

Groton Daily Independent

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The School/Community Activities Calendar is now available on-line. Look for the Activities Calendar link on the black bar at the home page of 397news.com.

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

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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Help Wanted

Want a fun job with flexible hours? We're looking for 16 year olds and older with smiling faces! Free meals and we'll work around your schedule. Are you a mom wanting some hours while your kids are in school or a teenager wanting to earn some money or an adult looking for work? Daytime – evening – week-end hours are available and we'll make the hours work for you! Stop in for an application. Dairy Queen, 11 East Hwy 12 in Groton.

CLEANER WANTED

SATURDAY CLEANER NEEDED IN FERENY, SD, 830 am to 130 pm. \$15 an hour. Must be dependable and be willing to work around customers coming into the family owned business. Please call Stephanie at 605-381-1758.

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

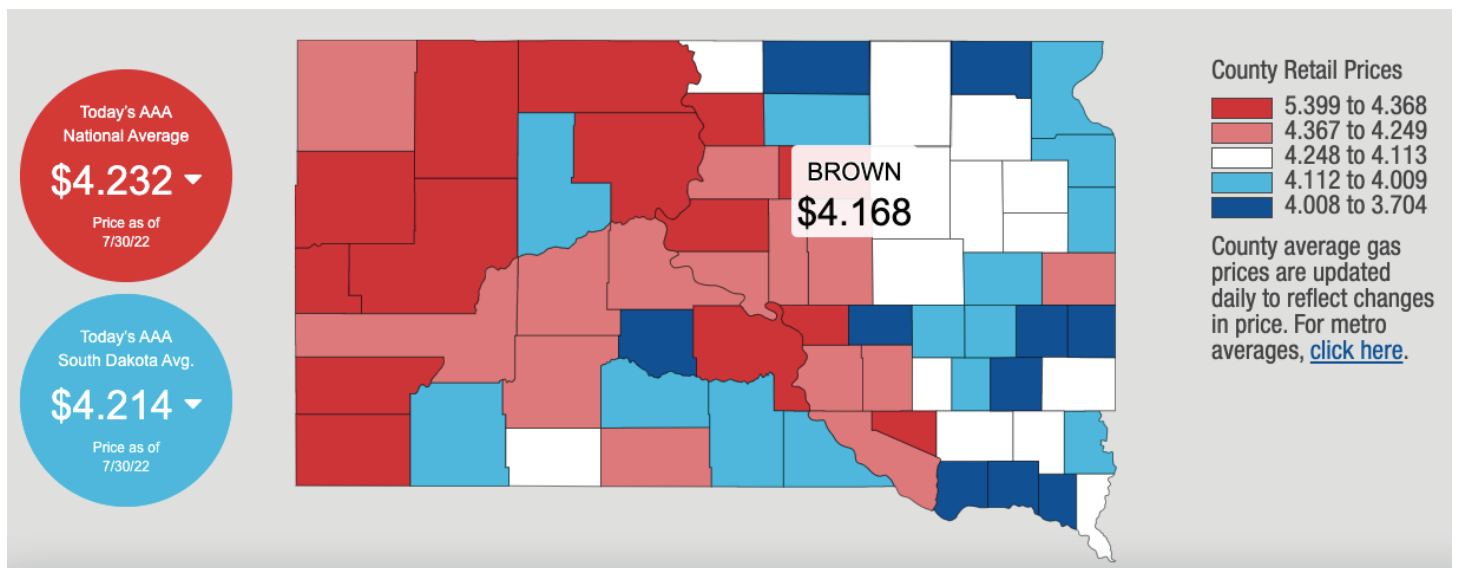
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South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$4.214	\$4.412	\$4.872	\$5.070
Yesterday Avg.	\$4.232	\$4.439	\$4.905	\$5.095
Week Ago Avg.	\$4.409	\$4.570	\$5.085	\$5.200
Month Ago Avg.	\$4.745	\$4.909	\$5.343	\$5.406
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.137	\$3.236	\$3.617	\$3.227

This Week



NATIONAL AVERAGE FALLS, BUT REBOUNDED GAS DEMAND AND CRUDE PRICES MAY CHANGE ITS COURSE

Since Monday, the national average for a gallon of regular gasoline has fallen eight cents to \$4.27. According to new data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA), gas demand increased from 8.52 million b/d to 9.25 million b/d last week. The estimated rate is 80,000 b/d lower than last year, but it could pressure pump prices and slow price decreases if the trend holds. Additionally, total domestic gasoline stocks decreased by 3.3 million bbl to 225.1 million bbl, signaling that higher demand reduced inventory last week.

At the close of Wednesday's formal trading session, WTI increased by \$2.28 to settle at \$97.26. Crude prices have increased this week as market concerns about weakening demand this summer have eased after the EIA reported that total domestic crude stocks decreased by 4.5 million bbl to 422.1 million bbl last week, 13.5 million bbl lower than the storage level at the end of July 2021.

Largest Weekly Decreases

Since last Thursday, these 10 states have seen the largest decreases in their averages: Kansas (-26 cents), Oklahoma (-25 cents), Nebraska (-25 cents), Iowa (-23 cents), Ohio (-23 cents), Wyoming (-21 cents), Indiana (-21 cents), Colorado (-21 cents), Michigan (-21 cents) and South Dakota (-20 cents).

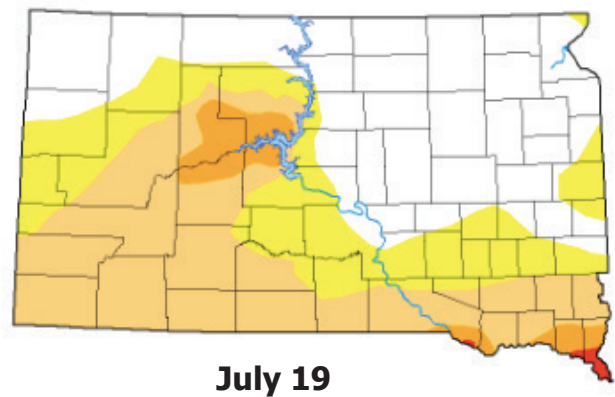
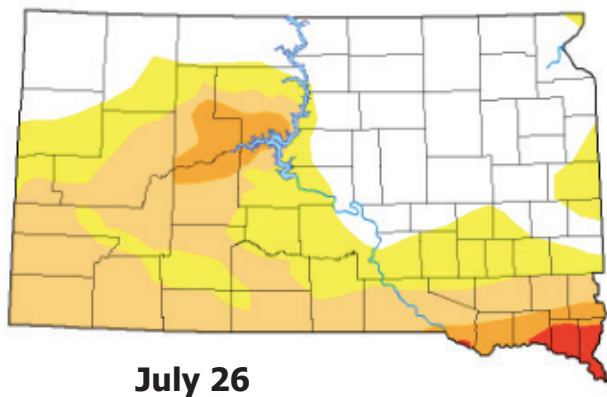
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



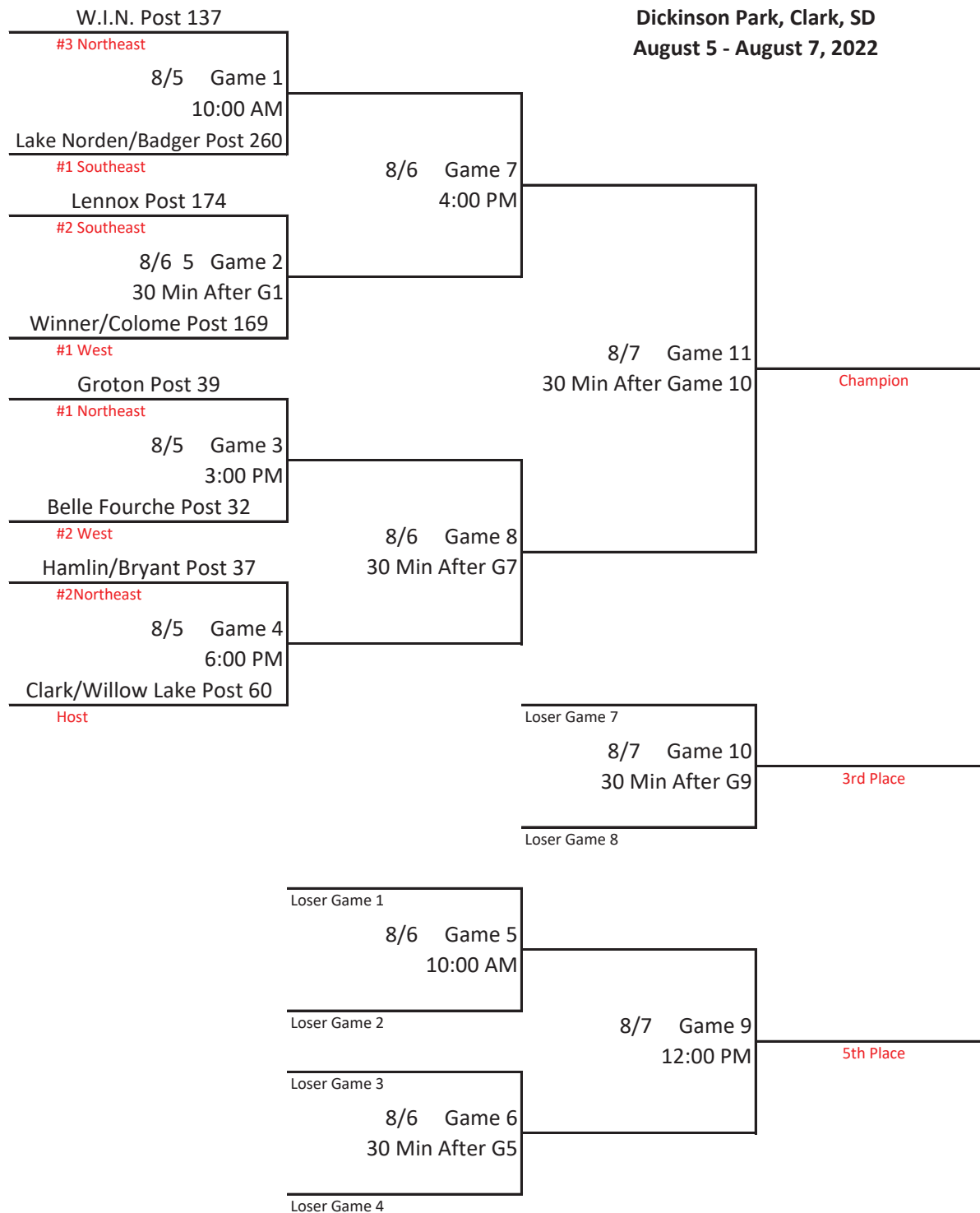
With the exception of Colorado (which was mostly warmer than normal) and southern Kansas (which was 4-8 degrees warmer than normal), temperatures in the High Plains region this week were generally within 2-4 degrees of normal. Rainfall from the North American Monsoon occurred in parts of southern, central, and eastern Colorado, locally easing drought conditions in the eastern part of the state. Heavy rains in south-central and southwest South Dakota, and in southern Nebraska, northern Kansas, and east-central Kansas, led to locally improved drought and dryness conditions. Meanwhile, south of the heavier rains, flash drought continued to take hold in southern Kansas, where a combination of dry and hot weather worsened conditions. Extreme drought expanded in parts of southwest Nebraska, where short- and long-term precipitation deficits worsened conditions amid poor crop health. Drought also expanded in northeast Nebraska and southeast South Dakota, where soil moisture deficits continued to mount amid warm temperatures and dry weather. Extreme drought also developed in western Wyoming, where above-normal evaporative demand combined with short-term precipitation deficits to worsen conditions locally.

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2022 South Dakota American Legion State Class "B" Jr. Baseball Tournament

South Dakota American Legion
State Class "B" Jr. Baseball Tournament
Dickinson Park, Clark, SD
August 5 - August 7, 2022



Tournament MVP:

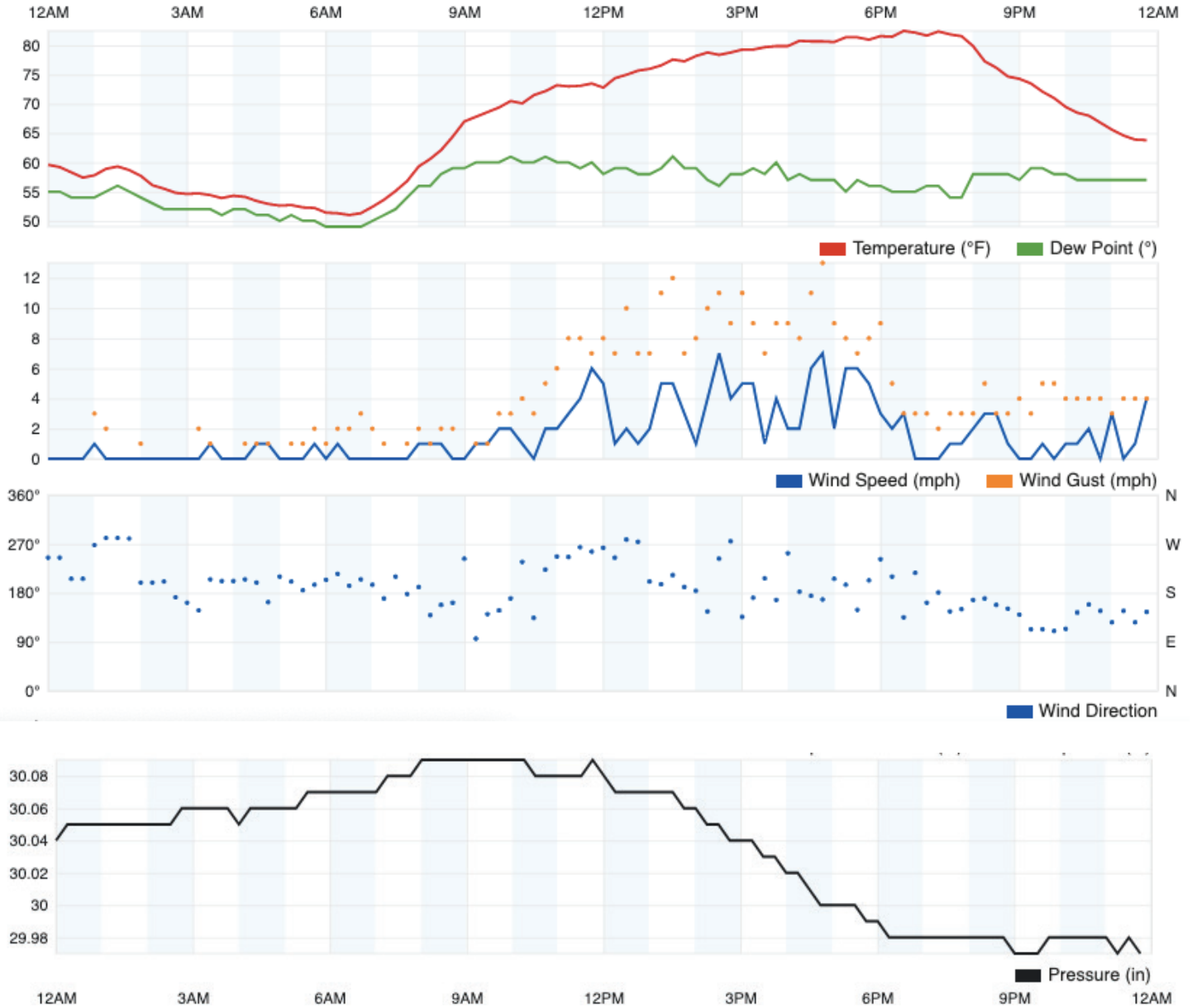
Big Stick Award:

Porter T. Talcott Sportsmanship Award:

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



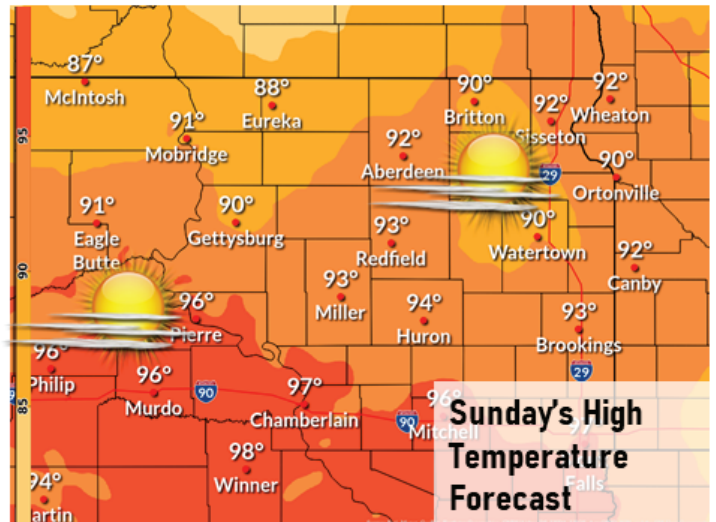
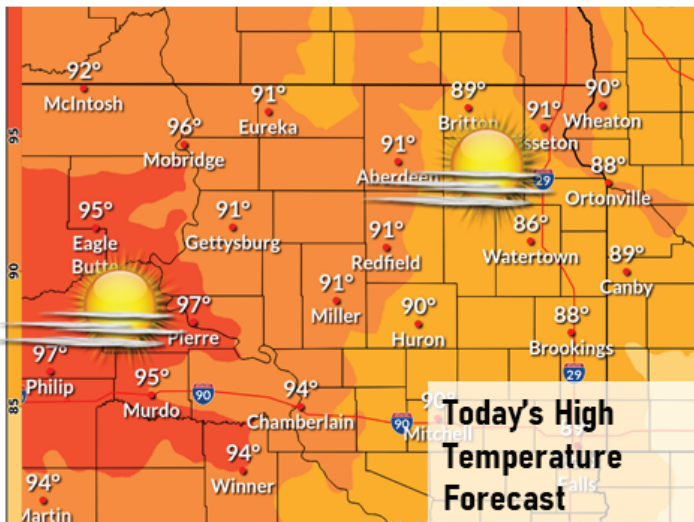
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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
Hot	Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms then Sunny	Clear	Sunny
High: 91 °F	Low: 68 °F	High: 91 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 86 °F

July Ends on a Hot Note

This weekend will feature hot, humidity, and breezy conditions. Isolated thunderstorms are possible today through Sunday afternoon for portions of the area as well. Find your latest detailed forecast at www.weather.gov/Aberdeen. **Stay hydrated, and consider limiting time spent outdoors.**



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 7/30/2022 5:16 AM Central

This weekend will feature hot, humid and breezy conditions. Isolated thunderstorms are possible today across central SD, and this evening through Sunday afternoon across portions of northeastern SD and west central MN. Stay hydrated, and consider limiting time spent outdoors!

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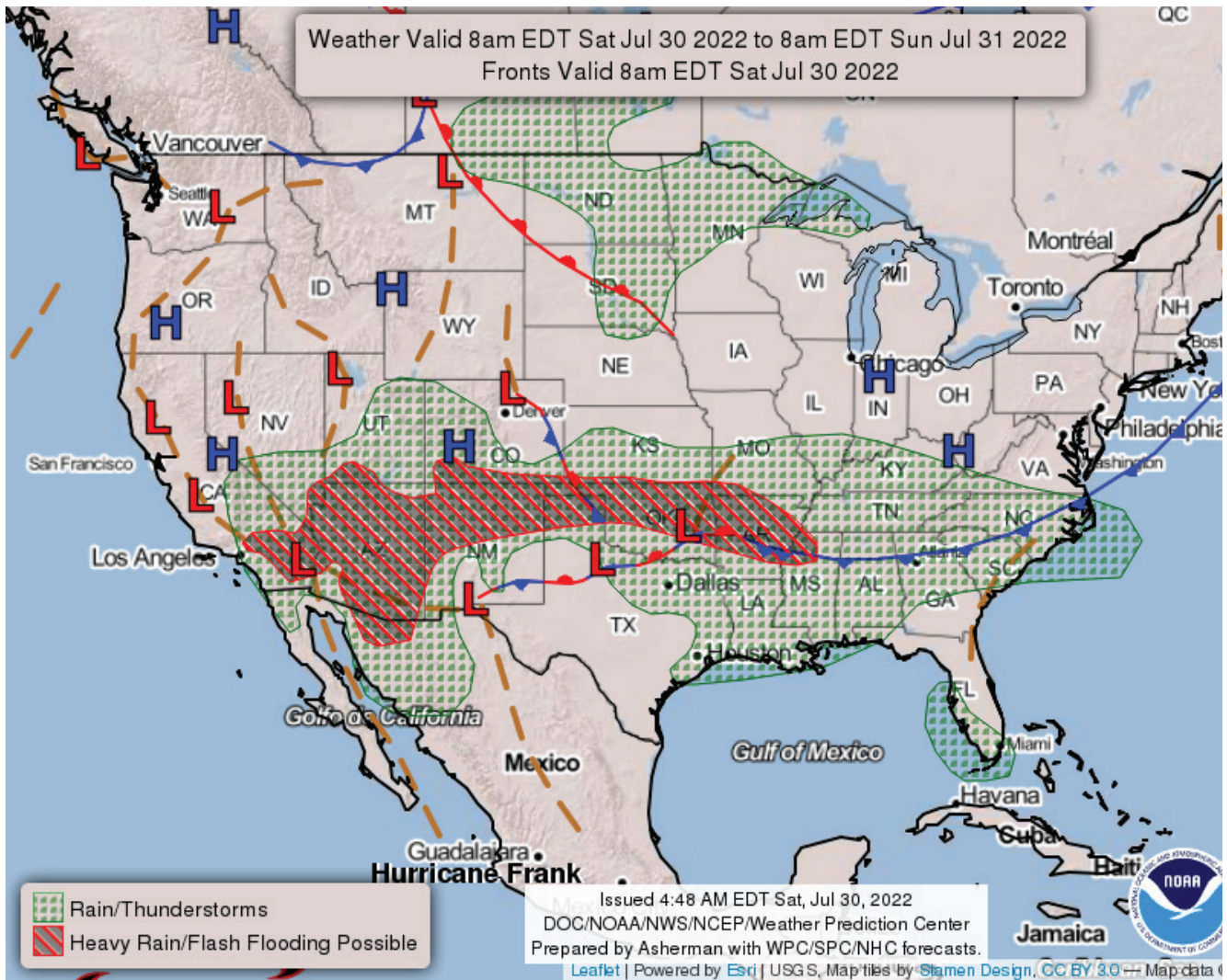
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 82 °F at 6:30 PM
Low Temp: 51 °F at 6:29 AM
Wind: 13 mph at 4:37 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 51 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 2006
Record Low: 39 in 1971
Average High: 85°F
Average Low: 60°F
Average Precip in July.: 3.01
Precip to date in July.: 2.80
Average Precip to date: 14.02
Precip Year to Date: 14.38
Sunset Tonight: 9:04:44 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:04:44 PM



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Today in Weather History

July 30, 1981: Operation Skywarn organized by the National Weather Service in Bismarck four years ago had a perfect opportunity to put the training into operation on this day. A spotter 20 miles west of Bismarck identified a rotating wall cloud 10 minutes before a tornado touchdown. The strong tornado was rated as having F3 strength, leaving behind an 18-mile long path of destruction. The force of the storm drove a stick between a tire and rim. A 6-inch steel beam was twisted and found near the high tension tower which had been toppled.

July 30, 2001: Strong winds of 81 mph blew much of the roof off of the bowling alley in Mobridge. Some flying debris also damaged a trailer home. Many trees were snapped in two or uprooted, and many power lines were downed. High winds brought down tree branches and also knocked the power out for several hours in Pollock.

July 30, 2010: Very heavy rains of 5 to 10 inches caused the Rosehill Dam to break in the early morning hours in southeast Hand County. Flash flooding began around 1 am CDT with two campers being swept up around 130 am CDT. The two campers clung to a tree until they could be rescued about 6 am CDT. They were both injured with one camper being treated for hypothermia and other airlifted to Sioux Falls for broken ribs and head trauma. The dam broke at 330 am CDT with the spillway breaking at 420 am CDT. There was between a 100 to the 150-foot hole left by the dam break. The flash flooding continued downstream on Sand Creek causing damage to area farms, filling basements, and flooding many roads.

1949 - The state record for Connecticut was established when the town of Greenville registered an afternoon high of 102 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1970: Hurricane Celia was born in the northwest of the Caribbean Sea on this day. The hurricane would be one of the worst ever to hit Texas and would reach Texas late on August 3. The storm reached its peak as it made landfall near Corpus Christi, Texas, as a strong Category 3 hurricane. Hurricane Celia is currently the last major hurricane to make landfall on the middle Texas Coast until Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

1965 - The temperature at Portland, OR, reached 107 degrees to equal their all-time record high. (The Weather Channel)

1979: A forty-minute hailstorm bombed Fort Collins, Colorado with baseball to softball size hail. Two thousand homes and 2500 automobiles were damaged, and about 25 persons were injured, mainly when hit on the head by the huge stones.

1987 - Afternoon highs of 105 degrees at Aberdeen SD, 102 degrees at Bismarck, ND, and 102 degrees at Pueblo, CO, were records for the date. Pueblo, CO, reported just .09 inch of rain for the first thirty days of the month. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A dozen cities in the north central and northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Downtown Baltimore, MD, hit 103 degrees, marking a record eight days of 100 degree heat for the month, and ten for the year. The high of 101 degrees at Billings, MT, marked a record seventeen days of 100 degree heat for the year. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the northeast, with nearly fifty reports of large hail or damaging winds in Pennsylvania and New York State. A tree fell on a car at Erie, PA, injuring four persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Morning thunderstorms over central Missouri deluged Columbia with 5.98 inches of rain causing flash flooding. Daytime thunderstorms in Kentucky drenched Paducah with 1.73 inches of rain in less than half an hour. Evening thunderstorms in the north central U.S. produced wind gusts to 78 mph east of Moccasin, MT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



WHO'S BIGGER?

One Sunday morning after church as the family was driving home, Molly asked, "Mom, the preacher said that God was bigger than any of us. Is that really true?"

"Yes, He is!" answered her mother.

"Well, Mom," she continued, "the preacher also said that God lives in us. Is that also true?"

"Yes," admitted the mother.

"Well, then," she asked rather confused, "why doesn't He show through us?"

How much of God is seen in or through our lives each day?

We speak of Him often, turn to Him quickly, and say we rely on Him totally, but do we consult with Him continually?

When we make plans, we need to include Him. If we visit with a friend, we need to invite Him into the conversation. As we leave for a journey, we need to ask Him to travel with us. Throughout the day, every day, at work or at play, we need to ask Him for His wisdom.

Perhaps if we consulted God for His advice in everything we do and were more conscious that His Spirit is actually within us, and that He wants to work through us, we would realize that He is bigger than we are and wants to "show through" us.

Prayer: Father, we often think of Your goodness, but rarely talk about it to others. We believe that You love us but seldom share this with others. Come, live through us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Galatians 2:20 My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

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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)
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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:

Mega Millions

13-36-45-57-67, Mega Ball: 14, Megaplier: 2

(thirteen, thirty-six, forty-five, fifty-seven, sixty-seven; Mega Ball: fourteen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$1,280,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 170,000,000

Music camp founder Utgaard gets North Dakota's top honor

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — International Music Camp founder Merton Utgaard will receive North Dakota's highest honor, Gov. Doug Burgum announced Friday.

Utgaard, who died in 1998 at age 84, is the 47th recipient of the Theodore Roosevelt Rough Rider Award. A ceremony will be scheduled later.

Utgaard, a native of Maddock, founded the music camp in 1956 at the International Peace Garden that sits astride the North Dakota and Canadian border, north of Dunseith. He served as director for 28 years.

At the time of his death, more than 90,000 students from more than 60 countries had attended the summer camp.

Utgaard was a teacher and director of bands at the University of Minnesota, the University of South Dakota, Ball State University, Northern Illinois University and the University of Manitoba-Brandon before he began to work full time on the International Music Camp in the mid-1960s.

Utgaard's portrait will hang in the North Dakota Capitol with those of the other 46 people who have received the award, established by Gov. William Guy in 1961.

Some others who have received it include bandleader Lawrence Welk, New York Yankees slugger Roger Maris, NBA player and coach Phil Jackson, western author Louis L'Amour, singer and actress Peggy Lee, and newsman Eric Sevareid.

South Dakota AG clears Rapid City officer in May shooting

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — An investigation found that a Rapid City police officer was justified in shooting at a woman seven times as she backed her car into a police squad car during a May pursuit, South Dakota's attorney general said Friday.

Attorney General Mark Vargo called the shooting, which hospitalized 32-year-old Shania Watkins, a "tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving situation."

The Division of Criminal Investigation found that Watkins, a Rapid City resident, fled from police in her car after an officer attempted to pull her over during the early hours of May 31. After being pursued by several squad cars at speeds of up to 65 mph, Watkins stopped her car in a mobile home park.

The investigation found that as a police officer pulled a squad car up to Watkins' vehicle and commanded that she exit the car, she reversed her car into the squad car. The collision caused Watkins' car to stop.

The officer fired seven rounds through the passenger front door and window of Watkins' car, striking her multiple times, investigators wrote in their report.

The report concluded that the officer "believed they were in a situation in which Watkins could inflict serious injury or death and responded with deadly force."

Watkins later told investigators that she was trying to drive home so that she would not receive a "tow bill after her potential arrest," according to the report. She also stated that "she had stopped the vehicle,

placed it in park or neutral, and put the keys in her pocket," as well as followed the officer's command to show her hands.

But the report claimed that video evidence from officers' body cameras conflicted with Watkins' statements. The Division of Criminal Investigation also found that she was under the influence of methamphetamine and marijuana at the time of the pursuit.

Watkins has been charged with aggravated eluding, Vargo said, and further charges could be considered now that the investigation is complete.

Oglala sue federal officials over law enforcement staffing

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Oglala Sioux Tribe is suing the federal government for failing to provide adequate law enforcement on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

The lawsuit filed this week against the Bureau of Indian Affairs and some high level officials in the Interior Department alleges the inadequacy has created a "public safety crisis" on the reservation.

Tribal officials say Pine Ridge with its 3 million acres of land has just 33 police officers and eight criminal investigators who handled more than 133,700 emergency calls last year. And, that there were six to eight officers on any given shift.

The complaint uses Rapid City as a comparison with its 176 police officers who handled nearly 115,000 emergency calls in 2021, the Argus Leader reported.

The tribe said the BIA is out of compliance with its standards of having 2.8 officers per 1,000 people. For Pine Ridge, that would require at least 140 tribal officers.

Court documents say officers are working an average of 80 hours of overtime on top of their 160 scheduled hours and do not have adequate back up when needed for emergency calls.

The tribe is requesting an injunction for the federal government to equip a minimum of 140 law enforcement officers on the reservation and a declaratory judgement stating the federal government violated its responsibilities to provide adequate law enforcement, according to the lawsuit.

NKorea claims no new fever cases amid doubts over COVID data

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea on Saturday reported no new fever cases for the first time since it abruptly admitted to its first domestic COVID-19 outbreak and placed its 26 million people under more draconian restrictions in May.

There have been widespread outside doubts about the accuracy of North Korean statistics as its reported fatalities are too low and its daily fever cases have been plummeting too fast recently. Some experts say North Korea has likely manipulated the scale of illness and deaths to help leader Kim Jong Un maintain absolute control amid mounting economic difficulties.

The North's anti-epidemic center said via state media it had found zero fever patients in the latest 24 hours, maintaining the country's total caseload of about 4.8 million. Its death count remains at 74, with a mortality rate of 0.0016% — the world's lowest, if true.

Despite the claimed zero cases, it is unclear whether and how soon North Korea would formally declare victory over COVID-19 and lift pandemic curbs because experts say it could face a viral resurgence later this year like many other countries. North Korea's state media have recently said it's intensifying and upgrading its anti-epidemic systems to guard against coronavirus subvariants and other diseases like monkeypox.

"The organizational power and unity unique to the society of (North Korea) is fully displayed in the struggle to bring forward a victory in the emergency anti-epidemic campaign," the official Korean Central News Agency said Saturday.

North Korea's claimed zero cases could have symbolic significance in its efforts to establish Kim's image as a leader who has suppressed the outbreak much faster than other countries. Kim would need such credentials to garner greater public support to surmount economic hardships caused by pandemic border closings, U.N. sanctions and his own mismanagement, observers say.

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"In North Korea, public health care and politics can't be separated from each other, and that aspect has been revealed again in its COVID-19 outbreak," said Ahn Kyung-su, head of DPRKHEALTH.ORG, a website focusing on health issues in North Korea. "Since they began with manipulated data, they're now putting an end to the outbreak with manipulated data."

North Korea had been widely expected to claim zero cases as its daily fever caseload has been nose-diving in recent days — there were three reported cases on Friday and 11 on Thursday — from a peak of about 400,000 a day in May. The country, which lacks test kits, has identified only a fraction of its 4.8 million fever patients as confirmed COVID-19 cases.

"Realistically speaking, hundreds of thousands of daily fever cases becoming zero in less than three months is something impossible," said Lee Yo Han, a professor at Ajou University Graduate School of Public Health in South Korea.

Many outside experts earlier worried the North's outbreak would have devastating consequences because most of its people are believed to be unvaccinated and about 40% are reportedly undernourished. But now, activists and defectors with contacts in North Korea say they haven't heard of a humanitarian disaster. They say the country's outbreak has also likely peaked.

In an indication of an easing outbreak, North Korea this week held massive no-mask public events in its capital, Pyongyang, where thousands of aged Korean War veterans and others gathered from across the country to celebrate the 69th anniversary of the end of the 1950-53 war. During an anniversary ceremony, Kim hugged and exchanged handshakes with some veterans before he took group photos with other participants. No one wore masks, according to state media photos.

Shin Young-jeon, a professor of preventive medicine at Seoul's Hanyang University, said North Korea would know that zero cases don't mean it has no COVID-19 patients because there are likely asymptomatic cases. He said North Korea won't likely announce it has officially beaten the pandemic anytime soon because of worries about a resurgence.

"North Korea's state media have already used expressions like it's winning its anti-virus fight. The only other expression they can use now is declaring the coronavirus has been completely eliminated from its territory," Shin said. "But if new cases emerge again, North Korea would lose its face."

The only route for North Korea's fresh viral spread from abroad is likely China, its main ally that shares a long, porous border, and North Korea would find it difficult to announce victory over the pandemic until China does, Lee said.

The North Korea-China border has been largely shut for more than 2 ½ years, except for a few months when it reopened earlier this year.

Some observers say the North's elevated pandemic response has provided Kim with a tool to boost his authoritarian rule amid public complaints over long-running restrictions. They say North Korea could report a small number of fever cases again in the coming days.

Foreign experts struggle to assess the true number of fatalities in North Korea. They note the North's shortage of test kits would also make it virtually impossible for the country to determine whether aged people or others with underlying diseases died of COVID-19 or something else.

Shin, the university professor, stood by his earlier study that predicted North Korea would likely suffer 100,000-150,000 deaths. He said he used South Korean data showing its mortality rate of unvaccinated people for the omicron variant, whose outbreak North Korea admitted in May, was 0.6%.

Other experts say the North's fatalities would be several thousand at the maximum. They said bigger death tolls must have been detected by North Korea monitoring groups.

Pope says he'll slow down or retire: 'You can change a pope'

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE (AP) — Pope Francis acknowledged Saturday that he can no longer travel like he used to because of his strained knee ligaments, saying his weeklong Canadian pilgrimage was "a bit of a test" that showed he needs to slow down and one day possibly retire.

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Speaking to reporters while traveling home from northern Nunavut, the 85-year-old Francis stressed that he hadn't thought about resigning but said "the door is open" and there was nothing wrong with a pope stepping down.

"It's not strange. It's not a catastrophe. You can change the pope," he said while sitting in an airplane wheelchair during a 45-minute news conference.

Francis said that while he hadn't considered resigning until now, he realizes he has to at least slow down.

"I think at my age and with these limitations, I have to save (my energy) to be able to serve the church, or on the contrary, think about the possibility of stepping aside," he said.

Francis was peppered with questions about the future of his pontificate following the first trip in which he used a wheelchair, walker and cane to get around, sharply limiting his program and ability to mingle with crowds.

He strained his right knee ligaments earlier this year, and continuing laser and magnetic therapy forced him to cancel a trip to Africa that was scheduled for the first week of July.

The Canada trip was difficult, and featured several moments when Francis was clearly in pain as he maneuvered getting up and down from chairs.

At the end of his six-day tour, he appeared in good spirits and energetic, despite a long day traveling to the edge of the Arctic on Friday to again apologize to Indigenous peoples for the injustices they suffered in Canada's church-run residential schools.

Francis ruled out having surgery on his knee, saying it would not necessarily help and noting "there are still traces" from the effects of having undergone more than six hours of anesthesia in July 2021 to remove 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his large intestine.

"I'll try to continue to do the trips and be close to people because I think it's a way of servicing, being close. But more than this, I can't say," he said Saturday.

In other comments aboard the papal plane, Francis:

— Agreed that the attempt to eliminate Indigenous culture in Canada through a church-run residential school system amounted to a cultural "genocide." Francis said he didn't use the term during his Canada trip because it didn't come to mind. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission determined in 2015 that the forced removal of Indigenous children from their homes and placement in church-run residential schools to assimilate them into Christian, Canadian constituted a "cultural genocide."

"It's true I didn't use the word because it didn't come to mind, but I described genocide, no?" Francis said. "I apologized, I asked forgiveness for this work, which was genocide."

— Suggested he was not opposed to a development of Catholic doctrine on the use of contraception. Church teaching prohibits artificial contraception. Francis noted that a Vatican think tank recently published the acts of a congress where a modification to the church's absolute "no" was discussed. He stressed that doctrine can develop over time and that it was the job of theologians to pursue such developments, with the pope ultimately deciding.

Francis noted that church teaching on atomic weapons was modified during his pontificate to consider not only the use but the mere possession of atomic weapons as immoral and to consider the death penalty immoral in all cases.

— Confirmed he hoped to travel to Kazakhstan in mid-September for an interfaith conference where he might meet with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, who has justified the war in Ukraine. Francis also said he wants to go to Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, though no trip has yet been confirmed. He said he hoped to reschedule the trip to South Sudan he canceled because of his knee problems. He said the Congo leg of that trip would probably have to be put off until next year because of the rainy season.

Time to check Mega Millions numbers: Are you a billionaire?

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — You bought a Mega Millions lottery ticket and have been dreaming of how you'll spend \$1.28 billion. Now it's time to check your numbers and face reality.

Friday's winning numbers are: 13-36-45-57-67, Mega Ball: 14.

The jackpot is the third-largest lottery prize and the biggest in nearly four years.

It grew so large because there have been 29 consecutive draws without a winner, a span that stretches back to April 15 when a Tennessee player matched all of the game's six numbers.

The \$1.28 billion prize is for players who are paid with the annuity option, which makes 30 annual payments that stretch over 29 years. Nearly all jackpot winners choose the cash option, which for Friday night's drawing is an estimated \$747.2 million.

The odds of winning the jackpot are 1 in 302.5 million.

Mega Millions is played in 45 states as well as Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The game is coordinated by state lotteries.

The jackpot is the latest focus of lotteries that have been conducted in the U.S. and around the world for centuries.

Across the U.S., state lottery systems use lottery revenue to boost education, tourism, transportation and much more. With the big Mega Millions jackpot, state officials are hoping increased national interest in securing the top prize will result in more funding for their own causes.

Jewish volunteers bond with Ukrainian kids at summer camp

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — A 5-year-old girl's drawing at a summer camp in Poland's capital caught the eye of one of her counselors. Why did she use black and white, and not red or pink, to make a heart, Rabbi Ilana Baird asked the child.

The girl, sighing heavily, said it was black like the dog she left behind in Ukraine.

Baird, who lives in California, volunteered with several other Jewish people originally from Russia or other parts of the former Soviet Union to mentor Ukrainian refugee children at the camp in Warsaw. The program, which ended Friday, was designed to give some joy to youngsters traumatized by war, to help prepare them for a new school year in Poland, and to give their mothers some time to themselves.

After performing puppet shows and reading stories to her group of 5- and 6-year-old campers, painting a lot of little faces and dispensing lots of big hugs, the rabbi saw another heart drawing. This one was pink.

"Happiness," the girl explained.

Baird, 48, was happy to see cheerful colors and rainbows also emerging in the artwork of other children under her care at the Kef Be Kayitz camp, a Hebrew name that means Fun in the Summer.

For the volunteers, the decision to take time off from their usual jobs in the United States and fly to Poland to work with the Ukrainian children was driven by desire to help those in need, a value that is universal and a central part of Jewish religious teachings.

"Jewish people have suffered so much in the past. We suffered pogroms, we suffered the Holocaust and we suffered antisemitism," Baird said. "And we have a sense of obligation to help people who are suffering right now."

After Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, people across Poland sprang into action to welcome and help refugees from the neighboring country. Poland has accepted more of the war's refugees than any other nation.

Local and international Jewish organizations also wasted no time in trying to meet the most urgent needs: to house and feed the Ukrainians, most of whom are women and children.

With the war about to enter its sixth month, the camp at the Lauder Morasha School in Warsaw reflects the type of programming being developed to meet the changing needs of refugees. Many Ukrainians realize they won't be able to go home soon, or perhaps ever, said Helise Lieberman, the director of the Taube Center for Jewish Life and Learning.

Mornings were devoted to Polish, English and math lessons so the children will be in a stronger position to adapt to school. Many of the Ukrainian kids who arrived in Poland since February finished the Ukrainian academic year remotely but will be entering Polish schools in September.

Campers spent afternoons doing arts and crafts, playing sports and making excursions to city museums

and parks. About a third of the 90 children who attended the camp are Jewish, according to Marta Saracyn, the head of the Jewish Community Center of Warsaw.

"It's a lovely bubble for kids to be kids," Saracyn said.

Some of the Ukrainian refugee mothers need to look for jobs, and some are severely depressed after being separated from partners and relatives back home, organizers said.

The Taube Center and the Jewish Community Center of Warsaw organized the camp in conjunction with the Jewish Federations of North America, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Joint Distribution Committee.

The Jewish Federations of North America recruited nearly 90 Russian-speaking educators and rabbinic leaders to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland and Hungary, and 10 helped out at the Warsaw camp, said Hannah Miller, who runs the volunteer program.

The 10 camp volunteers are Russian-speaking immigrants who left the Soviet Union decades ago, or the children of Russian Jewish immigrants. Only a couple spoke Ukrainian, so they mostly spoke to the children in Russian, which is also widely used in much of Ukraine.

Baird recalled painting the face of a boy who became upset when he realized she wasn't from Ukraine. "Why did you come here?" he asked her.

"Because you don't need to be from Ukraine to help others," the rabbi answered, "you just need to be human."

The Jewish school where the camp took place is located blocs from the former Warsaw Ghetto, where Jews were imprisoned by German forces, killed and starved during the Holocaust before they were sent to concentration and extermination camps.

Poland was home to nearly 3.5 million Jews before World War II, most of whom were killed by German Nazi forces. But Jewish life has reemerged in the country since the fall of Moscow-backed communism in 1989.

"If this had happened 30 years ago, there would not have been Jewish communal institutions to provide relief and care," said Lieberman, an American who was the founding principal of the Lauder Morasha School.

In race for monkeypox vaccines, experts see repeat of COVID

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — Moves by rich countries to buy large quantities of monkeypox vaccine, while declining to share doses with Africa, could leave millions of people unprotected against a more dangerous version of the disease and risk continued spillovers of the virus into humans, public health officials are warning.

Critics fear a repeat of the catastrophic inequity problems seen during the coronavirus pandemic.

"The mistakes we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic are already being repeated," said Dr. Boghuma Kabisen Titanji, an assistant professor of medicine at Emory University.

While rich countries have ordered millions of vaccines to stop monkeypox within their borders, none have announced plans to share doses with Africa, where a more lethal form of monkeypox is spreading than in the West.

To date, there have been more than 21,000 monkeypox cases reported in nearly 80 countries since May, with about 75 suspected deaths in Africa, mostly in Nigeria and Congo. On Friday, Brazil and Spain reported deaths linked to monkeypox, the first reported outside Africa.

"The African countries dealing with monkeypox outbreaks for decades have been relegated to a footnote in conversations about the global response," Titanji said.

Scientists say that unlike campaigns to stop COVID-19, mass vaccination against monkeypox won't be necessary. They think targeted use of the available doses, along with other measures, could shut down the expanding epidemics recently designated by the World Health Organization as a global emergency.

Yet while monkeypox is much harder to spread than COVID-19, experts warn that if the disease spills over into general populations — currently in Europe and North America it is circulating almost exclusively among gay and bisexual men — the need for vaccines could intensify, especially if the virus becomes

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entrenched in new regions.

On Thursday, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called for the continent to be prioritized for vaccines, saying it was again being left behind.

"If we're not safe, the rest of the world is not safe," said Africa CDC's acting director, Ahmed Ogwel.

Although it has been endemic in parts of Africa for decades, monkeypox mostly jumps into people from infected wild animals and has not typically spread very far beyond the continent.

Experts suspect the monkeypox outbreaks in North America and Europe may have originated in Africa long before the disease started spreading via sex at two raves in Spain and Belgium. Currently, more than 70% of the world's monkeypox cases are in Europe, and 98% of cases are in men who have sex with men.

WHO is developing a vaccine-sharing mechanism for affected countries, but has released few details about how it might work. The U.N. health agency has made no guarantees about prioritizing poor countries in Africa, saying only that vaccines would be dispensed based on epidemiological need.

Some experts worry the mechanism could duplicate the problems seen with COVAX, created by WHO and partners in 2020 to try to ensure poorer countries would get COVID-19 shots. That missed repeated targets to share vaccines with poorer nations and at times relied on donations.

"Just asking countries to share is not going to be enough," said Sharmila Shetty, a vaccines adviser for Medecins Sans Frontieres. "The longer monkeypox circulates, the greater chances it could get into new animal reservoirs or spread to" the human general population, she said. "If that happens, vaccine needs could change substantially."

At the moment, there is only one producer of the most advanced monkeypox vaccine: the Danish company Bavarian Nordic. Its production capacity this year is about 30 million doses, with about 16 million vaccines available now.

In May, Bavarian Nordic asked the U.S. to release more than 215,000 doses it was due to receive, "to assist with international requests the company was receiving," and the U.S. complied, according to Bill Hall, a spokesman for the department of Health and Human Services. The U.S. will still receive the doses, but at a later date.

The company declined to specify which countries it was allocating doses for.

Hall said the U.S. has not made any other promises to share vaccines. The U.S. has ordered by far the most number of doses, with 13 million reserved, although only about 1.4 million have been delivered.

Some African officials said it would be wise to stockpile some doses on the continent, especially given the difficulties Western countries were having stopping monkeypox.

"I really didn't think this would spread very far because monkeypox does not spread like COVID," said Salim Abdool Karim, an infectious diseases epidemiologist at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. "Africa should procure some vaccines in case we need them, but we should prioritize diagnostics and surveillance so we know who to target," he said. "Normally, you're able to get ahead of a disease like monkeypox, but I am concerned (the number of new cases) hasn't started coming down yet."

Dr. Ingrid Katz, a global health expert at Harvard University, said the monkeypox epidemics were "potentially manageable" if the limited vaccines were distributed appropriately. She believed it was still possible to prevent monkeypox from turning into a pandemic, but that "we need to be thoughtful in our prevention strategies and rapid in our response."

In Spain, which has Europe's biggest monkeypox outbreak, demand for vaccines far exceeds supply.

"There is a real gap between the number of vaccines that we currently have available and the people who could benefit," said Pep Coll, a medical director at a Barcelona health center that was dispensing shots this week.

Daniel Rofin, 41, was more than happy to be offered a dose recently. He said he decided to get vaccinated for the same reasons he was immunized against COVID-19.

"I feel reassured it is a way to stop the spread," he said. "We (gay men) are a group at risk."

UN relaxes arms embargo on Central African Republic

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By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. Security Council voted Friday to relax the arms embargo against the Central African Republic, a disappointment to its government, which sought a complete lifting of the ban on the sale or transfer of weapons and ammunition.

The vote was 10-0 with Russia, China and the council's three African members that supported a lifting of the embargo abstaining.

Sylvie Baïpo-Temon, the Central African Republic's foreign minister, told the council after the vote that the government welcomed the first step toward an arms embargo on armed groups.

She also welcomed the end to limits on some categories of weapons for government forces, but she stressed that "this embargo is no longer justified."

"The embargo from 2013 is undeniably ineffective because it no longer provides specific solutions to the grave problems posed by the proliferation of arms by extremists and rebels who have many, many sophisticated weapons themselves," Baïpo-Temon said.

The mineral-rich but impoverished Central African Republic has faced deadly intercommunal fighting since 2013, when predominantly Muslim Seleka rebels seized power and forced President Francois Bozize from office. Mostly Christian militias later fought back, also targeting civilians in the streets. Untold thousands were killed, and most of the capital's Muslims fled in fear.

A peace deal between the government and 14 rebel groups was signed in February 2019, but violence erupted after the constitutional court rejected Bozize's candidacy to run for president in December 2020. President Faustin Archange Touadera won a second term with 53% of the vote, but he continues to face opposition from a rebel coalition linked to Bozize.

The government controls the capital, but much of the country is controlled by armed groups.

France drafted the resolution and engaged in lengthy negotiations with Russia over maintaining the arms embargo to avert a possible Russian veto.

France's deputy political coordinator Wadid Benaabou said the objective of the arms embargo has always been to reduce the threat of armed groups.

He said the Security Council "has always been attentive" to the needs of the CAR government and Friday's resolution makes it even easier for its forces to obtain all types of weapons and ammunition.

"They have thus received more than 20,000 weapons and 29 million rounds of ammunition in recent years," Benaabou said after the vote.

Kenya's U.N. Ambassador Martin Kimani said the resolution "has taken a positive step towards the full lifting of the arms embargo." But he said Kenya voted to abstain because the resolution doesn't fully lift sanctions against the CAR government, a view backed by Ghana and Gabon.

U.S. deputy ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis welcomed the extension of the arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze saying these measures aim to promote peace and stability in CAR and across the region.

"On the arms embargo, the region is awash with guns and it's time to stem the unfettered flow," DeLaurentis told the council after the vote. "If effectively implemented, this arms embargo will help silence the guns."

He called on CAR authorities to continue improving physical protection and accountability for its weapons.

"The truth is, military actions alone will not resolve CAR's crises," DeLaurentis said. "Good governance, credible security sector reform, transparent disarmament and reintegration, national dialogue, and justice and accountability are the most important steps toward peace."

Analysis: A world changed, maybe permanently, by Ukraine war

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — July 16, 1945: An incandescent mushroom cloud in New Mexico heralds the dawn of the nuclear age. July 20, 1969: Neil Armstrong takes a small step and a giant leap in the dust of the Moon.

Feb. 24, 2022: Russian President Vladimir Putin chews up the world order and 77 years of almost uninterrupted peace in Europe by invading Ukraine, disrupting the supplies of food it produces for many of

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the planet's 8 billion people.

All were watersheds in world history, turning points that will be taught in schools for decades to come. All changed not just lives but also trajectories for mankind, with repercussions felt across continents and for the foreseeable future.

Russia's invasion, the killing and maiming, have quickly added Mariupol, Bucha and other Ukrainian names to Europe's long list of cities and towns associated with the abuses of war: Dresden, Srebrenica, the Nazi massacre in France's Oradour-sur-Glane, to name only a few.

And after nearly a half-year of fighting, with tens of thousands of dead and wounded on both sides, massive disruptions to supplies of energy, food and financial stability, the world is no longer as it was.

The air raid sirens that howl with regularity over Ukraine's cities can't be heard in Paris or Berlin, yet generations of Europeans who had grown up knowing only peace have been brutally awakened to both its value and its fragility.

Renewed war in Europe and the need to take sides — for self-preservation and to stand for right against wrong — have also shifted the world's geo-political tectonics and relationships between nations.

Some now barely talk to Russia. Some have banded together. Others, notably in Africa, want to avoid being sucked into the breakdown between Russia and the West. Some don't want to jeopardize supplies of food, energy, security and income. Russia and Western nations are working — notably, again, in Africa — on fence-sitters, lobbying them to take sides.

The war in Ukraine has held a mirror to mankind, too, reflecting, yet again, its propensity to live on the razor's edge of folly, to take steps back even as it pursues progress.

And there had been progress, with speedy vaccines against the COVID-19 global pandemic and deals on climate change, before Russia's all-powerful Putin made it his historical mission to force independent, Western-looking Ukraine at gunpoint back into the Kremlin's orbit, as it had been during Soviet times, when he served as an intelligence officer for the feared KGB.

With its united stance against the invasion, NATO has found renewed reason for being. Just three years ago in 2019 — before the double shock of COVID-19 followed by the Ukraine war made that seem a lifetime away — the world's biggest military alliance had appeared at risk of slowly sinking into disrepair.

French President Emmanuel Macron said it was suffering "brain death." And then-U.S. President Donald Trump didn't have much patience for the alliance that has been a cornerstone of U.S. security policy for more than half a century, grumbling that the U.S. was unfairly shouldering too much of the defense burden and other NATO members too little.

Now NATO is clubbing together increasingly heavy weapons for use by Ukraine on its front lines and relentlessly bombed trenches horribly reminiscent of World War I. It speed-dated Finland and Sweden when those Nordic countries decided that continuing to be nonaligned was too risky in the wake of the Russian invasion and that they needed the shield of the NATO umbrella against whatever Putin might do next.

Their becoming the 31st and 32nd members of NATO will add to the ways in which Europe has been changed permanently, or at least for the foreseeable future, by the war.

Further away, in Asia, the ripples are consequential, too.

China is scrutinizing the Russian campaign for military lessons that could be applied in any eventual invasion of the self-governed island of Taiwan. India, China and other energy-hungry Asian nations are boosting the Kremlin's war chest and undercutting Western sanctions by buying growing amounts of Russian oil.

And then there's Putin himself. In Ukraine, long before the invasion, many already felt that their country was engaged in a battle of survival against the Kremlin leader's designs. Since 2014, thousands of people had already been killed in fighting with Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The faces of Ukrainian dead from that conflict stare out from a memorial wall in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, bearing silent testimony to what is now, in the invasion's wake, recognized as fact in Western capitals: Putin cannot and should not be trusted.

Soaring prices for food, energy and just about everything — causing pain across continents and largely driven by the war's disruption to supplies — are another change, although perhaps less permanent. High

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inflation, an agony disturbingly familiar to those who lived through energy shocks of the 1970s, is back as a household term. Some economists warn that “stagflation” — a noxious combo of high inflation and slumping economic growth — could make a comeback, too.

So what’s next?

With no end in sight to the war, there are too many ifs and buts to hazard a solid guess. But with each additional day of fighting, the body count and the war’s ripples across the globe grow, and peace recedes.

Mankind became inured to the bomb, learning to live with it. Manned spaceflight became routine. All we can hope is that war in Europe will not.

Fetterman harnesses power of social media in Senate campaign

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — In one of this year’s most competitive U.S. Senate races, the biggest moments aren’t playing out on the campaign trail. They’re unfolding on social media.

For one stunt, Democrat John Fetterman of Pennsylvania rolled out an online petition to get his Republican rival, celebrity heart surgeon Dr. Mehmet Oz, enshrined in New Jersey’s Hall of Fame — a nod to Oz moving from his longtime home in New Jersey to run in neighboring Pennsylvania.

For another, Fetterman paid \$2,000 for an airplane to haul a banner over weekend beachgoers on the Jersey Shore welcoming Oz back home to the Garden State. And in particularly viral posts, Nicole “Snooki” Polizzi, star of the infamous MTV show “Jersey Shore,” and “Little” Steven Van Zandt of “The Sopranos” and Bruce Springsteen’s E Street Band recorded videos telling Oz to come home.

“Nobody wants to see you get embarrassed,” Van Zandt says. “So come on back to Jersey where you belong.”

For a campaign that could ultimately cost more than \$100 million, the stunts are cheap ways for Fetterman, Pennsylvania’s lieutenant governor, to generate attention. The millions of views are helpful for a candidate who has largely been sidelined from personal appearances after suffering a stroke in May.

And it’s about more than getting laughs: The social media strategy could prove potent in defining Oz as a carpetbagger disconnected from the state’s residents and culture.

“The reason it stands out is he seems to be doing the best job of anyone this election cycle at contrasting his personality versus that of his opponent,” said Dante Atkins, a Democratic campaign strategist based in Washington, D.C., who has not done any work for Fetterman.

Republicans acknowledge that Fetterman’s social media game is top-notch. But they question the value. Even at a time when most Americans use social media, many Pennsylvania voters on social media don’t see Fetterman’s material and, anyway, elections aren’t about who’s got the best troll game, they say.

Republicans also argue that Fetterman’s greatest hits are missing the issues that voters are most likely to consider when making up their minds: inflation, gas prices and the economy, for instance.

“People don’t really care where I’m from,” Oz said in an interview. “They care what I stand for.”

A lot of the material comes from Fetterman himself, said campaign spokesperson Joe Calvello. He does a lot of the posting on Twitter and if Fetterman himself doesn’t post it, he helps originate ideas.

He’ll shoot texts to campaign staff saying, “Hey what about this,” or “did you see this,” Calvello said. “He’s still very involved.”

Other material comes from campaign staff who develop ideas that stay on-brand for Fetterman and on turf that the candidate has staked out, Calvello said. That includes accusing oil companies of jacking up gas prices.

The concept of trolling Oz, and a lot of the memes, also came from Fetterman, Calvello said. The idea for the video by Snooki emerged from a brainstorm by a couple members of the staff, Calvello said.

Campaign staff wrote the script and Snooki — who was paid less than \$400 through the video-sharing Cameo website — ad-libbed some of it, but was not in on the joke until afterward.

With 3.2 million views, it scored the most engagement on Twitter ever on Fetterman’s account, “and that’s a high bar,” Calvello said.

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Van Zandt did his video for free and ad-libbed his script after the campaign contacted him directly to see if he'd cooperate, Calvello said.

It is difficult to know how much this will help Fetterman in a year when Democrats face stiff political headwinds, including high inflation and a traditional mid-term backlash against the party of the president.

Political scientists have had a hard time isolating the forces that affect how voters make up their minds, said Christopher Borick, an assistant professor of political science at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

In addition, voters tend to be older than the average social media user, Borick said.

Still, Pew Research Center last year estimated that seven in 10 Americans use social media, and it is unquestionable that the medium is becoming more important to reaching voters.

"The proof in the pudding is that campaigns have increasingly turned to it, and so they're going on the belief that it is a necessary and key component," Borick said.

Maggie McDonald, a post-doctoral fellow who studies social media in congressional campaigns at New York University's Center for Social Media and Politics, said Fetterman's social media game is among the best, if not the best, she's seen.

"I imagine in future years people will try to emulate this," McDonald said.

In addition to making people laugh, she said she thinks Fetterman's stunts could motivate appreciative viewers to contribute money to his campaign and push apathetic Democrats to get off the sidelines to vote for him.

Oz has tried to harness the power of social media for his campaign, and tried to respond to Fetterman online. He has drawn particular focus to Fetterman's absence from traditional retail campaigning in the aftermath of his stroke, including using a meme from the TV series "Lost."

In response to a Fetterman tweet about high gas prices, Oz retorted, "Curious as to why you have to fill up your tank so often when you're not out on the campaign trail meeting with Pennsylvanians."

Fetterman responded, "Dude, you're literally from Jersey," before he referred to a New Jersey state law that requires gas station attendants to pump gas for motorists. "I bet you don't even know how to pump your own gas."

Fetterman's campaign argues that its trolling of Oz is on point with issues that matter to voters. Some elements of it — such as a "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" parody video — try to ask whether a man who is worth nine figures can advocate for regular people who are pinched by high gas prices.

Besides contrasting himself with Oz, Fetterman is well versed in internet culture.

"He's extremely online, he knows his memes, he knows his internet subcultures, his campaign knows how to make things go viral and obliterate his opponent with online owns," Atkins said.

Don't expect the posts to stop anytime soon.

Fetterman now says he'll put up a billboard on the Betsy Ross Bridge connecting the states over the Delaware River that reminds motorists that they are leaving New Jersey for Pennsylvania "just like Dr. Oz."

US envoy: Russia intends to dissolve Ukraine from world map

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations said Friday there should no longer be any doubt that Russia intends to dismantle Ukraine "and dissolve it from the world map entirely."

Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the U.N. Security Council that the United States is seeing growing signs that Russia is laying the groundwork to attempt to annex all of the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk and the southern Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, including by installing "illegitimate proxy officials in Russian-held areas, with the goal of holding sham referenda or decree to join Russia."

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov "has even stated that this is Russia's war aim," she said.

Lavrov told an Arab summit in Cairo on Sunday that Moscow's overarching goal in Ukraine is to free its people from its "unacceptable regime."

Apparently suggesting that Moscow's war aims extend beyond Ukraine's industrial Donbas region in the

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east comprising Donetsk and Luhansk, Lavrov said: "We will certainly help the Ukrainian people to get rid of the regime, which is absolutely anti-people and anti-historical."

Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador Dmitry Polyansky told the Security Council on Friday that "The de-Nazification and demilitarization of Ukraine will be carried out in full."

"There must no longer be a threat from this stage to Donbas, nor to Russia, nor to the liberated Ukrainian territories where for the first time in several years people are finally able to feel that they can live the way they want," he said.

Polyansky also warned Western nations supplying long-range artillery and MLRS surface-to-surface rockets that they were shifting "the provisional security line" further toward the west, "and in so doing clarifying even further the aims and objectives of our special military operation."

Thomas-Greenfield went after countries that say "one country's security should not come at the expense of another's," asking what they call Russia's invasion of Ukraine. She didn't name any country but this is a view China has repeated frequently, including Friday by its deputy U.N. ambassador Geng Shuang.

He told the council, "Putting one's own security above that of others, attempting to strengthen military blocs, establishing absolute superiority ... will only lead to conflict and confrontation, divide the international community and make themselves less secure."

The U.S. ambassador also went after nations that call for all countries to embrace diplomacy without naming Russia, saying: "Let us be clear: Russia's ongoing actions are the obstacle to a resolution to this crisis." Again she named no countries but a significant number of nations in Africa, Asia and the Mideast take this approach.

Thomas-Greenfield cited evidence of mounting atrocities including the reported bombings of schools and hospitals, "the killing of aid workers and journalists, the targeting of civilians attempting to flee, the brutal execution-style murder of those going about their daily business in Bucha," the suburb of Ukraine's capital Kyiv where local authorities said hundreds of people were killed during its occupation by Russian forces.

She said there is evidence Russia forces "have interrogated, detained forcibly, deported an estimated hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens, including children -- tearing them from their homes and sending them to remote regions in the east."

Nearly 2 million Ukrainians refugees have been sent to Russia, according to both Ukrainian and Russian officials. Ukraine portrays these journeys as forced transfers to enemy soil, which is considered a war crime. Russia calls them humanitarian evacuations of war victims who already speak Russian and are grateful for a new home.

A recent Associated Press investigation based on dozens of interviews has found that while the situation is more nuanced than the Ukrainians suggest, many refugees are indeed forced to embark on a surreal trip into Russia, subjected along the way to human rights abuses, stripped of documents and left confused and lost about where they are. Those who leave go through a series of what are known as filtration points, where treatment ranges from interrogation and strip searches to being yanked aside and never seen again.

"The United Nations has information that officials from Russia's presidential administration are overseeing and coordinating filtration operations," Thomas-Greenfield told the council.

Polyansky countered that despite Ukraine's efforts at intimidation of their citizens "people are choosing the country that they trust" -- Russia.

He warned that heavy weapons being poured into Ukraine by the West "will spill over into Europe" because of what he claimed is "the flourishing corruption among Ukraine's political and military leadership."

Polyansky said Western weapons are only "dragging out the agony and increasing the suffering of the Ukrainian people."

Addressing Western ambassadors, he said: "The aims of our special military operation will be achieved either way, however much fuel you pour into the fire in the form of weapons."

Governor: Search for Kentucky flood victims could take weeks

By DYLAN LOVAN, BRUCE SCHREINER and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

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JACKSON, Ky. (AP) — Kentucky's governor said it could take weeks to find all the victims of flash flooding that killed at least 16 people when torrential rains swamped towns across Appalachia.

More rainstorms are forecast in coming days as rescue crews continue the struggle to get into hard-hit areas, some of them among the poorest places in America.

The rain let up early Friday after parts of eastern Kentucky received between 8 and 10 1/2 inches (20-27 centimeters) over 48 hours. But some waterways were not expected to crest until Saturday and Gov. Andy Beshear warned the death toll could rise further.

"From everything we've seen, we may be updating the count of how many we lost for the next several weeks," Beshear said. "In some of these areas, it's hard to know exactly how many people were there."

Patricia Colombo, 63, of Hazard, Kentucky, became stranded when her car stalled in floodwaters on a state highway. Colombo began to panic when water started rushing in. Though her phone was dead, she saw a helicopter overhead and waved it down. The helicopter crew radioed a ground team that plucked her to safety.

Colombo stayed the night at her fiance's home in Jackson and they took turns sleeping, repeatedly checking the water with flashlights to see if it was rising. Though her car was a loss, Colombo said others had it worse in a region where poverty is endemic.

"Many of these people cannot recover out here. They have homes that are half underwater, they've lost everything," she said.

It's the latest in a string of catastrophic deluges that have pounded parts of the U.S. this summer, including St. Louis earlier this week and again on Friday. Scientists warn climate change is making weather disasters more common.

As rainfall hammered Appalachia this week, water tumbled down hillsides and into valleys and hollows where it swelled creeks and streams coursing through small towns. The torrent engulfed homes and businesses and trashed vehicles. Mudslides marooned some people on steep slopes.

Rescue teams backed by the National Guard used helicopters and boats to search for the missing. Beshear said Friday that at least six children were among the victims and that the total number of lives lost could more than double as rescue teams reach more areas. Among those who died were four children from the same family in Knott County, the county coroner said Friday.

President Joe Biden said in a social media post that he spoke Friday with Beshear and offered the federal government's support. Biden also declared a federal disaster to direct relief money to more than a dozen Kentucky counties.

The flooding extended into western Virginia and southern West Virginia.

Gov. Jim Justice declared a state of emergency for six counties in West Virginia where the flooding downed trees, power outages and blocked roads. Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin also made an emergency declaration, enabling officials to mobilize resources across the flooded southwest of the state.

More than 20,000 utility customers in Kentucky and almost 6,100 in Virginia remained without power late Friday, poweroutage.us reported.

Extreme rain events have become more common as climate change bakes the planet and alters weather patterns, according to scientists. That's a growing challenge for officials during disasters, because models used to predict storm impacts are in part based on past events and can't keep up with increasingly devastating flash floods and heat waves like those that have recently hit the Pacific Northwest and southern Plains.

"It's a battle of extremes going on right now in the United States," said University of Oklahoma meteorologist Jason Furtado. "These are things we expect to happen because of climate change. ... A warmer atmosphere holds more water vapor and that means you can produce increased heavy rainfall."

The deluge came two days after record rains around St. Louis dropped more than 12 inches (31 centimeters) and killed at least two people. Last month, heavy rain on mountain snow in Yellowstone National Park triggered historic flooding and the evacuation of more than 10,000 people. In both instances, the rain flooding far exceeded what forecasters predicted.

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The floodwaters raging through Appalachia were so swift that some people trapped in their homes couldn't be immediately reached, said Floyd County Judge-Executive Robbie Williams.

Just to the west in hard-hit Perry County, authorities said some people remained unaccounted for and almost everyone in the area suffered some sort of damage.

"We've still got a lot of searching to do," said Jerry Stacy, the county's emergency management director.

More than 330 people have sought shelter, Beshear said. And with property damage so extensive, the governor opened an online portal for donations to the victims.

Beshear predicted that it would take more than a year to fully rebuild.

The governor got a look at the flooding from aboard a helicopter Friday.

"Hundreds of homes, the ballfields, the parks, businesses under more water than I think any of us have ever seen in that area," the governor said. "Absolutely impassable in numerous spots. Just devastating."

Portions of at least 28 state roads in Kentucky were blocked due to flooding or mudslides, Beshear said. Rescue crews in Virginia and West Virginia worked to reach people where roads weren't passable.

WVa delays chance to pass 1st new bill since abortion ruling

By JOHN RABY Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — West Virginia lawmakers passed up the chance Friday to become the first state to approve new legislation restricting access to abortions since the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling last month removing its protected status as a constitutional right.

The Republican-dominated Senate adopted its version of a bill along with amendments, one of which removes criminal penalties for physicians who perform illegal abortions. Late Friday night the House of Delegates, which passed its bill Wednesday, refused to concur with the Senate amendments, instead asking for a conference committee to iron out differences among the bills.

Both chambers then adjourned until they are called back sometime next month.

Several GOP-led states had "trigger" abortion bans in place in advance of the court ruling, but West Virginia lawmakers are taking action because of legal uncertainty over whether a ban from the 1800s that was upended by the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision could be enforced now.

As in other states dominated by socially conservative lawmakers, there's not much question about whether abortion will be banned generally now that states have the power to do so — but whether the ban will apply to pregnancies caused by rape or incest.

In South Carolina, a ban without the exceptions has been introduced. In Arkansas, outgoing GOP Gov. Asa Hutchinson would prefer to add them to the ban that's already in effect, but he has balked at asking lawmakers to address the issue in a special session.

The high-profile example of a 10-year-old rape victim in Ohio, a state without an exception for rape in its abortion restrictions, who traveled to Indiana for an abortion has amplified the debate.

Tension over the question gripped the Indiana Senate in a session that began Thursday and finally wrapped up after midnight. A final vote there is expected Saturday on the bill, which includes exceptions for rape and incest.

The West Virginia bill, which some lawmakers have complained was not vetted by any Senate committees, would ban abortions except in case of rape or incest.

The Senate approved an amendment sponsored by a physician, Kanawha County Republican Tom Takubo, that removes criminal penalties of three to 10 years upon conviction for any medical provider who performs an abortion.

Takubo said the bill already would subject a physician to the difficult loss of their license for performing an illegal abortion. He also said West Virginia already has problems retaining medical professionals, and if the criminal penalties are retained it could have a chilling effect on the practice.

Another approved amendment offered by Greenbrier County Democrat Stephen Baldwin would allow a minor to report a rape to someone covered as a "mandated reporter," such as a pastor or school counselor, who would be required to report the case to authorities. The House version requires law enforcement to

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be directly contacted.

The measure allows exemptions for victims of rape and incest up to 14 weeks of pregnancy. The bill also provides other exceptions for an ectopic pregnancy, a "nonmedically viable fetus" or a medical emergency that could kill or cause a substantial and irreversible injury.

A dozen of the 34 senators gave impassioned speeches before the 21-10 vote. Three senators were absent. Some who said they supported the bill also indicated they weren't happy with it. Some Republicans wanted a blanket ban on abortion. Others wanted the criminal penalties for physicians restored.

The state's only abortion clinic initially stopped offering abortions after the latest ruling, but resumed this month as it mounted a court challenge on whether the old ban applied. On July 18, a Charleston judge barred the state from enforcing the ban, ruling it had been superseded by a slew of conflicting modern laws such as a ban on abortion after 20 weeks.

Republican Gov. Jim Justice called the special legislative session to consider an abortion ban. He didn't indicate whether he would sign either bill, and the governor's office didn't immediately return an email Thursday requesting comment.

On Friday, people seated in the packed galleries above the Senate chamber shouted "shame on you" when the afternoon session went into recess almost as soon as it started.

When the debate finally began hours later, Democrats complained that they did not have a final version of the Senate's bill prior to the start of Friday's session that included a dozen amendments.

"This has been a slow-motion train wreck," Senate Democratic leader Stephen Baldwin of Greenbrier County. "This bill would put doctors in jail for doing their job and for following their oath."

In Indiana on Thursday, there was a nearly four-hour delay in a Senate session as lawmakers met privately to discuss the exceptions, which were ultimately left in over strong objections from some conservative lawmakers.

"Exceptions equal death for unborn innocent children," said Sen. Mike Young, the Republican who filed an amendment that would only allow abortions to protect the life of the mother.

Eighteen Republicans ultimately joined 10 Democrats in voting to keep the rape and incest exceptions in the proposal. But the votes of many of the Republicans who voted for eliminating the exceptions will be needed for the bill to advance to the House. If not enough switch, it could keep abortion would remain legal in the state for now.

A final vote there is expected Saturday.

While legislative battles over abortion have begun, much of the fallout from the Supreme Court's decision has played out in the court system. In Louisiana, enforcement began of a near-total ban but was halted by a judge earlier this month. On Friday, a judge ruled enforcement could resume — though it was not immediately clear when.

Pope visits Nunavut for final apology of his Canadian tour

By NICOLE WINFIELD and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

IQUALUIT, Nunavut (AP) — Pope Francis traveled to the edge of the Arctic on Friday to deliver an apology to the Inuit people for the "evil" of Canada's residential schools, wrapping up his week-long "penitential pilgrimage" to Canada with a dramatic visit to the remote territory of Nunavut to meet with school survivors.

Francis landed in Iqaluit, population 7,500, and met with former students at a primary school to hear first-hand their experiences of being torn from their families and forced to attend church-run, government funded boarding schools. The aim of the policy, which was in effect from the late 1800s to the 1970s, was to sever children from their Native cultures and assimilate them into Canadian, Christian society.

"How evil it is to break the bonds uniting parents and children, to damage our closest relationships, to harm and scandalize the little ones!" Francis told a gathering of Inuit youths and elders outside the school.

He thanked the school survivors for their courage in sharing their suffering, which he had heard for the first time this past spring when delegations of First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples traveled to the Vatican to seek an apology.

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"This only renewed in me the indignation and shame that I have felt for months," Francis said. "I want to tell you how very sorry I am and to ask for forgiveness for the evil perpetrated by not a few Catholics who contributed to the policies of cultural assimilation and enfranchisement in those schools."

Before his speech, the pope — seated in a chair covered in seal skin — watched Inuit throat singers and dancers perform. During his address, he said "I'm sorry" in Inuktitut, the Inuit language, drawing cheers. And he ended by saying "thank you" in Inuktitut.

The events stretched far longer than planned; the pope's plane took off for Rome about 90 minutes behind schedule.

The visit capped an unusual tour designed specifically to give the pope opportunities to apologize to generations of Native peoples for the abuses and injustices they suffered and to assure them that he was committed to helping them reconcile their relationship with the Catholic Church. After stops in Edmonton, Alberta, and Quebec City, Francis ended his pilgrimage in Nunavut, a vast territory straddling the Arctic Circle that represents the farthest north the Argentine pope has ever traveled.

Ahead of his arrival, organizers readied scores of hats with mesh face protection to guard against the mosquitoes that sometimes abound in the mild summer temperatures of Iqaluit, which is some 200 miles south of the Arctic Circle.

The Canadian government has said physical and sexual abuse were rampant at the residential schools, and Francis on Thursday begged forgiveness for the "evil" of clergy sexual abuse, vowing an "irreversible commitment" to prevent it from happening again. His vow came after he omitted a reference to sexual abuse in his initial apology this week, upsetting some survivors and earning a complaint from the Canadian government.

Francis' apologies have received a mixed response, with some school survivors welcoming them as helpful to their healing and others saying far more needs to be done to correct past wrongs and pursue justice. Several protesters appeared at the main event in Iqaluit with placards making demands of this nature.

The Inuit community is seeking Vatican assistance to extradite an 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.

The Canadian government said this week that it had asked France to extradite Rivoire, but did not say when. Rivoire has denied wrongdoing.

Francis heard from survivors in a private meeting, including one woman whose daughter died at a residential school; the woman and her husband have been searching for her grave for years. Another speaker was the daughter of one of Rivoire's victims, who died after years of alcohol abuse, said Lieve Halsberghe, an advocate for clergy abuse victims who has fought for years to bring Rivoire to justice.

The Inuit warmly welcomed Francis to their homeland and lit a ceremonial lamp, or qulliq, for the occasion.

Francis referred to its symbolic significance in his remarks, saying it dispelled the darkness and brought warmth.

"We are here with the desire to pursue together a journey of healing and reconciliation that, with the help of the Creator, can help us shed light on what happened and move beyond that dark past," Francis said.

Directing himself to younger generations, Francis urged them, too, to choose light rather than dark, to keep hopes alive, aim high and protect the environment. He stressed the value of teamwork, recalling the successes of Canada's beloved national sport of ice hockey.

Jimmy Lucassi, an Inuit from Iqaluit, was at the school grounds for Francis' visit along with his wife and children. "It probably means a lot to a lot of people," he said. "It's all we've been talking about. They closed the stores to celebrate."

The trip was the first in which the 85-year-old pope was forced to use a wheelchair, walker and cane because of painful strained knee ligaments that forced him to cancel a trip to Africa earlier this month. Even with a reduced schedule, the trip was clearly uncomfortable for Francis and he has said he felt "limited" by his inability to freely move about as he pleases.

Future travel is not clear. Francis has said he wants to visit Kyiv, Ukraine, but no trip is immediately on the horizon. He is also expected in Kazakhstan in mid September for an inter-religious meeting that might provide an opportunity to meet with the Russian Patriarch Kirill, who has justified Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Reaction to Francis' visit to Canada has been mixed, with even the government saying his apology didn't go far enough in accepting blame for the institutional role the Catholic Church played in supporting the school policy.

Some school survivors have accepted his apology as genuine and helpful to their process of healing from trauma. Others have found it still wanting, angered that it took the discovery of presumed unmarked graves outside some residential schools for the pope to apologize after Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 specifically called for a papal apology to be delivered on Canadian soil.

Still others have demanded the church provide further information about the fate of children who never returned home from the schools and repudiating the 15th century papal bulls that informed the so-called "Doctrine of Discovery" which legitimized the colonial-era seizure of Native lands for the sake of spreading Christianity.

It is unlikely that the Vatican itself would hold records concerning the fate of Indigenous children who died at the schools, though it would have documentation on any priests who faced canonical penalties after 2001, and possibly some before then. If the documents about the children exist, they would likely be in the archives of individual religious orders.

House approves bill to help West fight wildfires, drought

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House on Friday approved wide-ranging legislation aimed at helping communities in the West cope with increasingly severe wildfires and drought — fueled by climate change — that have caused billions of dollars of damage to homes and businesses in recent years.

The measure combines 49 separate bills and would increase firefighter pay and benefits; boost resiliency and mitigation projects for communities affected by climate change; protect watersheds; and make it easier for wildfire victims to get federal assistance.

"Across America the impacts of climate change continue to worsen, and in this new normal, historic droughts and record-setting wildfires have become all too common," said Rep. Joe Neguse, D-Colo., the bill's chief co-sponsor. Colorado has suffered increasingly devastating wildfires in recent years, including the Marshall fire last year that caused more than \$513 million in damage and destroyed nearly 1,100 homes and structures in Boulder County.

"What once were wildfire seasons are now wildfire years. For families across the country who have lost their homes due to these devastating wildfires and for the neighborhoods impacted by drought, we know that we need to apply a whole-of-government approach to support community recovery and bolster environmental resiliency," Neguse said. "This is a bill that we believe meets the moment for the West."

The bill was approved, 218-199, as firefighters in California battled a blaze that forced evacuation of thousands of people near Yosemite National Park and crews in North Texas sought to contain another fire.

One Republican, Pennsylvania Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, voted in favor of the bill, while Oregon Rep. Kurt Schrader was the only Democrat to oppose it.

The bill now goes to the Senate, where Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., has sponsored a similar measure.

Both the House and Senate bills would permanently boost pay and benefits for federal wildland firefighters. President Joe Biden signed a measure last month giving them a hefty raise for the next two years, a move that affects more than 16,000 firefighters and comes as much of the West braces for another difficult wildfire season.

Pay raises for the federal firefighters had been included in last year's \$1 trillion infrastructure bill, but the money was held up as federal agencies studied recruitment and retention data to decide where to deliver them. The raise approved by Biden was retroactive to Oct. 1, 2021, and expires Sept. 30, 2023.

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The House bill would make the pay raises permanent and sets minimum pay for federal wildland firefighters at \$20 per hour, or nearly \$42,000 a year. It also raises eligibility for hazardous-duty pay and boosts mental health and other services for firefighters. The bill is named after smokejumper Tim Hart, who died fighting a wildfire in New Mexico last year.

"The West is hot — hotter than ever — it is dry and when it is windy, the West is on fire," said Rep. Kim Schrier, D-Wash. "And we are seeing this every year because of climate change. That's why this bill is so important."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., called the bill "a major victory for Californians — and for the country." The Oak Fire, the largest wildfire so far this year, "is ravaging our state," she said. "At the same time, countless of our communities regularly suffer lack of rainfall that can kill crops and further fuel fires."

The House bill would deliver "urgently needed resources" to combat fires and droughts, "which will only increase in frequency and intensity due to the climate crisis," Pelosi said. The bill includes \$500 million to preserve water levels in key reservoirs in the drought-stricken Colorado River and invest in water recycling and desalination.

Republicans denounced the measure as "political messaging," noting that firefighters' hourly pay has already been increased above \$20 in most cases. The House bill does not appropriate additional money for the Forest Service or other agencies, and without such an increase, the Forest Service says it would have to lay off about 470 wildland firefighters.

Rep. Bruce Westerman of Arkansas, the top Republican on the House Natural Resources Committee, called it "egregious" that Democrats would seek to enact provisions that could lead to firefighter layoffs in the midst of a devastating wildfire season.

"Democrats are finally waking up to the wildfire and drought crises, exacerbated by years of forest mismanagement and a lack of long-term water storage. Unfortunately, Democrats' proposals are anything but solutions," Westerman said. He accused Democrats of failing to follow science showing the need to manage forests before fires begin, and said Democrats "fail to construct the kind of long-term infrastructure needed to make communities resilient to drought" while prioritizing "liberal talking points" about climate change.

Neguse called that accusation outrageous and noted that many of the bills included in the wildfire/drought legislation are Republican proposals.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said the bill was important to the whole country — not just the West, where wildfires and drought are a daily reality.

"We are one nation indivisible and if one part of us is burning, we are all burning," Hoyer said.

Besides boosting firefighter pay, the bill enhances forest management projects intended to reduce hazardous fuels such as small trees and underbrush that can make wildfires far more dangerous. It also establishes grant programs to help communities affected by air pollution from wildfires and improve watersheds damaged by wildfire.

Republicans called the thinning projects — which also include prescribed burns and removal of vegetation — meaningless without waivers of lengthy environmental reviews that can delay forest treatment by years.

The White House said in a statement that it supports efforts to address climate change, wildfires and drought, but wants to "work with the Congress to ensure the many provisions in the (bill) avoid duplication with existing authorities and administration efforts."

Review: Beyoncé escapes to dance world in 'Renaissance'

By NARDOS HAILE Associated Press

"Renaissance," Beyoncé (Columbia Records)

Beyoncé has been reborn again; this time it's on a shimmering dance floor.

But in her seventh studio album, "Renaissance," she has subverted the public's perception of her hitmaking history. Six years since her Grammy award-winning "Lemonade," people expect Beyoncé to consistently deliver. But she does not allow herself to be pigeonholed in her consistency, perfectionism and pop/R&B genre. She croons confidently in "Cozy," that she is "comfortable in my skin. Cozy with who I am," and it

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shows in this hour-long 16-track album.

Her voice glides with comfortability and ease in this cohesive dance-music album influenced by Black artists like disco queens Diana Ross and Donna Summer ("Summer Renaissance,") sampling Summer's "I Feel Love," Afrobeats ("Move") and most surprisingly twinges of Generation Z's favorite fast-paced hyper-pop ("All Up In Your Mind").

Each song is an adventurous, experimental journey into Beyoncé's pandemic psyche. In the album announcement posted on her Instagram, she said that creating this album has allowed her "to dream and to find escape during a scary time for the world."

Beyoncé builds a wistful, fun, out-of-body and almost extraterrestrial world filled with love, joy and friendship in "Renaissance." It's a world devoid of the intensity of the political, social and environmental challenges she states are present in 2022.

Speaking of an extraterrestrial world, "Alien Superstar," sampling Right Said Fred's 90s hit "I'm Too Sexy," pays homage to ballroom dance culture. The singer boldly states against a thumping rhythm and synth, that she is "too classy for this world, forever, I'm that girl."

The album's high points are significantly due to the seamless transitions into each song like "Cuff It" and "Energy." "Cuff It" begins as a summer disco/R&B fusion anthem to fall in love with as Beyoncé proclaims she feels like falling in love with a drink in her hand. "Cuff It" transitions to "Energy," which starts with Jamaican American rapper BEAM.

Standouts are "Virgo's Groove" and "Heated," which was co-written by Drake who dropped his own dance-inspired album earlier this summer. In both songs, Beyoncé is enjoying a summer filled with partying, dancing and self-love but also romantic love, singing that her partner's love keeps her alive in "Virgo's Groove."

The singer's long-awaited album is a successful reclaiming of dance music. She emphasizes a need to look outward and create a circle of love where people can venture out to the dance floor with no hesitation, no judgment — just dance.

House passes bill banning certain semi-automatic guns

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House passed legislation Friday to revive a ban on certain semi-automatic guns, the first vote of its kind in years and a direct response to the firearms often used in the crush of mass shootings ripping through communities nationwide.

Once banned in the U.S., the high-powered firearms are now widely blamed as the weapon of choice among young men responsible for many of the most devastating mass shootings. But Congress allowed the restrictions first put in place in 1994 on the manufacture and sales of the weapons to expire a decade later, unable to muster the political support to counter the powerful gun lobby and reinstate the weapons ban.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi pushed the vote toward passage in the Democratic-run House, saying the earlier ban "saved lives."

President Joe Biden hailed the House vote, saying, "The majority of the American people agree with this common sense action." He urged the Senate to "move quickly to get this bill to my desk."

However, it is likely to stall in the 50-50 Senate. The House legislation is shunned by Republicans, who dismissed it as an election-year strategy by Democrats. Almost all Republicans voted against the House bill, which passed 217-213.

The bill comes at a time of intensifying concerns about gun violence and shootings — the supermarket shooting in Buffalo, N.Y.; massacre of school children in Uvalde, Texas; and the July Fourth shootings of revelers in Highland Park, Ill.

Voters seem to be taking such election-year votes seriously as Congress splits along party lines and lawmakers are forced to go on the record with their views. A recent vote to protect same-sex marriages from potential Supreme Court legal challenges won a surprising amount of bipartisan support.

Biden was instrumental in helping secure the first semi-automatic weapons ban as a senator in 1994. The

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Biden administration said that for 10 years, while the ban was in place, mass shootings declined. "When the ban expired in 2004, mass shootings tripled," the statement said.

Republicans stood firmly against limits on ownership of the high-powered firearms during an at times emotional debate ahead of voting.

"It's a gun grab, pure and simple," said Rep. Guy Reschenthaler, R-Pa.

Said Rep. Andrew Clyde, R-Ga., "An armed America is a safe and free America."

Democrats argued that the ban on the weapons makes sense, portraying Republicans as extreme and out of step with Americans.

Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., said the weapons ban is not about taking away Americans' Second Amendment rights but ensuring that children also have the right "to not get shot in school."

Pelosi displayed a poster of a gun company's advertisement for children's weapons, smaller versions that resemble the popular AR-15 rifles and are marketed with cartoon-like characters. "Disgusting," she said.

In one exchange, two Ohio lawmakers squared off. "Your freedom stops where mine begins, and that of my constituents begins," Democratic Rep. Marcy Kaptur told Republican Rep. Jim Jordan. "Schools, shopping malls, grocery stores, Independence Day parades shouldn't be scenes of mass carnage and bloodshed."

Jordan replied by inviting her to his congressional district to debate him on the Second Amendment, saying he believed most of his constituents "probably agree with me and agree with the United States Constitution."

The bill would make it unlawful to import, sell or manufacture a long list of semi-automatic weapons. Judiciary Committee Chairman Rep. Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., said it includes an exemption that allows for the possession of existing semi-automatic guns.

Reps. Chris Jacobs of New York and Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania were the only Republicans to vote for the measure. The Democratic lawmakers voting no were Reps. Kurt Schrader of Oregon, Henry Cuellar of Texas, Jared Golden of Maine, Ron Kind of Wisconsin and Vicente Gonzalez of Texas.

For nearly two decades, since the previous ban expired Democrats had been reluctant to revisit the issue and confront the gun lobby. But voter opinions appear to be shifting and Democrats dared to act before the fall election. The outcome will provide information for voters of where the candidates stand on the issue.

Jason Quimet, executive director of the NRA Institute for Legislative Action, said in a statement following the vote that "barely a month after" the Supreme Court expanded gun rights "gun control advocates in Congress are spearheading an assault upon the freedoms and civil liberties of law-abiding Americans."

He said the bill potentially bans millions of firearms "in blatant opposition to the Supreme Court's rulings" that have established gun ownership as an individual right and expanded on it.

Among the semi-automatic weapons banned would be some 200-plus types of semi-automatic rifles, including AR-15s, and pistols. The restrictions would not apply to many other models.

Democrats had tried to link the weapons ban to a broader package of public safety measures that would have increased federal funding for law enforcement. It's something centrist Democrats in tough re-election campaigns wanted to shield them from political attacks by their Republican opponents they are soft on crime.

Pelosi said the House will revisit the public safety bills in August when lawmakers are expected to return briefly to Washington to handle other remaining legislation, including Biden's priority inflation-fighting package of health care and climate change strategies making its way in the Senate.

Congress passed a modest gun violence prevention package just last month in the aftermath of the tragic shooting of 19 school children and two teachers in Uvalde. That bipartisan bill was the first of its kind after years of failed efforts to confront the gun lobby, including after a similar 2012 mass tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

That law provides for expanded background checks on young adults buying firearms, allowing authorities to access certain juvenile records. It also closes the so-called "boyfriend loophole" by denying gun purchases for those convicted of domestic abuse outside of marriages.

The new law also frees up federal funding to the states, including for "red flag" laws that enable authorities to remove guns from those who would harm themselves or others.

But even that modest effort at halting gun violence came at time of grave uncertainty in the U.S. over restrictions on firearms as the more conservative Supreme Court is tackling gun rights and other issues.

Biden signed the measure two days after the Supreme Court's ruling striking down a New York law that restricted people's ability to carry concealed weapons.

Governor: Search for Kentucky flood victims could take weeks

By DYLAN LOVAN, BRUCE SCHREINER and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

JACKSON, Ky. (AP) — Kentucky's governor said it could take weeks to find all the victims of flash flooding that killed at least 16 people when heavy rains turned streams into torrents that swamped towns across Appalachia.

More rainstorms were forecast to roll through in coming days, keeping the region on edge as rescue crews struggled to get into hard-hit areas that include some of the poorest places in America.

The rain let up early Friday after some areas of eastern Kentucky received between 8 and 10 1/2 inches (20-27 centimeters) over 48 hours. But some waterways were not expected to crest until Saturday and Gov. Andy Beshear warned the death toll could rise sharply.

"From everything we've seen, we may be updating the count of how many we lost for the next several weeks," Gov. Andy Beshear said. "In some of these areas, it's hard to know exactly how many people were there."

Patricia Colombo, 63, of Hazard, Kentucky, got stranded after her car stalled in floodwaters on a state highway. Colombo began to panic when water started rushing in. Her phone was dead, but she saw a helicopter overhead and waved it down. The helicopter crew radioed a team on the ground that pulled her safely from her car.

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"Many of these people cannot recover out here. They have homes that are half underwater, they've lost everything," she said.

It's the latest in a string of catastrophic deluges that have hammered parts of the U.S. this summer, including St. Louis earlier this week and again on Friday. Scientists warn climate change is making weather disasters more common.

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patterns, according to scientists. That's a growing challenge for officials during disasters, because models used to predict storm impacts are in part based on past events and can't keep up with increasingly devastating flash floods and heat waves like those that have recently hit the Pacific Northwest and southern Plains.

"It's a battle of extremes going on right now in the United States," said University of Oklahoma meteorologist Jason Furtado. "These are things we expect to happen because of climate change. ... A warmer atmosphere holds more water vapor and that means you can produce increased heavy rainfall."

The deluge came two days after record rains around St. Louis dropped more than 12 inches (31 centimeters) and killed at least two people. Last month, heavy rain on mountain snow in Yellowstone National Park triggered historic flooding and the evacuation of more than 10,000 people. In both instances, the rain flooding far exceeded what forecasters predicted.

The floodwaters raging through Appalachia were so swift that some people trapped in their homes couldn't be immediately reached, said Floyd County Judge-Executive Robbie Williams.

Just to the west in hard-hit Perry County, authorities said some people remained unaccounted for and almost everyone in the area had suffered some sort of damage.

"We've still got a lot of searching to do," said Jerry Stacy, the emergency management director in Perry County.

More than 330 people have sought shelter, Beshear said. And with property damage so extensive, the governor opened an online portal for donations to the victims.

Beshear predicted that would take more than a year to fully rebuild.

The governor got a look at the flooding Friday aboard a helicopter.

"Hundreds of homes, the ballfields, the parks, businesses under more water than I think any of us have ever seen in that area," the governor said. "Absolutely impassable in numerous spots. Just devastating."

Portions of at least 28 state roads in Kentucky were blocked due to flooding or mudslides, Beshear said. Rescue crews in Virginia and West Virginia worked to reach people where roads weren't passable.

Appalachian flooding deaths set to climb; more rain forecast

By DYLAN LOVAN, BRUCE SCHREINER and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

JACKSON, Ky. (AP) — Trapped homeowners swam to safety and others were rescued by boat as record flash flooding killed at least 16 people in Kentucky and swamped entire Appalachian towns, prompting a frenzied search for survivors Friday through some of the poorest communities in America.

Authorities warned the death toll would likely grow sharply as search efforts continued. The rain let up early Friday morning, but some waterways were not expected to crest until Saturday and more storms were forecast to roll through the region early next week.

It's the latest in a string of catastrophic deluges that have hammered parts of the U.S. this summer, including St. Louis earlier this week and again Friday. Scientists warn climate change is making weather disasters more common.

Water poured down hillsides and into Appalachian valleys and hollows where it swelled creeks and streams coursing through small towns. The torrent engulfed homes and businesses and trashed vehicles. Mudslides marooned some people on steep slopes.

Rescue teams backed by the National Guard used helicopters and boats to search for the missing. But some areas remained inaccessible and Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said the death toll was "going to get a lot higher." It could take weeks to account for all victims, he said.

Patricia Colombo, 63, of Hazard, Kentucky, got stranded after her car stalled in floodwaters on a state highway. Colombo began to panic when water started rushing in. Her phone was dead, but she saw a helicopter overhead and waved it down. The helicopter crew radioed a team on the ground that pulled her safely from her car.

Colombo stayed the night at her fiance's home in Jackson and they took turns sleeping, repeatedly checking the water with flashlights to see if it was rising. Colombo lost her car but said others who were

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struggling prior to the floods had it worse.

"Many of these people cannot recover out here. They have homes that are half underwater, they've lost everything," she said.

The water came into Rachel Patton's Floyd County home so quickly that her mother, who is on oxygen, had to be evacuated on a door floated across the high water. Patton's voice faltered as she described their harrowing escape.

"We had to swim out and it was cold. It was over my head so it was, it was scary," she told WCHS-TV.

Beshear said Friday that at least six children were among the victims and that the total number of lives lost could more than double as rescue teams reach more areas. Among those who died were four children from the same family in Knott County, Coroner Corey Watson said Friday.

At least 33,000 utility customers were without power. The flooding extended into western Virginia and southern West Virginia, across a region where poverty is endemic.

"There are hundreds of families that have lost everything," Beshear said. "And many of these families didn't have much to begin with. And so it hurts even more. But we're going to be there for them."

Extreme rain events have become more common as climate change bakes the planet and alters weather patterns, according to scientists. That's a growing challenge for officials during disasters, because models used to predict storm impacts are in part based on past events and can't keep up with increasingly devastating flash floods, hurricanes and heat waves.

"This is what climate change looks like," meteorologist and Weather Underground founder Jeff Masters said of flooding in Appalachia and the Midwest. "These extreme rainfall events are the type you would expect to see in a warming world."

A day before the floods hit Appalachia, the National Weather Service had said Wednesday that there was a "slight to moderate risk of flash flooding" across the region on Thursday.

The deluge came two days after record rains around St. Louis dropped more than 12 inches (31 centimeters) and killed at least two people. Last month, heavy rain on mountain snow in Yellowstone National Park triggered historic flooding and the evacuation of more than 10,000 people. In both instances, the rain flooding far exceeded what forecasters predicted.

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More than 330 people have sought shelter, Beshear said. And with property damage so extensive, the governor opened an online portal for donations to the victims.

President Joe Biden called to express his support for what will be a lengthy recovery effort, Beshear said, predicting it will take more than a year to fully rebuild.

Biden also declared a federal disaster to direct relief money to more than a dozen Kentucky counties, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency appointed an officer to coordinate the recovery. FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell said at a briefing with Beshear that the agency would bring whatever resources were necessary to support search and recovery efforts.

Even the governor had problems reaching the devastation. His initial plans to tour the disaster area were postponed Friday because of unsafe conditions at an airport where he was to land. He got a look at the flooding later in the day aboard a helicopter.

"Hundreds of homes, the ballfields, the parks, businesses under more water than I think any of us have ever seen in that area," the governor said. "Absolutely impassable in numerous spots. Just devastating."

Portions of at least 28 state roads in Kentucky were blocked due to flooding or mudslides, Beshear said. Rescue crews in Virginia and West Virginia worked to reach people where roads weren't passable.

Gov. Jim Justice declared a state of emergency for six counties in West Virginia where the flooding

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downed trees, power outages and blocked roads. Gov. Glenn Youngkin also made an emergency declaration, enabling Virginia to mobilize resources across the flooded southwest of the state.

The National Weather Service said another storm front adding misery to flood victims in St. Louis on Friday could bring more thunderstorms to the Appalachians in coming days.

The hardest hit areas of eastern Kentucky received between 8 and 10 1/2 inches (20-27 centimeters) over 48 hours, said National Weather Service meteorologist Brandon Bonds.

The North Fork of the Kentucky River broke records in at least two places. It reached 20.9 feet (6.4 meters) in Whitesburg — more than 6 feet (1.8 meters) over the previous record — and crested at 43.5 feet (13.25 meters) in Jackson, Bonds said.

Stocks rally again, close out best month since Nov. 2020

By ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

Stocks racked up more gains Friday as Wall Street closed out its best month since November 2020, a welcome breather for investors after a punishing year for the market.

The S&P 500 index, a benchmark for many stock funds, rose 1.4% and finished 9.1% higher for July. A rebound in technology stocks, big retailers and other companies that rely on direct consumer spending helped power the index's broad gains this month. The index is still down 13.3% for the year.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq rose 1.9%, ending the month 12.4% higher, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 1% and notched a 6.7% gain for the month.

The latest rally came as investors weighed a mix of company earnings reports and new data showing inflation jumped by the most in four decades last month.

Stock gains in recent weeks have been fueled by better-than-expected corporate earnings reports and falling bond yields, which have pulled back after soaring much of this year on expectations of higher interest rates.

"You've had 10-year Treasury yields come down precipitously," said Rob Haworth, senior investment strategist at U.S. Bank Wealth Management. "With inflation so hot, I think the expectation is the Fed stays on path, but it's damaging enough for the economy that they're going to have to pivot in 2023."

The S&P 500 rose 57.86 points to 4,130.29. The Dow gained 315.50 points to close at 32,845.13. The Nasdaq rose 228.09 points to 12,390.69.

Smaller company stocks also gained ground. The Russell 2000 rose 12.20 points, or 0.7%, to 1,885.23. It ended July with a 10.4% gain.

Weak economic data, including a report Thursday showing that the U.S. economy contracted last quarter and could be in a recession, have also spurred stocks higher by giving some investors confidence that the Federal Reserve will be able to dial back its aggressive pace of rate hikes sooner than expected.

The central bank raised its key short-term interest rate by 0.75 percentage points on Wednesday, lifting it to the highest level since 2018. The Fed is raising rates in a bid to slow the U.S. economy and quell inflation.

An inflation gauge that is closely tracked by the Federal Reserve jumped 6.8% in June from a year ago, the biggest increase in four decades, leaving Americans with no relief from surging prices. On a month-to-month basis, inflation accelerated to 1% in June from May's 0.6% monthly increase, the Commerce Department said Friday.

The figures underscored the persistence of the inflation that is eroding Americans' purchasing power, dimming their confidence in the economy and threatening Democrats in Congress in the run-up to the November midterm elections.

Some market watchers advised against placing too much emphasis on the June data, however.

"This inflation metric is for June and we know much has changed since then, especially gas prices, so investors should put this inflation report into historical context," said Jeffrey Roach, chief economist for LPL Financial. "Looking ahead, July inflation rates will ease a bit from the previous month as food and energy costs should wane in July."

Still, inflation hit one company in its earnings on Friday: consumer staples giant Procter & Gamble. Shares in the maker of Tide laundry detergent fell 5.3% after the company said consumers were cutting back,

but the company's recent price increases were keeping profits up.

Other company earnings reports were more encouraging.

Exxon and Chevron posted record quarterly profits last quarter amid high oil and gas prices. The two companies made \$46 billion last quarter and roughly four times the amount of money they made in the same period a year earlier. Chevron shares jumped 8.9% to a six-week high, while Exxon rose 4.6%.

Amazon surged 10.4% for the biggest gain in the S&P 500 after the company posted a quarterly loss, but its revenue jumped sharply in the quarter.

Apple rose 3.3% after its quarterly earnings came in better than Wall Street expected. The iPhone maker saw its profit for the April-June period decline by 10% while revenue edged up 2% as it grappled with manufacturing headaches and inflation pressures.

It was a mixed day in the bond market. The two-year Treasury yield, which tends to move with expectations for the Fed, rose to 2.89% from 2.87% late Thursday. The 10-year yield, which influences mortgage rates, fell to 2.65% from 2.67%.

Russia, Ukraine trade blame for deadly attack on POW prison

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia and Ukraine accused each other Friday of shelling a prison in a separatist region of eastern Ukraine, an attack that reportedly killed dozens of Ukrainian prisoners of war captured after the fall of Mariupol, the city where troops famously held out against a monthslong Russian siege.

Both sides said the assault was premeditated with the aim of covering up atrocities.

Russia claimed that Ukraine's military used U.S.-supplied rocket launchers to strike the prison in Olenivka, a settlement controlled by the Moscow-backed Donetsk People's Republic. Separatist authorities and Russian officials said the attack killed 53 Ukrainian POWs and wounded another 75.

Moscow opened a probe into the attack, sending a team to the site from Russia's Investigative Committee, the country's main criminal investigation agency. The state RIA Novosti agency reported that fragments of U.S.-supplied precision High Mobility Artillery Rocket System rockets were found at the site.

The Ukrainian military denied making any rocket or artillery strikes in Olenivka, and it accused the Russians of shelling the prison to cover up the alleged torture and execution of Ukrainians there. An adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the shelling as "a deliberate, cynical, calculated mass murder of Ukrainian prisoners."

Neither claim could be independently verified.

Video shot by The Associated Press showed charred, twisted bed frames in the wrecked barracks, as well as burned bodies and metal sheets hanging from the destroyed roof. The footage also included bodies lined up on the ground next to a barbed-wire fence and an array of what was claimed to be metal rocket fragments on a wooden bench.

Denis Pushilin, the leader of the internationally unrecognized Donetsk republic, said the prison held 193 inmates. He did not specify how many were Ukrainian POWs.

The deputy commander of the Donetsk separatist forces, Eduard Basurin, suggested that Ukraine decided to strike the prison to prevent captives from revealing key military information.

Ukraine "knew exactly where they were being held and in what place," he said. "After the Ukrainian prisoners of war began to talk about the crimes they committed, and orders they received from Kyiv, a decision was made by the political leadership of Ukraine: carry out a strike here."

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak called for a "strict investigation" into the attack and urged the United Nations and other international organizations to condemn it. He said the Russians had transferred some Ukrainian prisoners to the barracks just a few days before the strike, suggesting that it was planned.

"The purpose — to discredit Ukraine in front of our partners and disrupt weapons supply," he tweeted.

Ukrainian officials alleged that Russia's Wagner Group, mercenaries Russia has used in other armed conflicts and reportedly elsewhere in Ukraine, carried out the assault.

Ukraine's security agencies issued a statement citing evidence that Russia was responsible, including

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the transfer of prisoners, analysis of injuries and the blast wave, intercepted phone conversations and the absence of shelling at the site.

"All this leaves no doubt: The explosion in Olenivka was a Russian terrorist act and a gross violation of international agreements," the statement said.

A Russian Defense Ministry spokesperson, Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, described the strike as a "bloody provocation" aimed at discouraging Ukrainian soldiers from surrendering. He too claimed that U.S.-supplied HIMARS rockets were used, and said eight guards were among the wounded.

Ukrainian forces are fighting to hold on to the remaining territory under their control in Donetsk. Together with the neighboring Luhansk province, they make up Ukraine's mostly Russian-speaking industrial Donbas region.

For several months, Moscow has focused on trying to seize parts of the Donbas not already held by the separatists.

Holding POWs in an area with active fighting appeared to defy the Geneva Convention, which requires that prisoners be evacuated as soon as possible after capture to camps away from combat zones.

The Ukrainian POWs at the Donetsk prison included troops captured during the fall of Mariupol. They spent months holed up with civilians at a giant steel mill in the southern port city. Their resistance during a relentless Russian bombardment became a symbol of Ukrainian defiance against Russia's aggression.

More than 2,400 soldiers from the Azov Regiment of the Ukrainian national guard and other military units gave up their fight and surrendered under orders from Ukraine's military in May.

Scores of Ukrainian soldiers have been taken to prisons in Russian-controlled areas. Some have returned to Ukraine as part of prisoner exchanges with Russia, but the families of other POWs have no idea whether their loved ones are still alive, or if they will ever come home.

In other developments Friday:

— U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke by phone to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in the highest-level known contact between the two sides since Russia invaded Ukraine. Blinken urged Russia to accept a deal to win the release of American detainees Brittney Griner and Paul Whelan.

— Ukraine's president visited one of the country's main Black Sea ports a week after a deal was struck to create safe corridors for grain shipments that have been trapped in the country since the war began. Workers were seen preparing terminals for grain exports, which are relied on by millions of impoverished people worldwide. Zelenskyy said the shipments would begin with the departure of several vessels that were already loaded but could not leave when Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

— The Ukrainian presidential office said at least 13 civilians were killed and another 36 wounded in Russian shelling over the last 24 hours. In the southern city of Mykolaiv, at least four people were killed and seven others wounded when Russian shelling hit a bus stop. The Russian barrage also hit a facility that distributed humanitarian aid where three people were wounded, officials said. Ukrainian officials also said at least four civilians were killed and five hurt in the eastern town of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region.

— An appeals court in Kyiv on Friday reduced to 15 years the life sentence of a Russian soldier convicted in the first war crimes trial since Russia invaded Ukraine. Critics had said the sentencing of Vadim Shishimarin, 21, was unduly harsh given that he confessed to the crime and expressed remorse. He pleaded guilty to killing a civilian and was convicted in May. His defense lawyer argued that Shishimarin shot a Ukrainian man on the orders of his superiors.

US rules out summer COVID boosters to focus on fall campaign

By MATTHEW PERRONE and LAURAN NEERGAARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. regulators said Friday they are no longer considering authorizing a second COVID-19 booster shot for all adults under 50 this summer, focusing instead on revamped vaccines for the fall that will target the newest viral subvariants.

Pfizer and Moderna expect to have updated versions of their shots available as early as September, the Food and Drug Administration said in a statement. That would set the stage for a fall booster campaign

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to strengthen protection against the latest versions of omicron.

The announcement means the U.S. won't pursue a summer round of boosters using the current vaccines for adults under 50, as some Biden administration officials and outside experts previously suggested. They had argued that another round of shots now could help head off rising cases and hospitalizations caused by the highly transmissible omicron strains.

Currently, all Americans age 5 and over are eligible for a booster shot five months after their initial primary series. Fourth doses of the Pfizer or Moderna shots — a second booster — are recommended for Americans 50 and older and for younger people with serious health issues that make them more vulnerable to COVID-19.

The FDA urged eligible adults who haven't been boosted to get their extra shot now: "You can still benefit from existing booster options and leave time to receive an updated booster in the fall," the agency said in a statement.

The White House has also emphasized that getting a fourth dose now won't impact anyone's ability to get omicron-targeted shots once they're made available — although how long it's been since their last dose will play a role in how soon they're eligible.

Two omicron subvariants, BA.4 and BA.5, are even more contagious than their predecessors and have pushed new daily cases above 125,000 and hospitalizations to 6,300. Those are the highest levels since February, though deaths have remained low at about 360 per day, thanks to widespread immunity and improved treatments against the virus.

The subvariants are offshoots of the strain responsible for nearly all of the virus spread in the U.S. this year.

All the COVID-19 vaccines given in the U.S. until now have been based on the original version of the virus that began spreading across the country in early 2020.

In June, the FDA told the vaccine makers that any boosters for the fall would have to combine protection against omicron BA.4 and BA.5 and the original coronavirus strain. Both manufacturers have been speeding their production and data gathering to have those so-called bivalent vaccines ready for the fall.

The FDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would have to sign off on revamped shots before their launch.

The U.S. has a contract to buy 105 million doses of the Pfizer combination shots once they're ready, and 66 million of Moderna's version. But how soon large amounts would become available isn't clear. The government contracts include options to purchase 300 million doses each, but reaching that total will require more funding from Congress, the Biden administration said.

As for timing, getting a booster too soon after the previous dose means missing out on its full benefit — something policymakers will have to take into consideration when rolling out revamped shots.

The White House has at times been frustrated by the pace of decision-making at the FDA and CDC, most notably last summer, when the regulators took weeks to decide whether to authorize the first booster dose for U.S. adults. Privately, West Wing officials believe the delay cost lives, preventing optimum protection amid the delta and omicron surges, but also fed into doubts about vaccine and booster effectiveness that impacted their uptake.

In recent weeks, some of those frustrations have bubbled up again, as regulators considered whether to recommend a fourth shot for all adults, not just those at highest risk from the virus. Some in the White House believe that the additional dose would have helped somewhat with the rapidly spreading BA.5 sub-variant, and also lift the confidence of anyone worried that their protection had waned.

Still, officials across the government have acknowledged the risks of vaccine fatigue among Americans, including tens of millions who still haven't received their first booster. Government figures show less than half of those eligible for a booster have gotten that third shot.

A look at pending legislation to protect same-sex marriages

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The Respect for Marriage Act, now pending in the Senate, would ensure that same-sex marriages are still legally recognized nationwide if the Supreme Court were to overturn its 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges decision that declared a constitutional right for gay couples to wed.

The House-passed legislation has some Republican support and is expected to come up for a vote in September. It is part of an effort by Democrats to protect various rights after Supreme Court decision last month to overturn Roe vs. Wade, which legalized abortion in all states.

While the Senate is not expected to approve separate House bills to legalize abortion or protect contraception rights, the same-sex marriage legislation has a real shot at passage after a handful of Republican senators indicated they would vote for it. Democrats need 10 GOP votes to overcome a filibuster and get the legislation through the 50-50 Senate.

A look at the bill:

PROTECTS, BUT DOESN'T CODIFY

The bill is designed to protect same-sex marriages after Justice Clarence Thomas suggested in a concurring opinion that the Obergefell decision upholding gay marriage should also be reconsidered.

The legislation wouldn't codify, or enshrine into law, Obergefell, which now requires states to issue same-sex marriage licenses. If the bill were passed and Obergefell were later overturned, some states could stop issuing those licenses, but all states would still have to recognize same-sex marriages performed legally in other states.

The practical effect of that would be that some people couldn't get married in their own states, but all same-sex marriages would continue to be recognized and eligible for the legal benefits of marriage.

Wisconsin Sen. Tammy Baldwin, the lead Democrat pushing the bill in the Senate, says the legislation was written that way because marriage is currently regulated by the states, not the federal government. Any legislation requiring federal regulation of marriages would be unlikely to garner enough support to pass.

REPEAL THE DEFENSE OF MARRIAGE ACT

If Obergefell were overturned today, federal law would partially revert to a 1996 statute called the Defense of Marriage Act. That legislation allowed states not to recognize same-sex marriages and legally defined the word "marriage" as a union between one man and one woman.

The bill would fully repeal that law, replacing it with the new language requiring that states and the federal government consider an individual married if they have been legally married in any state.

A separate 2013 Supreme Court case, *United States v. Windsor*, repealed part of the Defense of Marriage Act that kept legally married same-sex couples from receiving federal tax, health and pension benefits that were otherwise available to married couples. The bill includes provisions to ensure those benefits remain for same-sex couples, as well.

INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE

In addition to same-sex marriages, the bill would protect interracial marriages that were affirmed by the 1960s-era Supreme Court decision *Loving v. Virginia*. That decision invalidated state laws that banned marriages between individuals of different races.

The bill prohibits states "from denying full faith and credit to an out-of-state marriage based on the sex, race, ethnicity or national origin of the individuals in the marriage."

White House: No need for tensions if Pelosi visits Taiwan

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There's no reason for China and the U.S. "to come to blows" should House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visit Taiwan during an Asia trip she is expected to make soon, the White House said Friday, underscoring the international tensions surrounding her travel plans.

The remarks by National Security Council spokesman John Kirby came as Pelosi, D-Calif., offered a rationale for a visit to Asia that she had yet to publicly acknowledge. Kirby was asked Friday if the U.S. has noticed any Chinese military preparations due to her travel plans.

"There's no reason for it to come to that, to come to blows, to come to increased physical tension,"

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Kirby said at the White House. "There's no reason for that because there's been no change in American policy with respect to One China."

Seeming to stop just short of saying she would travel there, Pelosi said, "I'm very excited that should we go to the countries, that you'll be hearing about along the way about the conversations" she would have there.

She noted President Joe Biden's focus on Asia and referenced his recent trip to South Korea and Japan, telling reporters, "He has visited there, his vice president has visited, the secretary of commerce and others. And we want the Congress of the United States to be part of that initiative."

Pelosi and her aides have not confirmed her travel plans or named the countries she might visit, citing security concerns. China considers Taiwan its own territory and has said it might reclaim the island democracy by force.

For more than four decades, the U.S. has followed a "one China" policy in which it recognizes Beijing as the government of China yet maintains informal relations and defense ties with Taiwan.

China has objected strenuously to any Taiwan visit by Pelosi, warning of "resolute and strong measures" if she does.

Biden said earlier this month that the Pentagon thinks a Pelosi trip to Taiwan is "not a good idea right now." Senior defense officials who briefed reporters on Friday declined to discuss any potential preparations for a trip.

Biden has designed his foreign policy in part around countering China's growing economic and military might. Pelosi's itinerary has also become a domestic political issue, with some Republicans urging her to visit Taiwan as a show of standing up to Beijing.

Kirby said Friday that Pelosi "does not need nor do we offer approval or disapproval" for travel. And he said, "The speaker is entitled to travel aboard a military aircraft."

The military routinely supplies aircraft for travel by lawmakers, which presidents have the rarely used authority to deny. In a highly unusual move, then-President Donald Trump blocked Pelosi and other lawmakers from using a military plane to visit Afghanistan during a 2019 battle over a government shutdown and after she told him to delay his State of the Union address.

Blinken, Russian top diplomat speak about Griner, Whelan

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke by phone to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Friday in the highest-level known contact between the two sides since Russia invaded Ukraine, with Blinken urging Russia to accept a deal to win the release of American detainees Brittney Griner and Paul Whelan.

Russian officials gave no public hint whether Blinken had made any headway, only issuing a chiding statement afterward urging the U.S. to pursue the Americans' freedom through "quiet diplomacy, without releases of speculative information."

U.S. officials have in recent days publicized their efforts to get back Griner, a WNBA star, and Whelan, a corporate security executive, whose cases have drawn widespread national attention. While the direct outreach to Russian officials allows the Biden administration to show it is going all out to try to free the two U.S. citizens, it also risks undermining a core U.S. message to allies abroad: that isolating Russia diplomatically and economically will ultimately force Russia to pull its troops from Ukraine.

Blinken did not provide details of Lavrov's response to what he had previously called a "substantial proposal" for Russia to release Whelan and Griner. Blinken had publicly requested the call and revealed the existence of the offer to Russia. People familiar with the offer say the U.S. wants to swap Whelan and Griner for convicted Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout.

Blinken described the call as "a frank and direct conversation" centered primarily on the detained Americans.

"I urged Foreign Minister Lavrov to move forward with that proposal," he said. "I can't give you an as-

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assessment of whether that is any more or less likely.”

Blinken also said he had pressed Lavrov on the importance of Russia following through on an agreement to allow Ukrainian grain shipments to leave the Black Sea and warned him of consequences should Moscow move ahead with suspected plans to annex portions of eastern and southern Ukraine.

Blinken said he told Lavrov that the world will “never recognize” any annexation of Ukrainian territory, which he said would “result in significant additional costs for Russia.”

He declined to comment on how Lavrov replied to his messages. “I don’t want to characterize any of Foreign Minister Lavrov’s responses.”

In its statement afterward, the Russian Foreign Ministry said Lavrov “strongly suggested” to Blinken “returning to a professional dialogue in the mode of quiet diplomacy” on any efforts at American detainees’ release.

Lavrov also repeated Russia’s vows to keep fighting until it has achieved its aims in Ukraine, renewed complaints that U.S. and NATO support to Ukraine was prolonging the conflict, and accused the U.S. of not yet keeping up its end of agreements on the grain shipments from Ukraine, the Foreign Ministry said.

Blinken’s comments earlier this week marked the first time the U.S. government publicly revealed any concrete action it has taken to secure Griner’s release. The two-time Olympic gold medalist and player for the WNBA’s Phoenix Mercury was arrested at a Moscow airport in mid-February when inspectors found vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage.

Griner’s arrest came at a time of heightened tensions between Moscow and Washington ahead of Russia sending troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24. Griner’s five months of detention have raised strong criticism among teammates and supporters in the United States.

Her trial on drug charges started in a court outside Moscow this month, and she testified Wednesday that she didn’t know how the cartridges ended up in her bag but that she had a doctor’s recommendation to use cannabis to treat career-related pain.

The 31-year-old has pleaded guilty but said she had no criminal intent in bringing the cartridges to Russia and packed in haste for her return to play in a Russian basketball league during the WNBA’s offseason. She faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted of transporting drugs.

The Biden administration has faced political pressure to free Griner and other Americans whom the U.S. has declared to be “wrongfully detained” — a designation sharply rejected by Russian officials.

Whelan, a corporate security executive from Michigan, was sentenced to 16 years in prison on espionage charges in 2020. He and his family have vigorously asserted his innocence. The U.S. government has denounced the charges as false.

Russia has for years expressed interest in the release of Bout, a Russian arms dealer once labeled the “Merchant of Death.” He was sentenced to 25 years in prison in 2012 on charges that he schemed to illegally sell millions of dollars in weapons.

Kremlin officials presumably reveled in the news that the U.S., which has rallied friendly countries around the world to cut even vital trade ties with Russia to pressure it to withdraw from Ukraine, was now seeking engagement with Russia on a problem of its own.

“They are going to drag this out and try to humiliate us as much as they can,” said Ian Kelly, a retired career diplomat who served as U.S. ambassador to Georgia in the Obama and Trump administrations. “I don’t think it goes along with (the administration’s) overall policy.”

Kelly said the request for a call is “counterproductive to our broader effort to isolate Russia.”

Will Smith posts an apology video for slapping Chris Rock

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Will Smith has again apologized to Chris Rock for slapping him during the Oscar telecast in a new video, saying that his behavior was “unacceptable” and that he had reached out to the comedian to discuss the incident but was told Rock wasn’t ready.

“There is no part of me that thinks that was the right way to behave in that moment,” Smith said in

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the under-six minute video posted online Friday. "I am deeply remorseful and I'm trying to be remorseful without being ashamed of myself." To Rock, he said: "I'm here whenever you're ready to talk."

Smith, seated in a polo shirt and white ball cap, spoke directly to a camera, answering pre-selected questions about his behavior at the March 27 Academy Awards, when he slapped presenter Rock after the comedian made a reference about the hairstyle of Jada Pinkett Smith, Smith's wife.

Smith also apologized to Rock's family and especially his mother, Rosalie, who was horrified to see her son hurt and told US Weekly that, "When he slapped Chris, he slapped all of us. He really slapped me." Smith also apologized to Tony Rock, Chris' younger brother.

"I didn't realize how many people got hurt in that moment," Smith said.

Neither the apology or timing impressed crisis and PR expert Eric Schiffer, who called it "bizarre, strange and grossly over-rehearsed."

"It came across like he was doing a confessional in some closed room in a foreign country in order to escape the regime," said Schiffer, chairman and CEO of Patriarch Equity and chairman of Reputation Management Consultants. "It's just not the way to get out of the septic muck he put himself into because, once again, it started being about him and it's still about him."

In the video, Smith also apologized to his family "for the heat that I brought on all of us" and his fellow Oscar nominees to have "stolen and tarnished your moment." He mentioned Questlove by name; it was the musician-director's documentary win for "Summer of Soul (...Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised)" that was interrupted by the slap. Rock was on stage to present the documentary award.

Smith also said his wife did nothing to encourage his slap. "Jada had nothing to do with it," he said. "I made a choice on my own." Pinkett Smith has said that she has alopecia areata, a hair-loss disorder.

Following the altercation, the motion picture academy banned Smith from attending the Oscars or any other academy event for 10 years. Smith apologized to Rock in a statement after the Oscars, saying he was "out of line and I was wrong."

"I'm sorry really isn't sufficient," Smith said in the video, adding that he is hurting because he hasn't lived up to fans' impressions. "Disappointing people is my central trauma."

Many had speculated that Smith would appear on camera to discuss the slap first on Pinkett Smith's online series "Red Table Talk," but he chose to do it in a social media video post without any follow-up questions or surprise queries.

"It just had the reek of a fabricated attempt to be real. And that's not what he wanted to accomplish, nor was it persuasive," said Schiffer. "I do wish him well and hopefully he will find the right path. That path is really about humbleness and not about ego and self."

States hope for revenue boost with Mega Millions craze

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, JAMES POLLARD and GABE STERN Associated Press

A bump in college scholarships for New Mexico students. A new bike trail nestled in the western slope of Colorado. More homeless shelters in Arizona.

When lottery sales soar, players holding the golden ticket aren't the only ones who win. Across the U.S., state lottery systems use that money to boost education, tourism, transportation and much more. Now that the giant Mega Millions lottery jackpot has ballooned to more than \$1 billion, state officials are hoping increased national interest will result in more funding for their own causes.

However, critics of these lottery-funded programs note that lower-income players foot the bill for benefits they won't proportionately reap.

In South Carolina, lottery officials said 43 cents of every dollar spent directly support the state's education lottery account. The General Assembly then uses that money largely to fund scholarships. But the vast majority of South Carolina's proceeds go toward merit-based scholarships rather than need-based scholarships.

In New Mexico, some legislators and advocacy groups have criticized the lottery as a regressive source of income.

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"The people that play it are disproportionately low-income," said Fred Nathan, of the nonpartisan policy group Think New Mexico. He successfully lobbied for the state's 30% minimum contribution of lottery revenues for college scholarships, but said concerns remain about the share of lottery scholarships that go to children of affluent and middle-income families.

Mega Millions is played in 45 states as well as Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands. No one has matched the game's six selected numbers since April. The next drawing will be at 11 p.m. Friday in Atlanta.

On Friday, the historic jackpot attracted Bryan Byrd, 36, to buy a ticket at a gas station in Columbia, South Carolina. Byrd said he usually only plays when the pot gets this big.

His first move if he takes home the prize?

"Probably put my two weeks' notice in," said Byrd. "Hopefully I'm a winner."

The game is coordinated by state lotteries, which pull in revenue not only from Mega Millions but also from scratch tickets, Powerball and other authorized games. The revenue is then used to help pay out prizes, retailers, state funds and overhead costs.

The Michigan Lottery is on track to make its third consecutive annual contribution of \$1 billion to the state's school aid fund, according to player relations manager Jacob Harris, who said jackpots like this one help that cause. In Michigan, Harris said 28 cents for each dollar collected goes toward the fund.

In Georgia, ever since the jackpot started growing in April, the state has collected nearly \$22 million for college scholarships and pre-K programs, lottery officials say.

Oregon has recently posted some of its largest daily sales numbers for the Mega Millions draw, according to spokesperson Chuck Baumann. The \$1.4 million and \$1.2 million collected Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively, were good for the state's eighth- and 10th-highest single-day sales.

"Whether it's Powerball or Mega Millions, when the jackpots get big and people play, that's good for the state of Oregon, and those folks that receive lottery dollars," Baumann said. Voters over the years have approved measures sending lottery proceeds to education, parks and veterans' services funds.

On a typical Tuesday draw in Texas, statewide sales will hover around \$1 million for Mega Millions tickets. Last Tuesday, they sold \$20 million, according to Gary Grief, the executive director of the Texas Lottery Commission.

He expects the record sales to continue. A typical Friday nets about \$5 million in sales. He expects this Friday to crack \$80 million.

"As we're winding down to the end of our fiscal year, we were running neck and neck with last year's record sales pace," Grief said of the state's lottery revenue. That accounted for \$1.97 billion to the state's Foundational School Fund and \$23.4 million toward Veterans' Assistance. "This will push us past that."

Ticket sales are skyrocketing in New York. In the week ending July 23, Mega Millions sales totaled over \$26 million, according to a New York State Gaming Commission report. That's more than double the over \$12 million collected the previous week.

In Ohio, where lottery funding goes toward education, lottery sales have mainly stayed consistent, yet jackpot sales often fluctuate more than other lotteries, said Danielle Frizzi-Babb, Ohio Lottery's communications director. The Mega Millions jackpots are difficult to predict — and this jackpot, topping \$1 billion, has resulted in a sales jump that is difficult to see far in advance.

"When we get to that kind of number, the sales really, really, really ramp up," Frizzi-Babb said. "And that's just not something that you can plan for. But we're excited when it happens."

California had amassed over \$224 million in sales as of Thursday afternoon for the Mega Millions sequence. The estimated amount for education was \$89.6 million, according to Carolyn Becker, a California State Lottery spokesperson.

In fiscal year 2021, California generated about \$1.8 billion across all games for public education — though Becker described these funds as "supplemental" given the number of school systems in the country's most populous state.

"Even though it pales in comparison to a school budget, we hear from school teachers, administrators, et cetera, that every dollar helps," Becker said, adding that the funds have gone toward teacher salaries,

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computers and band and gym equipment.

Over in Tennessee, recent Mega Millions sales tickets have resulted in more than \$263 million that will be set aside for scholarships, grants and after-school programs.

The Tennessee Education Lottery called the ever-expanding prize a "welcome development" as they've seen more first-time players buy tickets hoping to score the prize.

Yet that hope comes as Americans are experiencing the highest inflation in decades, leaving many with fewer dollars to throw on entertainment. Some states are already experiencing dips in sales with their lotteries.

Iowa Lottery CEO Matt Strawn told board members in late June that higher gas and grocery costs were likely to blame for the dip in scratch off sales, while also noting that inflation had also caused an 82% hike in their staff's fuel budget. A spokesperson for the lottery said they believed an increase in Mega Millions sales will offset the decreased sales.

And even in a projected record revenue year in Texas, the returns from the lottery — which help fund education and veterans assistance — are somewhat dampened due to its weakened purchasing power.

"The money that we turn over to (the Texas Education Agency), it's going to purchase something somewhat less than what it purchased a year ago," said Grief.

Richer nations fall short on climate finance pledge

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

Richer countries failed to keep a \$100 billion-a-year pledge to developing nations to help them achieve their climate goals, according to an analysis by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD.

\$83.3 billion in climate financing was given to poorer countries in 2020, a 4% increase from the previous year, but still short of the proposed goal. The United Nations-backed payment plan was first agreed in 2009 to help poorer nations adapt to the effects of climate change and reduce emissions.

The pledge, which was originally set up as an annual commitment from its inception until 2020, has never been fulfilled.

"We know that more needs to be done" to address the shortfall, admitted OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann.

Who pays for tackling and adapting to climate change has been a key sticking point between richer nations and poorer ones since international climate negotiations began 30 years ago.

Harsen Nyambe, who heads the African Union climate change and environment division, told the Associated Press the continent will continue to put pressure on richer nations to ensure the \$100 billion-a-year agreement is fulfilled. He added that the funds will give the continent better access to required technology and will help nations transition to green energy in a fair way.

But others believe that after decades of unmet promises, it's unlikely that richer countries will start to step up.

"They do not have the money. They are over-committed with issues such as Ukrainian crisis and that is why they have been unable to meet any of their pledges," said Godwell Nhamo, a climate research professor at the University of South Africa.

"Africa should move on and find other sources of funding," he added.

A report released by the British charity Oxfam in 2020 warned that the recent increase in funding came in the form of loans, not grants, with climate-related loans increasing from \$13.5 billion in 2015 to \$24 billion in 2018. The charity said at the time that reaching the \$100 billion goal in this way "would be cause for concern, not celebration." It's unclear whether the latest year-on-year increase in climate funding came in the form of loans or grants.

In recent years, climate financing has helped fund greener energy and transport sectors for poorer nations, as well as adaptation measures for the agriculture and forestry industries which are threatened by land degradation, according to the OECD. ___ Associated Press climate and environmental coverage

receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Shark sightings get more common at New York beaches

By ARIJETA LAJKA Associated Press

BABYLON, N.Y. (AP) — As bathers cooled themselves in the Atlantic surf on New York's Fire Island last Wednesday, Reily Winston held up a smooth dogfish shark his friend had just caught fishing off a pier in an inlet behind the beach. He briefly cradled the bloodied shark in his hands before releasing it back into the ocean.

Shark sightings have become more common along Long Island's shores this summer — and not just the mostly harmless, abundant dogfish.

Since June, there have been at least five verified encounters where sharks bit swimmers and surfers. Though there were no fatalities, sightings prompted officials to temporarily close some beaches to swimming, from New York City's Rockaway Beach to Long Island's Smith Point County Park, where a surfer beat a shark on its snout after it bit his calf.

George Gorman, regional director for the state park system on Long Island, referred to the recent shark interactions as "extraordinarily unusual."

Sharks aren't new to New York's waters. Sand tiger, sandbar and dusky sharks are some of the more common species found near shore. But in the last century or so, New York state had documented only 13 shark attacks.

Experts say sharks aren't setting out to dine on people, but instead are chasing bunker fish near beaches. Recent shark bites are likely mistakes, according to Gorman.

"We think it has to do with the menhaden fish, with the bunker fish being close to shore and the sharks just making a mistake," he said.

Swimmers may also be interacting with sharks while they are feeding.

"When there's a food source close to shore, they'll come close to shore to feed on that," said Frank Quevedo, executive director of The South Fork Natural History Museum. "If people are in the water, they may interfere with or get in the way of shark feeding."

Factors contributing to the spike in shark sightings are the improvement in water quality and thriving bunker fish populations due to conservation efforts. Quevedo noted that in 2019, New York passed legislation to protect Atlantic menhaden, the main food source for many species like dolphins, whales, tuna, seals, striped bass and sharks.

"This is all a positive sign that the marine ecosystem is healthy," said Chris Scott, supervising marine biologist for the Department of Environmental Conservation, during a news conference Monday. "And it's important because sharks are a keystone species that regulate the species diversity, abundance, distribution, the marine habitat."

Conservation efforts have led to a rebound in shark populations elsewhere in the northeastern U.S., too. In New England, a big increase in the seal population has led to a surge in visits from great white sharks — and the occasional serious attack. Sharks have killed people on Massachusetts' Cape Cod and in Maine in recent years.

The risk of shark attack remains very low — far lower than hazards like drowning. But in response to shark sightings, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul directed state agencies to ramp up shark surveillance. State agencies have added lifeguards and deployed helicopters, drones and boats to monitor sharks along the coast.

Officials say they are still seeing a steady attendance of people coming to Long Island beaches, and shark sightings haven't deterred some beachgoers from going into the water — though they might not be venturing as far out.

While lifeguards kept watch, New York City resident Antoinelle Hilton waded along the beach at Fire Island's Robert Moses State Park.

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"Sometimes I'm on the edge, like I don't want to go deep in or I'll stay on the shallow side," said Hilton. "I just make sure I'm by the lifeguards and I'm fine."

While out on boat patrol hundreds of yards away from Long Island beaches on Wednesday, The Associated Press didn't spot any sharks, but did see dolphins. Lt. Sean Reilly, supervising environmental conservation officer with the DEC, says he hasn't seen any sharks from the boat during recent patrols. It's the lifeguards who are encountering sharks near the shore, Reilly said. On patrols, dolphins are a much more common sight than sharks.

"When I started 20-something years ago, we saw a dolphin on rare occasions," Reilly said. "Now every time we go into the ocean, we seem to see multiple schools of dolphins."

During the patrol, a radio alert came in, reporting shark sightings near Fire Island.

"That's where most of the sharks are seen, by people actually catching them because they are not up on the surface most of the time," he said.

Scott said to prevent risky shark interactions, avoid swimming in murky waters and in areas where there are schools of menhaden and seals in the water because sharks might be feeding. Don't swim during dusk, dawn, and nighttime, when sharks feed the most. Swim in groups so sharks don't misidentify humans as prey.

"When people go to the beach...the chances of them getting into a car accident on their way to the beach is more likely than the chances of actually seeing or interacting with a shark when they're at the beach," said Quevedo. "So, my two cents here is to use caution."

Jan. 6 panel to share 20 transcripts with Justice Department

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Jan. 6 committee will share 20 of its interview transcripts with the Justice Department as federal prosecutors have been increasingly focused on efforts by former President Donald Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the election.

A committee aide said that the panel will share the 20 transcripts but has "no plans to share additional transcripts at this time." The person, who requested anonymity to discuss the confidential transaction, would not say which interviews the committee is sharing.

The information sharing comes after the committee had rejected a Justice Department request for transcripts in May. At the time, the committee's chairman, Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, had said it was "premature" for the committee to share its work because the panel's probe is ongoing.

Since then, the panel has been negotiating an agreement over the documents as the department has stepped up its probes. Several senior aides to former Vice President Mike Pence have appeared before a federal grand jury and prosecutors have seized records from a group of Republicans who served as fake electors in battleground states won by President Joe Biden. Trump and his allies pushed officials in those states to replace Biden's duly selected electors with ones who supported him as they advanced claims that his victory had been stolen.

It remains unclear whether prosecutors might seek to bring criminal charges against Trump, who denies any wrongdoing.

Attorney General Merrick Garland, who is facing mounting pressure from congressional Democrats to bring charges against the former president, has said prosecutors will hold anyone accountable — no matter their position — if they broke the law.

In an interview with NBC News this week, Garland said the Justice Department would "bring to justice everybody who was criminally responsible for interfering with the peaceful transfer of power from one administration to another."

The committee has not said if it plans to eventually share all of its transcripts with the Justice Department or the public. The Jan. 6 panel has done more than 1,000 interviews, but not all of those were formally transcribed.

The Justice Department declined to comment Friday on the transcripts.

Spain: Prosecutors to seek 8-year prison term for Shakira

MADRID (AP) — Prosecutors in Spain said Friday they would ask a court to sentence Colombian pop star Shakira to eight years and two months in prison, if she is convicted in her expected trial for alleged tax fraud.

Shakira, whose full name is Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll, is charged with failing to pay the Spanish government 14.5 million euros (\$15 million) in taxes between 2012 and 2014. The prosecutors said they would also seek a fine of 24 million euros (\$24 million).

The indictment details six charges against Shakira. The singer this week rejected a settlement deal offered by prosecutors, opting to go to trial instead. A trial date has yet to be set.

Her publicists in London said in a statement Friday that Shakira “has always cooperated and abided by the law, demonstrating impeccable conduct as an individual and a taxpayer.” The publicists accused the Spanish Tax Agency of violating her rights.

Shakira’s Spanish public relations team said earlier this week that the artist has deposited the amount she is said to owe, including 3 million euros in interest.

Prosecutors in Barcelona have alleged the Grammy winner spent more than half of each year between 2012 and 2014 in Spain and should have paid taxes in the country.

Shakira recently ended an 11-year-long relationship with FC Barcelona star Gerard Piqué, with whom she has two children. The family used to live in Barcelona.

Some Republicans see good politics in same-sex marriage bill

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When asked if he’d support legislation to protect same-sex marriage, one conservative Republican senator was almost nonchalant.

“I see no reason to oppose it,” Ron Johnson of Wisconsin told reporters, bringing Democrats one vote closer to an unexpected victory as they move to safeguard same-sex marriage and other rights after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion nationwide.

Johnson’s answer, which came after 47 Republicans voted for the bill in the House last week, was reflective of a stark shift in GOP positioning after decades of fighting same-sex marriage. Ten years ago, most Republicans proudly espoused that marriage could only be between a man and a woman. Now, a federal law protecting same-sex marriage is within reach in an election year, with some Republican backing.

The signal of possible support from Johnson — arguably the most vulnerable Republican senator up for reelection this year — comes as Wisconsin’s other senator, Tammy Baldwin, is the lead Democrat charged with persuading the necessary 10 Republicans to vote for the bill. Baldwin, who is the first openly gay senator and has been working on gay rights issues since she first entered state politics in 1986, says the “world has changed,” especially since the Supreme Court’s 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision upholding gay marriage.

A Gallup poll conducted in May showed broad support for same-sex marriage, with 71% of U.S. adults saying they think such unions should be recognized by law, including 55% of Republicans. Polling in Wisconsin mirrors that national survey, with 54% of Republicans in the state saying that they favor same-sex marriage in a Marquette Law School poll from April. In May 2014, the state poll found support from only 23% of Republicans.

“People began to see that the sky has not fallen,” Baldwin said in an interview, and that the 2015 decision gave legal protections to families who did not previously have them. She says every member of Congress now has friends, family or staff who are openly gay.

“That probably has the biggest impact on where people land,” she said. “This is a vote of conscience.”

The bill pending in the Senate would repeal the Clinton-era Defense of Marriage Act that allowed states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages and instead require states to recognize all marriages that were legal where they were performed. The new Respect for Marriage Act would also protect interracial mar-

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riages by requiring states to recognize legal marriages regardless of "sex, race, ethnicity, or national origin."

A vote could come as soon as next week, but it will more likely be in September when Congress returns from the August recess.

Republican Sens. Rob Portman of Ohio, Susan Collins of Maine and Thom Tillis of North Carolina have also said they will vote for the legislation; Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski has also supported same-sex marriage in the past. Several other Republicans have said they are undecided, including Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt, Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst and Indiana Sen. Mike Braun.

Notably silent is Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who has declined to comment until Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer holds a vote.

Baldwin and other advocates say more GOP senators are quietly contemplating the bill. Democrats need 10 Republican votes to overcome a filibuster and get a bill through the 50-50 Senate.

A range of Republicans voted for the bill in the House, including New York Rep. Elise Stefanik, the No. 3 House Republican; Pennsylvania Rep. Scott Perry, the chair of the conservative House Freedom Caucus; and all four Republican members of Utah's congressional delegation.

Still, the majority of House Republicans voted against it, and a similar dynamic is expected in the Senate.

Republicans opposing the bill give a variety of reasons, with most arguing that the Supreme Court is unlikely to overturn Obergefell and that Senate Democrats are playing politics by putting the bill on the floor. Democrats point to Justice Clarence Thomas' concurring opinion to the June ruling overturning Roe in which he said that high court rulings protecting same-sex marriage and the right for couples to use contraception should also be reconsidered.

Asked about their opposition, many Republicans have focused on the process rather than the substance.

Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, who is up for reelection this year, told CNN last week that he thinks the bill is a "stupid waste of time." He said later that he believes "there is zero chance, below zero chance, that the Supreme Court or anyone is going to outlaw gay marriage in this country."

Even Johnson blamed Democrats as he said he was unlikely to oppose it, arguing that it was settled law and the vote is unnecessary. He said he still believes that marriage should be between a man and a woman. But "society has pretty well accepted it and moved on," he said.

Other Republicans have made similar arguments, shifting from the more ideologically rigid statements of years past.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who will vote against the bill, said he recognizes that "reasonable people can disagree" with him that marriage should be between a man and a woman, "and there is room for a diversity of views on that question."

North Dakota Sen. Kevin Cramer says he will vote against it "unless I can be compelled somehow." He says he believes because of his evangelical Christian faith that marriage is between a man and a woman, but "it's not like I feel super strongly about it, either."

Cramer said he thinks the Senate will get the 60 votes needed to pass the bill. "It's more that people are ambivalent about it," he said.

Portman, who is pushing to get more votes from his party, notes that public opinion has changed substantially over the years. He has supported same-sex marriage since 2013, when he announced that one of his sons is gay and that he believes people should be respected for who they are.

He faced criticism from some fellow Republicans at the time, but he says people now come up to him frequently to thank him for his support.

It's not just Republicans who have evolved on the issue. Former President Barack Obama didn't publicly support same-sex marriage until 2012, pushed in part by then-Vice President Joe Biden, who had come out in support a few days earlier. When the Defense of Marriage Act passed the Senate in 1996, only 14 Democrats opposed it.

David Stacy, a lead lobbyist for the Human Rights Campaign, says advocates for same-sex marriage faced many setbacks in the early 2000s, including state ballot measures to ban gay marriages. But he says he believes Republicans created a backlash of sorts by trying to use the issue against Democrats.

While the advocates lost many of those fights, "we were educating the public and moving public opinion," Stacy says.

Ships must slow down more often to save whales, feds say

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Vessels off the East Coast must slow down more often to help save a vanishing species of whale from extinction, the federal government said Friday.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration made the announcement via new proposed rules designed to prevent ships colliding with North Atlantic right whales. Vessel strikes and entanglement in fishing gear are the two biggest threats to the giant animals, which number less than 340 and are falling in population.

Efforts to save the whales have long focused on fishing gear, especially that used by East Coast lobster fishermen. The proposed vessel speed rules signal that the government wants the shipping industry to take more responsibility.

"Changes to the existing vessel speed regulation are essential to stabilize the ongoing right whale population decline and prevent the species' extinction," state the proposed rules, which are slated to be published in the federal register.

The new rules would expand seasonal slow zones off the East Coast that require mariners to slow down to 10 knots (19 kilometers per hour). They would also require more vessels to comply with the rules by expanding the size classes that must slow down. The rules also state that NOAA would create a framework to implement mandatory speed restrictions when whales are known to be present outside the seasonal slow zones.

Federal authorities spent a few years reviewing the speed regulations used to protect the whales. The shipping rules have long focused on a patchwork of slow zones that require mariners to slow down for whales. Some of the zones are mandatory, while others are voluntary.

Environmental groups have made the case that many boats don't comply with the speed restrictions and that the rules need to be tighter. Environmental organization Oceana released a report in 2021 that said noncompliance was as high as nearly 90% in voluntary zones and was also dangerously low in the mandatory ones.

"The government is proposing a significant improvement in protections for North Atlantic right whales today, which are constantly at risk from speeding vessels," said Gib Brogan, a campaign director at Oceana. "It's no secret that speeding vessels are rampant throughout North Atlantic right whales' migration route, all along the East Coast."

Many members of the shipping industry were keenly aware the new speed rules were on the way. The London-based International Chamber of Shipping, which represents more than 80% of the world merchant fleet, has been working with the International Maritime Organization and other stakeholders to better protect the right whales, said Chris Waddington, the chamber's technical director.

The chamber's members are used to complying with speed limits in whale zones, he said.

"The shipping industry takes the protection of whales seriously and has undertaken measures to safeguard them, from engaging stakeholders to reducing speed and rerouting," Waddington said. "There is always more that can be done, and that is why we are working with the IMO and conservationists on reviewing maritime guidelines."

The whales were once numerous off the East Coast, but their populations plummeted due to commercial whaling generations ago. Although they've been protected under the Endangered Species Act for decades, they've been slow to recover.

More than 50 of the whales were struck by ships between spring 1999 and spring 2018, NOAA records state. Scientists have said in recent years that warming ocean temperatures are causing the whales to stray out of protected areas and into shipping lanes in search of food.

Environmentalists have said that's a good reason to tighten protections. The proposed shipping rules will be subject to a public comment process before they can become law.

"This proposal is a step in the right direction, but it won't help a single right whale until it's actually final-

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ized," said Kristen Monsell, an attorney for environmental group Center for Biological Diversity.

The whales give birth off the coast of Georgia and Florida and head north to feed off of New England and Canada. They're popular with whale watching tours that leave from places such as Provincetown, Massachusetts, and Portland, Maine, in the summer.

Members of New England's lobster fishing industry have made the case that too many rules designed to save the whales focus on fishing and not on vessel strikes. Some characterized the new vessel speed rules as overdue.

Fishermen are unfairly being held accountable for whale deaths that occur due to vessel strikes, said Patrice McCarron, executive director of the Maine Lobstermen's Association, which is the largest fishing industry association on the East Coast.

"This is putting a tremendous amount of pressure on the lobster industry to continue to alter our fishery to account for right whale deaths not connected to the lobster fishery," McCarron said.

Inflation and wage data suggest US prices will keep climbing

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation surged in June and workers' average wages accelerated in the spring — signs that Americans won't likely feel any relief from rising prices anytime soon and that the Federal Reserve will feel compelled to further raise borrowing costs.

An inflation gauge closely tracked by the Fed jumped 6.8% in June from a year ago, the government said Friday, the biggest such jump in four decades. Much of the increase was driven by energy and food.

On a month-to-month basis, too, prices surged 1% in June, the biggest such rise since 2005. Even excluding the volatile food and energy categories, prices climbed 0.6% from May to June.

Employees' wages, excluding government workers, jumped 1.6% in the April-June quarter, matching a record high reached last fall. Higher wages tend to fuel inflation if companies pass their higher labor costs on to their customers, as they often do.

Friday's figures underscored the persistence of the inflation that is eroding Americans' purchasing power, dimming their confidence in the economy and threatening Democrats in Congress in the run-up to the November midterm elections.

Some signs indicate that certain categories of inflation may moderate in the coming months, though not by very much: Gas prices have fallen since mid-June from an average national peak of \$5 to \$4.26, according to AAA. Likewise, other commodity prices, for items such as wheat and copper, have plunged.

But more persistent drivers of inflation show little, if any, evidence of slowing. The wage data released Friday — a measure known as the employment cost index — indicated that paychecks were still growing at a robust pace. That's good for workers, but it could raise concerns at the Fed about its effect on prices. Chair Jerome Powell specifically cited this measure during a news conference Wednesday as a source of concern for the the central bank's policymakers.

"This is a (report) that's going to keep Fed officials up at night," said Omair Sharif, president of Inflation Insights.

The government also reported Friday that consumer spending managed to just outpace inflation last month, rising 0.1% from May to June. Spending actually jumped, but most of the gain was wiped out by higher prices.

Rising consumer demand for services, such as airline tickets, hotel rooms and restaurant meals, is still helping fuel inflation. Many retail and consumer goods chains, though, say inflation is squeezing shoppers and limiting how far their money goes — a sign that consumer spending could further weaken.

This week, Walmart said its profits would fall because its customers are spending more on pricier food and gas, leaving them less able to buy clothes and other discretionary items. Likewise, Best Buy downgraded its sales and profit forecasts because surging inflation has forced consumers to reduce their purchases of electronics appliances.

Inflation has been rising so fast that despite the pay raises many workers have received, most consum-

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ers are falling behind the rising cost-of-living.

High inflation and interest rates are also hampering the U.S. economy, which shrank in the April-June quarter for a second straight quarter, intensifying fears that a recession is looming. Two quarters of declining growth meet an informal rule of thumb for when a recession begins, although robust hiring suggests that the economy still maintains pockets of strength and isn't yet in a downturn.

On Wednesday, the Fed raised its benchmark interest rate by three-quarters of a point for a second straight time in its most aggressive drive in more than three decades to tame high inflation. Powell signaled that the Fed' could raise rates by smaller increments in the coming months.

Still, he also stressed that the Fed's policymakers regard the fight against inflation to be their top priority. He gave no hint that a weakening economy would cause the Fed to slow or reverse its rate hikes this year or early next year if inflation remained high.

By raising borrowing rates, the Fed makes it costlier to take out a mortgage or an auto or business loan. The goal is for consumers and businesses to borrow, spend and hire less, thereby cooling the economy and slowing inflation.

Globally, inflation is weighing heavily on other economies, too. This month, prices jumped 8.9% in the 19 European countries that use the euro currency from a year earlier. Europe's economy has been hit particularly hard by higher natural gas and oil prices stemming from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, though it managed to grow slightly in the second quarter.

The Fed monitors Friday's inflation gauge, called the personal consumption expenditures price index, even more closely it does the government's better-known consumer price index. Earlier this month, the CPI reported an acceleration in inflation, to 9.1% in June from a year earlier, the highest in nearly 41 years.

The PCE index tends to show a lower inflation level than CPI. Rents, which are rising at their fastest pace in 35 years, are given less weight in the PCE than in the CPI.

The PCE price index also seeks to account for changes in how people shop when inflation jumps. As a result, it can capture, for example, when consumers switch from pricey national brands to cheaper store brands.

How to recession-proof your life amid economic uncertainty

By ADRIANA MORGA and CORA LEWIS The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Prices for gas, food and rent are soaring. The Federal Reserve has raised interest rates to the highest level since 2018. The U.S. economy has shrunk for two straight quarters.

Economists are divided over whether a recession is looming. What's clear is that economic uncertainty isn't going away anytime soon. But there are steps you can take now to be ready for whatever is ahead.

Yiming Ma, an assistant professor at Columbia University, says it's not a question of if but when a recession will happen. People should prepare but not panic, she said.

"Historically the economy has always been going up and down," said Ma. "It's something that just happens, it's a bit like catching a cold."

But, she notes, some people's immune systems are better able to recover than others. It's the same with finances. If you think a recession could destabilize yours, here are some things you can do to prepare.

KNOW YOUR EXPENSES AND MAKE A BUDGET

Knowing how much you spend every month is key. Ma recommends sitting down and writing how much you spend day-to-day. This will help you see what's coming in, what's going out, and which unnecessary expenses you might be able to cut.

"By understanding what money you are getting and what you are spending, you may be able to make changes to help you through tough times," advises the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation's Money Smart, a financial education program.

Budgets often reveal expenses that can be eliminated entirely or impulsive spending that can be avoided with planning.

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For guidance creating a budget, free courses such as "Creating a budget (and sticking to it)" by CT Dollars and Sense, a partnership of Connecticut state agencies, and Nerd Wallet's Budget Calculator can be good places to start.

SAVE AS YOU CAN

The more non-essential expenses you can cut, the more you can save.

It's not possible for everyone, but Gene Natali, cofounder of Troutwood, an app that helps people create financial plans, says it's ideal to budget to save enough to cover basic necessities for three to six months.

Programs such as America Saves, a non-profit campaign by the Consumer Federation of America, can help create a roadmap.

And if you do have a savings account, it's important to check whether your bank gives you a good interest rate and shop around if it doesn't, Ma said.

Her advice is to keep an eye on the monthly fees or service charges that might eat into your savings. But don't limit your options. Online banks sometimes offer better rates than traditional ones.

CONSOLIDATE YOUR LOANS, AND DON'T TAKE ANY MORE

As interest rates rise, experts recommend that you consolidate your loans to have just one fixed-rate loan and, if you can, pay down as much of your debt as possible.

"Job security tends to be worse when a recession comes, it's not a great time to accumulate debt," said Ma.

But paying off your existing debt is easier said than done. The Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Advice guide for Getting Out of Debt can help you make a plan.

With interest rates high, it's also not a great time to take out new loans for big expenses like cars, though experts do recommend that if you need durable goods such as vacuum cleaners, stoves or dishwashers, you buy them as soon as possible to avoid future price increases.

VISIT SECOND-HAND STORES AND YARD SALES

Allen Galeon, an in-home caregiver in California, has been affected for months by the rising prices of household staples like groceries, paper towels, and gas for his commute.

His son's favorite Hi-C orange juice, which was \$1.99 for a six-pack, is now \$2.50.

Since the start of the pandemic, when Galeon cut down from caring for multiple families to a single client to reduce his health risks, his household has dealt with financial instability.

One choice he's made is to buy items like clothes or electronics second-hand whenever possible, whether from Goodwill, pawn shops, or Craigslist. And Craigslist allows you to search by area, to cut down on driving – which means less gas and inconvenience.

NEGOTIATE YOUR MONTHLY BILLS

Since the pandemic, many companies have updated their relief policies and have become more flexible with users, according to Kia McCallister-Young, director of America Saves.

Calling providers of monthly services to negotiate bills — whether it's utilities, phone service, cable, internet, or auto insurance — can lead to meaningful savings, said McCallister-Young. Individuals can ask for the best rate, any available discounts, rebates, or coupons that can lead to a lowered monthly fee. If a provider is competitive with other companies, there's an even better chance of getting a discount, she added.

"If you tell them, 'I'm thinking of changing' or that you're shopping around, that helps — if they know you're considering leaving, they'll give you the best rate, and the goal right now is to find as much cashflow as possible," she said.

Check out federal programs such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which helps cover bills, and Lifeline, which can assist with phone bills. If you are unsure if you qualify for any federal or state program, you can call 211, which will connect you with a local specialist who can assist you.

SWITCH UP YOUR GROCERIES

Grocery shopping with a meal plan, buying generic rather than brand-name or purchasing in bulk are some of the recommendations from the Consumer Federation of America.

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"A lot of stores have price matching, so if you show them that a competitor is selling the same product at a lower rate, they'll match that," said McCallister-Young. "You also want to be looking at the stores that are closest to you, so you're not spending the extra money you'd save on gas."

An alternative way to save money on groceries is to check out food sharing apps such as Olio, which connects people around their community to share extra grocery items, and Too Good to Go, where customers can buy businesses' surplus food at a discount.

LOOK AT GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Even with these saving and spending practices, a month's wages aren't always enough to cover important expenses. If this is your situation, programs around the country are available to assist you.

"Sometimes there just isn't enough 'end of the month' at the end of the month," said Michael Best, an attorney at the National Consumer Law Center who works on financial services issues.

To make use of these resources, check if you qualify for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Farmers Market Nutrition Program, or the Homeowner Assistance Fund. All of these are federal programs coordinated by state governments. Some states offer additional local programs for their residents.

LOOK FOR COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

If you are experiencing food or housing insecurity, look for non-profit or community organizations around you. From housing support and food banks to utility assistance, non-profit organizations around the country can help. National organizations such as Feeding America host food banks in all 50 states.

"We're already seeing the community reaching out to us in overwhelming numbers because of what's happening in the country in terms of economic stability," said Kavita Mehra of Sakhi for South Asian Women, an organization that helps domestic violence survivors in New York City.

Her organization provides housing, food, and cash emergency assistance for people in the community. She said that between January and June, her group distributed over \$150,000 in emergency cash assistance to survivors who were having a harder time keeping the lights on and putting food on the table. That's more than all of last year.

Food assistance organizations such as Ample Harvest, Hunger Free America and Food Rescue US offer maps that allow users to search a nearby food bank by typing their zip code.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Between worrying about the bills and not knowing what your financial future might look like, your stress levels can go through the roof.

"It's a hectic existence," Galeon said. "You have to do a lot of managing, and you have to keep a cool head, for the sake of your mental health."

Debra Kissen, a clinical director of Light On Anxiety CBT Treatment Center, recommends first recognizing when your body is stressed. Then she advises mindfulness exercises such as breathing, touching a wall to calm yourself, and completing the "five senses for anxiety relief" exercise.

Most health insurance covers some type of mental health assistance. If you don't have health insurance, you can look for sliding-scale therapists around the country, including through FindTreatment.gov and the Anxiety and Depression Association of America directory.

Election conspiracies grip Nevada community, sowing distrust

By SAM METZ Associated Press

TONOPAH, Nev. (AP) — The Nye County Commission is used to dealing with all sorts of hot-button controversies.

Water rights, livestock rules and marijuana licenses are among the many local dramas that consume the time of the five commissioners in this vast swath of rural and deeply Republican Nevada. Last spring, it was something new: voting machines.

For months, conspiracy theories fueled on social media by those repeating lies about former President Donald Trump's loss in 2020 inflamed public suspicions about whether election results could be trusted.

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In response, the commission put a remarkable item on its agenda: Ditch the county's voting machines and instead count every vote on every ballot — more than 20,000 in a typical general election — entirely by hand.

Commissioners called a parade of witnesses, including three from out of state who insisted voting machines could be hacked and votes flipped without leaving a trace. They said no county could be certain their machines weren't accessible via the internet and open to tampering by nefarious actors.

It was all just too much for Sam Merlino, a Republican who has spent more than two decades administering elections as the county's clerk. She simply felt outgunned.

"It just made me feel helpless," she said in a recent interview from her office in Tonopah, an old silver mining town surrounded by hills of rock and sagebrush about halfway between Las Vegas and Reno.

She defended the system's checks and balances that ensure an accurate vote tally, but was bombarded with technical jargon and theories unlike any she'd ever heard. "I couldn't do anything but just sit and listen," she said.

When the county commission voted unanimously to recommend hand-counting ballots — even though there was no evidence of any tampering — she decided she'd had enough and submitted her resignation. Merlino will step down next week and leave the administration of elections in a county about twice the size of New Hampshire to a new clerk; the most likely candidate to succeed her is someone who has promoted voting machine conspiracy theories and falsely contends that Trump actually won the 2020 election.

Merlino's departure and Nye County's plans to scrap voting machines and hand-count every ballot open a window into the real-world consequences of unfounded conspiracy theories that have spread across the country since Trump's defeat. The moves also raise questions about how local elections will be run when overseen by people who are skeptical of the process.

A network of people peddling conspiracy theories about the security of voting machines has hop-scotched the country for more than a year, spinning elaborate yarns involving Venezuelan software, the Chinese Communist Party and offshore servers. They have tried to persuade state and local officials to do just what Nye County is attempting.

While no state has taken the same step, their efforts find fertile ground in conservative parts of the U.S. such as Nye County, where suspicions of government run deep. Already this year, some rural county boards have threatened to refuse to certify the results of their primary elections, even without evidence of problems.

Nye County, the country's third largest by area, stretches from the strip malls on the outer margins of Las Vegas through desolate rangelands where cattle graze and the military trains pilots and practices missile-firing and bomb drops.

Conspiracy theories have long found an audience in the county. It's home to part of Area 51, the once-secret U.S. Air Force base that draws alien enthusiasts and UFO hunters. During public comment at county commission meetings, residents reference Infowar's Alex Jones, who has peddled fake conspiracy theories about the Newtown, Connecticut, school massacre. In Pahrump, the county's most populous town, a plaque on a park bench honors the late radio host and conspiracy theorist Art Bell, who lived here until his death in 2018.

Its voters are unrelentingly Republican. In 2018, they chose a Republican brothel owner over a Democrat in a statehouse race — even though the brothel owner had died weeks earlier.

Trump won Nye County by more than 40 percentage points among the 25,427 ballots cast in November 2020. That margin, however, has done nothing to stifle the spread of conspiracy theories about voter fraud and ballot tampering.

At a recent Republican Party event and county commission meeting, many brought up stories they had heard involving QR codes, half-inserted USB drives and foreign hackers infiltrating machines manufactured by Dominion Voting Systems.

No evidence has surfaced to prove any of the theories, yet they continue to spread in Nye County Facebook groups.

Merlino recalled when an error on a sample ballot ballooned on social media into a full-blown corruption

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conspiracy theory about the printing company's financial ties: "Just like anything, once a rumor starts or once something is out there, people feed on it," she said.

County commissioners say they are obligated to take action as a way to re-establish trust in elections, a concern that fed into their vote to recommend hand-counting ballots in the upcoming November election rather than use tabulating machines.

Election experts are skeptical that hand-counting is doable anywhere except in the tiniest counties; Nye County has about 31,500 registered voters. They say the potential for human error is far greater than running ballots through a tabulator and auditing the results afterward to ensure accuracy.

"It's a very bad idea, and everyone from the most conservative election officials to the most liberal will testify to that," said David Becker, the executive director of the Center for Election Innovation & Research, a nonprofit that works on election procedures.

A lengthy hand-counting process could spark a political crisis in the state, a perennial presidential battleground and one of six states where Trump disputed his 2020 loss. It's not clear what would happen if just one of Nevada's 17 counties fails to finish counting votes within the seven-day timeframe required under state law, or declines to certify the results.

The secretary of state's office has said hand-counting could conflict with state law and has scheduled hearings in August to discuss regulations for any county planning to attempt it.

Supporters of the move are undaunted. At a dimly lit Mexican restaurant in Pahrump, an hour's drive from Las Vegas, activists attending a recent Nye County "GOP Unity" event attributed support for hand-counting to what they claimed were unexplained irregularities and suspicions about election tampering.

"You just don't know 100%," said Leo Blundo, a Nye County commissioner who voted against certifying the results from the June primary after he lost his reelection bid.

Pahrump Republican Tina Trenner said cutting voting off from electrical sources could help ease skepticism about election results.

"They could be hacked. Something as simple as a phone with a hotspot in it, sitting up on the counter, can suddenly make those machines available on the internet," she said.

The push to hand-count ballots also has won support from at least one prominent Nevada Republican — Jim Marchant, the GOP nominee for secretary of state, the office that oversees elections. He has participated in rallies and other events around the country promoting the falsehood that Trump actually won the 2020 election.

"If we get out en masse and vote, we'll overwhelm the system so that any mechanisms they have in place to manipulate the system will be negated," he told applauding Republicans in Pahrump, without specifying who he feared would manipulate the election.

Marchant repeated a promise he made to the Nye County Commission months earlier, when the clerk said hand-counting ballots would require a substantial number of people. Marchant told The Associated Press he could provide as many members of his "election integrity" movement from Nevada and elsewhere as necessary to help with the process.

In a stump speech, Marchant said he was eager to work with Mark Kampf, the winner of the Republican Party primary in the Nye County clerk's race. Kampf's platform included replacing voting machines with hand-counting.

In one debate, Kampf, an accountant and corporate auditor, insisted Trump won the 2020 election. He told voters he was concerned that an interstate voter roll maintenance system could be a ploy from billionaire investor and philanthropist George Soros. He warned about the misuse of ballot drop boxes, citing the film "2000 Mules." Experts say it uses flawed analysis of cellphone data and drop box surveillance footage to cast doubt on the results of the 2020 election.

Kampf, who is expected to be appointed to replace Merlino in August, declined to comment for this story. He told the commission at its July meeting that he planned to emphasize voter education to restore trust in elections.

That may prove a tall task in a community that remains spellbound by Trump's ongoing insistence that he was the true winner.

The degree to which distrust has entrenched itself worries Merlino, whose own efforts to educate have done little to sway her neighbors.

After a mostly quiet tenure, the self-described "personal responsibility Republican" said she has been sickened to witness fictions and falsehoods taking root in her county and politicizing the work of her fellow election workers in Nevada.

Merlino's office has been inundated with public records requests from people looking for evidence of fraud or tampering. County residents who deny the results of the 2020 presidential election without evidence yell at her and her staff while in line to vote. Myths of stolen elections have even estranged her from members of her own family, including one to whom she hasn't spoken in over six months.

On top of all that, the commission's move toward hand-counting convinced her it was time to step down. "I don't think it can be done," she said. "If they want to give it a go, that's why I'm giving them the opportunity to do it."

Ditch the necktie: Spain's leader backs conserving energy

By RAQUEL REDONDO Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Spain's leader has proposed an energy-saving move that many men have already embraced.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has asked government officials and people working in the private sector to save energy by giving up wearing neckties at work.

Appearing at a news conference in an open-necked white shirt and blue jacket, Sánchez explained he had dressed less formally not as a nod to the casual Friday custom but to curb utility use — presumably air-conditioning, but he did not spell that out.

"I'd like you to note that I am not wearing a tie. That means that we can all make savings from an energy point of view," the prime minister said at the news conference called to summarize his government's annual performance.

He said he encouraged his ministers and public officials, "that if not necessary, don't use a tie."

Spain has sweltered for more than a month, with temperatures in parts of the country often surpassing 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit). The government has urged people to reduce electricity costs by not overusing air conditioning.

Rising energy costs for households and businesses in Spain has been a major issue in recent months, especially since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February. Sánchez said the government would present a new energy-saving plan next week, but he gave no details.

He said the plan was designed to cut utility bills and to reduce energy dependency on "the aggressor, (Russian President Vladimir) Putin."

In June, Spain approved economic relief measures worth more than 9 billion euros (\$9.2 billion), including reductions in electricity taxes and a one-time payment of 200 euros (\$200) for people with low-incomes.

Coleen Rooney victorious in 'Wagatha Christie' court battle

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — In a legal showdown between soccer spouses that mixed celebrity, social media and amateur sleuthing, a judge has ruled whodunnit.

Judge Karen Steyn on Friday cleared Coleen Rooney of libeling Rebekah Vardy by claiming that Vardy had leaked her private social media posts to the tabloid press.

In a devastating blow to Vardy, who launched the libel suit to defend her reputation, the judge said Rooney's allegation was "substantially true." Steyn said it was likely that Vardy's agent, Caroline Watt, had passed Rooney's private information to The Sun newspaper, and that "Mrs. Vardy knew of and condoned this behavior."

Vardy, who sued after Rooney accused her in 2019 of sharing private Instagram content with The Sun, said she was "extremely sad and disappointed at the decision."

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Rooney said she was pleased with the verdict, but added that "it was not a case I ever sought or wanted." "I never believed it should have gone to court at such expense in times of hardship for so many people when the money could have been far better spent helping others," she said in a statement.

The case, heard at the High Court in May, was a media sensation. The women are celebrities in their own right, and both are married to famous footballers: Vardy to Leicester City and England striker Jamie Vardy, Rooney to former Manchester United and England star Wayne Rooney.

Then there was the amateur detective work that led to Rooney's accusation. Rooney, 36, has said she purposely posted fake stories on Instagram to find out who was passing her private information to the press. The stories — including one about a fictitious basement flood at the Rooneys' house and another reporting Coleen Rooney was trying to revive her TV career — duly appeared in *The Sun*.

Rooney said she had blocked all accounts from seeing her Instagram stories apart from the one she suspected of being the leaker. In an October 2019 social media post to almost 2 million followers, she revealed: "It's Rebekah Vardy's account."

Rooney was dubbed "Wagatha Christie," a play on the slang term "WAG" — wives and girlfriends of soccer stars — and the name of crime author Agatha Christie.

Vardy, 40, strenuously denied leaking, and sued for libel "to establish her innocence and vindicate her reputation," her lawyer Hugh Tomlinson said.

The case caused a media frenzy during seven days of hearings as the two women went to court, along with their husbands, despite being urged by judges and legal experts to settle. The case has reportedly cost each side more than 1 million pounds (\$1.2 million) in legal fees.

Both women testified during the trial, with Vardy several times breaking down in tears. The judge was scathing about Vardy's credibility as a witness, saying some of her evidence was "manifestly inconsistent with the contemporaneous documentary evidence, evasive or implausible." Rooney, in contrast, was "honest and reliable," the judge said.

Vardy's agent did not give evidence. Vardy's lawyers said Watt's health was too fragile for her to take the stand. Watt's phone, which was sought by Rooney's lawyers as evidence, was reported to have fallen into the North Sea.

The judge noted that the chances this was an accident were "slim."

Media lawyer Jonathan Coad told the BBC the outcome was "an absolute disaster" for Vardy, who "has been effectively branded a liar."

Though the case was treated by the media and much of the public as an entertaining spectacle, the judge noted that it had a human cost.

She said Vardy had faced "vile abuse" from members of the public after Rooney's post, "including messages wishing her, her family, and even her then-unborn baby, ill in the most awful terms."

"Nothing of which Mrs. Vardy has been accused, nor any of the findings in this judgment, provide any justification or excuse for subjecting her or her family, or any other person involved in this case, to such vitriol," Steyn said.

Vardy indicated she would not appeal.

"Please can the people who have been abusing me and my family now stop," she said. "The case is over."

Inflation hits record 8.9% in euro area, but economy grows

By COURTNEY BONNELL and COLLEEN BARRY AP Business Writers

LONDON (AP) — Inflation in the European countries using the euro currency shot up to another record in July, pushed by higher energy prices fueled by Russia's war in Ukraine, but the economy managed better-than-expected, if meager, growth in the second quarter.

Annual inflation in the eurozone's 19 countries rose to 8.9% in July, an increase from 8.6% in June, according to numbers published Friday by the European Union statistics agency.

For months, inflation has been running at its highest levels since 1997, when record-keeping for the euro began, leading the European Central Bank to raise interest rates last week for the first time in 11 years

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to tamp down prices.

The euro-area economy managed to expand by 0.7% from April through July over the previous quarter, contrasting with the contraction in the United States, where fears are growing of a recession. The outlook is just as gloomy for Europe.

Analysts say the economic growth tied to a rebound in tourism could be the last glimmer of upbeat news, with inflation, rising interest rates and a worsening energy crisis fueled by the war expected to push the euro area into recession later this year.

"This is as likely to be as good as it will get for the eurozone for the foreseeable future," Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist for Capital Economics, wrote in an analyst note.

Growth already has stagnated in Germany, Europe's traditional economic engine, after being hit with a series of cuts in Russian natural gas used for industry. France avoided fears of a recession by posting modest 0.5% growth in the second quarter, while Italy and Spain exceeded expectations with 1% and 1.1% expansions, respectively.

Energy prices, meanwhile, surged in the eurozone by 39.7% this month, only slightly lower than June due to gas supply concerns. Prices for food, alcohol and tobacco rose by 9.8%, faster than the increase posted last month because of higher transport costs, shortages and uncertainty around Ukrainian supply.

"Another ugly inflation reading for July," said Bert Colijn, senior eurozone economist for ING bank, adding that there was "no imminent sign of relief."

The U.S. is also facing high inflation, clocking in at 40-year highs, but unlike Europe, has already seen its economy shrink for two straight quarters. At the same time, the job market is stronger than before the COVID-19 pandemic, and most economists, including Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, have said they don't think the economy is in recession.

Many, however, increasingly expect an economic downturn in the U.S. to begin later this year or next, much like in Europe.

Europe's risk is largely tied to its reliance on Russian energy, with Moscow throttling down flows of natural gas that power factories, generate electricity and heat homes in the winter.

More reductions this week through a major pipeline to Germany, Nord Stream 1, have heightened fears that the Kremlin may cut off supplies completely. That would force rationing for energy-intensive industries and spike already record-high levels of inflation driven by soaring energy prices, threatening to plunge the 27-nation bloc into recession.

While European Union governments approved a measure this week to reduce gas use by 15% and have passed tax cuts and subsidies to ease a cost-of-living crisis, Europe is at the mercy of Russia and the weather.

A cold winter, when natural gas demand soars, could draw down storage levels that governments are now scrambling to fill but has been made infinitely harder by Russia's cuts.

"With the region's gas supply now reduced and inflation set to remain high for some time, the eurozone is likely to fall into recession," Michael Tran, an assistant economist with Capital Economics, said in an analysis this week.

While the European Central Bank has begun raising rates to cool inflation and expects another bump in September, it had trailed other central banks like the Fed and the Bank of England in making credit more expensive, fearing the outside impact of soaring energy prices tied to the war.

The impact of the ECB's recent rate hike on inflation was "very limited, although it does add to a further cooling of demand in the eurozone," ING's Colijn wrote.

"With a recession looming and inflation reaching new highs, the question is how the ECB will respond to an economy which is already cooling down," he said.

Abortion foes downplay complex post-Roe v. Wade realities

By AMANDA SEITZ and JOSH KELETY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When a 10-year-old Ohio girl traveled to Indiana last month to end a pregnancy forced onto her by a rapist, several conservative politicians and TV pundits called the report a hoax.

After horrific details confirmed the case was real, some tried a new tack: claiming, without evidence, that

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the child could have still legally obtained an abortion in Ohio under a near-total abortion ban that exempts only mothers whose lives or major bodily functions are at risk once fetal cardiac activity is detected.

Catherine Glenn Foster, president of the anti-abortion Americans United for Life, added another defense for young rape victims: She told the House Judiciary Committee that a 10-year-old's pregnancy "would probably impact her life and so, therefore, it would fall under any exception and would not be an abortion."

In televised statements and interviews, anti-abortion advocates have used misleading rhetoric about abortion access to downplay fallout and complications from restrictive abortion laws as doctors, struggling to interpret laws that have largely been untested in courts, turn away pregnant patients for care.

Those efforts have had an immediate impact, casting a narrative about a post-Roe v. Wade world that overlooks how abortion laws enacted in recent weeks have complicated the way doctors treat rape victims, miscarriages and ectopic pregnancies.

More than half a dozen doctors interviewed by The Associated Press said they feel compromised and uncertain operating in an abortion landscape fundamentally changed by a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that rejected nearly 50 years of precedent that abortion was a protected constitutional right.

"It's a horrible position for health care providers to be in, to be unsure about what's legal and what's not legal, and to be questioning the care that they know that they should provide," said Dr. Jennifer Kerns, an associate professor in the department of obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences at the University of California, San Francisco.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost, who initially questioned reporting of the 10-year-old girl's rape case, said in a Fox News Channel interview that she did not have to leave Ohio for abortion treatment, citing the state's exemptions. Last week, Ohio Right to Life President Mike Gonidakis repeated the claim during a public forum: "She could have had that abortion here." The law's Republican sponsor said the same in a newspaper column published Thursday.

But it's not as clear cut as they've suggested.

The state's nonpartisan Legislative Service Commission confirmed in an analysis that the age of a mother, alone, would not allow a girl to legally access the procedure in the state. Doctors in Ohio are required to document a medical condition and rationale if they administer an abortion to provide life-saving treatment.

Yost's office did not return a request for additional comment. Gonidakis laid out "different scenarios" to the AP under which the girl might have been able to access the abortion in Ohio, such as if a doctor agreed her life was at risk because of her age, while noting that he had not reviewed her medical records.

Across social media, some conservatives have also minimized concerns about access to treatment for ectopic pregnancies, calling it "still legal in every state." An ectopic pregnancy is defined as one in which a fertilized egg grows outside the uterus, where it has no chance of survival.

Earlier this month, abortion opponent Erin Morrow Hawley told the House Reform and Oversight Committee that ectopic pregnancies had become the subject of "misinformation."

"There have been social media posts suggesting that women won't get treated for an ectopic pregnancy because doctors might be afraid of performing the procedure, but that's absolutely false," said Hawley, an attorney at the religious nonprofit Alliance Defending Freedom. "Treatment for an ectopic pregnancy is not, in fact, an abortion."

State abortion laws, however, have fueled confusion.

Doctors generally agree that the procedure to end an ectopic pregnancy, which typically includes medication or surgery to remove the pregnancy, is not the same as an abortion.

But women reportedly have been declined care in states that have severely restricted abortion access, like Ohio, where an abortion is banned once fetal cardiac activity is detected. Fetal heartbeats can still be present in ectopic pregnancies. In one case, a central Texas hospital told a physician not to treat an ectopic pregnancy until it ruptured, per a letter from the Texas Medical Association.

In an email to the AP, Hawley said that doctors who have turned away ectopic pregnancy patients because of abortion bans are misinterpreting the laws.

Still, before Roe v. Wade was even overturned by the Supreme Court in June, some religious hospitals had policies against treating women for ectopic pregnancies.

And many states have not specified in their newly enacted abortion bans that an ectopic pregnancy can be treated as an exception. That's left doctors in some states leery of ending the pregnancy, said Dr. Kate White, an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Boston University School of Medicine. Lawmakers in West Virginia, for example, are considering an abortion ban that would carve out an exception for ectopic pregnancies.

"Clinicians may be afraid to treat it if the abortion law in their state does not explicitly carve out ectopic pregnancy. You can see their worry, 'Hey, growing pregnancy, can't interrupt it ever,'" White said. "They are afraid that the law is too broad."

New constitution gives some Tunisians hope, others concern

By FRANCESCA EBEL Associated Press

TUNIS, Tunisia (AP) — Tunisian voters have approved a referendum on a new constitution that gives more powers to the country's president. It's a step that brings hope to many in the struggling North African nation, but critics warn it could return Tunisia to autocracy and say low turnout marred the vote's legitimacy.

Some people interviewed by The Associated Press this week celebrated the result of Monday's referendum and expressed support for President Kais Saied, who spearheaded the project and proposed the text himself.

Others said they worry about what the changes could mean for the future of democracy in the country. The overhauled constitution gives sweeping executive powers to the president and weakens the influence of the legislative and judicial branches of the government.

Adel, a 51-year-old plumber who refused to give his last name due to fear of political reprisals, said that while he supported Saied, he did not participate in Monday's referendum because he thought the proposed changes gave the executive branch too much power.

"This constitution he made was not for the long-term. Those who will come after Saied will do whatever they want without being held accountable," he said.

In 2011, Tunisians rose up against Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the country's strongman president, and kicked off the Arab Spring protests in North Africa and the Middle East. Tunisia was the only nation to emerge from the protests with a democratic government.

Saied won the presidency in 2019 with over 70% of the vote. He continues to enjoy widespread popular support; recent polls put his approval rating at well over 50%.

The referendum took place a year to the day after Saied froze Tunisia's parliament and dismissed his government. Opponents derided the moves as "a coup," but many Tunisians supported the president's actions due to exasperation with political elites and years of economic stagnation.

In the same way, many citizens think the new constitution will end years of political deadlock and reduce the influence of the country's largest political party, Ennahdha. Others saw a "yes" vote as a vote for Saied and a chance to change their fortunes.

Saida Masoudi, 49, a fast-food seller in a Tunis suburb who voted for the revised constitution, said she hoped the changes would pave the way to economic reforms and lower living costs.

"We just want the country to improve and reform. That's why I participated in this referendum, so that the country will return to how it was before" she said, adding that she thinks Tunisians lived better under Ben Ali than they do today.

However, Heba Morayef, Amnesty International's regional director, called the constitution's adoption "deeply worrying." She said in a statement that the revisions were drafted behind closed doors in a process controlled by Saied.

"The new constitution dismantles many of the guarantees to the independence of the judiciary, removes protection for civilians from military trials and grants the authorities the power to restrict human rights or renege on international human rights commitments in the name of religion" Morayef said.

Official preliminary results showed about one-third of registered voters cast ballots, with 94.6% giving their approval.

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Opposition leaders had called for a boycott of the referendum, saying the process was flawed, and they argue the turnout reflected discomfort with the changes to Tunisia's system of government.

"The referendum was rigged from the start, with no participation threshold provided for," International Commission of Jurists regional director Said Benarbia said. "The low turnout and the opaque, illegal process by which the adoption of the constitution was made possible do not give the president any mandate or legitimacy to change Tunisia's constitutional order."

Several people the Associated Press spoke with said they did not vote in the referendum. Some said they were uninterested in politics, while others said a new constitution would do little to change their quality of life. Several did not understand the changes it would introduce.

"I didn't vote because none of this interests me," Khalil Riahi, a 26-year-old DJ, said. "Whether it's Kais Saied doing this or someone else, it's all the same to me. Nothing will change."

Monica Marks, Professor of Middle East politics at NYU Abu Dhabi, says that many Tunisians have grown tired, disillusioned and cynical in recent years but that they "never called for a complete up-ending of their political system".

"What they've been calling for, for years, is for effective leadership from government that makes a real tangible difference in their everyday lives and solves the economic challenges that they're desperately grappling with" says Marks, explaining that many are attached to the idea that "one man alone can take the system, break it and maybe fix it."

"There are still a lot of Tunisians who believe that Saied is Mr. Fix It... They believe he is the man who will clean up everything, even though he's ruled by powers of personal decree for an entire year, and their situation tangibly hasn't changed."

Today in History: July 30, USS Indianapolis is torpedoed

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, July 30, the 211th day of 2022. There are 154 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 30, 1945, the Portland class heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis, having just delivered components of the atomic bomb to Tinian in the Mariana Islands, was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine; only 317 out of nearly 1,200 men survived.

On this date:

In 1619, the first representative assembly in America convened in Jamestown in the Virginia Colony.

In 1729, Baltimore, Maryland, was founded.

In 1864, during the Civil War, Union forces tried to take Petersburg, Virginia, by exploding a gunpowder-laden mine shaft beneath Confederate defense lines; the attack failed.

In 1916, German saboteurs blew up a munitions plant on Black Tom, an island near Jersey City, New Jersey, killing about a dozen people.

In 1918, poet Joyce Kilmer, a sergeant in the 165th U.S. Infantry Regiment, was killed during the Second Battle of the Marne in World War I. (Kilmer is remembered for his poem "Trees.")

In 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a measure making "In God We Trust" the national motto, replacing "E Pluribus Unum" (Out of many, one).

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed a measure creating Medicare, which began operating the following year.

In 1980, Israel's Knesset passed a law reaffirming all of Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish state.

In 2008, ex-Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic (RA'-doh-van KA'-ra-jich) was extradited to The Hague to face genocide charges after nearly 13 years on the run. (He was sentenced by a U.N. court in 2019 to life imprisonment after being convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.)

In 2010, the Afghan Taliban confirmed the death of longtime leader Mullah Mohammad Omar and appointed his successor, Mullah Akhtar Mansoor.

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In 2016, 16 people died when a hot air balloon caught fire and exploded after hitting high-tension power lines before crashing into a pasture near Lockhart, Texas, about 60 miles northeast of San Antonio.

In 2020, John Lewis was eulogized in Atlanta by three former presidents and others who urged Americans to continue the work of the civil rights icon in fighting injustice during a moment of racial reckoning. Herman Cain, a former Republican presidential candidate and former CEO of a pizza chain who became an ardent supporter of President Donald Trump, died in Atlanta of complications from the coronavirus at the age of 74; he was hospitalized less than two weeks after attending Trump's campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he was photographed not wearing a mask.

Ten years ago: Republican presidential challenger Mitt Romney, on a visit to Israel, outraged Palestinians by telling Jewish donors that their culture was part of the reason Israel was more economically successful than the Palestinians. At the London Olympics, American teenager Missy Franklin won the women's 100-meter backstroke before Matt Grevers led a 1-2 finish for the U.S. in the men's race.

Five years ago: Three days after the U.S. Congress approved sanctions against Russia in response to its meddling in the 2016 U.S. election and its military aggression in Ukraine and Syria, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the United States would have to cut the number of embassy and consulate staff in Russia by 755.

One year ago: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis barred school districts from requiring students to wear masks when the new school year began. Broadway theater operators announced that COVID-19 vaccinations and masks would be required when theaters reopened in the weeks ahead. Japan expanded a coronavirus state of emergency to four more areas in addition to Tokyo following record spikes in infections as the capital hosted the Olympics. The first flight evacuating Afghans who'd worked alongside Americans in Afghanistan brought more than 200 people to new lives in the United States; the flight that landed outside Washington, D.C., carried translators and close family members.

Today's Birthdays: Former Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig is 88. Blues musician Buddy Guy is 86. Feminist activist Eleanor Smeal is 83. Former U.S. Rep. Patricia Schroeder is 82. Singer Paul Anka is 81. Jazz musician David Sanborn is 77. Former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is 75. Actor William Atherton is 75. Actor Jean Reno (zhahn rih-NOH') is 74. Blues singer-musician Otis Taylor is 74. Actor Frank Stallone is 72. Actor Ken Olin is 68. Actor Delta Burke is 66. Law professor Anita Hill is 66. Singer-songwriter Kate Bush is 64. Country singer Neal McCoy is 64. Actor Richard Burgi is 64. Movie director Richard Linklater is 62. Actor Laurence Fishburne is 61. Actor Lisa Kudrow is 59. Bluegrass musician Danny Roberts (The Grascals) is 59. Country musician Dwayne O'Brien is 59. Actor Vivica A. Fox is 58. Actor Terry Crews is 54. Actor Simon Baker is 53. Actor Donnie Keshawarz is 53. Movie director Christopher Nolan is 52. Actor Tom Green is 51. Rock musician Brad Hargreaves (Third Eye Blind) is 51. Actor Christine Taylor is 51. Actor-comedian Dean Edwards is 49. Actor Hilary Swank is 48. Olympic gold medal beach volleyball player Misty May-Treanor is 45. Actor Jaime Pressly is 45. Alt-country singer-musician Seth Avett (AY'-veht) is 42. Actor April Bowlby is 42. Former soccer player Hope Solo is 41. Actor Yvonne Strahovski is 40. Actor Martin Starr is 40. Actor Gina Rodriguez is 38. Actor Nico Tortorella is 34. Actor Joey King is 23.