, and Carolyn Maloney, 76, are part of a crop of Democrats who rose to power in the 1990s only to fail on issues ranging from guns to climate change and abortion. The redistricting process that merged their congressional districts offers a chance for new leadership, Patel says.

"If we keep doing the same thing over and over and expecting different result: That's not just the definition of insanity," he said. "That's also the definition of incumbency."

More than 1,100 miles to the west in the presidential testing ground of Iowa, Republican Jeremiah Bronson was also considering whether someone other than 76-year-old Donald Trump might carry his party into the future. Bronson expressed growing interest in 55-year-old Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

"He seems to be on the same page with conservatives around the country," Bronson, 39, said as he dined on barbecued pork sandwiches with a half-dozen other Story County Republicans.

In a nation faltering along seemingly every conceivable divide, there's a shared desire among Democrats and Republicans for a new generation of political leadership. The conversation is most pronounced when it comes to the White House as Trump considers another campaign and President Joe Biden confronts skepticism about his ability to mount a reelection bid in 2024 when he is 82.

"There's just a sense of like, that rematch between these two old guys seems ridiculous to people," said Sarah Longwell, a Republican strategist who conducts almost weekly focus groups with voters across the country and political spectrum.

There are recurring calls for youth and change in U.S. politics.

Bill Clinton's appeal for a new generation of leadership helped him rise from governor of Arkansas to the first baby boomer president in 1992. In 2008, Barack Obama's relative youth was an asset in his primary campaign against Hillary Clinton and during the general election against Arizona Sen. John McCain.

More recently, Pete Buttigieg's 2020 presidential bid gained traction with its focus on fresh leadership before being overtaken by Biden, viewed by many Democrats as the safer choice against Trump.

The dynamics have shifted since then, with some Democratic voters furious that Biden and leaders in Congress haven't done more to protect abortion rights, respond more aggressively to a wave of mass shootings and address climate change.

A new Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll shows 83% of U.S. adults say the country is on the wrong track. Only 36% approve of Biden's leadership overall, while 62% disapprove. Polling from AP-NORC in recent months captured deepening pessimism among members of his own Democratic Party about Biden, the direction of the country and the state of the economy. A January AP-NORC poll found just 28% of those surveyed and 48% of Democrats said they want Biden to run for reelection in 2024.

Julián Castro, a former Obama housing secretary and onetime presidential candidate, said there's "no

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doubt" that members of his party are frustrated and that Democrats in Washington need to show a sense of urgency and produce results. In a telephone interview from the Texas Democratic Convention in Dallas, he said Democrats seemed energized.

"My immediate hope is that that angst and frustration is going to be channeled positively to turnout in November," he said, referring to the midterm elections. "And then we'll reckon with what's beyond that when November happens."

Biden has repeatedly insisted he will run for reelection. But should he decide to step aside, a host of younger Democrats could be in contention. They include Vice President Kamala Harris, who is 57. California Gov. Gavin Newsom, 54, and Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker, 57, have garnered attention for their responses to the Supreme Court's abortion ruling and mass shootings.

Some Democrats seeking office this year have been clear about their desires that a new generation take its place in politics.

Last month, the Democratic candidate for governor in South Carolina, Joe Cunningham, proposed not only term limits but also age limits for officeholders, saying it was time to end America's "geriatric oligarchy" of politicians who are staying "in office way past their prime." To Cunningham, who recently turned 40, that includes the incumbent he hopes to oust in November, 75-year-old Republican Henry McMaster, who is the state's oldest sitting governor.

But Cunningham also said the proposal was intended to apply to Biden.

For Republicans, the most pressing debate often seems to focus less explicitly on age and more on whether the party should move on from Trump. That's particularly true in the wake of hearings by the House Jan. 6 committee that have drawn new attention to his desperate efforts to stay in office after losing the 2020 election.

The Jan. 6 hearings may be sending voters looking elsewhere.

An AP-NORC in June found that 48% of U.S. adults say Trump should be charged with a crime for his role in the siege of the U.S. Capitol. January's AP-NORC poll showed that people were just as down on Trump running again in 2024 as they were Biden: Just 27% of U.S. adults wanted Trump to run again, including a slim majority – 56% -- of Republicans. That poll also showed the former president's popularity with the GOP dropped somewhat, with 71% of Republicans saying they had a favorable opinion of Trump compared with 78% in a September 2020 AP-NORC/USAFacts poll.

Longwell, the Republican strategist, said the hearings seem to be having an impact even among Republican voters who are not watching the sessions or persuaded by them because they are a reminder of the tumult that has surrounded Trump.

"One of the things I hear coming up over and over again in the groups is that Trump has a lot of baggage and that there's all these other stars, Republican stars, and maybe it's time Trump should be like an elder statesman," she said.

A number of figures from Trump's world and outside it are seen as potential challengers in 2024. Trump and his associates are especially focused on Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who, at 43, is increasingly viewed as a younger heir to the former president's brand of politics.

Other Republicans making increasingly overt moves toward a presidential run include Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton, 45; former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, 50; Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, 51; former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, 58; and former Vice President Mike Pence, 63.

Pat Brady, the former chair of the Illinois Republican Party who is not a Trump supporter, said he thinks the "fever has broken" when it comes to Trump's standing with the GOP.

"I think the combination of him just spending all his time, every speech, relitigating 2020. Voters typically look forward. They don't look backward," he said.

Brady said part of the frustrations voters have with their political leaders is the age-related.

"When you look at the leadership, I'm old and those guys make me look young," said 61-year-old Brady. "This is a vibrant youthful country, fundamentally, and we've got a bunch of old people running it."

Catholic hospitals' growth impacts reproductive health care

By SUSAN HAIGH and DAVID CRARY Associated Press

PUTNAM, Conn. (AP) — Even as numerous Republican-governed states push for sweeping bans on abortion, there is a coinciding surge of concern in some Democratic-led states that options for reproductive health care are dwindling due to expansion of Catholic hospital networks.

These are states such as Oregon, Washington, California and Connecticut, where abortion will remain legal despite the U.S. Supreme Court's recent ruling overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

Concerns in these blue states pertain to such services as contraception, sterilization and certain procedures for handling pregnancy emergencies. These services are widely available at secular hospitals but generally forbidden, along with abortion, at Catholic facilities under directives set by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The differing perspectives on these services can clash when a Catholic hospital system seeks to acquire or merge with a non-sectarian hospital, as is happening now in Connecticut. State officials are assessing a bid by Catholic-run Covenant Health to merge with Day Kimball Healthcare, an independent, financially struggling hospital and health care system based in the town of Putnam.

"We need to ensure that any new ownership can provide a full range of care — including reproductive health care, family planning, gender-affirming care and end-of-life care," said Connecticut Attorney General William Tong, a Democrat.

Lois Utley, a specialist in tracking hospital mergers, said her organization, Community Catalyst, has identified more than 20 municipalities in blue or purple states where the only acute care hospitals are Catholic.

"We are definitely sliding backwards in terms of comprehensive reproductive health," Utley said. "Catholic systems are taking over many physician practices, urgent care centers, ambulatory care centers, and patients seeking contraception won't be able to get it if their physician is now part of that system."

According to the Catholic Health Association, there are 654 Catholic hospitals in the U.S., including 299 with obstetric services. The CHA says more than one in seven U.S. hospital patients are cared for in a Catholic facility.

The CHA's president, Sister Mary Haddad, said the hospitals provide a wide range of prenatal, obstetric and postnatal services while assisting in about 500,000 births annually.

"This commitment is rooted in our reverence for life, from conception to natural death," Haddad said via email. "As a result, Catholic hospitals do not offer elective abortions."

Protocols are different for dire emergencies when the mother "suffers from an urgent, life-threatening condition during pregnancy," Haddad said. "Catholic health clinicians provide all medically indicated treatment even if it poses a threat to the unborn."

This approach is now being mirrored in several states imposing bans that allow abortions only to save a mother's life. There is concern that doctors governed by such bans — whether a state law or a Catholic directive — may endanger a pregnant woman's health by withholding treatment as she begins to show ill effects from a pregnancy-related problem.

In California, Democratic state Sen. Scott Wiener is among those warily monitoring the proliferation of Catholic health care providers, who operate 52 hospitals in his state.

The hospitals provide "superb care to a lot of people, including low-income communities," Wiener said. But they "absolutely deny people access to reproductive health care."

"It's the bishop, not professional standards, that are dictating who can receive what health care," Wiener said. "That is scary."

Charles Camosy, professor of medical humanities at the Creighton University School of Medicine, says critics of the mergers fail to acknowledge a major benefit of Catholic health care expansion.

"These mergers take place because Catholic institutions are willing to take on the really hard places where others have failed to make money," he said. "We should focus on what these institutions are doing in a positive way — stepping into the breach where virtually no one else wants to go, especially in rural areas."

That argument has resonance in mostly rural northeast Connecticut, where Day Kimball serves a population of about 125,000.

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Kyle Kramer, Day Kimball's CEO, said the 104-bed hospital has sought a financial partner for more than seven years and would soon face "very serious issues" if forced to continue alone.

Regarding the proposed merger, he said, "Change is always difficult."

However, he said Day Kimball would remain committed to comprehensive care if the merger proceeds, seeking to inform patients of all options in such matters as contraception, miscarriages and ectopic pregnancies.

As for abortions, Kramer said Day Kimball had never performed them for the sole purpose of ending a pregnancy and would continue that policy if partnering with Covenant.

Despite such assurances, some residents are concerned that the region's only hospital would become Catholic-owned. Some merger opponents protested outside the hospital last Monday.

Sue Grant Nash, a retired Day Kimball hospice social worker, described herself as religious but said people's values should not be imposed on others.

"Very important articles of faith that Catholics may have, and I respect completely, shouldn't impact the quality of health care that is available to the public," she said.

There have been related developments in other states.

—In Washington, Democratic state Sen. Emily Randall plans to re-introduce a bill that would empower the attorney general to block hospital mergers and acquisitions if they jeopardize "the continued existence of accessible, affordable health care, including reproductive health care." Gov. Jay Inslee says he is in support of such a measure.

The state has already passed a bill that bars the state's religious hospitals from prohibiting health care providers from providing medically necessary care to hasten miscarriages or end nonviable pregnancies, like ectopic pregnancies. Under the new law, patients can sue a hospital if they are denied such care, and providers can also sue if they're disciplined for providing such care.

—In Oregon, the state has new authority to bar religious hospitals from acquiring or merging with another health care entity if that means access to abortion and other reproductive services would be reduced. A law that took effect March 1 requires state approval for mergers and acquisitions of sizable health care entities.

The law also allows the state to consider end-of-life options allowed by hospitals seeking to establish a footprint or expand in Oregon, which in 1994 became the first state to legalize medical aid in dying.

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Concerns in these blue states pertain to such services as contraception, sterilization and certain procedures for handling pregnancy emergencies. These services are widely available at secular hospitals but generally forbidden, along with abortion, at Catholic facilities under the Ethical and Religious Directives set by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The differing perspectives on these services can clash when a Catholic hospital system seeks to acquire or merge with a non-sectarian hospital, as is happening now in northeastern Connecticut. State officials are assessing a bid by Catholic-run Covenant Health to merge with Day Kimball Healthcare, an independent, financially struggling hospital and health care system based in the town of Putnam.

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Despite the assurances, some residents are concerned that the region's only hospital would become Catholic-owned. Some merger opponents protested outside the hospital last Monday.

"The public is being told if you don't take Covenant, you won't have a hospital at all," said Elizabeth Canning of Pomfret, Connecticut. "Which is, of course, frightening. So people go, 'Okay, well, we'll take them. ... It's better than nothing.'"

"I've had wonderful care here. That's not my objection," Canning continued. "I don't want any religion involved in my health care."

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—In Oregon, the state has new authority to bar religious hospitals from acquiring or merging with another health care entity if that means access to abortion and other reproductive services would be reduced. A law that took effect March 1 requires state approval for mergers and acquisitions of sizable health care entities.

Thirty percent of acute care beds in the state are controlled by systems that restrict access to these services, according to Katie Shriver of the Service Employees International Union, who testified in support of the bill last year.

The law also allows the state to consider end-of-life options allowed by hospitals seeking to establish a footprint or expand in Oregon, which in 1994 became the first state to legalize medical aid in dying.

—In Newport Beach, California, Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian divorced itself from a large Catholic health system earlier this year. The separation from Providence Health & Services, which runs 52 hospitals across seven states, came after a years-long legal battle.

In a 2020 lawsuit, Hoag said it was a "captive affiliate" of Providence, which is headquartered more than 1,000 miles away in Washington state. Hoag was founded as a Presbyterian institution in 1952.

In 2013, Hoag joined with St. Joseph Health, a local Catholic hospital chain, aspiring to broaden access to health care in its area. In 2016, Providence Health absorbed St. Joseph along with Hoag.

Hoag's doctors questioned Providence's move to standardize treatment decisions across its hospitals and also balked at restrictions on reproductive care. In 2014 then-Attorney General Kamala Harris approved the health systems' affiliation on condition that Hoag would not be bound by Catholic health directives.

Hoag's lawsuit said its "Presbyterian beliefs, values and policies have been compromised due to restrictions within the larger Catholic system."

— In New York, two Democratic legislators proposed a bill this year that would have required the state's health department to publish a list of health services that are unavailable at each general hospital so patients can be better informed.

The lawmakers said the legislation, which failed, was needed to address "health care deserts" where hospitals have closed or merged with religiously affiliated entities and reproductive care and other health services have been lost.

The New York Civil Liberties Union, which has raised concerns about hospitals in Schenectady and Lockport affiliating with Catholic entities, says some New York patients have had difficulty obtaining miscarriage services and birth control pills from Catholic providers.

Today in History: July 25, Concorde crash near Paris

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, July 25, the 206th day of 2022. There are 159 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 25, 1972, the notorious Tuskegee syphilis experiment came to light as The Associated Press reported that for the previous four decades, the U.S. Public Health Service, in conjunction with the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, had been allowing poor, rural Black male patients with syphilis to go without

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treatment, even allowing them to die, as a way of studying the disease.

On this date:

In 1866, Ulysses S. Grant was named General of the Army of the United States, the first officer to hold the rank.

In 1943, Benito Mussolini was dismissed as premier of Italy by King Victor Emmanuel III, and placed under arrest. (However, Mussolini was later rescued by the Nazis, and re-asserted his authority.)

In 1946, the United States detonated an atomic bomb near Bikini Atoll in the Pacific in the first underwater test of the device.

In 1956, the Italian liner SS Andrea Doria collided with the Swedish passenger ship Stockholm off the New England coast late at night and began sinking; 51 people — 46 from the Andrea Doria, five from the Stockholm — were killed. (The Andrea Doria capsized and sank the following morning.)

In 1960, a Woolworth's store in Greensboro, North Carolina, that had been the scene of a sit-in protest against its whites-only lunch counter dropped its segregation policy.

In 1978, Louise Joy Brown, the first "test tube baby," was born in Oldham, England; she'd been conceived through the technique of in-vitro fertilization.

In 1994, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (YIT'-sahk rah-BEEN') and Jordan's King Hussein (hoo-SAYN') signed a declaration at the White House ending their countries' 46-year-old formal state of war.

In 2000, a New York-bound Air France Concorde crashed outside Paris shortly after takeoff, killing all 109 people on board and four people on the ground; it was the first-ever crash of the supersonic jet.

In 2010, the online whistleblower Wikileaks posted some 90,000 leaked U.S. military records that amounted to a blow-by-blow account of the Afghanistan war, including unreported incidents of Afghan civilian killings as well as covert operations against Taliban figures.

In 2016, on the opening night of the Democratic national convention in Philadelphia, Bernie Sanders robustly embraced his former rival Hillary Clinton as a champion for the same economic causes that enlivened his supporters, signaling it was time for them to rally behind her in the campaign against Republican Donald Trump.

In 2019, President Donald Trump had a second phone call with the new Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, during which he solicited Zelenskyy's help in gathering potentially damaging information about former Vice President Joe Biden; that night, a staff member at the White House Office of Management and Budget signed a document that officially put military aid for Ukraine on hold.

In 2020, federal agents fired tear gas to break up rowdy protests in Portland, Oregon, that continued into the early morning, demonstrations had been taking place in Portland every night for two months in the aftermath of the Minneapolis death of George Floyd.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama embraced some degree of control on the sale of weapons but also told the National Urban League in New Orleans he would seek a national consensus on combating violence. NBC announced it had topped the \$1 billion mark in advertising sales for the upcoming Olympic Games in London, topping the \$850 million in ad sales for the Beijing games in 2008.

Five years ago: A bitterly-divided Senate voted to move forward with Republican legislation to repeal and replace "Obamacare." Sen. John McCain, returning to the Capitol for the first time since he was diagnosed with brain cancer, cast a decisive "yes" vote. (Three days later, McCain joined with two other Republican senators and Democrats in defeating the repeal effort.) House Majority Whip Steve Scalise, who was critically wounded in a shooting at a baseball practice on June 14, was released from a Washington hospital.

One year ago: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi named a second Republican critic of Donald Trump, Rep. Adam Kinzinger, to a special committee investigating the Capitol riot; he joined Rep. Liz Cheney as the committee's two Republicans, both selected by Democrats. Golfers Bryson DeChambeau and Jon Rahm, who'd won the past two U.S. Open golf tournaments, dropped out of the Tokyo Games after testing positive for COVID-19.

Today's Birthdays: Folk-pop singer-musician Bruce Woodley (The Seekers) is 80. Rock musician Jim McCarty (The Yardbirds) is 79. Rock musician Verdine White (Earth, Wind & Fire) is 71. Singer-musician Jem Finer (The Pogues) is 67. Model-actor Iman is 67. Cartoonist Ray Billingsley ("Curtis") is 65. Rock musician

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Thurston Moore (Sonic Youth) is 64. Celebrity chef/TV personality Geoffrey Zakarian is 63. Actor-singer Bobbie Eakes is 61. Actor Katherine Kelly Lang is 61. Actor Ileana Douglas is 57. Country singer Marty Brown is 57. Actor Matt LeBlanc is 55. Actor Wendy Raquel Robinson is 55. Rock musician Paavo Lotjonen (PAH'-woh LAHT'-joh-nehn) (Apocalyptica) is 54. Actor D.B. Woodside is 53. Actor Miriam Shor is 51. Actor David Denman is 49. Actor Jay R. Ferguson is 48. Actor James Lafferty is 37. Actor Shantel VanSanten is 37. Actor Michael Welch is 35. Actor Linsey Godfrey is 34. Classical singer Faryl Smith is 27. Actor Mason Cook is 22. Actor Meg Donnelly (TV: "American Housewife") is 21. Actor Pierce Gagnon is 17.