

Groton Daily Independent

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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 FERNEY, 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**

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

Death Notice: LaVonne Raap

LaVonne Raap, 87, of Groton passed away July 30, 2022 at Sun Dial Manor in Bristol. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

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

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

August 2, 2022 – 7:00pm
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
2. The Pantry Update & Request for Space for a Thrift Store to Fund The Pantry – Enrich Groton SoDak
3. Minutes
4. Bills
5. Department Reports
6. Revisitation of Updated Community Center Fees
7. Discussion and Possible Approval of Changing the Intersection of West 5th Avenue & North Washington Street into a 4-way Stop
8. Agreement for DANR ARPA Administrative Assistance with NECOG
9. Secretary's Award for Drinking Water Excellence 2021 – 21 consecutive years of safe drinking water to the City of Groton
10. WEB Water increasing rates effective October 2022 - \$0.74 per 1000 contracted gallons usage increase, along with \$0.96 per 1000 over-the-contract rate increase
11. 2022 SD Municipal League Annual Conference – October 4-7, 2022 – Watertown, SD – Douglas Heinrich
12. Announcement: Family Fun Fest on Main Street in Groton – August 11, 2022 – 5:30pm-7:30pm
13. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
14. Adjournment

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MIKE ROUNDS United States Senator for
SOUTH DAKOTA



THE ROUNDS REPORT

Weekly Round[s] Up by Senator Mike Rounds **July 25-31, 2022**

We stayed busy again this week out in Washington - are you sensing a theme here? We're now just one week away from our August in-state work period, which means we had a lot of work to get done last week and a lot ahead of us this week. On top of voting on legislation and attending committee hearings, I got to meet with nominees to executive positions and talk with multiple South Dakotans. Here's my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakota groups I visited with: South Dakota Trucking Association, South Dakota's delegates to Boys & Girls Nation, and Tomorrow's Ag Leaders with the South Dakota Agri-Business Association.

Other meetings this week: Two ambassadors from other countries to the United States: Taranjit Sandhu of India and Seleshi Bekele of Ethiopia; two nominees to executive positions whose nominations are being processed in the Armed Services and Foreign Relations committees; Tom Bossert, president of Trinity Cyber; and five British members of parliament who were visiting from all the way across the pond! Additionally, I hosted a great meeting with leaders in the cyber security community including National Cyber Director Chris Inglis, Executive Director of the Cyberspace Solarium Commission Mark Montgomery, Senator Angus King of Maine and Representative Mike Gallagher. We also had our Senate Prayer Breakfast (Senator Steve Daines from Montana was our speaker) and Senate Bible Study (Our verse of the week was 1 Corinthians 6:11), both of which happen weekly when the Senate is in session.

Met with South Dakotans from: Aberdeen, Brandon, Britton, Gettysburg, Harrisburg, Mitchell, Pierre, Rapid City, Rockham, Sioux Falls, Tabor, Wessington Springs, Wilmot and Wolsey.

Topics discussed: New GDP data indicating that we've entered a recession, cybersecurity, fertilizer costs, workforce issues supply chain issues, and high fuel prices.

Votes taken: 6 - One of these was on the Water Resources Development Act, which had a few of my amendments in it pertaining to the Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers that run through South Dakota.

Bills passed this week: My Greatest Generation Commemorative Coin Act unanimously passed both the Senate and the House this week. This bill would authorize the Department of the Treasury to mint commemorative coins, with proceeds going toward maintenance and repair at the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. This bill now goes to the president's desk.

Hearings: Senate Armed Services Committee - We had a hearing this week on nominations for positions within the Defense Department; Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health Policy - I served as ranking member for a hearing on the Biden administration's budget requests for Africa.

Classified briefings: This week I had a classified briefing on America's Indo-Pacific policy and operations as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Canistota, Dell Rapids, Garretson, Madison, Montrose, Salem and Spearfish.

Media appearances this week: "Ask the Senator" on KCCR in Pierre; "Drive Time" on WNAX in Yankton.

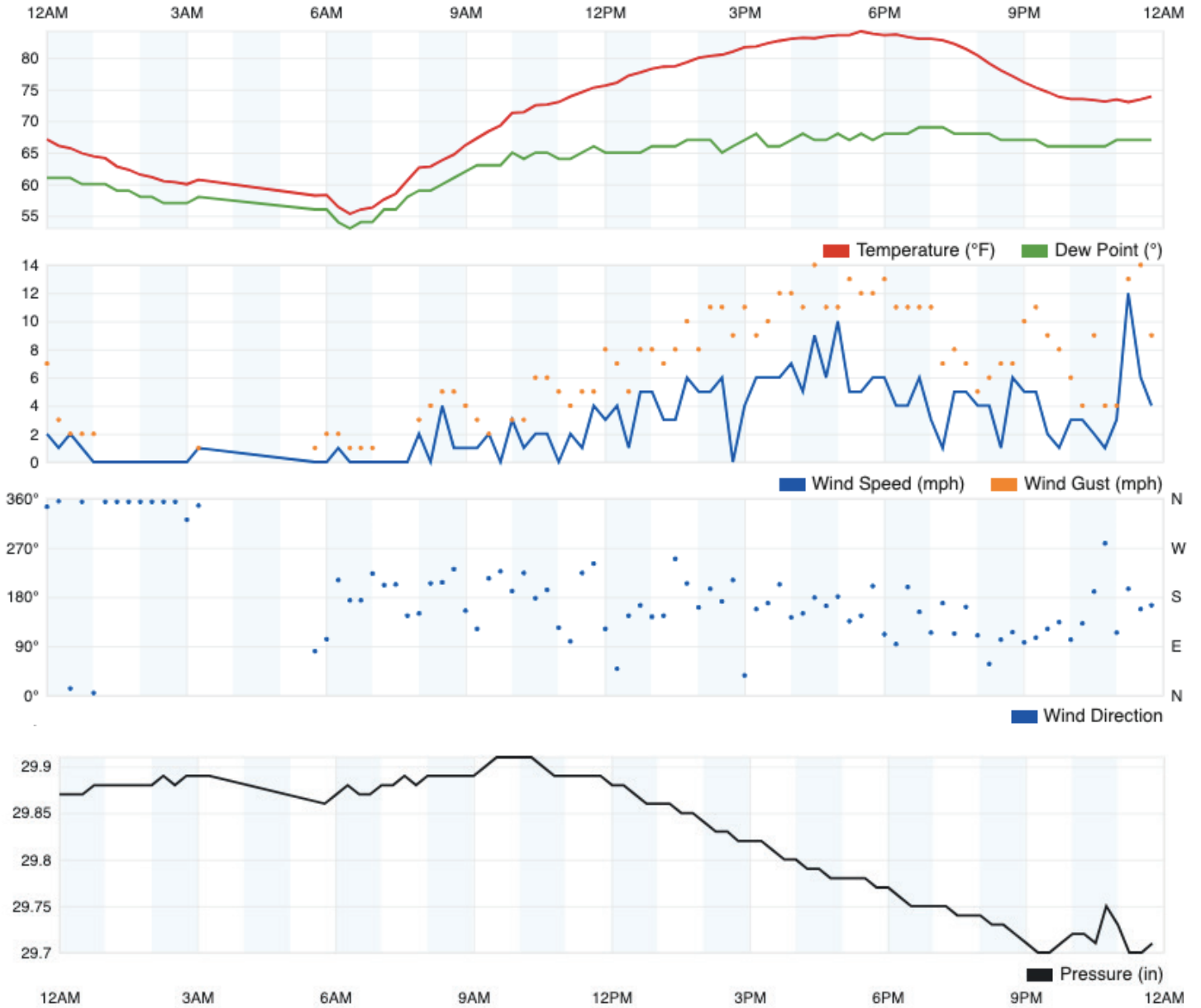
Staff happenings: After a fun summer season playing against teams from different senate offices, our office softball team played Senator Thune's team on Wednesday night. Team Rounds won 20-9 and brought home the traveling Tatanka trophy for another year! Better luck next year, Senator Thune!

Steps taken this week: 53,096 (or 24.60 miles)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Hot

Tonight



Chance
T-storms

Wednesday



Sunny

Wednesday
Night



Mostly Clear

Thursday



Sunny then
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 97 °F

Low: 67 °F

High: 84 °F

Low: 60 °F

High: 92 °F

Extreme Heat & Fire Weather Concerns Today

Maximum Heat Index Forecast

	8/2 Tue							Maximum
	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	
Aberdeen	92	96	98	100	99	99	99	100
Britton	91	94	98	98	99	97	97	99
Eagle Butte	91	93	95	96	95	93	91	96
Eureka	89	92	94	96	95	94	94	96
Gettysburg	88	91	93	94	95	94	93	95
Kennebec	92	96	97	98	99	98	97	99
McIntosh	90	92	91	92	91	91	89	92
Milbank	94	97	98	102	101	101	101	102
Miller	92	94	95	96	97	96	94	97
Mobridge	91	93	96	96	96	95	95	96
Murdo	91	94	96	97	97	96	95	97
Pierre	91	95	98	99	99	99	98	99
Redfield	93	96	97	97	100	99	97	100
Sisseton	95	98	101	102	101	101	102	102
Watertown	92	94	95	97	96	97	98	98
Webster	88	91	93	93	95	94	92	95
Wheaton	90	94	96	98	99	100	99	100

Minimum RH Forecast

	8/2 Tue										Minimum
	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	
Aberdeen	52	44	41	38	34	34	34	35	38	42	34
Britton	61	57	52	49	43	40	43	45	50	59	40
Eagle Butte	14	13	11	11	12	16	18	22	25	30	11
Eureka	41	32	29	26	24	22	21	24	27	35	21
Gettysburg	28	22	20	17	17	16	16	21	25	32	16
Kennebec	23	18	16	15	14	15	17	21	29	34	14
McIntosh	24	20	19	20	21	22	24	26	30	34	19
Milbank	57	50	46	45	40	40	40	43	46	53	40
Miller	30	24	20	19	18	19	21	24	30	40	18
Mobridge	28	23	18	16	16	17	19	24	28	34	16
Murdo	18	15	14	14	14	17	19	23	30	35	14
Pierre	19	15	14	13	13	14	15	18	23	28	13
Redfield	50	41	36	33	29	28	30	33	37	45	28
Sisseton	56	49	47	45	40	40	42	44	47	52	40
Watertown	57	52	47	40	37	36	37	41	45	50	36
Webster	57	50	45	42	38	36	36	41	43	51	36
Wheaton	61	54	52	49	44	46	44	49	56	61	44

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast

	8/2 Tue										Maximum
	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	
Aberdeen	15	16	16	16	15	17	17	15	15	16	17
Britton	20	18	20	18	17	18	18	18	16	15	20
Eagle Butte	15	20	22	24	25	26	25	25	24	21	26
Eureka	15	16	17	18	21	22	22	22	21	21	22
Gettysburg	17	16	17	20	22	22	21	20	20	16	22
Kennebec	15	14	16	18	21	22	22	23	21	18	23
McIntosh	20	23	25	28	30	29	28	26	24	22	30
Milbank	18	18	17	17	16	14	13	12	9	10	18
Miller	16	15	15	14	14	16	16	17	15	14	17
Mobridge	15	16	20	22	23	23	24	24	23	20	24
Murdo	14	15	20	21	23	25	24	24	22	21	25
Pierre	14	13	16	18	21	22	21	24	23	20	24
Redfield	15	15	15	15	14	15	16	14	13	15	16
Sisseton	20	18	18	16	16	16	15	14	15	15	20
Watertown	21	21	21	20	17	15	14	14	10	12	21
Webster	21	22	21	21	18	17	17	16	15	14	22
Wheaton	17	16	16	16	14	14	13	12	12	13	17

Updated: 8/2/2022 5:02 AM Central



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

The combination of high humidity values and afternoon temperatures in the 90s to low 100s will drive heat index values into the triple digits this afternoon from parts of south central South Dakota north and east into west central Minnesota. Conditions farther west will be just as hot with afternoon readings in the upper 90s to low 100s but humidity values will be much less and combined with gusty winds will produce red flag conditions across north central South Dakota.

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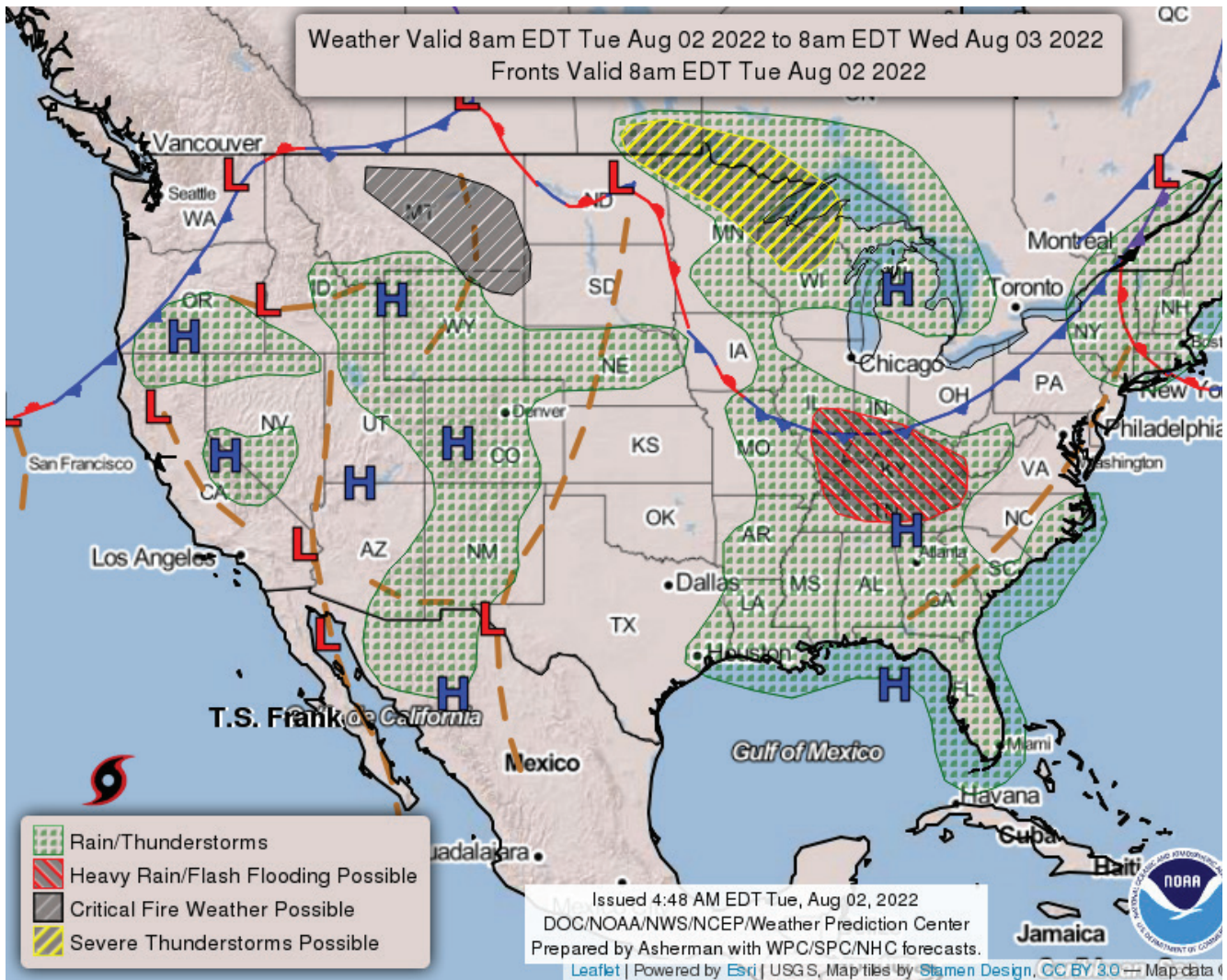
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 84 °F at 5:32 PM
Low Temp: 55 °F at 6:27 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 11:21 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 44 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 105 in 1938
Record Low: 40 in 2018
Average High: 85°F
Average Low: 59°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 0.15
Precip to date in Aug.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 14.25
Precip Year to Date: 14.54
Sunset Tonight: 9:00:53 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:17:36 AM



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Today in Weather History

August 2, 1960: Hail, the size of a hen egg caused moderate damage to a total loss of corn, soybean, and grain crops on 50 to 75 farms in Marshall, Roberts, and Grant Counties. High winds caused damage to buildings and uprooted trees in Britton.

1954 - Severe thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail for thirty minutes in north central Kansas. One drift measured 200 feet long, seventy feet wide and three feet deep. (The Weather Channel)

1975 - Record heat gripped New England. Highs of 104 degrees at Providence, RI, and 107 degrees at Chester and New Bedford, MA, established state records. The heat along the coast of Maine was unprecedented, with afternoon highs of 101 degrees at Bar Harbor and 104 degrees at Jonesboro. (The Weather Channel)

1985: A strong and sudden wind gusts cause a plane crash at the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport in Texas that kills 135 people. The rapid and unexpected formation of a supercell, an incredibly powerful form of a thunderstorm, led to the tragedy.

1987 - Hot weather continued in the central U.S. Fifteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Concordia KS with a reading of 106 degrees, and Downtown Kansas City, MO, with a high of 105 degrees. Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in the Ohio Valley and the north central U.S. Thunderstorms in South Dakota produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Philip, and hail two inches in diameter at Faulkton. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Searing heat continued from the Middle and Upper Mississippi Valley to the Middle and Northern Atlantic Coast States. Twenty-six cities reported record high temperatures for the date. Chicago IL reported a record seven days of 100 degree heat for the year. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Low pressure representing the remains of Hurricane Chantal deluged north central Texas with heavy rain. Up to 6.50 inches drenched Stephens County, and Wichita Falls reported 2.22 inches of rain in just one hour. Bismarck, ND, reported a record warm morning low of 75 degrees, and record hot afternoon high of 101 degrees, and evening thunderstorms in North Dakota produced wind gusts to 78 mph at Lakota. Early evening thunderstorms in Florida produced high winds which downed trees at Christmas. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2006: Johannesburg, South Africa residents see snow flurries for the first time in at least eight years.

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NOT US

Leaving church one Sunday morning, a husband and wife said to the pastor, "That was a great sermon, one of your very best. I only wish that our neighbors had been here with us. Everything you said applied specifically to them. They needed to hear it, not us!"

Far too many individuals come to church with a shield or sieve, not a wagon or wheelbarrow. Instead of taking the message with them and applying it to their lives, they deflect anything that applies to them or allow only little bits and pieces of carefully sifted material to enter their minds or hearts.

One of the important parts of a healthy lifestyle is an annual physical examination by a physician. It is designed as an "early warning system" to detect any life-threatening disease. Many times illnesses can be stopped immediately and effectively before it becomes deadly.

That is why we need a Scriptural check-up, using God's Word as the "standard" of our Spiritual health. Paul wrote, "Examine yourselves...test yourselves" – with His word as the measure - to see if you are truly living a God-honoring, Spirit-filled, Christian life. A Scriptural checkup done daily will help us to recognize "which direction we are growing." There must be an awareness of Christ's presence and power in our lives by the way we are living and how we are honoring God. If we are not getting closer to God every day, we are moving farther away from Him. It's one way or the other – either/or. It cannot be both!

Prayer: Help us, Father, to be honest with ourselves about the "condition" of our salvation and our relationship with You. May we be true Christians, not imposters. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: 2 Corinthians 13:5-6 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.

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2022-23 Community Events

- 07/21/2022: Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/22/2022: Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
07/24/2022: Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
07/27/2022: Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm
08/05/2022: Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
08/12/2022: GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
No Date Set: Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot
09/10/2022: Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
No Date Set: 6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm
09/11/2022: Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10 a.m.
09/02-04: Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/01/2022: Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/07/2022: Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
10/31/2022: Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2022: United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/12/2022: Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course
12/10/2022: Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm
01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
07/04/2023 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start (4th of July)
07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)

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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 Monday:

Lotto America

21-24-42-48-51, Star Ball: 10, ASB: 4

(twenty-one, twenty-four, forty-two, forty-eight, fifty-one; Star Ball: ten; ASB: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$17,640,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 1,280,000,000

Powerball

15-21-31-36-65, Powerball: 16, Power Play: 3

(fifteen, twenty-one, thirty-one, thirty-six, sixty-five; Powerball: sixteen; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$202,000,000

Taliban under scrutiny as US kills al-Qaida leader in Kabul

By RAHIM FAIEZ and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — The U.S. drone strike that killed al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri on the balcony of a Kabul safe house intensified global scrutiny Tuesday of Afghanistan's Taliban rulers and further undermined their efforts to secure international recognition and desperately needed aid.

The Taliban had promised in the 2020 Doha Agreement on the terms of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan that they would not harbor al-Qaida members. Nearly a year after the U.S. military's chaotic pullout from Afghanistan, al-Zawahri's killing raises questions about the involvement of Taliban leaders in sheltering a mastermind of the 9/11 terror attacks and one of America's most-wanted fugitives.

The safe house is in Kabul's upscale Shirpur neighborhood, home to several Taliban leaders who had moved into mansions of former top Afghan officials of the toppled Western-backed government.

The Taliban initially sought to describe the strike as America violating the Doha deal, which also includes a Taliban pledge not to shelter those seeking to attack the United States — something al-Zawahri had done for years in internet videos and online screeds. The Taliban have yet to say who was killed in the strike.

Meanwhile, rumors persist of unease in the Taliban ranks — particularly between the powerful group known as the Haqqani network, which apparently sheltered al-Zawahri, and other Taliban figures.

"The killing of Ayman al-Zawahri has raised many questions," said one Pakistani intelligence official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to The Associated Press as he wasn't authorized to speak publicly to reporters. Al-Zawahri took over as al-Qaida's leader after Osama bin Laden was killed in Pakistan in 2011, in an operation by U.S. Navy SEALs.

"The Taliban were aware of his presence in Kabul, and if they were not aware of it, they need to explain their position," the official said.

The strike early Sunday shook awake Shirpur, once home to historic buildings bulldozed in 2003 to make way for luxury homes for officials in Afghanistan's Western-backed government and international aid organizations. After the U.S. withdrawal in August 2021, the Taliban elite began taking some of the abandoned homes there.

The house where al-Zawahri stayed was the home of a top aide to senior Taliban leader Sirajuddin Haqqani, according to a senior U.S. intelligence official. Taliban officials blocked AP journalists in Kabul from reaching the damaged house on Tuesday.

The U.N. Security Council was informed by monitors of militant groups in July that al-Qaida enjoys greater freedom in Afghanistan under the Taliban, but confines itself to advising and supporting the country's new rulers.

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A report by the monitors said the two groups remain close and that al-Qaida fighters, estimated to number between 180 to 400, are represented "at the individual level" among Taliban combat units.

The monitors said it's unlikely al-Qaida will seek to mount direct attacks outside Afghanistan, "owing to a lack of capability and restraint on the part of the Taliban, as well as an unwillingness to jeopardize their recent gains" such as having a safe haven and improved resources.

During the first half of 2022, al-Zawahri increasingly reached out to supporters with video and audio messages, including assurances that al-Qaida can compete with the Islamic State group for leadership of a global movement, the report by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team said.

IS militants have emerged as a major threat to the Taliban over the past year, carrying out a series of deadly attacks against Taliban targets and civilians.

The Haqqani network is an Afghan Islamic insurgent group, built around the family of the same name. In the 1980s, it fought Soviet forces and over the past 20 years, it battled U.S.-led NATO troops and the former Afghanistan government.

Sirajuddin Haqqani has also served as the first deputy leader of the Taliban movement since 2016. Since last August, he also served the appointed interior ministry of the Taliban government. The U.S. government maintains a \$10 million bounty on him for "numerous significant kidnappings and attacks against U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan, the Afghan government and civilian targets."

But the Haqqanis, from Afghanistan's eastern Khost province, have disagreed with others in the Taliban leadership, mostly from the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar. Some believe Sirajuddin Haqqani wants more power. Other Taliban figures have opposed the Haqqanis' violent attacks against civilians in Kabul and elsewhere.

"It seems to me that the power struggle within the Taliban is general. It's not necessarily about the U.S. or about the international community. It's about the new regime, how to share power within the new regime, who gets what position, who gets to control what ministries, to decide the general policies and so on," said Jerome Drevon, the International Crisis Group's senior analyst studying Islamist militant groups.

"It's not that surprising that the building would be owned by the Haqqani family. ... That creates a tension between what the Taliban movement is, especially in terms of how it's trying to reach out to the international community, to normalize itself and so on," he said.

The timing of the strike also couldn't come at a worse time politically for the Taliban. The militants face international condemnation for refusing to reopen schools for girls above the sixth grade, despite earlier promises. The United Nations mission to Afghanistan also criticized the Taliban for human rights abuses under their rule.

The U.S. and its allies have cut off billions in development funds that kept the government afloat in part over the abuses, as well as froze billions in Afghan national assets.

This sent the already shattered economy into free fall, increasing poverty dramatically and creating one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Millions, struggling to feed their families, are kept alive by a massive U.N.-led relief effort.

The Taliban have been trying to reopen the taps to that aid and their reserves. However, al-Zawahri's killing already has been seized upon by the U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken as a sign that the Taliban "grossly violated the Doha Agreement and repeated assurances ... that they would not allow Afghan territory to be used by terrorists to threaten the security of other countries."

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid alleged the U.S. violated the Doha Agreement by launching the strike. Afghanistan's state-run television channel — now under the Taliban — reported that President Joe Biden said al-Zawahri had been killed.

"The killing of Ayman al-Zawahri closes a chapter of al-Qaida," said Imtiaz Gul, the executive director of the Islamabad-based Center for Research and Security Studies.

In the Mideast, al-Zawahri's killing coincided with the 32nd anniversary of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, which sparked U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia — the same presence that bin Laden pointed to in launching the 9/11 attacks. Anwar Gargash, a senior diplomat in the United Arab Emirates, noted the timing.

It's "a chance for the region to contemplate and reflect on the absurdity of extremism, terrorism and reckless military adventures and how all of this frayed (the region's) fabric," Gargash wrote on Twitter. The "lessons and teachings are present, and hope rests on the countries of the region uniting together to guarantee security and shared development."

Pelosi believed headed to Taiwan, raising tension with China

By EILEEN NG Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi left Malaysia on Tuesday and was expected to visit Taiwan, escalating tensions with Beijing, which claims the self-ruled island as its own territory.

The plane carrying Pelosi and her delegation left from a Malaysian air force base after a brief stopover that included a lunch meeting with Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob, an official said on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to release details to the media.

Pelosi is on an Asian tour this week that is being closely watched to see if she will defy China's warnings against visiting Taiwan.

It was unclear where she was headed from Malaysia, but local media in Taiwan reported that she would arrive on Tuesday night, becoming the highest-ranking elected U.S. official to visit in more than 25 years. The United Daily News, Liberty Times and China Times — Taiwan's three largest national newspapers — cited unidentified sources as saying she would spend the night in Taiwan.

Taiwan's Foreign Ministry declined to comment. Premier Su Tseng-chang didn't explicitly confirm Pelosi's visit, but said Tuesday that "any foreign guests and friendly lawmakers" are "very much welcome."

China, which regards Taiwan as a renegade province to be annexed by force if necessary, has repeatedly warned of retaliation if Pelosi visits, saying its military will "never sit idly by."

"The U.S. and Taiwan have colluded to make provocations first, and China has only been compelled to act out of self-defense," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told reporters Tuesday in Beijing.

Hua said China has been in constant communication with the U.S. and made clear "how dangerous it would be if the visit actually happens." Any countermeasures China take will be "justified and necessary" in the face of Washington's "unscrupulous behavior," she said.

China's military threats have driven concerns of a new crisis in the Taiwan Strait, which separates the two sides, that could roil global markets and supply chains.

The White House on Monday decried Beijing's rhetoric, saying the U.S. has no interest in deepening tensions with China and "will not take the bait or engage in saber rattling."

White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby underscored that the decision on whether to visit Taiwan was ultimately Pelosi's. He noted that members of Congress have routinely visited the island over the years.

Kirby said administration officials are concerned that Beijing could use the visit as an excuse to take provocative retaliatory steps, including military action such as firing missiles in the Taiwan Strait or around Taiwan, or flying sorties into the island's airspace and carrying out large-scale naval exercises in the strait.

"Put simply, there is no reason for Beijing to turn a potential visit consistent with long-standing U.S. policy into some sort of crisis or use it as a pretext to increase aggressive military activity in or around the Taiwan Strait," Kirby said.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken also urged China to "act responsibly" if Pelosi proceeds with the visit.

"If the speaker does decide to visit, and China tries to create some kind of a crisis or otherwise escalate tensions, that would be entirely on Beijing," he told reporters at U.N. headquarters in New York. "We are looking for them, in the event she decides to visit, to act responsibly and not to engage in any escalation going forward."

U.S. officials have said the U.S. military would increase its movement of forces and assets in the Indo-

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Pacific region if Pelosi visits Taiwan. U.S. Navy aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and its strike group were in the Philippine Sea on Monday, according to officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations.

The Reagan, the cruiser USS Antietam and the destroyer USS Higgins left Singapore after a port visit and moved north to their homeport in Japan. The carrier has an array of aircraft, including F/A-18 fighter jets and helicopters, on board as well as sophisticated radar systems and other weapons.

Taiwan and China split in 1949 after the Communists won a civil war on the mainland. The U.S. maintains informal relations and defense ties with Taiwan even as it recognizes Beijing as the government of China.

Beijing sees official American contact with Taiwan as encouragement to make the island's decades-old de facto independence permanent, a step U.S. leaders say they don't support. Pelosi, head of one of three branches of the U.S. government, would be the highest-ranking elected American official to visit Taiwan since then-Speaker Newt Gingrich in 1997.

Pelosi kicked off her Asian tour in Singapore on Monday as her possible visit to Taiwan sparked jitters in the region.

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong "highlighted the importance of stable U.S.-China relations for regional peace and security" during talks with Pelosi, the city-state's Foreign Ministry said. This was echoed by Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi in Tokyo, who said stable ties between the two rival powers "are extremely important for the international community as well."

The Philippines urged the U.S. and China to be "responsible actors" in the region. "It is important for the U.S. and China to ensure continuing communication to avoid any miscalculation and further escalation of tensions," said Foreign Affairs spokesperson Teresita Daza.

China has been steadily ratcheting up diplomatic and military pressure on Taiwan. China cut off all contact with Taiwan's government in 2016 after President Tsai Ing-wen refused to endorse its claim that the island and mainland together make up a single Chinese nation, with the Communist regime in Beijing being the sole legitimate government.

On Thursday, Pelosi is to meet with South Korean National Assembly Speaker Kim Jin Pyo in Seoul for talks on security in the Indo-Pacific region, economic cooperation and the climate crisis, according to Kim's office. Pelosi is also due to visit Japan, but it is unclear when she heading there.

EXPLAINER: Is Alex Jones' trial about free speech rights?

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Conspiracy theorist Alex Jones arrived at a Texas courthouse for his defamation trial for calling the Sandy Hook Elementary School attack a hoax with the words "Save the 1st" scrawled on tape covering his mouth.

Although Jones portrays the lawsuit against him as an assault on the First Amendment, the parents who sued him say his statements were so malicious and obviously false that they fell well outside the bounds of speech protected by the constitutional clause.

The ongoing trial in Austin, which is where Jones' far-right Infowars website and its parent company are based, stems from a 2018 lawsuit brought by Neil Heslin and Scarlett Lewis, whose 6-year-old son was killed in the 2012 attack along with 19 other first-graders and six educators.

Jones is expected to testify Tuesday in his own defense.

Here's a look at how the case relates to the First Amendment:

ARE ALL DEFAMATION LAWSUITS FIRST AMENDMENT CASES?

They are. Defamation laws evolved through decades of U.S. Supreme Court rulings on what is and isn't protected speech.

Typically, the first question jurors answer at trials is whether the speech qualifies as unprotected defamation. If it does, they address the question of damages.

Jones' trial largely skipped the first question and went straight to the second. From the start, it focused not on whether Jones must pay damages, but how much.

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WHY IS HIS TRIAL DIFFERENT?

Jones seemed to sabotage his own chance to fully argue that his speech was protected by not complying with orders to hand over critical evidence, such as emails, which the parents hoped would prove he knew all along that his statements were false.

That led exasperated Judge Maya Guerra Gamble to enter a rare default judgment, declaring the parents winners before the trial even began.

Judges in other lawsuits against Jones have issued similar rulings.

"I don't know why they didn't cooperate," said Stephen D. Solomon, a founding editor of New York University's First Amendment Watch. "It is just really peculiar. ... It's so odd to not even give yourself the chance to defend yourself."

It might suggest Jones knew certain evidence would doom his defense.

"It is reasonable to presume that (Jones) and his team did not think they had a viable defense ... or they would have complied," said Barry Covert, a Buffalo, New York, First Amendment lawyer.

HAVE BOTH SIDES REFERRED TO THE FIRST AMENDMENT?

Yes. During opening statements last week, plaintiffs' lawyer Mark Bankston told jurors it doesn't protect defamatory speech.

"Speech is free," he said, "but lies you have to pay for."

Jones' lawyer Andino Reynal said the case is crucial to free speech.

And Jones made similar arguments in a deposition.

"If questioning public events and free speech is banned because it might hurt somebody's feelings, we are not in America anymore," he said.

Jones, who had said actors staged the shooting as a pretext to strengthen gun control, later acknowledged it occurred.

WHAT ARE KEY ELEMENTS OF DEFAMATION?

Defamation must involve someone making a false statement of fact publicly — typically via the media — and purporting that it's true. An opinion can't be defamatory. The statement also must have done actual damage to someone's reputation.

The parents suing Jones say his lies about their child's death harmed their reputations and led to death threats from Jones' followers.

IS IT EASIER FOR NON-PUBLIC FIGURES TO PROVE DEFAMATION?

Yes. They must merely show a false statement was made carelessly.

In *New York Times v. Sullivan* in 1964, the Supreme Court said the bar for public figures must be higher because scrutiny of them is so vital to democracy. They must prove "actual malice," that a false statement was made "with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard of whether it was false or not."

ARE THE PARENTS PUBLIC FIGURES?

Their lawyers say they clearly aren't in the category of politicians or celebrities who stepped voluntarily into the public arena.

The high court, however, has said those who temporarily enter public debates can become temporary public figures.

Jones argues that Heslin did just that, entering the national debate over guns by advocating for tougher gun laws on TV and before Congress.

WHAT DAMAGES ARE BEING SOUGHT?

The plaintiffs are seeking \$150 million for emotional distress, as well as reputational and punitive damages. Reynal told jurors that his client has been punished enough, losing millions of dollars being booted off major social media platforms.

He asked them to award the plaintiffs \$1.

CAN FIRST AMENDMENT ISSUES INFLUENCE THE TRIAL'S OUTCOME?

Indirectly, yes.

Jones can't argue that he's not liable for damages on the grounds that his speech was protected. The

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judge already ruled he is liable. But as a way to limit damages, his lawyers can argue that his speech was protected.

"Jurors could say (Jones' defamatory statements) is actually something we don't want to punish very hard," said Kevin Goldberg, a First Amendment specialist at the Maryland-based Freedom Forum.

COULD JONES HAVE WON IF THE TRIAL WAS ALL ABOUT FREE SPEECH?

He could have contended that his statements were hyperbolic opinion — that wild, non-factual exaggeration is his schtick.

But it would have been tough to persuade jurors that he was merely riffing and opining.

"It was a verifiable fact the massacre occurred at Sandy Hook," said Solomon. "That's not opinion. It is a fact." Even if the parents were deemed public figures, imposing the higher standard, "I think Alex Jones would still lose," he said.

But Covert said defamation is always a challenge to prove.

"I wouldn't discount the possibility Jones could have prevailed," he said. "Trying to speculate what a jury would find is always a fool's errand."

MIGHT THE SUPREME COURT BE SYMPATHETIC TO ANY JONES APPEAL?

Conservatives and liberal justices have found that some deeply offensive speech is protected.

In 2011, the high court voted 8-to-1 to overturn a verdict against the Kansas-based Westboro Baptist Church for picketing military funerals with signs declaring that God hates the U.S. for tolerating homosexuality.

"As a Nation we have chosen ... to protect even hurtful speech ... to ensure that we do not stifle public debate," the ruling said.

But it and the Jones case have key differences.

"The were both extreme, outrageous, shocking, deplorable. But the Westboro Baptist Church was also manifestly political and not defamatory ... not about any one person's reputation" Goldberg said.

He added: "I'd be shocked if (Jones') case ever ended up in the Supreme Court."

Stephen King set to testify for govt in books merger trial

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the Justice Department bids to convince a federal judge that the proposed merger of Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster would damage the careers of some of the most popular authors, it is leaning in part on the testimony of a writer who has thrived like few others: Stephen King.

The author of "Carrie," "The Shining" and many other favorites, King has willingly — even eagerly — placed himself in opposition to Simon & Schuster, his longtime publisher. He was not chosen by the government just for his fame, but for his public criticism of the \$2.2 billion deal announced in late 2021, joining two of the world's biggest publishers into what rival CEO Michael Pietsch of Hachette Book Group has called a "gigantically prominent" entity.

"The more the publishers consolidate, the harder it is for indie publishers to survive," King tweeted last year.

One of the few widely recognizable authors, known for his modest-sized glasses and gaunt features, King is expected to take the witness stand Tuesday, the second day of a federal antitrust trial anticipated last two to three weeks.

He may not have the business knowledge of Pietsch, the DOJ's first witness, but he has been a published novelist for nearly 50 years and knows well how much the industry has changed: Some of his own former publishers were acquired by larger companies. "Carrie," for instance, was published by Doubleday, which in 2009 merged with Knopf Publishing Group and now is part of Penguin Random House. Another former King publisher, Viking Press, was a Penguin imprint that joined Penguin Random House when Penguin and Random House merged in 2013.

King's affinity for smaller publishers is personal. Even while continuing to publish with the Simon &

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Schuster imprint Scribner, he has written thrillers for the independent Hard Case Crime. Years ago, the publisher asked him to contribute a blurb, but King instead offered to write a novel for them, "The Colorado Kid," released in 2005.

"Inside I was turning cartwheels," Hard Case co-founder Charles Ardai would remember thinking when King contacted him.

King himself would likely benefit from the Penguin Random House-Simon & Schuster deal, but he has a history of favoring other priorities beyond his material well-being. He has long been a critic of tax cuts for the rich, even as "the rich" surely includes Stephen King, and has openly called for the government to raise his taxes.

"In America, we should all have to pay our fair share," he wrote for The Daily Beast in 2012.

On Monday, attorneys for the two sides offered contrasting views of the book industry. Government attorney John Read invoked a dangerously narrow market, ruled tightly by the Big Five— Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster, HarperCollins Publishing, Macmillan and Hachette — with little chance for smaller or startup publishers to break through.

Attorney Daniel Petrocelli argued for the defense that the industry was actually diverse, profitable and open to newcomers. Publishing means not just the Big Five, but also such medium-size companies as W.W. Norton & Co. and Grove Atlantic. The merger, he contended, would in no way upend the ambitions so many hold for literary success.

"Every book starts out as an anticipated bestseller in the gleam of an author's or an editor's eye," he said.

Italy's salty Po Delta hurting agriculture, fisheries

By LUIGI NAVARRA and LUCA BRUNO Associated Press

PORTO TOLLE, Italy (AP) — Drought and unusually hot weather have raised the salinity in Italy's largest delta, where the mighty Po River feeds into the Adriatic Sea south of Venice, and it's killing rice fields along with the shellfish that are a key ingredient in one of Italy's culinary specialties: spaghetti with clams.

At least one-third of the stock of prized double-valve clams raised in the Po Delta have died off. Plants along the banks of the Po River are wilting as they drink in water from increasingly salty aquifers and secondary waterways have dried up, shrinking amphibians and birds' wetland homes.

"It is evident that there is an entire system with an ecology that will have permanent problems," said Giancarlo Mantovani, director of Po River Basin Authority. The ecosystem includes the Po Delta Park, which along with neighboring lands in Veneto form a reserve recognized by UNESCO for its biodiversity.

The amount of water entering the delta from the Po River is at an all-time low, hitting just 95 cubic meters (3,350 cubic feet) a second last month, due to drought conditions caused by a lack of wintertime snowpack and spring and summer rains. That is one-tenth of annual averages. It has been nearly two months since farmers have been able to tap the river water for agriculture.

The impact may be even more lasting, as saltwater is leaching inland distances never before recorded, and seeping into aquifers, underground layers of rock that can hold water.

And while deltas are by definition an area of exchange between fresh and salt water, the movement is becoming more and more one-directional: Inland penetration of saltwater has increased from two kilometers (just over a mile) in the 1960s and 10 kilometers (six miles) in the 1980s to an astounding 38 kilometers (nearly 24 miles) this year.

"The territory around the Po is three meters below sea level, therefore there is a continual flow of saline water that is going into the aquifers," Mantovani said. "We are therefore not only creating an agricultural problem, a human problem, but also an environmental problem. ... This is a perfect storm."

For growers of clams, excessive salinity, high temperatures and the resulting spread of algae are suffocating the mollusk that is the centerpiece of one of summertime Italy's favorite dishes: Spaghetti alle vongole. And none are more prized than the vongole veraci with a striped and grooved shell that are raised in the Adriatic Sea.

"You can see the clams are suffering," said Katisucia Bellan, who has been clamming for 27 years. "In

the afternoon, with this heat, the lagoon dries up. You can pass with the tractor here.”

According to the Coldiretti agricultural lobby, this year’s die-off could accelerate if the proper exchange of salt and fresh water is not restored. It blames the failure to remove sediment from the delta, which allows oxygen and fresh water into the lagoon, for aggravating the situation.

Meanwhile, clam farmers worried that more stock could die have rushed to market while they still have mollusks to sell. This abundance has forced down prices, creating more economic hardship. “There is a double negative effect: die-off and lower prices,” said Coldiretti’s Alessandro Faccioli said.

Nearby rice growers also are watching the rise of salinity with increasing anxiety. The paddies of the Po Delta are a small part of Italy’s national rice production, which is centered in drought-stricken Piedmont and Lombardy closer to the source of the Po River. While the bigger producers are suffering from a lack of water in their fields, those in the delta are suffering the increased salt content, which is killing off plants.

Grower Elisa Moretto, who runs a small family business, hopes they can salvage one-third of their crop this year, but that remains to be seen. If she can eke a profit is up to other forces, including increased fuel and fertilizer costs.

But the real worry is for the future, if salinity rises and causes permanent damage to the aquifers.

“If that happens, everything dies,” Moretto said.

EXPLAINER: How health care for vets became fight in Congress

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bill that would enhance health care and disability benefits for millions of veterans exposed to toxic burn pits hit a snag in the Senate last week, angering advocates like comedian Jon Stewart who say help from the government is long overdue.

Lawmakers have been hearing increasingly from constituents with respiratory illnesses and cancers that they attribute to serving near burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan. The military used the pits to dispose of such things as chemicals, cans, tires, plastics and medical and human waste.

Veterans groups say servicemembers who were exposed to the pits have waited long enough for enhanced health benefits, and lawmakers largely agree. The Senate is ultimately expected to send the measure to President Joe Biden’s desk. It’s just a question of when.

Where the issue stands:

HOW WOULD THE BILL HELP IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS?

First, veterans who served near burn pits will get 10 years of health care coverage through the Department of Veterans Affairs upon their separation from the military rather than five.

Second, the legislation directs the VA to presume that certain respiratory illnesses and cancers were related to burn pit exposure. This takes the burden of proof off the veteran, allowing them to obtain disability payments to compensate for their injury without having to show the illness was a result of their service.

Roughly 70% of disability claims related to burn pit exposure are denied by the VA due to lack of evidence, scientific data and information from the Defense Department.

IS THERE HELP FOR OTHER VETERANS? Yes. For example, hundreds of thousands of Vietnam War-era veterans and survivors also stand to benefit. The bill adds hypertension, or high blood pressure, as a presumptive disease associated with Agent Orange exposure. The Congressional Budget Office projected that about 600,000 of 1.6 million living Vietnam vets would be eligible for increased compensation, though only about half would have severe enough diagnoses to warrant receiving it.

Also, veterans who served in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Guam, American Samoa and Johnston Atoll will be presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange. That’s another 50,000 veterans and survivors of deceased veterans who would get compensation for illnesses presumed to have been caused by their exposure to the herbicide, the CBO projected.

HOW MUCH WILL THE BILL COST?

The bill is projected to increase federal deficits by about \$277 billion over 10 years, the CBO said. Lawmakers did not include offsetting spending cuts or tax increases to help pay for the spending.

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WHERE DO THINGS STAND IN CONGRESS? Both the House and the Senate have approved the bill overwhelmingly. The Senate did so in June, but the bill contained a revenue-related provision that must originate in the House, requiring a do-over to make a technical fix.

The House approved the fixed bill by a vote of 342-88. So, now the measure is back before the Senate, where the previous iteration had passed by a vote of 84-14. Biden says he will sign it.

SO WHY HASN'T THE SENATE APPROVED IT YET?

When the CBO scored the bill, it projected that nearly \$400 billion slated to be spent on health services would move from discretionary spending to mandatory spending, which is mostly sheltered from the bruising battles that occur each year over where to spend money in appropriations bills.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonpartisan fiscal watchdog, said a reclassification of nearly \$400 billion from discretionary to mandatory would "both reduce the pressure to keep those costs under control and make it easier for appropriators to spend more elsewhere in the budget without offsets."

Those dynamics also applied to the bill when the Senate approved it in June. Nevertheless, senators voted for the measure overwhelmingly.

But, last week more than two dozen Republicans who voted for the bill in June voted against advancing it this time. They sided with Republican Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, who is seeking a vote on an amendment that he says would not reduce spending on veterans but would prevent spending increases in other nondefense programs down the road.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has offered to let the Senate vote on the Toomey amendment with 60 votes needed for passage, the same number that is needed to advance the bill itself.

It's unclear how the delay will be resolved, though Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell predicted Monday that the bill will pass this week.

Advocacy groups for veterans, a key voting bloc in the upcoming midterm elections, are furious and ramping up the political pressure on lawmakers to act. At a Capitol Hill news conference the day after last week's procedural vote, speakers used terms such as "villains" and "reprehensible" to describe the Republican senators who voted against advancing the measure last week but voted for almost the exact same bill in June.

"Veterans are angry and confused at the sudden change from those they thought had their backs," said Cory Titus of the group Military Officers Association of America.

"You just screwed veterans yesterday," added Tom Porter of the group Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. "Now, we're going to hold them accountable."

Brittney Griner back in Russian court on cannabis charge

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

KHIMKI, Russia (AP) — American basketball star Brittney Griner was back in court on Tuesday for her trial for cannabis possession amid U.S. diplomatic efforts to secure her release.

During the hearing, prosecutors called a state narcotics expert who analyzed cannabis found in Griner's luggage. Her defense fielded a specialist who challenged the analysis, charging that it was flawed and didn't conform to official rules.

If convicted, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) star and two-time Olympic gold medalist could face 10 years in prison. As her trial has progressed, the Biden administration has faced growing public pressure to get her released.

In an extraordinary move, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week spoke to his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, urging him to accept a deal under which Griner and Paul Whelan, an American imprisoned in Russia on an espionage conviction, would go free.

The Lavrov-Blinken call marked the highest-level known contact between Washington and Moscow since Russia sent troops into Ukraine more than five months ago, the direct outreach at odds with U.S. efforts to isolate the Kremlin.

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People familiar with the proposal say it envisions trading Griner and Whelan for the notorious arms trader Viktor Bout. It underlines the public pressure that the White House has faced to get Griner released.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters Monday that Russia has made a "bad faith" response to the U.S. government's offer, a counteroffer that American officials don't regard as serious. She declined to elaborate.

Griner has acknowledged there were vape canisters containing cannabis oil in her luggage when she was arrested at a Moscow airport in February. But she insisted that she had no criminal intent and that the canisters ended up in her luggage because she was packing hastily. Griner played for a Russian women's basketball team in the WNBA off-season.

To bolster her case, her defense lawyers have presented testimony from doctors that she was prescribed cannabis as a treatment for pain. Medical marijuana treatment is not legal in Russia.

While judges have leeway to consider mitigating factors under Russian law, acquittals are rare and account for less than 1% of cases in Russian criminal prosecutions.

A conviction, however, could potentially pave the way for Griner's exchange as Russian officials said it could only happen after the judicial process is completed.

Tom Firestone, a Washington attorney who formerly served as legal adviser at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, said Griner could be handed a tough sentence as a way for Russians "to maximize their leverage in negotiations." He told The Associated Press that Russia "may want to let this play out a little bit longer and try to extract more concessions."

Russian officials have scoffed at U.S. statements about the case, saying they show a disrespect for Russian law. They remained poker-faced, urging Washington to discuss the issue through "quiet diplomacy without releases of speculative information."

Bad weather in Black Sea slows 1st Ukrainian grain shipment

By SUSIE BLANN and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The first cargo ship to leave Ukraine since Russia invaded its neighbor more than five months ago has run into bad weather in the Black Sea and is set to arrive later than scheduled in Istanbul, a Turkish official said Tuesday.

The Sierra Leone-flagged Razoni, which set sail from the Ukrainian port of Odesa on Monday, is now expected to reach Istanbul early Wednesday, according to Rear Admiral Ozcan Altunbulak, a coordinator at the joint center established to oversee the grain shipments.

Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish and U.N. officials are to inspect the ship after it anchors in Istanbul. The inspections are part of a U.N.- and Turkish-brokered deal to shift Ukrainian grain stockpiles to foreign markets and alleviate a mounting global food crisis.

Altunbulak said "preparations and planning" are continuing for other ships expected to leave Ukraine's ports, but he did not provide details.

As part of the July 22 agreement on shipments, which include Russian grain and fertilizer, safe corridors through the mined waters outside Ukraine's ports were established.

The situation in the Black Sea remains tense, however, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged international partners to keep a close eye on Moscow's compliance with the deal.

More ships are expected to leave from Ukraine's ports through the safe corridors. At Odesa, 16 more vessels, all blocked since Russia's invasion on Feb. 24, were waiting their turn, with others to follow, Ukrainian authorities say.

The more than 26,000 tons of corn on board the Razoni, destined for Lebanon, will make barely a dent in what the World Bank last week called "rising food insecurity" across the world.

"Record high food prices have triggered a global crisis that will drive millions more into extreme poverty," its latest food security update said, blaming the war in Ukraine, global supply chain problems and the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the restart of shipments from Ukraine and Russia, which are major world suppliers of wheat, barley,

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corn and sunflower oil, raised hopes that the situation could improve. The fertile Black Sea region has long been known as the breadbasket of Europe.

The shipping developments came against a backdrop of continued fighting, especially in southern and eastern Ukraine.

Moscow's forces stuck to their familiar pattern of bombarding areas they don't hold, with Ukrainian officials reporting that the Russian shelling killed at least three civilians in eastern areas overnight.

In the Donetsk region at the forefront of the Russian offensive, the bombardments targeted towns and villages, especially Bakhmut which has taken the brunt of recent shelling.

Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said that "the Russians are leveling Bakhmut with a massive barrage from the ground and from the air."

"The shelling of Bakhmut is continuing around the clock, leaving civilians little chance to survive," Kyrylenko said in televised remarks.

The United States said it was sending an additional \$550 million worth of military aid to Kyiv. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a tweet late Monday that the package included 75,000 rounds of artillery ammunition and more ammunition for the American-built HIMARS multiple rocket launchers, which have given Ukrainian forces an advantage on the battlefield.

House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump face primaries

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Three Republican U.S. House members who voted to impeach Donald Trump over the Jan. 6 insurrection are being challenged in Tuesday's primary elections by rivals endorsed by the former president.

The primaries for Reps. Peter Meijer, Jaime Herrera Beutler and Dan Newhouse are the biggest test yet for GOP incumbents who broke with Trump after a mob of his supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol in a bid to keep him in power. Trump has vowed revenge against the 10 House Republicans who crossed party lines for the impeachment vote.

Of the 10, four opted not to run for reelection in this year's midterm elections. As for the ones who did, Rep. Tom Rice of South Carolina lost to a Trump-endorsed challenger in June, while Rep. David Valadao of California survived a challenge that same month from a fellow Republican, advancing to the general election. Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming is bracing for defeat in her Aug. 16 primary against a Trump-backed rival.

In other races Tuesday, two Democratic incumbents in Michigan are facing each other in a newly drawn congressional district, and two members of the progressive "Squad" have primary challengers in Missouri and Michigan. In Arizona, GOP voters will decide whether to nominate a major QAnon figure for a congressional seat.

Some of the top elections:

FACING VOTERS AFTER IMPEACHMENT VOTES

The three House Republicans facing primary challenges Tuesday for impeaching Trump say they don't regret their vote.

In Michigan, Meijer voted for impeachment just days after he was sworn into office for his first term. The former president has endorsed Meijer's opponent, John Gibbs, a businessman and missionary who served in the Trump administration under Housing Secretary Ben Carson.

Gibbs has contended Meijer is not a true Republican because he voted to impeach Trump, and Gibbs chastised Meijer for supporting bipartisan gun control legislation that President Joe Biden signed into law in June.

Meijer, a member of the Army Reserves who served in Iraq, has criticized Biden over the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, as well as his handling of the economy. The congressman's family is well known in the Midwest as owners of the chain of Meijer grocery megastores, and he has a large fundraising advantage over Gibbs. The winner will face Democrat Hillary Scholten in November in the state's Democratic-leaning 3rd Congressional District.

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In Washington state, the two Republicans who voted for impeachment are competing in crowded primaries, from which the top two vote-getters, regardless of political party, will move on to the general election in November.

Herrera Beutler's primary against eight challengers, four of whom are Republicans, in Washington state's 3rd Congressional District will be one of the toughest of her career. Trump is backing Joe Kent, a former Green Beret who has promoted the former president's lies that the 2020 election was stolen.

Herrera Beutler has been in Congress since 2011 and represents an area that has favored Republicans.

In the central part of Washington, Newhouse, a four-term congressman, is facing seven challengers, six of whom are Republicans, in the solidly conservative 4th Congressional District. His rivals include Loren Culp, a former small-town police chief who refused to concede the governor's race in 2020. Culp has Trump's backing but has lagged other candidates in fundraising.

CANDIDATE LINKED TO QANON

Ron Watkins, one of the most prominent figures in the QAnon conspiracy movement, is running for a House seat in Arizona's sprawling 2nd Congressional District.

He served as the longtime administrator of online message boards that helped seed the conspiracy movement whose adherents believe a group of satanic, cannibalistic child molesters secretly runs the globe.

Watkins no longer runs the message boards and has denied fueling the QAnon movement. He said he is running for Congress because he hopes to "fix the machine from the inside."

He is considered a long shot in the crowded GOP field, having been outpaced in campaign fundraising by the other candidates.

State Rep. Walter Blackman and Eli Crane, a former Navy SEAL who owns a bottle opener business and was endorsed by Trump, are considered the leading GOP contenders. The winner will take on Democratic U.S. Rep. Tom O'Halleran in November in a district that favors Republicans.

FROM COLLEAGUES TO COMPETITORS

Two incumbent Michigan Democrats, Reps. Andy Levin and Haley Stevens, are running against each other for a newly drawn 11th Congressional District in suburban Detroit. They're vying for a left-leaning area, which means the winner of Tuesday's contest will likely win the seat in November.

Stevens flipped a district in 2018 that was long held by Republicans. Before running for office, she led the auto bailout under President Barack Obama.

Levin also won his first term in 2018, taking over the seat long held by his father, Rep. Sander "Sandy" Levin. He's been endorsed by Sens. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren.

CHALLENGING THE 'SQUAD'

Two members of the Squad in Congress are facing primary challenges on Tuesday.

In Michigan, Rep. Rashida Tlaib faces three Democratic challengers as she seeks a third term in office. She's running in a newly drawn Detroit-area district where the winner is expected to easily carry the 12th Congressional District seat in November. Tlaib's main competition is longtime Detroit City Clerk Janice Winfrey, who has strong name recognition in the city.

In Missouri, first-term Rep. Cori Bush is facing a challenge in the state's 1st Congressional District. State Sen. Steve Roberts is betting that Bush, a vocal advocate for defunding the police and moving money to social services and mental health programs, is too liberal even for heavily Democratic St. Louis.

Roberts has twice faced rape allegations, though prosecutors said they didn't have enough evidence to merit charges. He has accused the Bush campaign of dredging up the allegations to distract from her record.

Bush has touted her accomplishments, including persuading the Environmental Protection Agency to clean up radioactive waste near a St. Louis County creek, pushing for climate change action and standing against evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

10 YEARS AFTER TUCSON SHOOTING, INTERN SEEKS GIFFORDS' SEAT

Daniel Hernandez Jr., the hero intern credited with saving Rep. Gabrielle Giffords' life after an attempted assassination in 2011, is running for her former seat in Congress.

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Hernandez, who recently stepped down from the state Legislature to focus on his campaign, faces another former lawmaker in the Democratic primary. However, the once highly competitive district centered in Tucson now favors Republicans after the boundaries were redrawn.

Hernandez was a 20-year-old college student in his first week interning for Giffords when he went to her "Congress on your corner" constituent event. A gunman there opened fire, killing six and injuring 13. Hernandez kept the Democratic congresswoman conscious and applied pressure to her head wound until paramedics arrived.

Despite dangers, deep roots make Appalachia hard to leave

By DYLAN LOVAN Associated Press

GARRETT, Ky. (AP) — This tiny sliver of a town off a state highway in eastern Kentucky has been home to Brenda Francis and her husband, Paul, for decades.

Paul Francis was born 73 years ago in this house, a yellow and brown one-story, which like many dwellings in Garrett is nestled in a valley between tall, forested hills. The retired school teacher loves it here, and the couple was gifted the house by his parents about 40 years ago.

But after another flood — this one maybe the worst they've seen — Brenda Francis said she is done. She joins many others in this corner of Appalachia who see this latest disaster as a devastating blow to their lifestyle. Some say they're considering moving away, despite their deep roots.

Francis, 66, said her husband wants to stay: "But not me. I don't want to live here no more, and he knows it. So we're going to be getting out of here."

Kentucky's Appalachian region has known hardship. The coal economy withered away and took the good-paying jobs with it. The opioid crisis flooded towns with millions of pain pills. Prospects were so bleak that many people left, cutting the population in many counties by double digit percentages in the past two decades. In the Francis' home county of Floyd, the population has declined by 15% since 2000. And household annual income in many of the counties hit hardest by last week's flooding is a little more than half the national average of about \$65,000.

But many stayed, held by ties to their communities, families and their history here. The flooding that hit the area last week is making even some of those stalwarts reconsider, especially in and around Garrett, a community of about 1,300 people that was founded by a coal company in the early 1900s.

The region's strong social fabric and familial connections give pause to people considering moving away from home, said Ann Kingsolver, an Appalachian Studies professor at the University of Kentucky.

"Social capital is really important," Kingsolver said in an email message. "Those are the resources that people have through investing in social networks of kin and neighbors over many years— a kind of wealth beyond monetary value."

When the 2008 financial crisis hit, she said, many young people moved back to rural communities in Appalachia because they had a place to live and child care options.

Kingsolver said there is little available rental or motel space in those rural areas, but flooding victims often get help and shelter from relatives and neighbors nearby.

Pam Caudill lives on the same street as her son, who's been a big help since the floodwaters reached 4 feet (1.2 meters) high in her home in Wayland, just a few minutes from Garrett.

Her husband died of a heart attack in May, and the flooding has tested her resolve to remain in her small town.

"I have thought about it, but here's the thing: It took everything that me and my husband could do to buy a house," she said, weeping. "It's hard to let go of something that you worked so hard for."

So she and her son will instead see what can be salvaged in her home and hope the foundation remains solid.

"It was my husband's home; it's my children's home," said Caudill, who temporarily relocated to a state park shelter over the weekend. "Wayland the town has always been their home."

Two miles outside Garrett, 104-year-old Annis Clark rode out the storm on her own as she lost electricity

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and her basement flooded. She and her husband built their house in the '50s, and she's stayed long after he died in the 1980s, her son, Michael Clark said.

"She's a survivor. I don't know of any other way to put it," said Clark, who attended Garrett High School and then moved away to Lexington, where he worked in television production and operations. "I have no doubt she will stay here until she's done."

Clark was buying supplies for her Monday in nearby Prestonsburg. He graduated from high school in 1964, and said many of his classmates moved away like he did to seek jobs. In many parts of eastern Kentucky, he said, "unless you wanted to be a (coal) miner, your options would typically be teacher."

In Garrett, Brenda Francis despaired at the inches of mud that had flowed into the area under their home, which was raised after a flood in the 1950s, when her husband's parents lived there.

"When you get older, you're not able to clean all this up. We're just totally exhausted," Francis said. "How are we going to get this mud out of here?"

Despite his wife's frustrations, Paul Francis was cheerfully cleaning up the family homestead, stacking toys in a '70s pickup truck his father bought brand new. Sloshing around in rubber boots, he smiled as he prepared to hook up a pressure washer to clean mud from his grandchildren's toys.

Their grandchildren are one of the reasons Brenda Francis wants to move away, to higher ground in Prestonsburg, where the children live. She said they, like many in town, have no flood insurance on their house — but they do have a possible buyer. She's hoping the fact that the house's living spaces stayed dry will make it a desirable property.

Her adult sons love the town of Garrett, but "they're all grown and got their own families now. They don't want to come back here," she said as her husband's pressure washer hummed in the background.

"Who would want to come?" she said. "It still floods here."

Arizona GOP primary tests power of Trump's election lies

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — The Republican Party's embrace of Donald Trump's election lies will be tested on Tuesday as voters in Arizona choose between candidates who say they wouldn't have certified the results of the 2020 campaign and those who argue it's time to move on.

The former president has endorsed and campaigned for a slate of contenders who support his falsehoods, most prominently former television news anchor Kari Lake in the race for governor. Lake, who says she would have refused to certify President Joe Biden's narrow Arizona victory, faces Karrin Taylor Robson, a lawyer and businesswoman who says the GOP should focus on the future despite an election she has called "unfair."

And in the race to oversee elections as secretary of state, Trump is also backing a state lawmaker who was at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 and claims the former president was cheated out of victory.

As the midterm primary season enters its final stretch this month, the Arizona races are poised to provide important clues about the GOP's direction. Victories by Trump-backed candidates could provide the former president with allies who hold sway over the administration of elections as he considers another bid for the White House in 2024. Defeats, however, might suggest openness in the party to a different path forward.

"I think the majority of the people, and a lot of people that are supporters of Trump, they want to move on," said former Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer, who is backing Robson. "I mean, that was two years ago. Let's go. Let's move."

Other closely watched races on Tuesday include the Republican contests for Michigan governor and Missouri senator. Voters in Kansas will be the first to weigh in on abortion rights since the U.S. Supreme Court revoked a woman's constitutional right to an abortion. And two Republican House members from Washington state who voted to impeach Trump are facing primary challengers.

But the contests are especially salient in Arizona, a longtime Republican stronghold that has become more favorable to Democrats in recent years because of explosive growth in and around Phoenix. The primary and the fall election will provide insight into whether Biden's success here in 2020 was a onetime

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event or the onset of a long-term shift away from the GOP.

With such high stakes, Arizona has been central to efforts by Trump and his allies to cast doubt on Biden's victory with false claims of fraud.

Federal and state election officials and Trump's own attorney general have said there is no credible evidence the election was tainted. The former president's allegations of fraud were also roundly rejected by courts, including by judges Trump appointed. A hand recount led by Trump supporters in Arizona's largest county found no proof of a stolen election and concluded Biden's margin of victory was larger than the official count.

Though Trump is still the most popular figure inside the GOP, his efforts to influence primary elections this year have yielded mixed results. His preferred candidates in states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania prevailed in their primaries.

But in Georgia, another state that is central to Trump's election lies, his handpicked candidate for governor was defeated by more than 50 percentage points. Georgia's Republican secretary of state was also renominated over a Trump-backed primary rival.

The former president is hoping he'll have more success in Arizona, where the incumbent governor, Doug Ducey, can't run for reelection. That could give Trump a better opportunity than in Georgia to influence the winner.

Lake is well known in much of the state after anchoring the evening news in Phoenix for more than two decades. She's now running as a fierce critic of the mainstream media, which she says is unfair to Republicans, and other enemies of Trump's Make America Great Again Movement, including the McCain family.

A vocal supporter of Trump's election lies, Lake says her campaign is "already detecting some stealing going on" in her own race, but she has repeatedly refused to provide any evidence for the claim.

Robson, whose housing developer husband is one of the state's richest men, is largely self-financing her campaign. The GOP establishment, growing increasingly comfortable creating distance from Trump, has rallied around her over the past month with a series of endorsements from Ducey, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and former Vice President Mike Pence.

The groundswell of establishment support for Robson has drawn national scrutiny to a race for what it says about the GOP base ahead of the crucial presidential primary in two years.

"Everyone wants to try to make this some kind of proxy for 2024," said Christie, who ran for president in 2016. "Believe me, I've been through enough of these to know that 2024 will be decided by the people who step up to the plate and '24 and how they perform or don't perform at that time."

Robson is running a largely old-school Republican campaign focused on cutting taxes and regulations, securing the border and advancing school choice.

On the Democratic side, Secretary of State Katie Hobbs is the front-runner against Marco Lopez, a former mayor of Nogales and border enforcement official during President Barack Obama's administration.

As Arizona's top elections official, Hobbs endeared herself to Democrats with an impassioned defense of the integrity of the 2020 election, a stance that has drawn death threats. However, she's been weighed down by a discrimination case won by a Black policy adviser from Hobbs' time in the Legislature.

In the Senate race, Trump is backing Blake Masters, a 35-year-old first-time candidate who has spent most of his career working for billionaire Peter Thiel, who is bankrolling his campaign. Masters is emphasizing cultural grievances that animate the right, including critical race theory and allegations of big tech censorship.

Until Trump's endorsement, the race had no clear front-runner between Masters, businessman Jim Lamon and Attorney General Mark Brnovich, all of whom jockeyed for his support.

Lamon says Trump made a mistake in endorsing Masters and is digging into his own fortune to highlight Masters' ties to technology firms and his writings as a college student supporting open borders. Lamon signed a certificate falsely stating that Trump had won Arizona in 2020 and that he was one of the state's "duly elected and qualified" electors.

Trump soured on Brnovich and may have torpedoed his campaign when the attorney general's election

fraud investigation failed to produce criminal charges against election officials.

The eventual winner in the primary will take on incumbent Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly in the fall.

The Republican race for secretary of state includes Mark Finchem, a Trump-backed candidate who was at the Capitol on Jan. 6, and Shawna Bolick, a state lawmaker who has pushed for legislation allowing the Legislature to overturn the will of the voters and decide which candidate gets the state's 11 electoral votes for president. The GOP establishment has rallied around advertising executive Beau Lane, who says there were no widespread problems with the 2020 election.

Republican state House Speaker Rusty Bowers, who gave testimony to the House Jan. 6 committee about Trump's pressure campaign following the 2020 election, faces a Trump-backed challenger in his bid to move up to the state Senate.

Uvalde rekindles school police officer's looming fears

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

AURORA, Colo. (AP) — Tony Ramaeker averages around 14,000 steps a day as he walks around the Nebraska high school where he is assigned to work as a sheriff's deputy, greeting students arriving in the morning, wandering the hallways to talk to them and watching out for those who might be eating alone in the cafeteria.

The former Marine and longtime youth pastor keeps his office in suburban Omaha stocked with treats such as Little Debbie snacks and Pop-Tarts because eating helps kids in crisis calm down and talk.

But in the back of his mind, a thought always looms: What would he do if a gunman attacked the school?

The latest reminder of that danger came in May when 19 children and two teachers were killed in a fourth-grade classroom in Uvalde, Texas. The fear that the next shooting could happen in their hallways hangs over school resource officers across the United States, exacerbating an already difficult job: They're called on to be battle-ready officers whom parents and students can trust to protect them.

Yet school police officers have been criticized for their treatment of students of color. Black students, especially, are often disproportionately arrested or disciplined when a school has armed police, critics say. And students of color report feeling less safe around police than white students.

Officers say they're acutely aware of the criticism, striving to build relationships with students and interact for more reasons than just discipline. They stress that officers who work in schools need to be specifically trained to work with children and teens. Gone are the days when it was enough to hire an officer near or in retirement and keep a police car parked outside a school. School officers are now asked to be counselors and teachers, working empathetically and diplomatically with students and administrators, while also being an armed guardian.

Ramaeker, who practices mixed martial arts, said he believes he wouldn't hesitate to do whatever he could to protect his students and staff. He has even thought through how he would use the handgun he has holstered to his hip if he didn't have time get a rifle he has kept secured in the building since the 2018 Parkland school shooting. He believes officers need to decide what they would do before a shooting happens to be mentally prepared and avoid indecision.

"If someone comes in to try to hurt a part of my family, whether it's my blood family or my school family, there is no hesitation," he said.

Reminders of the threat of school shootings were omnipresent at a recent National Association of School Resource Officers conference in Colorado where hundreds of officers gathered for training.

An exhibit hall featured booths with businesses selling ideas to stop the next school shooter, like door locks, and simulation machines to mimic shootings. One business showed off foldable assault rifles it said one school resource officer takes in a Hello Kitty backpack to his school in Alabama.

"Mom and Dad don't want to see this weapon in their school, but it's got to be there," said Dan Pose, CEO of Gulf Coast Tactical, which sells the rifles.

Officers also sat in on sessions to learn about what went right and wrong at past school shootings. In one of those, they heard about the failure by a school safety monitor to send out an alert when he initially

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spotted the Parkland school shooter walking onto the campus. The armed school resource officer accused of hiding during the shooting was later charged with being criminally negligent.

In another, they got a briefing on a 2019 school shooting in Colorado, in which a private security guard who was secretly armed accidentally wounded two students.

A Colorado county sheriff also pointed to a more subtle failure in the response to that fatal 2019 shooting: Officers unnecessarily traumatized evacuated elementary students by having them line up with their hands on their heads even though authorities knew the gunmen involved were either teens or adults.

"That right there will last a lifetime," Douglas County Sheriff Tony Spurlock said, pointing to the photo of the children, one of whom has her hands folded in prayer instead. Later, he explained that he wanted to encourage school resource officers to use their discretion and find ways to minimize trauma to children.

Officer Roy Mitchell Jr. said he tries not to let preparing for a shooting rule his thoughts, but he watches out at entrances and windows for anyone unfamiliar headed into the suburban Baltimore high school where he works. He also considers where he would try to move students to should there be an attack.

"I try to always have some type of a game plan in my head," he said.

Mitchell, Ramaeker and other officers in Denver for the conference stressed that building relationships and getting to know what's going on in the lives of students is vital for all aspects of the job — whether they're acting as confidants or cops.

Some offer to help make waffles and pancakes in cooking class or fill-in to serve lunch when cafeteria workers are out sick. Others squeeze into desks in the back row to observe what students are learning. They're encouraged to teach a class, on topics such as citizens' civil rights and the legal process. They keep an eye out for who drives what cars, who is dating whom and who might be eating lunch in the bathroom because they have no friends.

It's an intense version of community policing that they hope will make them positive role models while also helping them learn about any kinds of threats that emerge in their schools.

Lt. Sandra F. Calloway-Crim, who has been a school resource officer in Valley, Alabama, for 18 years, said she got a call late one night after patrol officers found a 13-year-old student at one of her schools wandering outside alone in his pajamas. She knew the boy's father would be working the night shift but that his mother would be at home, and directed the officers to take the boy there.

Still, some activists say police don't belong in a school at all. Some districts got rid of police officers in schools during the protests over racial injustice following the murder of George Floyd in 2020 amid criticism that they have disproportionately arrested Black students, sweeping them into the criminal justice system.

Officers from Fremont, California, were removed from schools but brought back a year later after negotiating terms of a new agreement with officials. They spoke at the recent conference, encouraging supervisors to keep track of all the positive interactions they have with students to help balance the reports about investigations and arrests that police normally only document.

Don Bridges, who started a school resource officer program in suburban Baltimore in 1989, bristles at the "school to prison pipeline" criticism. Bridges, who is Black, saw the program as a way to build relationships between students and law enforcement after seeing too many people who looked like him getting arrested when he worked in patrol. He said having police in schools does not lead to Black students being targeted when officers are properly trained.

Detective Beth Sanborn drops what she is doing at home and heads into work whenever her phone explodes with messages from students at the campus where she works in suburban Philadelphia about a social media post seen as threatening.

She feels guilty sometimes for putting the needs of her "school kids" ahead of her own children. Emotional crises, fights and the fallout from failed relationships tend to be more at the front of her mind than the possibility of a shooting but she said building relationships with her students is the key to preventing all kinds of problems.

"While it always has the potential to be there, what we hope is that by stressing that sense of community, that we can avert any kind of violence," she said.

After Parkland's school resource officer failed to intervene when a student opened fire in 2018, students

at a high school in Cullman, Alabama, asked Officer Seth Sullivan if he would promise to protect them. "You're damn skippy I'm going to be in there. Those are my kids," Sullivan said.

2 found dead in charred car within California wildfire zone

By NOAH BERGER and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

YREKA, Calif. (AP) — At least two people have died from a raging California blaze that was among several menacing thousands of homes Monday in the Western U.S.

Two bodies were found inside a charred vehicle Sunday in the driveway of a home near the remote community of Klamath River, the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office said in a statement. The names of the victims and other details weren't immediately released.

The McKinney Fire in Northern California near the state line with Oregon exploded in size to nearly 87 square miles (225 square kilometers) after erupting Friday in the Klamath National Forest, firefighting officials said. It is California's largest wildfire of the year so far and officials have not yet determined the cause.

Gusty winds from a thunderstorm powered the blaze of a few hundred acres into a massive conflagration while lightning caused a couple of smaller blazes nearby, including one near the community of Seiad Valley, fire officials said.

On Monday, heavy rain helped dampen the fire but it still threatened structures after torching more than 100, ranging from homes to greenhouses, fire and sheriff's officials said.

About 2,500 people remained under evacuation orders.

"If you get an order, that means go. This fire behavior, as you'll hear, is incredible. Don't try to fight it. Don't try to stick around," Siskiyou County Office of Emergency Services Director Bryan Schenone said at a community meeting Monday evening.

Stormy and cloudy weather helped fire crews attack the blaze, and bulldozers had managed to ring the town of Yreka, fire officials said.

As of Monday, the blaze was about 4 miles (6.4 kilometers) from the town of around 7,500 people.

Valerie Linfoot's son, a fire dispatcher, called to tell her their family home of three decades in Klamath River had burned. Linfoot said her husband worked as a U.S. Forest Service firefighter for years and the family did everything they could to prepare their house for a wildfire — including installing a metal roof and trimming trees and tall grasses around the property.

"It was as safe as we could make it, and it was just so dry and so hot and the fire was going so fast," Linfoot told the Bay Area News Group. She said her neighbors have also lost homes.

"It's a beautiful place. And from what I've seen, it's just decimated. It's absolutely destroyed," she told the news group.

In northwestern Montana, winds picked up Monday afternoon on a fire burning in forested land west of Flathead Lake, forcing fire managers to ground all aircraft and leading the Lake County Sheriff's Office to start evacuating residents on the northeastern corner of the fire.

The fire was putting up a lot of smoke, creating visibility problems for aircraft, said Sara Rouse, a spokesperson for the fire management team.

The fire, which started Friday afternoon near the town of Elmo on the Flathead Indian Reservation, measured 20 square miles (52 square kilometers), fire officials said.

The Moose Fire in Idaho has burned more than 85 square miles (220 square kilometers) in the Salmon-Challis National Forest while threatening homes, mining operations and fisheries near the town of Salmon. It was 23% contained Monday.

And a wildfire raging in northwestern Nebraska led to evacuations and destroyed or damaged several homes near the small city of Gering. The Carter Canyon Fire began Saturday as two separate fires that merged. It was about 30% contained by early Monday.

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency Saturday, allowing him more flexibility to make emergency response and recovery effort decisions and to tap federal aid.

Scientists have said climate change has made the West warmer and drier over the last three decades

and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

The U.S. Forest service shut down a 110-mile (177-kilometer) section of the famed Pacific Crest Trail in Northern California and southern Oregon. Sixty hikers in that area were helped to evacuate on Saturday, according to the Jackson County Sheriff's Office in Oregon, which aided in the effort.

California governor declares monkeypox state of emergency

By DON THOMPSON Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California's governor on Monday declared a state of emergency to speed efforts to combat the monkeypox outbreak, becoming the second state in three days to take the step.

Gov. Gavin Newsom said the declaration will help California coordinate a government-wide response, seek more vaccines and lead outreach and education efforts on where people can get treatment and vaccination.

"We'll continue to work with the federal government to secure more vaccines, raise awareness about reducing risk, and stand with the LGBTQ community fighting stigmatization," Newsom said in a statement announcing his declaration.

Nearly 800 cases of monkeypox have been reported in California, according to state public health officials.

The monkeypox virus spreads through prolonged and close skin-to-skin contact, which can include hugging, cuddling and kissing, as well as through the sharing of bedding, towels and clothing. People getting sick so far have mainly been men who have sex with men, though health officials note that the virus can infect anyone.

"Public health officials are clear: stigma is unacceptable and counterproductive in public health response," Michelle Gibbons, executive director of the County Health Executives Association of California said in a statement. "The fact is that monkeypox is primarily spread by skin to skin contact and sharing objects like bedding or towels, without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity."

The type of monkeypox virus identified in this outbreak is rarely fatal, and people usually recover within weeks. But the lesions and blisters caused by the virus are painful, and they can prevent swallowing or bowel movements if in the throat or anus.

The declaration in California came after a similar one in New York state on Saturday, and in San Francisco on Thursday. Newsom's administration had said as recently as Friday that it was too soon for such a declaration.

After pressing for Newsom to make such a declaration, Democratic state Sen. Scott Wiener of San Francisco hailed the governor's decision.

"The monkeypox outbreak is an emergency, and we need to use every tool we have to control it," Wiener said.

Newsom's proclamation allows emergency medical personnel to administer monkeypox vaccines that are approved by the federal government.

That's similar to a recent law that allows pharmacists to administer vaccines, Newsom's administration said. It said the state's response is building on the steps developed during the coronavirus pandemic to set up vaccination clinics and make sure there is outreach to vulnerable populations in cooperation with local and community-based organizations.

California has received more than 61,000 vaccine doses and has distributed more than 25,000 doses.

"We don't have any time to waste," Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger said in a statement. She said the nation's most-populous county must use all available resources to speed the distribution of vaccines and help to those who have been infected.

Newsom's office said Los Angeles County has received a separate allocation of vaccine.

As of last week, the state had expanded its testing capacity to process more than 1,000 tests a week. Critics have said the long wait for test results delayed treatment options.

In San Francisco, Peter Tran was among hundreds who lined up sometimes for hours to receive the monkeypox vaccine at the Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital on Monday after the clinic was forced to close last week because it did not receive enough doses.

"It's horrible. Like this is a vaccine that's been out for such a long time. And like, it's not even a deadly disease. It's harder to be transmitted than COVID. But the rollout of the vaccines throughout this nation is absolutely horrible," Tran said.

"I think the science shows that protection is greatly improved with the vaccine. So that's why I'm doing it. And I honestly just don't want the lesions on my body. I heard the lesions are painful and leave scarring. So I think that's another motivation to go out and get it."

Before making their own emergency declaration last week, San Francisco city officials were criticized for not responding rapidly enough to the outbreak. They, in turn, faulted the federal government for failing to deliver enough vaccines. The city received about 4,000 doses on Friday, enabling it to restart vaccinations, and hopes to administer them by mid-week, said Dr. Lukejohn Day, chief medical officer at the Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital.

The city had 305 cases as of Monday, he said.

The World Health Organization has declared the monkeypox outbreak in more than 70 countries a global emergency.

Watching al-Qaida chief's 'pattern of life' key to his death

By ZEKE MILLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the sun was rising in Kabul on Sunday, two Hellfire missiles fired by a U.S. drone ended Ayman al-Zawahri's decade-long reign as the leader of al-Qaida. The seeds of the audacious counterterrorism operation had been planted over many months.

U.S. officials had built a scale model of the safe house where al-Zawahri had been located, and brought it into the White House Situation Room to show President Joe Biden. They knew al-Zawahri was partial to sitting on the home's balcony.

They had painstakingly constructed "a pattern of life," as one official put it. They were confident he was on the balcony when the missiles flew, officials said.

Years of efforts by U.S. intelligence operatives under four presidents to track al-Zawahri and his associates paid dividends earlier this year, Biden said, when they located Osama bin Laden's longtime No. 2 — a co-planner of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the U.S. — and ultimate successor at the house in Kabul.

Bin Laden's death came in May 2011, face to face with a U.S. assault team led by Navy SEALs. Al-Zawahri's death came from afar, at 6:18 a.m. in Kabul.

His family, supported by the Haqqani Taliban network, had taken up residence in the home after the Taliban regained control of the country last year, following the withdrawal of U.S. forces after nearly 20 years of combat that had been intended, in part, to keep al-Qaida from regaining a base of operations in Afghanistan.

But the lead on his whereabouts was only the first step. Confirming al-Zawahri's identity, devising a strike in a crowded city that wouldn't recklessly endanger civilians, and ensuring the operation wouldn't set back other U.S. priorities took months to fall into place.

That effort involved independent teams of analysts reaching similar conclusions about the probability of al-Zawahri's presence, the scale mock-up and engineering studies of the building to evaluate the risk to people nearby, and the unanimous recommendation of Biden's advisers to go ahead with the strike.

"Clear and convincing," Biden called the evidence. "I authorized the precision strike that would remove him from the battlefield once and for all. This measure was carefully planned, rigorously, to minimize the risk of harm to other civilians."

The consequences of getting it wrong on this type of judgment call were devastating a year ago this month, when a U.S. drone strike during the chaotic withdrawal of American forces killed 10 innocent family members, seven of them children.

Biden ordered what officials called a "tailored airstrike," designed so that the two missiles would destroy only the balcony of the safe house where the terrorist leader was holed up for months, sparing occupants elsewhere in the building.

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A senior U.S. administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the strike planning, said al-Zawahri was identified on “multiple occasions, for sustained periods of time” on the balcony where he died.

The official said “multiple streams of intelligence” convinced U.S. analysts of his presence, having eliminated “all reasonable options” other than his being there.

Two senior national security officials were first briefed on the intelligence in early April, with the president being briefed by national security adviser Jake Sullivan shortly thereafter. Through May and June, a small circle of officials across the government worked to vet the intelligence and devise options for Biden.

On July 1 in the White House Situation Room, after returning from a five-day trip to Europe, Biden was briefed on the proposed strike by his national security aides. It was at that meeting, the official said, that Biden viewed the model of the safe house and peppered advisers, including CIA Director William Burns, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines and National Counterterrorism Center director Christy Abizaid, with questions about their conclusion that al-Zawahri was hiding there.

Biden, the official said, also pressed officials to consider the risks the strike could pose to American Mark Frerichs, who has been in Taliban captivity for more than two years, and to Afghans who aided the U.S. war efforts who remain in the country. U.S. lawyers also considered the legality of the strike, concluding that al-Zawahri’s continued leadership of the terrorist group and support for al-Qaida attacks made him a lawful target.

The official said al-Zawahri had built an organizational model that allowed him to lead the global network even from relative isolation. That included filming videos from the house, and the U.S. believes some may be released after his death.

On July 25, as Biden was isolated in the White House residence with COVID-19, he received a final briefing from his team.

Each of the officials participating strongly recommended the operation’s approval, the official said, and Biden gave the sign-off for the strike as soon as an opportunity was available.

That unanimity was lacking a decade earlier when Biden, as vice president, gave President Barack Obama advice he did not take — to hold off on the bin Laden strike, according to Obama’s memoirs.

The opportunity came early Sunday — late Saturday in Washington — hours after Biden again found himself in isolation with a rebound case of the coronavirus. He was informed when the operation began and when it concluded, the official said.

A further 36 hours of intelligence analysis would follow before U.S. officials began sharing that al-Zawahri was killed, as they watched the Haqqani Taliban network restrict access to the safe house and relocate the dead al-Qaida leader’s family. U.S. officials interpreted that as the Taliban trying to conceal the fact they had harbored al-Zawahri.

After last year’s troop withdrawal, the U.S. was left with fewer bases in the region to collect intelligence and carry out strikes on terrorist targets. It was not clear from where the drone carrying the missiles was launched or whether countries it flew over were aware of its presence.

The U.S. official said no American personnel were on the ground in Kabul supporting the strike and the Taliban was provided with no forewarning of the attack.

In remarks 11 months ago, Biden had said the U.S. would keep up the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and other countries, despite pulling out troops. “We just don’t need to fight a ground war to do it.” “We have what’s called over-the-horizon capabilities,” he said.

On Sunday, the missiles came over the horizon.

EXPLAINER: Who was al-Zawahri — and why did US kill him?

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S. drone strike in Afghanistan this weekend killed Ayman al-Zawahri, who helped Osama bin Laden plot the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States and helped al-Qaida survive and spread in the years after. By finding and striking al-Zawahri, President Joe Biden said, the U.S. was

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ensuring that Afghanistan under the Taliban would never again become a base for attacks on the rest of the world, as it was in 2001.

A look at the al-Qaida leader, who evaded U.S. capture for 21 years after the suicide airliner attacks that in many ways changed America and its relations with the rest of the world.

WHO WAS AYMAN AL-ZAWAHRI?

Americans who lived through the 9/11 attacks may not remember al-Zawahri's name, but many know his face, more than two decades on: a man in glasses, slightly smiling, invariably shown in photos by the side of bin Laden as the two arranged the strike on the United States.

An Egyptian, al-Zawahri was born June 19, 1951, to a comfortable family in a leafy, drowsy Cairo suburb. Religiously observant from boyhood, he immersed himself in a violent branch of a Sunni Islamic revival that sought to replace the governments of Egypt and other Arab nations with a harsh interpretation of Islamic rule.

Al-Zawahri worked as an eye surgeon as a young adult, but also roamed Central Asia and the Middle East, witnessing Afghans' war against Soviet occupiers in that country, and meeting young Saudi Osama bin Laden and other Arab militants rallying to help Afghanistan expel Soviet troops.

He was one of hundreds of militants captured and tortured in Egyptian prison after Islamic fundamentalists' assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981. Biographers say the experience further radicalized him. Seven years later, al-Zawahri was present when bin Laden founded al-Qaida.

Al-Zawahri merged his own Egyptian militant group with al-Qaida. He brought al-Qaida organizational skill and experience — honed underground in Egypt, evading Egyptian intelligence — that allowed al-Qaida to organize cells of followers and strike around the world.

WHY WAS AL-ZAWAHRI IMPORTANT?

After the years of quietly assembling the suicide attackers, funds and plans for the Sept. 11 attack, Zawahri and lieutenants ensured that al-Qaida survived the global manhunt that followed to attack again.

On the run after 9/11, al-Zawahri rebuilt al-Qaida leadership in the Afghan-Pakistan border region and was the supreme leader over branches in Iraq, Asia, Yemen and beyond. With a credo of targeting near and far enemies, al-Qaida after 9/11 carried out years of unrelenting attacks: in Bali, Mombasa, Riyadh, Jakarta, Istanbul, Madrid, London and beyond. Attacks that killed 52 people in London in 2005 were among al-Qaida's last devastating attacks in the West, as drone strikes, counterterror raids and missiles launched by the U.S. and others killed al-Qaida-affiliated fighters and shattered parts of the network.

HOW WAS HE KILLED?

Around sunrise Sunday, Al-Zawahri walked out on the balcony of a house in Kabul, Afghanistan. He apparently lingered outside on the balcony, as U.S. intelligence had noted he often did. On this day, a U.S. drone fired two Hellfire missiles at the al-Qaida leader as he stood, according to U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the strike.

His presence in Afghanistan had been widely suspected for some time, analysts said. U.S. officials learned this year that Zawahri's wife and other family members had moved to a safe house in Kabul recently. Zawahri soon followed, the senior administration officials said.

U.S. officials, joined by top leaders all the way up to, eventually, Biden, spent careful months confirming his identity — and his fateful practice of standing alone on that same balcony — and planned the strike.

WHAT DOES HIS KILLING MEAN FOR AL-QAIDA?

It depends on which al-Qaida lieutenant succeeds him. And after decades of U.S. and other strikes, that's a pretty thin group. Al-Qaida expert Ali Soufan points to an Egyptian, Saif al-Adl, as one of the candidates to be dreaded by the West, given al-Adl's revered status within al-Qaida, his experience, and the potential of his charisma to draw back al-Qaida defectors who've moved to other groups.

But al-Qaida overall now faces a succession crisis and a shaky future. That includes rivalries against aggressive upstart extremist groups that came into being after 9/11 and also have a presence in Afghanistan.

Charles Lister, another expert in violent extremist networks, wrote after the killing that the nature and spread of conflicts around the Middle East, Africa and South Asia today favor locally focused jihadist organizations rather than globally focused ones.

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Al-Qaida's next leader will have to prove his relevance to "self-confident affiliates that have been more willing to push back against a central leadership perceived as detached from the realities of conflicts thousands of miles away," Lister wrote.

DID THE TALIBAN KNOW AL-ZAWAHRI WAS IN AFGHANISTAN?

Undoubtedly, U.S. officials said. It wasn't clear Monday how long al-Zawahri had been in Afghanistan, but his presence there had been widely rumored for some time, said Asfandyar Mir, a Central Asia expert with the U.S. Institute of Peace. Not only that: The house where Al-Zawahri was living with his family was owned by a top aide to senior Taliban leader Sirajuddin Haqqani, according to a senior U.S. intelligence official.

It could be that someone among the Taliban sold out al-Zawahri and his family to U.S. or other foreign interests. But it was a Taliban government that took in al-Qaida's leaders in the mid-1990s and allowed them to plot the 9/11 attacks there, sparking the 20-year U.S.-led war there. The worry after al-Zawahri's death in Afghanistan's capital was that the Taliban were allowing armed extremist organizations a home in Afghanistan again in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal, as the West had feared.

Biden: Killing of al-Qaida leader is long-sought 'justice'

By MATTHEW LEE, NOMAAN MERCHANT and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden announced Monday that al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Kabul, an operation he said delivered justice and hopefully "one more measure of closure" to families of the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

The president said in an evening address from the White House that U.S. intelligence officials tracked al-Zawahri to a home in downtown Kabul where he was hiding out with his family. The president approved the operation last week and it was carried out Sunday.

Al-Zawahri and the better-known Osama bin Laden plotted the 9/11 attacks that brought many ordinary Americans their first knowledge of al-Qaida. Bin Laden was killed in Pakistan on May 2, 2011, in operation carried out by U.S. Navy SEALs after a nearly decade-long hunt.

As for Al-Zawahri, Biden said, "He will never again, never again, allow Afghanistan to become a terrorist safe haven because he is gone and we're going to make sure that nothing else happens."

"This terrorist leader is no more," he added.

The operation is a significant counterterrorism win for the Biden administration just 11 months after American troops left the country after a two-decade war.

The strike was carried out by the CIA, according to five people familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity. Neither Biden nor the White House detailed the CIA's involvement in the strike.

Biden, however, paid tribute to the U.S. intelligence community in his remarks, noting that "thanks to their extraordinary persistence and skill" the operation was a success.

Al-Zawahri's death eliminates the figure who more than anyone shaped al-Qaida, first as bin Laden's deputy since 1998, then as his successor. Together, he and bin Laden turned the jihadi movement's guns to target the United States, carrying out the deadliest attack ever on American soil — the Sept. 11 suicide hijackings.

The house Al-Zawahri was in when he was killed was owned by a top aide to senior Taliban leader Sirajuddin Haqqani, according to a senior intelligence official. The official also added that a CIA ground team and aerial reconnaissance conducted after the drone strike confirmed al-Zawahri's death.

A senior administration official who briefed reporters on the operation on condition of anonymity said "zero" U.S. personnel were in Kabul.

Over the 20-year war in Afghanistan, the U.S. targeted and splintered al-Qaida, sending leaders into hiding. But America's exit from Afghanistan last September gave the extremist group the opportunity to rebuild.

U.S. military officials, including Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have said al-Qaida was trying to reconstitute in Afghanistan, where it faced limited threats from the now-ruling Taliban. Military leaders have warned that the group still aspired to attack the U.S.

After his killing, the White House underscored that al-Zawahri had continued to be a dangerous figure.

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The senior administration official said al-Zawahri had continued to "provide strategic direction," including urging attacks on the U.S., while in hiding. He had also prioritized to members of the terror network that the United States remained al-Qaida's "primary enemy," the official said.

The 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon made bin Laden America's Enemy No. 1. But he likely could never have carried it out without his deputy. Bin Laden provided al-Qaida with charisma and money, but al-Zawahri brought tactics and organizational skills needed to forge militants into a network of cells in countries around the world.

U.S. intelligence officials have been aware for years of a network helping al-Zawahri dodge U.S. intelligence officials hunting for him, but didn't have a bead on his possible location until recent months.

Earlier this year, U.S. officials learned that the terror leader's wife, daughter and her children had relocated to a safe house in Kabul, according to the senior administration official who briefed reporters.

Officials eventually learned al-Zawahri was also at the Kabul safe house.

In early April, White House deputy national security adviser Jon Finer and Biden's homeland security adviser Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall were briefed on this developing intelligence. Soon the intelligence was carried up to national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

Sullivan brought the information to Biden as U.S. intelligence officials built "a pattern of life through multiple independent sources of information to inform the operation," the official said.

Senior Taliban figures were aware of al-Zawahri's presence in Kabul, according to the official, who added the Taliban government was given no forewarning of the operation.

Inside the Biden administration, only a small group of officials at key agencies, as well as Vice President Kamala Harris, were brought into the process. Through May and June, Biden was updated several times on the growing mound of intelligence that confirmed al-Zawahri was hiding out in the home. Over the last few weeks, Biden brought together several Cabinet officials and key national security officials to scrutinize the intelligence findings.

On July 1, Biden was briefed in the Situation Room about the planned operation, a briefing in which the president closely examined a scale model of the home Zawahri was hiding out in. He gave his final approval for the operation on Thursday. Al-Zawahri was on the balcony of his hideout on Sunday when two Hellfire missiles were launched from an unmanned drone, killing him.

Al-Zawahri's family was in another part of the house when the operation was carried out, and no one else was believed to have been killed in the operation, the official said.

"We make it clear again tonight: That no matter how long it takes, no matter where you hide, if you are a threat to our people, the United States will find you and take you out," Biden said.

Al-Zawahri was hardly a household name like bin Laden, but he played an enormous role in the terror group's operations.

The two terror leaders' bond was forged in the late 1980s, when al-Zawahri reportedly treated the Saudi millionaire bin Laden in the caves of Afghanistan as Soviet bombardment shook the mountains around them.

Al-Zawahri, on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorist list, had a \$25 million bounty on his head for any information that could be used to kill or capture him.

Al-Zawahri and bin Laden plotted the 9/11 attacks that brought many ordinary Americans their first knowledge of al-Qaida.

Photos from the time often showed the glasses-wearing, mild-looking Egyptian doctor sitting by the side of bin Laden. Al-Zawahri had merged his group of Egyptian militants with bin Laden's al-Qaida in the 1990s.

"The strong contingent of Egyptians applied organizational know-how, financial expertise, and military experience to wage a violent jihad against leaders whom the fighters considered to be un-Islamic and their patrons, especially the United States," Steven A. Cook wrote for the Council on Foreign Relations last year.

When the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan demolished al-Qaida's safe haven and scattered, killed and captured its members, al-Zawahri ensured al-Qaida's survival. He rebuilt its leadership in the Afghan-Pakistan border region and installed allies as lieutenants in key positions.

He also reshaped the organization from a centralized planner of terror attacks into the head of a franchise chain. He led the assembling of a network of autonomous branches around the region, including in Iraq,

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Saudi Arabia, North Africa, Somalia, Yemen and Asia. Over the next decade, al-Qaida inspired or had a direct hand in attacks in all those areas as well as Europe, Pakistan and Turkey, including the 2004 train bombings in Madrid and the 2005 transit bombings in London.

More recently, the al-Qaida affiliate in Yemen proved itself capable of plotting attacks against U.S. soil with an attempted 2009 bombing of an American passenger jet and an attempted package bomb the following year.

But even before bin Laden's death, al-Zawahri was struggling to maintain al-Qaida's relevance in a changing Middle East.

He tried with little success to coopt the wave of uprisings that spread across the Arab world starting in 2011, urging Islamic hard-liners to take over in the nations where leaders had fallen. But while Islamists gained prominence in many places, they have stark ideological differences with al-Qaida and reject its agenda and leadership.

Nevertheless, al-Zawahri tried to pose as the Arab Spring's leader. America "is facing an Islamic nation that is in revolt, having risen from its lethargy to a renaissance of jihad," he said in a video eulogy to bin Laden, wearing a white robe and turban with an assault rifle leaning on a wall behind him.

Al-Zawahri was also a more divisive figure than his predecessor. Many militants described the soft-spoken bin Laden in adoring and almost spiritual terms.

In contrast, al-Zawahri was notoriously prickly and pedantic. He picked ideological fights with critics within the jihadi camp, wagging his finger scoldingly in his videos. Even some key figures in al-Qaida's central leadership were put off, calling him overly controlling, secretive and divisive.

Some militants whose association with bin Laden predated al-Zawahri's always saw him as an arrogant intruder.

"I have never taken orders from al-Zawahri," Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, one of the network's top figures in East Africa until his 2011 death, sneered in a memoir posted on line in 2009. "We don't take orders from anyone but our historical leadership."

There had been rumors of al-Zawahri's death on and off for several years. But a video surfaced in April of the al-Qaida leader praising a Indian Muslim woman who had defied a ban on wearing a hijab, or headscarf. That footage was the first proof in months that he was still alive.

A statement from Afghanistan's Taliban government confirmed the airstrike, but did not mention al-Zawahri or any other casualties.

It said the Taliban "strongly condemns this attack and calls it a clear violation of international principles and the Doha Agreement," the 2020 U.S. pact with the Taliban that led to the withdrawal of American forces.

"Such actions are a repetition of the failed experiences of the past 20 years and are against the interests of the United States of America, Afghanistan, and the region," the statement said.

Visitors to world's tallest tree could face \$5K fine, jail

OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ undefined

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Tree enthusiasts who make the trek to the world's tallest tree deep in a Northern California forest will face a fine and possible jail time after park officials declared the remote area off-limits because of damage done by trampling visitors to the tree and surrounding forest, a park official said Monday.

The tree, a 380-foot (115-meter) coast redwood, is in a remote area of Redwood National Park and is not accessible by any trail. But that hasn't stopped scores of visitors from hiking to the tree, said Leonel Arguello, the park's manager for natural resources.

Arguello said the tree, known as Hyperion, was "discovered" by two amateur naturalists in 2006. By 2010, visitors started trekking to see the tall, skinny redwood after bloggers, travel writers and others shared its exact location online. In 2019, Guinness World Records declared the tree, estimated to be between 600 and 800 years old, the tallest in the world.

Hikers have bushwhacked off-trail into dense vegetation to reach the tree, making many social trails. The tree has also been damaged by visitors who step on its base. The area around the tree no longer

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has ferns due to trampling, Arguello said.

"The social trails have grown in number, the amount of garbage has increased, there's human waste that has been seen and as more people go up to this tree, they create more social trails and all of that is having damage impacts to the vegetation, to the soils and, and all of the garbage just sits out there," he said.

The area has no cell phone reception and if someone were to get hurt, it would take a lot of time and resources to rescue that person. That, paired with the trampling of the tree's base and the forest, led officials to declare the area closed — and impose a \$5,000 fine and up to six months in jail for those who hike there anyway, he said.

Arguello said that Hyperion visitors may be disappointed to realize the tree is not really that much to look at because, from its base, all they can see are branches.

"It's tall, but it's not really that impressive to look at from the base because you cannot see the top of the tree. All you can see are the branches of this tall, skinny tree," Arguello said.

Park officials are encouraging people to visit Tall Trees Grove, where there are plenty of established trails and visitors have access to many imposing redwood trees.

"You can walk the grove and then go picnic by the creek and splash and swim in the water. You don't have to scramble and bushwhack up to this tall, skinny tree that isn't that impressive," Arguello said.

Rapper Mystikal again accused of rape; held without bond

By JANET McCONNAUGHEY Associated Press

Rapper Mystikal was jailed in Louisiana on Monday, accused of rape more than a year after prosecutors dropped charges that had kept him jailed for 18 months in another part of the state.

Michael "Mystikal" Tyler was arrested on charges including rape and domestic abuse battery, Sheriff Bobby Webre of Ascension Parish, just outside Baton Rouge, said in a Facebook post Monday.

The 51-year-old hip-hop legend is being held without bond on 10 charges, according to the sheriff's office inmate lookup.

Attorney Joel Pearce, of Shreveport, who represented the rapper in the earlier case, said he believes bond will be discussed at a hearing Tuesday in Ascension Parish.

"I'm expecting it to be a big bond," he said.

Pearce said he has not been retained for Tyler's current case but they are supposed to meet Wednesday or Thursday to discuss the case. He said he will make a statement then.

Pearce represented the rapper on charges brought in 2017 accusing him of a sexual assault at a Shreveport casino in 2016. Prosecutors dropped those rape and kidnapping charges in December 2020 after new evidence was presented to a grand jury and it did not bring a new indictment.

Shreveport is more than 200 miles (320 kilometers) northwest of Ascension Parish.

Webre said deputies were called to a hospital just before midnight Sunday about a sexual assault and interviewed the victim, who had minor injuries.

"Through further investigation, Michael 'Mystikal' Tyler was identified as a suspect," the statement said.

The new charges include first-degree rape, simple robbery, false imprisonment, simple criminal damage to property, and drug charges including possession of amphetamines. Conviction for first-degree rape carries at least a life sentence — the prosecutor can choose whether to ask for the death penalty.

Tyler pleaded guilty in 2003 to sexual battery and served six years in prison.

In April 2021, he told The Associated Press that his past put him in a "horrible fraternity," but he was ready to move on.

Mystikal's 2000 hit, "Shake (it Fast)" peaked at No. 13 on the Billboard Hot 100. His 2000 album "Let's Get Ready" went multiplatinum.

Democrat Sinema's views on economic bill remain shrouded

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic Sen. Kyrsten Sinema's views remained a mystery Monday as party leaders eyed votes later this week on their emerging economic legislation and both parties pointed to dueling studies they used to either laud or belittle the measure's impact.

With Democrats needing all of their 50 votes for the energy and health care measure to move through the Senate, a Sinema spokesperson suggested the Arizona lawmaker would take her time revealing her decision. Hannah Hurley said Sinema was reviewing the bill and "will need to see what comes out of the parliamentary process." It could take days for the chamber's rules umpire to decide whether the measure flouts procedural guidelines and needs changes.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., announced an agreement last week on legislation boosting taxes on huge corporations and wealthy individuals, bolstering fossil fuels and climate change efforts and curbing pharmaceutical prices. Overall, it would raise \$739 billion over 10 years in revenue and spend \$433 billion, leaving over \$300 billion to modestly reduce federal deficits.

The legislation would give President Joe Biden a victory on his domestic agenda in the runup to this fall's congressional elections. If Sinema demands changes, she would face enormous pressure to reach an accord with top Democrats and avoid a campaign-season defeat that would be a jarring blow to her party's prospects in November.

Manchin is one of Congress' most conservative and contrarian Democrats. He has spent over a year forcing his party to starkly trim its economic proposals, citing inflation fears, and his compromise with Schumer last week shocked colleagues who'd given up hope that he would agree to such a wide-ranging measure.

Sinema has played a lower-profile but similar role as Manchin — a lawmaker who can be unpredictable and willing to use the leverage all Democrats have in a 50-50 Senate. Last year, she lauded a proposal for a minimum tax on large corporations — which the new legislation has — but has also expressed opposition to increasing corporate or individual tax rates.

"She has a lot in this bill," Manchin, citing her support for past efforts to rein prices for prescription drugs, told reporters Monday. He said she's been "very adamant" about not increasing taxes, adding, "I feel the same way."

Manchin has asserted the bill's imposition of a 15% minimum tax on corporations earning over \$1 billion annually is not a tax increase. He says it closes loopholes such companies use to escape paying the current 21% corporate tax.

Republicans mocked that reasoning and said its tax boosts would weaken the economy and kill jobs. They cited a report from Congress' nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation that said about half of the corporate minimum tax would hit manufacturing firms.

"So in the middle of a supply chain crisis, Democrats want huge job-killing tax hikes that will disproportionately crush American manufacturing and manufacturing jobs," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

Biden has said he will not raise taxes on people earning under \$400,000 annually. Manchin has said the Democratic package honors that pledge.

Republicans recently distributed another Joint Committee on Taxation analysis that said the measure would raise taxes on people earning below that figure. Democrats criticized the study as incomplete, saying it omitted the impact on middle-class families of the bill's health insurance subsidies and clean energy tax cuts.

Democrats touted a report by Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics. It said the measure "will nudge the economy and inflation in the right direction, while meaningfully addressing climate change and reducing the government's budget deficits."

Schumer said he expected votes to begin this week in the Senate, where Vice President Kamala Harris could cast the tie-breaking vote to assure its passage. The narrowly divided House has left town for an August recess, but Democratic leaders have said they would bring lawmakers back for a vote, perhaps next week.

Browns QB Watson suspended 6 games, NFL weighs appeal

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

Cleveland Browns quarterback Deshaun Watson was suspended for six games Monday after being accused by two dozen women in Texas of sexual misconduct during massage treatments, in what a disciplinary officer said was behavior "more egregious than any before reviewed by the NFL."

The punishment handed out by the game's disciplinary officer, former federal judge Sue L. Robinson, fell well short of what the NFL had asked for: an open-ended suspension of at least a year for violating the league's personal conduct policy.

Watson, who played for four seasons with the Houston Texans before being traded to Cleveland in March, recently settled 23 of 24 lawsuits filed by women alleging sexual harassment and assault during the treatments in 2020 and 2021.

The NFL has three days to appeal the decision.

"Although this is the most significant punishment ever imposed on an NFL player for allegations of non-violent sexual conduct, Mr. Watson's pattern of conduct is more egregious than any before reviewed by the NFL," Robinson wrote in the conclusion to her 16-page report.

As a condition of his reinstatement, Robinson mandated that Watson only use massage therapists approved by the team for the rest of his career. And she said Watson must have "no adverse involvement with law enforcement and must not commit any additional violations" of the personal conduct policy.

The NFL Players Association has said it would abide by Robinson's ruling. If the NFL appeals, Commissioner Roger Goodell or someone he designates will make the ruling on an appropriate punishment, per terms of the collective bargaining agreement. The union then could try to challenge that ruling in federal court.

The league had pushed for a suspension of at least a year and a \$5 million fine for the 26-year-old Watson during a three-day hearing before Robinson in June, two people familiar with the discussions told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the hearing wasn't public.

The NFL presented a 215-page report based on dozens of interviews, including testimony from four of 12 women interviewed by league investigators. Robinson determined that Watson violated three provisions of the personal conduct policy: sexual assault; conduct posing a genuine danger to the safety and well-being of another person; and conduct that undermines or puts at risk the integrity of the NFL.

Robinson said the league acknowledged at the hearing that its recommended punishment was "unprecedented" and she concluded the NFL should not change its standards of discipline for nonviolent sexual assault without giving fair notice to players.

"Defining prohibited conduct plays a critical role in the rule of law, enabling people to predict the consequences of their behavior," she wrote. "It is inherently unfair to identify conduct as prohibited only after the conduct has been committed, just as it is inherently unjust to change the penalties for such conduct after the fact."

Robinson rejected Watson's denials of wrongdoing and considered his "lack of expressed remorse" to be an aggravating factor.

"As to mitigating factors, he is a first offender and had an excellent reputation in his community prior to these events. He cooperated in the investigation and has paid restitution," she wrote.

Watson, who signed a fully guaranteed \$230 million, five-year contract, will lose only \$345,000 if the suspension is unchanged because his base salary this season is \$1.035 million. His \$45 million signing bonus is not affected by the suspension.

In a statement, the league said it is "reviewing Judge Robinson's imposition of a six-game suspension and will make a determination on next steps."

This was the first case for Robinson, who was jointly appointed by the NFL and the union to handle player misconduct — a role previously held by Goodell.

Watson can continue to practice and play in exhibition games before his suspension begins the first week of the regular season. He can return to practice in Week 4 and would be eligible to play on Oct. 23 when the Browns play at Baltimore.

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He waved toward cheering fans while he and his teammates began their stretching period before practice Monday in Berea, Ohio. "We got your back, Watson!" yelled one.

Rhonda Whitelock, president of the Touchdown Browns Backers Club in suburban Cleveland, said a six-game suspension is not long enough given the accusations made by so many women. She said there are some men and women in the club who are "disgusted" by the team's decision to trade for Watson and won't watch the Browns anymore, while others believe Watson's accusers aren't telling the truth.

With an appeal still possible, Browns owners Dee and Jimmy Haslam delayed commenting until practice ended.

"We respect Judge Robinson's decision, and at the same time, empathize and understand that there have been many individuals triggered throughout this process," the Haslams said. "We know Deshaun is remorseful that this situation has caused much heartache to many and he will continue the work needed to show who he is on and off the field, and we will continue to support him."

After learning the ruling was imminent, the NFLPA issued a joint statement with Watson on Sunday night, saying they will not appeal and urged the league to follow suit. The union had argued Watson shouldn't be punished at all because he was not convicted of a crime.

Two grand juries in Texas declined to indict Watson on criminal complaints brought by 10 of the women. Watson, a three-time Pro Bowl pick with the Texans, has seen his playing career stalled by the allegations. He sat out the 2021 season after demanding a trade before the allegations came out.

In their lawsuits, the women accused Watson of exposing himself, touching them with his penis or kissing them against their will. One woman alleged Watson forced her to perform oral sex.

Watson has denied all wrongdoing, insisting any sexual activity with three of the women was consensual. He publicly insisted his goal was to clear his name before agreeing to confidential financial settlements with 20 of the women June 21.

"This case started because one woman had the fortitude to step forward and make her voice heard," said attorney Tony Buzbee, who represents the women in the civil lawsuits. "Her courage inspired many others with the same experience. None of this saga would have occurred without that one brave voice. One person can make a difference."

Buzbee said his legal team was not involved in the process that led to Watson's suspension and that he wouldn't comment on the decision. However, he did note that "only a small fraction of those women that we represent were ever spoken to by the NFL's lawyers."

Watson's high-profile case has renewed scrutiny of the league's handling of player misbehavior, along with its support for women.

Since Watson was traded to the Browns, fans questioned whether the league had the authority to ban him from playing despite no criminal charges.

The league has been sensitive about its image and handing out the appropriate discipline for Watson after being criticized for its handling of previous cases of domestic violence or sexual misconduct against women involving Baltimore running back Ray Rice, Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and Cleveland running back Kareem Hunt, among others.

The Browns were widely condemned for signing Watson. The team has been desperate to find a long-term answer at quarterback — they've had a league-high 32 starters since 1999 — and many questioned why the team would take on a player with so much baggage.

At his introductory news conference after being traded to Cleveland, Watson was adamant about his innocence.

"I have never assaulted, disrespected or harassed any woman in my life," he said at the dais, where he was joined by Browns general manager Andrew Berry and coach Kevin Stefanski. "I was raised differently. That is not my DNA. That is not my culture. That is not me as a person."

The remaining lawsuit could still go to trial, but both sides agreed to wait until 2023, after after the upcoming season.

On July 15, 30 women settled lawsuits against the Texans after claiming the team ignored and enabled

Watson as he harassed and assaulted them during the therapy sessions. Terms of the settlements were confidential.

An All-American at Clemson, Watson was drafted by the Texans with the No. 12 pick in 2017. He has developed into one of the league's elite QBs, throwing for 4,823 yards and 33 TDs in 2020 despite playing on a Texans team that went 4-12.

Settlement blocks new federal fracking leases in California

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Leasing for new oil and gas drilling on federal land in central California is temporarily blocked under a settlement announced Monday between the state and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

The deal, which still needs court approval, centers on more than 2,500 square miles (6,475 square kilometers) of land and subsurface mineral rights owned by the federal government in California's Central Valley, a hub for oil and gas activity. It prohibits the federal government from leasing any of the land for drilling until it completes a fresh review of environmental harms that may be caused by fracking, a process used to extract oil and gas from rock.

"Fracking is dangerous for our communities, damaging to our environment, and out of step with California's climate goals," California Attorney General Rob Bonta said in a statement announcing the settlement.

The dispute over federal drilling activity on the land began in 2014, when the Obama administration wanted to lease the land. Environmental groups sued, arguing the plan failed to assess environmental harms. In 2017, the bureau agreed to provide additional environmental review, according to the settlement.

Later, the Trump administration moved forward with the 2014 plan without substantial changes, the settlement said. The environmental groups sued again and so did the state of California, arguing that the federal government failed to evaluate how fracking would affect water, air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, recreational use of the lands, seismic impacts and more.

Fracking is the process of injecting a high-pressure mix of mostly water with some sand and chemical additives into rock to create or expand fractures that allow oil and gas to be extracted. It's a controversial practice due to concerns about the injected chemicals contaminating groundwater.

The settlement puts a moratorium on any sales of oil and gas leases on federal land around Bakersfield until the appropriate environmental reviews are completed.

The Biden administration tried to suspend sales of leases for oil and gas drilling on federal land but was blocked by a court. The first auctions for onshore leasing since Biden took office began at the end of June. The available land covered about 225 square miles (580) square kilometers in mostly Western states, but none in California.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom has called for a ban on new fracking permits on state-permitted land starting in 2024. Fracking accounts for just a small percentage of oil production in the state. Newsom's administration has already begun denying fracking permits solely based on climate change concerns, prompting oil and gas groups to sue.

Kevin Slagle, a spokesman for the Western States Petroleum Association, said decisions that make it harder to produce energy in California will cause prices to rise.

"It's unfortunate that President Biden travels the world asking other countries to increase production while our governor is working hard to eliminate domestic resources," he said in a statement.

Supreme Court certifies ruling ending Trump border policy

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The Supreme Court on Monday certified its month-old ruling allowing the Biden administration to end a cornerstone Trump-era border policy to make asylum-seekers wait in Mexico for hearings in U.S. immigration court, a pro forma act that has drawn attention amid near-total silence from the White House about when, how and even whether it will dismantle the policy.

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The two-word docket entry read "judgment issued" to record that justices voted 5-4 in a ruling issued June 30 that the administration could scrap the "Remain in Mexico" policy, overruling a lower court that forced the policy to be reinstated in December.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said shortly after the Supreme Court victory that justices would need to communicate the decision to a lower court, which, in turn, should lift the order to keep the policy in place in a lawsuit filed by the state of Texas. Beyond that, administration officials have said little, including whether any of the thousands subject to the policy since December will be allowed to enter and remain in the United States while their cases are being considered in immigration court.

The White House and Homeland Security Department had no immediate comment on the Supreme Court certification; the Justice Department declined comment. Officials in Mexico had no immediate comment.

About 70,000 migrants were subject to the policy, known officially as "Migrant Protection Protocols," or MPP, from when former President Donald Trump introduced it in January 2019 until President Joe Biden suspended it on his first day in office in January 2021, fulfilling a campaign promise. Many were allowed to return to the United States to pursue their cases during the early months of Biden's presidency.

Nearly 5,800 people have been subject to the policy from December through June, according to figures released Friday, a modest number that would make any reluctance to end it seem less plausible. Nicaraguans account for the largest number, with others from Cuba, Colombia and Venezuela.

A sign posted last week at the entrance to the Salvation Army migrant shelter in Tijuana, Mexico, by the United Nations' International Organization for Migration appeared to best capture the public understanding of the policy's status: "Wait for official information! The Remain in Mexico (MPP) program remains in effect. The United States government will inform you of any changes."

Critics of the policy have been increasingly outspoken about the Biden administration's reticence on "Remain in Mexico," and Monday's certification renewed their calls for an immediate end to the policy.

"It's a zombie policy," said Karen Tumlin, founder of Justice Action Center, an immigration litigation organization.

The final move may rest with U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk in Amarillo, Texas, a Trump appointee whose ruling last year brought "Remain in Mexico" back.

Psychiatrist says Sandy Hook parents fear for their lives

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The parents of a Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting victim live with a complex form of post-traumatic stress disorder and a constant fear that followers of conspiracy theorist Alex Jones will kill them, a psychiatrist testified Monday at Jones' defamation trial.

Neil Heslin and Scarlett Lewis, the parents of 6-year-old Jesse Lewis, have sued Jones and his media company Free Speech Systems over the harassment and threats they and other parents say they've endured for years while Jones and his Infowars website claimed the 2012 attack that killed 20 first-graders and six school staffers was a hoax or faked.

"The overwhelming cause of their pain is what Jones is doing," said Roy Lubit, a forensic psychiatrist hired by the plaintiffs to review the trauma faced by the parents.

The post-traumatic stress disorder the parents suffer from is not based on a single event, but on constant trauma, and is similar to that endured by soldiers in war zones or child abuse victims, Lubit said.

Heslin and Scarlett Lewis are consumed not just with the memory of their son's horrific death, but the denials and attacks on them and their son's legacy they've endured for years. He noted the security the parents hired to protect them at the two-week trial.

Lubit said Heslin has had guns fired at his home and has been accosted on the street. Scarlett Lewis told Lubit that she installed sophisticated surveillance equipment at her home and sleeps with a gun, a knife and pepper spray at her bedside.

Jones' attorney Andino Reynal tried to attack the credibility of Lubit's testimony and whether he is biased in favor of the parents, who are seeking at least \$150 million in the case. He noted that Lubit briefly ran

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for Congress in Connecticut as a Democrat in 2018.

"You don't like Alex Jones, do you?" Reynal asked.

"I don't like what he does," Lubit answered.

Mark Bankston, attorney for Heslin and Lewis, said the family has gone into isolation under a "large and professional security team" because of an incident that happened since the trial began. He did not provide details of what happened.

"They are in isolation and they are going to stay that way, and all I can tell you is they are terrified right now," Bankston said.

Heslin and Lewis have attended almost all of the trial since opening statements on July 26, and first arrived at the courthouse with a small security detail. They left the courtroom together Monday morning.

Michael Crouch, a Connecticut psychologist who has treated Heslin and Stewart, said the lies about a Sandy Hook hoax stole precious memories of their son.

"If Alex Jones, if he was spreading the belief, the lies, that Neil's an actor, that means Jesse doesn't exist. Which is crazy," Crouch said. "You're taking away what they know of their son, what they want to hold on to."

Heslin and Lewis are expected to testify Tuesday as the final witnesses for their side.

Reynal said Jones will testify Tuesday in his own defense.

Monday's testimony also included videotaped depositions from an Infowars reporter who said that at the website, there was no fact-checking, source-vetting, verifying information through second sources or training about journalistic standards.

Jones, who has attended only some of the trial, was not in the courtroom for Monday morning's testimony.

The trial is in Texas because Jones lives in Austin and his media company, Free Speech Systems, is based there. The company filed for federal bankruptcy protection, though defense attorneys say that should not disrupt the trial, which is in its second week.

Free Speech Systems, which operates Infowars, listed \$14.3 million in assets. That includes almost \$1.16 million in cash and almost \$1.6 million in property and equipment, as of May 31.

It also listed \$79 million in liabilities, with a \$54 million debt owed to PQPR Holdings.

Sandy Hook families have separately sued Jones over the \$54 million debt listing, arguing that PQBR is a Nevada-registered company owned by Jones and his family through shell entities. That lawsuit in state court is still pending.

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

1st ship carrying Ukrainian grain leaves the port of Odesa

By SUSIE BLANN and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The first ship carrying Ukrainian grain set out Monday from the port of Odesa under an internationally brokered deal to unblock the embattled country's agricultural exports and ease the growing global food crisis.

The Sierra Leone-flagged cargo ship Razoni sounded its horn as it departed with over 26,000 tons of corn destined for Lebanon.

"The first grain ship since Russian aggression has left port," Ukrainian Minister of Infrastructure Oleksandr Kubrakov declared on Twitter.

Russia and Ukraine signed agreements in Istanbul with Turkey and the U.N. on July 22, clearing the way for Ukraine to export 22 million tons of grain and other agricultural products that have been stuck in Black Sea ports because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine more than five months ago. The deals also allow Russia to export grain and fertilizer.

As part of the agreements, safe corridors through the mined waters outside Ukraine's ports were es-

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tablished.

Ukraine and Russia are major global suppliers of wheat, barley, corn and sunflower oil, with the fertile Black Sea region long known as the breadbasket of Europe. The holdup of shipments because of the war has worsened rising food prices worldwide and threatened hunger and political instability in developing nations.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy sounded a cautious note. Calling the shipment "the first positive signal that there is a chance to stop the spread of a food crisis in the world," he also urged international partners to closely monitor Moscow's compliance with the deal.

"We cannot have the illusions that Russia will simply refrain from trying to disrupt Ukrainian exports," Zelenskyy said.

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov hailed the ship's departure as "very positive," saying it would help test the "efficiency of the mechanisms that were agreed to during the talks in Istanbul."

Under the agreements, ships going in and out of Ukrainian ports will be subject to inspection to make sure that incoming vessels are not carrying weapons and that outgoing ones are bearing only grain, fertilizer or related food items, not any other commodities.

The Razoni was scheduled to dock early Wednesday in Istanbul, where teams of Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish and U.N. officials were set to board it for inspection.

More ships are expected to leave from Ukraine's ports through the safe corridors. At Odesa, 16 more vessels, all blocked since Russia's invasion on Feb. 24, were waiting their turn, with others to follow, Ukrainian authorities said.

But some shipping companies are not yet rushing to export food across the Black Sea as they assess the danger of mines and the risk of Russian rockets hitting grain warehouses and ports.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who proposed the grain deal in April, said the Razoni was "loaded with two commodities in short supply: corn and hope."

"Hope for millions of people around the world who depend on the smooth running of Ukraine's ports to feed their families," he said.

Lebanon, the corn's destination, is in the grip of a severe financial crisis. A 2020 explosion at its main port in Beirut shattered its capital city and destroyed grain silos. Lebanon imports mostly wheat from Ukraine but also buys its corn for making cooking oil and animal feed.

Kubrakov said the shipments will also help Ukraine's war-shattered economy.

"Unlocking ports will provide at least \$1 billion in foreign exchange revenue to the economy and an opportunity for the agricultural sector to plan for next year," he said.

Hearing the ship sound its horn as it left port delighted Olena Vitalievna, an Odesa resident.

"Finally, life begins to move forward and there are some changes in a positive direction," she said. "In general, the port should live its own life because Odesa is a port city. We live here. We want everything to work for us, everything to bustle."

The resumption of the grain shipments came as fighting raged elsewhere in Ukraine, with Russia pressing its offensive in the east while Ukraine tries to retake territory in the Russian-occupied south.

Ukraine's presidential office said at least three civilians were killed and 16 wounded by Russian shelling in the Donetsk region over the past 24 hours. Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko repeated a call for all residents to evacuate, emphasizing the need to remove about 52,000 children still there.

Two civilians were killed and two seriously wounded when Russian forces fired missiles at a bus evacuating people from a village in the southern Kherson region, according to Oleksandr Vilkul, head of the military administration in the city of Kryvyi Rih.

Ukrainian authorities have been calling on civilians in that region, which was overrun by Russian troops early in the war, to evacuate ahead of a planned counteroffensive.

More shelling was reported in Kharkiv in the northeast and Mykolaiv in the south.

Analysts warned that the continuing fighting could still upend the grain deal.

"The departure of the first vessel doesn't solve the food crisis; it's just the first step that could also be

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the last if Russia decides to continue attacks in the south," said Volodymyr Sidenko, an expert with the Kyiv-based Razumkov Center think tank.

In other developments:

— In Washington, President Joe Biden approved an additional \$550 million in military aid to Ukraine, including more ammunition for howitzers and for the new American-supplied multiple rocket launchers that are making a difference on the battlefield. The package brings total U.S. military assistance to Ukraine to approximately \$8.7 billion since the start of the Biden administration.

— Ukraine's human rights ombudsman said he had written to his Russian counterpart suggesting a joint visit to the Olenivka prison, where dozens of Ukrainian POWs were killed in an explosion Friday. Dmitry Lubets said the Russian side indicated it would consider it.

Both sides have blamed each other for the blast at the prison, which is in Russian-controlled territory. Ukrainian officials maintain the explosion was caused by a bomb set off inside the building.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has also requested access to the prison, but so far has been turned down.

Russell was a champion of activism before winning NBA titles

By KYLE HIGHTOWER AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Bill Russell never had to find his voice as an activist. He didn't know any other way but to speak his mind.

It's what made the winningest athlete in team sports one of the greatest champions of activism. His belief in equality and the stances he took helped create a pathway that athletes today continue to walk in.

Len Elmore, who played 10 seasons in the NBA and is a senior lecturer at Columbia University where he's taught on athlete activism and social justice in sports, called Russell's social contributions "immortal."

"He showed many of us in the game how to be," Elmore said.

Before Russell, who died Sunday at age 88, developed the skills that would make him an 11-time NBA champion with the Boston Celtics, two-time Hall of Famer and an Olympic gold medalist, he had a front row view of the racial indignities endured by his parents as he grew up in segregated Monroe, Louisiana.

In a time when Jim Crow laws in the South existed to silence the views of Black people, he was groomed to be an unapologetic thinker.

"I have never worked to be well-liked or well-loved, but only to be respected," Russell wrote in his 1966 book "Go Up For Glory." "I believe I can contribute something far more important than mere basketball."

That conviction was rooted in what he observed as a child in the late 1930s and early 1940s in Louisiana, where his father, Charles, worked at a paper bag company.

Russell was with him at a gas station one day when the attendant ignored them as he talked to a white man and then proceeded to provide service to other cars that had arrived after them.

Charles was about to drive off when the attendant pulled a gun and said, "Don't you try that, boy, unless you want to get shot," Russell recalled in his book.

His father responded by grabbing a tire iron and chasing the man away.

Decades before Colin Kaepernick's national anthem demonstrations to raise awareness about police brutality, or the collective sports world advocating for justice following the 2020 death of George Floyd and others, Russell used his platform to hasten civil rights.

It's why when Russell later faced his own forms of discrimination decades later, he didn't hesitate to challenge the status quo.

One of the first examples was 1961 when the Celtics were in Lexington, Kentucky for an exhibition game.

The team was in their hotel when teammates Sam Jones asked Satch Sanders to go to the lobby to get some food. They were refused service.

Later they were met by Russell and K.C. Jones. After Sam told them what had happened, Russell suggested none of the Black players should participate in the game and informed Celtics coach Red Auerbach.

The game would be called off after two more players from the St. Louis Hawks joined the protest.

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When former President Barack Obama presented Russell with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011, he called it an example of how he “stood up for rights and dignity of all men.”

Russell didn't just risk sully his reputation, he put his life at risk in the wake of the 1963 assassination of civil rights activist Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi. Just days after Evers was slain, Russell reached out to the leader's brother, Charles Evers. He wanted to inquire about what he could do to help.

Charles Evers asked him if he'd be willing to visit the state and stage its first integrated basketball camp. It was a huge ask considering the very real peril Russell would be putting himself in by visiting a city riddled members of the Ku Klux Klan. Still, Russell accepted the invitation.

“I didn't want to go to Mississippi. I was like anyone else. I was afraid I might get killed,” Russell would later write. “My wife asked me not to go. Some friends said the same thing. A man must do what he thinks is right. I called Eastern Airlines and ordered my ticket.”

Despite coming off his third MVP award and fifth NBA title, Russell said “without hesitation” he'd have left the Celtics that season if his continued presence in Mississippi or anywhere else could have advanced civil rights push.

“If my popularity depends on a thing like this, I don't give a damn,” he said at the time.

A star of Russell's stature to show a willingness to put his convictions ahead of his athletic career put him in a small group during that time like Muhammad Ali, Lew Alcindor (now Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) and Jim Brown.

And it was Russell, Alcindor and Brown sitting beside Ali in Cleveland in 1967 when the boxer announced he was refusing induction into the U.S. military to fight in the Vietnam War.

Current Celtics star Jaylen Brown, one of several young NBA players who have used their own platforms to raise awareness and engage in social justice protests, said it was Russell who first taught him “it is OK to be more than just a basketball player.”

It echoed what Russell wrote in 1966 about how he wished to be remembered.

“In the end, I live with the hopes that when I die it will be inscribed for me: Bill Russell. He was a man.”

Brittney Griner's trial resumes amid intensified diplomacy

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Since Brittney Griner last appeared in her trial for cannabis possession, the question of her fate has expanded from a tiny, cramped courtroom on Moscow's outskirts to the highest level of Russia-U.S. diplomacy.

The WNBA star and two-time Olympic gold medalist returns to court on Tuesday, a month after the beginning of the trial in which she could face 10 years in prison if convicted. As the trial has progressed, the Biden administration has faced rising calls for action to win her release.

In an extraordinary move, Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week spoke to his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, urging him to accept a deal under which Griner and Paul Whelan, an American imprisoned in Russia on an espionage conviction, would go free.

Although details of the offer remain shrouded, Blinken's public announcement of a proposal was at odds with the convention of keeping prisoner-release negotiations tightly under wraps. When American Trevor Reed, serving time for assaulting a police officer, was freed in April in exchange for a Russian drug trafficker, no clues of an imminent swap had emerged.

The Lavrov-Blinken call also was the highest-level known contact between Washington and Moscow since Russia sent troops into Ukraine more than five months ago. The direct outreach risks undermining a core message to U.S. allies that isolating Russia could force the eventual withdrawal of troops from Ukraine.

It also underlines the public pressure that the White House has faced to get Griner released, which has brought some backlash. Former President Donald Trump strongly criticized the proposal that people familiar with it have said envisions trading Griner and Whelan for the notorious arms trader Viktor Bout.

“He's absolutely one of the worst in the world, and he's going to be given his freedom because a potentially spoiled person goes into Russia loaded up with drugs,” Trump said.

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White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters Monday that Russia has made a “bad faith” response to the U.S. government’s offer, a counteroffer that American officials don’t regard as serious. She declined to elaborate.

Griner, speaking from the defendant’s cage in a courtroom that barely holds a dozen people, has acknowledged there were vape canisters containing cannabis oil in her luggage when she was arrested at a Moscow airport in February. But she says she had no criminal intent and that the canisters ended up in her luggage because she was packing hastily. Griner played for a Russian women’s basketball team in the WNBA off-season.

To bolster her case, her defense lawyers have called character witnesses from her Russian team, UMMC Ekaterinburg, and presented testimony from doctors that she was prescribed cannabis as a treatment for pain. Medical marijuana treatment is not legal in Russia.

Her lawyers say they hope such testimony will bring leniency from the judge, who they say under Russian law has leeway to consider mitigating factors.

Acquittals are rare in Russian criminal prosecutions — less than 1% of cases. Sentences can be suspended.

If a conviction is a foregone conclusion, it would also potentially be a step forward. Russian officials have said no release of Griner could occur until the judicial process is completed.

However, a Washington attorney who formerly was legal adviser at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow said there is no formal requirement for a conviction before an exchange.

“If she is in fact being used as a political bargaining chip — and the administration has already designated her as wrongfully detained, presumably because they think she is being used as a political pawn — they may impose a very significant sentence as a way to maximize their leverage in negotiations,” the attorney, Tom Firestone, told The Associated Press.

He also said that, given the Biden administration’s public commitment to securing the release of Whelan and Griner, Russia “may want to let this play out a little bit longer and try to extract more concessions.”

Russian officials have given no public hint of whether Blinken made headway in his call with Lavrov, only issuing a statement urging the Americans to pursue the matter through “quiet diplomacy without releases of speculative information.”

Russia has repeatedly expressed annoyance with American statements on the case, saying they show a disrespect for Russian law.

As species recover, some threaten others in more dire shape

By JOHN FLESHER, CHRISTINA LARSON and PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

GLEN ARBOR, Mich. (AP) — In a forest near Lake Michigan, two scientists attached a backpack tracking device to a merlin they’d lured into a net. The mission: help prevent the predatory species from gobbling up piping plovers — highly endangered shorebirds that nest nearby.

Merlins themselves were going downhill decades ago but are recovering, thanks to bans on pesticides such as DDT. That’s good for them — but not for plovers in the Great Lakes region, where only 65 to 70 pairs remain. The small falcons are “are a big threat to their recovery,” said Nathan Cooper, a research ecologist with Smithsonian’s National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute.

The situation is ironic. A troubled species rebounds thanks to restoration efforts, only to make things worse for others in peril by preying on them or outcompeting them for food and living space. Similar circumstances have turned up elsewhere, challenging wildlife experts who want them all to thrive in balanced, healthy environments.

For instance, the iconic bald eagle’s comeback has pressured rare water birds. Resurgent peregrine falcons menace endangered California least terns and Western snowy plovers that take refuge at naval bases near San Diego. And, off the California coast, attacks from protected white sharks hinder recovery of threatened sea otters.

Gray seals previously on the brink of extirpation in waters of New England now occupy some Massachusetts beaches by the hundreds. The 800-pound mammal’s return has raised worries about vulnerable

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fish stocks.

Such unintended consequences don't necessarily reveal flaws in the U.S. Endangered Species Act or conservation programs, experts say. Rather, they illustrate nature's complexity and the importance of protecting biological communities, not just individual species.

"Clearly there are occasions when we get these conflicts between species that we're trying to protect," said Stuart Pimm, a Duke University extinction specialist. "But is it a major worry in conservation? No."

Species recoveries can produce tradeoffs, since some animals are more adaptable than others to changes in the climate or landscape, said Bruce Stein, chief scientist with the National Wildlife Federation.

"A lot of ecosystems where these things are occurring are a little out of whack to begin with because we've altered them in some way," Stein said. "With climate change, there are going to be winners and losers. The losers will tend to have specific habitat requirements, narrow ecological niches, and often will be the ones already declining."

OUTSMARTING A MERLIN

Smithsonian interns Tim Baerwald and Zachary Bordner snared the merlin at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore with help from its natural enemy: a great horned owl. This one was dead but fitted with remote-control devices to make it hoot and flap its wings.

The merlin darted overhead, sounding high-pitched, rapid-fire distress calls. It dove into a net stretched between steel poles. The scientists gently disentangled the brownish-speckled female, then attached the tracker and a leg band.

"As long as it's fitted correctly, she'll have a long and happy life," Baerwald said before Bordner released the merlin, which zipped back to its nesting tree.

Merlin numbers in the region have jumped since the DDT ban in 1972. They're suspected of killing at least 57 adult piping plovers in the past 10 to 15 years, said Cooper of Smithsonian.

The sandy-backed, ring-necked plovers skitter along beaches nibbling tiny marine animals and eggs. They're among three remaining North American populations, their decline caused primarily by habitat loss and predation.

While officials have shot some merlins, they're looking for non-lethal controls. Data from the transmitter backpacks might help determine whether capturing and relocating them is worth trying, said Vince Cavalieri, a biologist with the national lakeshore.

EAGLES THREATEN RARE BIRDS

Recovery of America's national bird, the bald eagle, is a triumph. But in one area of coastal Maine, the big raptor poses a problem for the only U.S. breeding population of great cormorants.

"When they're disturbed by eagles, the adult cormorants will flush and leave their nests," said Don Lyons, a conservation scientist at the National Audubon Society's Seabird Institute.

Then gulls, ravens and crows swoop in to gobble cormorant eggs and chicks. "If this happens repeatedly, an entire colony can fail," Lyons said.

His team organizes volunteers to camp near cormorant gatherings to scare away eagles.

In Southern California, least terns and snowy plovers are no match for attacking peregrine falcons, which like eagles bounced back after the ban on DDT. Such pesticides are passed up food chains and cause large birds to produce eggs with thin shells, which females crush when trying to incubate them.

The San Diego Zoo and Wildlife Alliance tries to protect the endangered birds by hiring a falconer to capture problem peregrines, keeping them in a holding facility over winter or releasing them in Northern California. Some find a new territory, while others go back, said Nacho Vilchis, a conservation ecologist.

"If there's a real problem bird that keeps returning, we may ask for permission for lethal removal, but that's only rarely done," Vilchis said.

Hunting and bounties devastated New England's gray seals. Saved by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, the population has rebounded to tens of thousands.

Fishing groups contend the seals could threaten cod stocks that regulators are struggling to rebuild after decades of overfishing.

The Coastal Ecosystem Alliance, based in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, wants to weaken the protection act to allow hunting and slow the seals' population growth, said board member Peter Krogh.

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"Gray seals are certainly this case where recovery has both been cause for celebration and cause for concern," said Kristina Cammen, a University of Maine marine mammal scientist who says they're less of a hazard to fish populations than humans are.

SEALS, CORMORANTS BEDEVIL FISHERS

Like the clash over seals and cod, there are other cases where reviving species may be more a nuisance to people than a threat to other wildlife.

Fish farmers in the South and anglers in the Great Lakes region and Pacific Northwest have long complained about the double-crested cormorant, a dark-feathered diving bird that gorges on catfish, perch, salmon and other prized species.

Cormorants have done so well since the DDT ban that agencies have tried limiting them in some locations with egg oiling, nest destruction and even shooting — drawing lawsuits from environmentalists who say the birds are a scapegoat for human actions that harm fish.

"They're a part of our avian community and our ecosystems, and there needs to be a place for them," said Dave Fielder, a fisheries research biologist with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. "But when their numbers are so high that they potentially decimate the recreational fishery, that's a problem."

Wild turkeys were spread across North America before European settlement but had dwindled to tens of thousands by the 1930s, disappearing from many states. Now they're hunted in 49 states and are so common in New England that they often cause traffic tie-ups.

Some hunters say hungry turkeys are outcompeting ruffed grouse, which are decreasing in parts of their range, such as the Upper Midwest. But scientists point to habitat loss and climate change.

The National Wild Turkey Federation is helping move turkeys from states with plenty — such as North Carolina, Maine and West Virginia — to Texas and others that could use more, said Mark Hatfield, national director of conservation services.

"If you introduce hunting localized wild turkeys, you reduce the problem with overabundant turkeys right away," Hatfield said.

NATURE AT WORK

Conflicts between recovering species and ones still in trouble don't always mean something is wrong, scientists say. It could reflect a return to how things were before humans got in the way.

"When a population gets back to where it's having the same interactions with other organisms as before it went down, that's nature at work," said John Fitzpatrick, emeritus director of Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology.

The bald eagle is "challenging our preconceived notions about what's normal" for prey such as great cormorants in New England and common murrelets on the West Coast, which might have been less abundant before eagles declined, said Lyons of the Audubon Society.

The eagle's recovery "complicates the conservation of certain other species," Lyons said. "But their recovery is such a wonderful outcome ... that's a welcome complication."

Predator-prey relationships are complex and intervening can be tricky, said Stein of the wildlife federation. It's often wiser, he said, to focus on protecting habitat and reconnecting fragmented landscapes to promote natural migration than "moving things around willy-nilly."

But environmental scientist Ian Warkentin, a merlin specialist, said there can be ways to help struggling species without being heavy-handed. Larger falcons — such as peregrines sometimes used to chase birds from airports — might be deployed to shoo merlins from plover nesting areas.

"I fall on the side of the fence that says we should do whatever we can ... to aid the recovery of species for which we've caused such grief," said Warkentin, from Memorial University of Newfoundland's Grenfell Campus.

Chances of climate catastrophe are ignored, scientists say

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Experts are ignoring the worst possible climate change catastrophic scenarios, including collapse of so-

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ciety or the potential extinction of humans, however unlikely, a group of top scientists claim.

Eleven scientists from around the world are calling on the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world's authoritative climate science organization, to do a special science report on "catastrophic climate change" to "bring into focus how much is at stake in a worst-case scenario." In their perspective piece in Monday's Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences they raise the idea of human extinction and worldwide societal collapse in the third sentence, calling it "a dangerously under-explored topic."

The scientists said they aren't saying that worst is going to happen. They say the trouble is no one knows how likely or unlikely a "climate endgame" is and the world needs those calculations to battle global warming.

"I think it's highly unlikely you are going to see anything close to even extinction over the next century simply because humans are incredibly resilient," said study lead author Luke Kemp at the Center for the Study of Existential Risk at the University of Cambridge in England. "Even if we have a 1% chance of having a global catastrophe, going extinct over the coming century, that 1%, that is way too high."

Catastrophic climate scenarios "appear likely enough to warrant attention" and can lead to prevention and warning systems, Kemp said.

Good risk analyses consider both what's most likely and what's the worst that could happen, study authors said. But because of push back from non-scientists who reject climate change, mainstream climate science has concentrated on looking at what's most likely and also disproportionately on low-temperature warming scenarios that come close to international goals, said co-author Tim Lenton, director of the Global Systems Institute at the University of Exeter in England.

There is, Lenton said, "not enough emphasis on how things, the risks, the big risks, could go plausibly badly wrong."

It's like an airplane, Lenton said. It's overwhelmingly likely that it will land safely, but it's only because so much attention was made to calculate the worst case scenario and then figure out how to avoid a crash. It only works if you research what could go badly wrong and that isn't being done enough with climate change, he said.

"The stakes may be higher than we thought," said University of Michigan environment dean Jonathan Overpeck, who wasn't part of the study. He worries that the world "may stumble" upon climate risks it doesn't know about.

When global science organizations look at climate change they tend to just look at what happens in the world: extreme weather, higher temperatures, melting ice sheets, rising seas and plant and animal extinctions. But they aren't factoring enough how these reverberate in human societies and interact with existing problems — like war, hunger and disease — study authors said.

"If we don't look at the intersecting risks, we'll be painfully surprised," said University of Washington public health and climate professor Kristie Ebi, a co-author who like Lenton has been part of United Nations global climate assessments.

It was a mistake health professionals made before COVID-19 when assessing possible pandemics, Ebi said. They talked about disease spread, but not lockdowns, supply chain problems and spiraling economies.

Study authors said they worry about societal collapse — war, famine, economic crises — linked to climate change more than the physical changes to Earth itself.

Outside climate scientists and risk experts were both welcoming and wary of focusing on the worst of the worst, even as many reject climate doom talk.

"I do not believe civilization as we know it will make it out of this century," University of Victoria climate scientist Andrew Weaver, a former British Columbia legislator for the Green Party, said in an email. "Resilient humans will survive, but our societies that have urbanized and are supported by rural agriculture will not."

Climate scientist Zeke Hausfather of the tech company Stripe and Berkeley Earth has criticized climate scientists in the past for using future scenarios of greatly increasing carbon pollution when the world is no longer on those paths to more rapid warming. Yet, he said it does make sense to look at catastrophic

scenarios "as long as we are careful not to conflate the worst case with the most likely outcome."

Talking about extinction of humans is not "a very effective communications device," said Brown University climate scientist Kim Cobb. "People tend to immediately say, well, that's just, you know, arm waving or doomsday mongering."

What's happening short of extinction is bad enough, she said.

Co-author Tim Lenton said researching worst case scenarios could find nothing to worry about: "Maybe it's that you can thoroughly rule out a number of these bad scenarios. Well, that's actually really well worth spending your time doing that. Then we should all cheer up a bit."

EXPLAINER: Watson discipline didn't require legal charges

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

When two separate Texas grand juries declined to indict Deshaun Watson on criminal complaints stemming from allegations of sexual assault or harassment by 24 women, it didn't clear the three-time Pro Bowl quarterback from facing consequences from the NFL.

Watson and the Cleveland Browns found out the severity of his punishment on Monday, when he was suspended six games for violating the league's personal conduct policy. He won't be paid while suspended, though he won't lose as much as he would have if the NFL had its way.

Disciplinary officer Sue L. Robinson made the decision after the NFL pushed for an indefinite suspension of at least one year and Watson's legal team argued for no punishment during a three-day hearing that concluded June 30.

A look at the issue:

WHY WAS WATSON DISCIPLINED IF HE NEVER FACED LEGAL CHARGES?

A player does not have to be convicted or even charged with a crime to be disciplined for conduct detrimental to the league, per the collective bargaining agreement between the NFL and the NFL Players' Association. Ezekiel Elliott, Ben Roethlisberger, Jameis Winston and Kareem Hunt are among the many players who have received suspensions for various infractions despite not being charged criminally.

Some legal experts are critical of the process.

"Normally arbitration is reserved for civil matters in workplaces, which is what makes the NFL's investigation of criminal allegations wholly unique and, in my opinion, potentially unfair," said attorney Amy Dash, founder of League of Justice, a website that reports on sports and the law. "The determinations create a presumption of guilt by many people in the public forum. But so far courts have not wanted to disturb the outcomes because the whole process was negotiated and agreed upon in the CBA by the players' union reps and the league."

Dash also noted that sometimes players are being investigated for criminal allegations in the arbitration process and they "don't have the same protections a defendant in the criminal courts would have such as presumption of innocence, a burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, the same rules of evidence and discovery, etc."

But the league negotiated its disciplinary process with the union so it has the power, as an employer, to impose punishment.

WHAT WAS DIFFERENT ABOUT WATSON'S CASE?

The major difference in Watson's case was the discipline came from an independent arbiter. The league and union agreed in the 2020 CBA that a disciplinary officer would determine whether a player violated the personal conduct policy and whether to impose discipline. Previously, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell had the authority to do it.

This was the first case for Robinson, who was jointly appointed by the league and the union.

However, Goodell still has the right to overturn her decision if either side appeals. Per the CBA, an appeal would be heard by Goodell or a person he designates and the written decision would be final.

After learning the ruling was imminent, the NFLPA issued a joint statement with Watson on Sunday night saying they would not appeal Robinson's ruling and urged the league to follow suit.

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Goodell wasn't directly involved in Robinson's decision, but the league made it clear it wanted an unprecedented punishment. The NFL is well aware of public perception. Fallout from its decision in the Ray Rice case in 2014 — when the league increased its suspension only after video of the former Ravens running back hitting his fiancée emerged — led the NFL to vow it would levy harsher penalties in cases involving violence and sexual assault against women.

WHAT IS THIS COSTING WATSON?

Watson settled 23 of the civil lawsuits from 24 women alleging sexual harassment and assault during private massage therapy sessions when he played for the Houston Texans.

Watson, who signed a fully guaranteed \$230 million, five-year contract, will lose only \$345,000 if the suspension is unchanged because his base salary this season is \$1.035 million. His \$45 million signing bonus is not affected by the suspension.

After one of the grand juries declined to indict Watson in March, Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg said: "We respect our justice process. I love the law. It's designed to get to the truth. That's really what people want. I don't think as a culture we can live with injustice. Remember, a grand jury no bill is not an exoneration. People, even when they clear the criminal justice system, often face accountability and repercussions in other parts of our legal system. And so I think to determine whether justice was done in this case you're going to have to wait and see how it all comes out on the civil side of things and then through the NFL on the administrative side of things. And then people will determine whether that's justice."

The administrative part has now been decided.

New this week: 'The Sandman,' 'My Life as a Rolling Stone'

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's a collection curated by The Associated Press' entertainment journalists of what's arriving on TV, streaming services and music platforms this week.

MOVIES

— Ron Howard is a master at the ripped-from-the-headlines drama and this time takes on the riveting story of the 2018 rescue of a boys' soccer team from the Tham Luang cave in the new film "Thirteen Lives," coming to Prime Video on Friday, Colin Farrell and Viggo Mortensen play the English cave divers who travel to Thailand to help with the impossible rescue mission. The film takes care to present a holistic picture of all the disparate components that came together to make the rescue successful, including the help of the Thai Navy Seals, cave and water experts and nearby farmers. As in "Apollo 13," it hardly matters that we already know the ending: Howard makes it a suspenseful, thrilling ride.

— Rebecca Hall plays a single mother to a teenage daughter whose busy life is upended when a figure from her past, played by Tim Roth, returns in "Resurrection" carrying with him the "horrors of her past." The film from writer-director Andrew Seman made a splash at the Sundance Film Festival earlier this year and will be available to rent on Friday from IFC. As with Hall's unsettling turn in the "The Night House," her performance in this diabolical psychological thriller promises to burrow deep in your psyche.

— AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr

MUSIC

— Has it really been five years since Calvin Harris released his awesome "Funk Wav Bounces Vol. 1"? It has, but now it's time to celebrate: Vol. 2 drops this week. You've likely already heard "Potion" with Dua Lipa and Young Thug and the list of contributors on "Funk Wav Bounces Vol. 2" is staggering: 21 Savage, Stefflon Don, Chlöe, Charlie Puth, Pusha T, Shenseea, Tinashe, Normani, Lil Durk, Halsey, Offset, 6lack, Justin Timberlake, Coi Leray, Busta Rhymes, Donae'O, Latto, Pharrell, Swae Lee, Jorja Smith and Snoop Dogg. One disco throwback before the Friday release is "Stay With Me," which has Timberlake, Halsey and Pharrell teaming up.

— Rising country star Travis Denning has a six-song EP that shows off a lot of his style. "Might As Well Be Me" includes the sweetly rocking song "Buy a Girl a Drink," the ballad "She's On It" and the playful "Don't Give a Truck." A native of Warner Robins, Georgia, Denning celebrated his first No. 1 single with

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"After A Few" and first made waves with the release of his Top 40 debut single "David Ashley Parker From Powder Springs." He's currently out on the road this summer with Dierks Bentley, and will join Jake Owen on tour this fall.

— T Bone Burnett is back for the second installment of his The Invisible Light project, which is a fusion of trance, electronic, folk, tribal and global music. The trilogy's first installment, "The Invisible Light: Acoustic Space," was released in 2019 and now it's time for "The Invisible Light: Spells," out Friday. Burnett has once again teamed up with Jay Bellerose and Keefus Ciancia. Singles from the nine-track album include the utterly weird, spoken-word "Realities.com" and the captivating, driving "I'm Starting a New Life."

— AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

TELEVISION

— Straight out of San Diego's Comic-Con, here comes "The Sandman." Neil Gaiman, who wrote the acclaimed series of graphic novels published by DC Comics, developed and is executive producer for the 10-episode series debuting Friday on Netflix. Tom Sturridge plays the title character, who's dream-control central for everyone until he's captured and imprisoned for a century and then some. His mission: to travel across worlds and time to repair the damage caused by falling down on the job. The sprawling and eclectic cast includes Boyd Holbrook, Patton Oswalt, Jenna Coleman, David Thewlis, Stephen Fry, Asim Chaudhry, Sanjeev Bhaskar and Joely Richardson.

— As the title suggests, the four-part docuseries "My Life as a Rolling Stone" takes an individual approach to band members Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Ronnie Wood and the late Charlie Watts. Each is the subject of an hourlong film that relies on new and archive interviews and previously unseen footage to create "intimate" portraits of the artists. The films also trace how they came together to create a timeless body of work. The chapter on Watts, who died in August 2021 at age 80, includes tributes from his fellow band members and peers. The series debuts Sunday on the Epix channel with Jagger's story and continues on Sundays through Aug. 28.

Dems seem headed for climate, health win after ups and downs

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's been more than a year in the making and has seen plenty of ups and downs. Now, a Democratic economic package focused on climate and health care faces hurdles but seems headed toward party-line passage by Congress next month.

Approval would let President Joe Biden and his party claim a triumph on top priorities as November's elections approach. They have not forgotten that they came close to approving a far grander version of the bill last year, only to see Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., one of their most conservative and contrarian members, torpedo it at the eleventh hour.

This time, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has crafted a compromise package with Manchin, to the surprise of everyone, transforming the West Virginian from pariah to partner. The measure is more modest than earlier versions but still checks boxes on issues that make Democrats giddy.

Here's what they face:

WHAT'S IN IT?

The measure would raise \$739 billion in revenue over 10 years and spend \$433 billion. More than \$300 billion would be left for trimming federal deficits.

Those are meaningful cuts in red ink. But they're tiny compared with the \$16 trillion in new debt the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates will accumulate over the next decade.

The package would save consumers and the government money by curbing prescription drug prices, and it would subsidize private health insurance for millions of people. It would bolster the IRS budget so the tax agency can collect more unpaid taxes.

The plan would foster clean energy and offshore energy drilling, a balance demanded by Manchin, a champion of fossil fuels. It also would collect new taxes from the largest corporations and wealthy hedge fund owners.

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It's a fraction of the \$3.5 trillion package that Biden proposed early in his presidency, which also envisioned sums for initiatives such as paid family leave and universal preschool. It's also smaller than the roughly \$2 trillion alternative the House passed last November after Manchin demanded cuts then derailed the deal anyway, citing inflation fears.

IT'S NOW CALLED THE "INFLATION REDUCTION ACT," BUT ...

... will it do that? It certainly could, but there are dissenters.

First, some context.

By one inflation measure the Federal Reserve studies closely, prices jumped 6.8% in June from a year ago, the biggest increase in four decades. That followed government figures showing the economy shrank anew last quarter, fueling recession worries.

"Improved tax collection, drug savings, and deficit reduction would put downward pressure on inflation," the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget said Friday. In what passes for a rave review, the bipartisan fiscal watchdog group called the legislation "exactly the kind of package lawmakers should put in place to help the economy in a number of ways."

"Deficit reduction is almost always inflation-reducing," Jason Furman, a Harvard University economics professor who was a top economic adviser to President Barack Obama, wrote Friday in *The Wall Street Journal*. He said the measure would also "reduce inflation by slowing the growth of prescription-drug prices."

A more sobering assessment came from the University of Pennsylvania's Penn Wharton Budget Model, which analyzes economic issues.

"The act would very slightly increase inflation until 2024 and decrease inflation thereafter," the group wrote Friday. "These point estimates are statistically indistinguishable from zero, thereby indicating low confidence that the legislation will have any impact on inflation."

A chorus of Republicans say Democrats' bill would be widely damaging. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., calls it "a giant package of huge new job-killing tax hikes, Green New Deal craziness that will kill American energy, and prescription drug socialism that will leave us with fewer new life-saving medicines."

CHANGES AHEAD

The 725-page measure will probably still change somewhat.

Schumer said this past week that Democrats planned to add language aimed at reducing patients' costs of insulin, the diabetes drug that can cost hundreds of dollars monthly.

Insulin price curbs were a highlight of Democrats' bigger package last year, including a \$35 monthly cap for patients who get the drug through Medicare or private insurers. But that fell out this year as the measure was trimmed.

Sens. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., and Susan Collins, R-Maine, produced a bill capping insulin's price, but it seems unlikely to survive as separate legislation. The two lawmakers haven't produced the 10 Republicans who would be needed to succeed in the 50-50 Senate, where most bills need 60 votes.

Its prospects also diminished after the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated it would cost about \$23 billion. The budget office said the bill would reduce insulin costs for many consumers, but also drive up government costs and premiums charged by Medicare and private insurers.

It's unclear what insulin language Democrats will propose for their new economic package. Prior language that required private insurers to set a \$35 monthly insulin cap may violate the chamber's rules, which only allow provisions primarily affecting the federal budget.

In addition, under the process Democrats are using to move the measure through the chamber by a simple majority, with Vice President Kamala Harris' tiebreaking vote, it would face multiple amendments in a voting session that can run through the night, and there is no telling whether some will pass.

PROSPECTS

Every Republican seems poised to vote "no."

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Democrats will need all 50 of their own votes in the Senate, where unpredictable Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., has yet to state her view.

Democrats can lose no more than four House votes to succeed there. Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said Friday that when the Senate approves the package, "We'll pass it."

Schumer wants Senate passage next week. He acknowledged that timeline is "going to be hard" because it will take time for the chamber's parliamentarian to make sure the bill conforms to Senate rules.

This will also take luck. All 50 Democrats, including both independents who support them, will have to be healthy enough to show up and vote.

That's not guaranteed. The latest, extremely contagious COVID-19 variant is spreading around the country. And the chamber has 33 senators who are 70 years old or more, including 19 Democrats.

Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., 77, was the latest senator to announce he'd contracted the disease. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., 82, has been out after hip surgery. Both are expected back next week.

This story was first published on July 30, 2022. It was updated on August 1, 2022 to make clear that CBO said the measure would reduce insulin costs for many consumers, but would drive up government costs and premiums charged by Medicare and private insurers.

Bumps, bipartisanship in long fight for semiconductor bill

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Five weeks ago, senior Biden administration aides gathered for their regular Thursday morning meeting about passing a bill to revive the U.S. computer chip sector, worried that it could be in peril.

After 18 months, the bipartisan effort to provide \$52 billion for semiconductors was getting close to the finish line. But they were concerned that Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell might block it.

This was not just another would-be-nice bill. Many in the meeting had sat through multiple Situation Room briefings about frightening scenarios if the deal stalled. They had come to believe the very trajectory of the economy and national security was at stake.

The billions for computer chips and scientific research, they argued, could help to cut inflation, create new factory jobs, defend the U.S. and its allies and preserve an edge against an ambitious and aggressive China.

More than 90% of advanced chips come from Taiwan. Should Taiwan be invaded or shipping channels closed, the U.S. and much of the world would face a cascading economic crisis and find the weapon systems meant to defend their citizens impossible to maintain and update.

The Biden team resolved to ignore any possible McConnell threats as a "false choice" and keep working with Republican senators who had backed the bill, like John Cornyn of Texas, Todd Young of Indiana and Roger Wicker of Mississippi.

Brian Deese, director of the White House National Economic Council, recalled the sentiment coming out of the meeting: "There's been too much progress, too much trust and there's too much at stake" to see the effort stall now. "We're going to keep our heads down and drive forward."

Just hours later, McConnell vowed on Twitter that the semiconductor bill would be dead if Democratic senators tried to push through a separate budget and domestic spending package on a party-line vote.

But the Kentucky senator's gambit would ultimately fail.

President Joe Biden will soon sign into law the \$280 billion CHIPS and Science Act — which also includes substantial money for scientific research. The event has been delayed by Biden's rebound case of COVID-19. This account of how the bill came together draws from interviews with 11 Biden administration and congressional officials, most of whom spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

The back story reveals the complexities of bipartisanship, even when all sides agree on the need to act.

McConnell threatened to block the semiconductor investment even though he supported the idea, hoping to head off separate Democratic legislation. Biden's team took the unusual step of enlisting former members of the Trump administration — a group generally reviled by Democrats — to find Republican

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votes. There were GOP lawmakers such as Oklahoma Rep. Frank Lucas who helped craft the bill but ultimately felt obligated to vote against it, displeased by the Democratic tax increases and spending that could soon follow.

"House Republicans have been working in good faith this entire time to come to consensus legislation that can be passed by both chambers," Lucas said in speech to the House last week. "But time and time again, we've been thwarted as Democratic leadership has moved the goalposts, shut down the process, and chosen their divisive, partisan policies."

For most of the process, the technical nature of computer chips and scientific research meant that the talks could occur beyond the din of partisan squabbling. Both sides knew that government-funded research after World War II eventually led to the internet, MRIs, coronavirus vaccines and other innovations that shape today's world. It was only toward the end, as success neared, that the politics were publicly amplified.

As administration officials see it, the bill cleared Congress last week because of a deep coalition and unrelenting persistence. But as many Republicans interpret events, they provided key support, then got double-crossed.

McConnell's two-week blockade ended after West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin said on July 14 that he largely opposed his fellow Democrats' spending and tax plans. Assuming Biden's broader agenda was on ice, Senate Republicans could confidently vote for the computer chips bill.

But four hours after the chips bill passed the Senate on July 27, Manchin announced a major deal with Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer. There was \$369 billion to fight climate change, a 15% minimum corporate tax, a lowering of prescription drug prices and some \$300 billion in deficit reduction — the kind of package McConnell had wanted to stop. It also threw Republican support in the House into doubt.

In the end, though, Democrats still got help passing the bill from 24 Republicans, some of whom said it was vital to protect national security.

The process had begun 18 months earlier in an Oval Office meeting with lawmakers on Feb. 25 of last year, just a month into Biden's presidency. The National Defense Authorization Act had approved investing in semiconductor development, but Congress still had to appropriate the money to make it happen and a bipartisan group was urging the president to help.

"I'm 100% for that, but we need to do more than that," Biden told them, believing that supply chains needed to be strengthened as well.

The issue stayed largely in the background as the president pushed a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package through Congress in March 2021, then turned his attention to bipartisan infrastructure talks and an expansive domestic agenda that the White House called "Build Back Better."

But the risks from computer chip shortages became clearer in the spring and summer of 2021 as inflation kept rising. A Commerce Department survey from September 2021 showed that manufacturers were down on average to just a five-day supply of chips, compared with 40 days before the pandemic.

On June 8, 2021, the Senate passed its version of the semiconductor bill and the House followed suit eight months later. But there were key differences that would have to be reconciled by a joint conference committee.

Hoping to keep up the pressure this year, Biden used his State of the Union address in March to highlight an announcement by Intel to invest \$20 billion for what could be eight semiconductor plants outside Columbus, Ohio — a commitment that was contingent on final passage of the bill. Biden called Intel's planned 1,000-acre (400 hectare) site a "field of dreams" on which "America's future will be built."

Deese and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo intensified their outreach after the speech. Internal White House records show 85 meetings and events involving companies and stakeholders since the start of this year, with a focus on the end-users of chips and equipment manufacturers and dealers. Starting in March, senior aides — including White House chief of staff Ron Klain, legislative affairs director Louisa Terrell, Deese, Raimondo and, occasionally, national security adviser Jake Sullivan — began their Thursday morning strategy meetings on the initiative.

Biden's team also enlisted help from Trump administration veterans. Among them were Robert Lighthizer, U.S. trade representative under Trump, and former national security advisers H.R. McMaster and Robert

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O'Brien.

The commerce secretary decided to cold call Mike Pompeo, Trump's former secretary of state, who had been openly critical of Biden in a February speech, vowing "we're making sure he doesn't own a single branch of government."

"I'm always happy to help a fellow Italian," Raimondo recalled Pompeo saying after she asked for his assistance. Representatives for Pompeo did not respond to requests about this exchange.

By Raimondo's count, she had 250 meetings with businesses and outside groups and roughly 300 meetings or calls with lawmakers on the bill over 18 months.

Meanwhile, Russia's invasion of Ukraine had worsened inflationary pressures around the world as energy and food costs shot up, a reminder of the havoc that would occur if access to semiconductors was further disrupted.

Biden felt the pressure to have more domestic production as he toured in May the world's largest semiconductor facility — a Samsung campus in South Korea with buildings decorated in the geometric colors of the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian and nearly as tall as the U.S. Capitol dome, their interiors clean and futuristic.

"We've got to do this in America," Biden told Raimondo. "We've got to build this in America."

But then Intel announced in late June that it would postpone the groundbreaking for its Ohio plant because the bill had not passed. Then McConnell decided to halt negotiations with a tweet on the last day of June. Several days later, France announced a new semiconductor plant made possible by the European Union's own \$43.8 billion investment in chip production.

Raimondo felt a pit in her stomach after learning of McConnell's tweet but kept working the phones that weekend with Republicans.

"There has to be a way," she said. "Should we make the bill smaller? Would he go for just chips? You know, just constant engagement."

The Senate ultimately passed the bill when it appeared the separate Democratic agenda package was going nowhere. But after Manchin revived it with his Schumer deal last week, House Republicans mounted a last minute push to stop the chips bill. White House officials kept calling lawmakers and it passed as a bipartisan win.

"I feel great about America today," Raimondo said after the vote. "It takes a little bit longer than it should, a lot more drama than you would like, but it happens."

Some Republicans were bitter. Texas Sen. Cornyn had warned of a recession if the U.S. lost access to advanced computer chips and had been a driving force behind the bill, yet he felt that Manchin had undermined the ability to negotiate in good faith.

"That trust was eviscerated," he said in a floor speech.

Biden got handed a note that the House had passed the bill while he was in a meeting with CEOs. He announced the news to applause and then, with plenty of additional work to do on the economy, moved the conversation on.

"Sorry for the interruption," he said.

End of the beginning: England wants Euro win to lead to more

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — In soccer-mad England, which sees itself as the home of the world's game, women and girls finally have a team full of heroes who look like them.

Some 7,000 singing, dancing, flag-waving fans — many of them mothers and daughters — jammed into central London's Trafalgar Square on Monday to celebrate England's victory in the 2022 women's European championship, the first major soccer victory by any England team in 56 years.

The tournament, hosted by England and watched by record audiences on television and in stadiums across the country, was the culmination of years of investment in women's soccer that organizers hope will spur more girls to play the game, which is known here as football.

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Madison Fullerd-Jones is already on board.

The 9-year-old from Maidstone, southeast of London, got up early and came to the capital with her mother, aunt, two sisters and a cousin to celebrate with the Lionesses, as England's soccer team is known. Wearing an England shirt and waving a flag bearing the national Cross of St. George, Madison said she hoped to play for England some day, just like her favorite player, Georgia Stanway.

"I just want to show how good I am and show that girls can do what boys can do," she said. "I'm passionate about football."

England captain Leah Williamson would be proud.

The legacy of the tournament will be "change of the best kind," Williamson told the crowd.

"The legacy of the tournament was ... what we've done for young girls and women who can look up and aspire to be us," she said, still wearing the winner's medal that was draped around her neck Sunday night by Prince William. "I think England have hosted an incredible tournament, and we've changed the game in this country, and hopefully across Europe, across the world."

England beat Germany 2-1 Sunday night in an overtime game watched by 87,192 fans at Wembley Stadium, a record for any European championship final, men's or women's. The tournament as a whole attracted 574,875 spectators, more than double the previous record of 240,055 set in 2017 in the Netherlands.

Many more watched on TV, with the final achieving a peak audience of 17.5 million viewers and an average audience share of 66%, according to Ratings UK.

The figures underscore the resurrection of women's football in England, where the men who ran the game once banned women from using their facilities for 50 years until the early 1970s.

After previous generations of women soccer players were forced to support themselves by working outside the sport, today's players are able to focus on the game fulltime following the creation of a fully professional league in 2018-19.

Now supporters of the game are targeting increased participation at the grassroots level to spur continued success.

The Football Association, the sport's governing body in England, is campaigning for schools in England to provide equal opportunities for boys and girls to play soccer as part of the curriculum. A recent study found that 72% of primary schools provided equal instruction to boys and girls, but that figure fell to 44% in secondary schools.

"This generation of ladies have had to fight and scrap and do everything," Ian Wright, a former England player, said on the BBC. "Everybody's in tears because this is the culmination of a lot of hard work, a lot of suffering, a lot of parents, a lot of people doing a lot work to get them here. ... It's up to the FA to take over grassroots and get rid of all those barriers."

The match also prompted immense interest in Germany, where many feel that not enough is being done to support female athletes.

"It's a concern of the government as a whole to do more for sport, including women's football," government spokesman Wolfgang Büchner said Monday in Berlin.

He praised the German team for being such positive role models for young people.

"Perhaps you could say, especially during a summer with so much depressing news, that the wonderful performance of the German women's team at this European Championship has done many people in Germany good," Büchner said.

Supporters of women's soccer hope this victory will energize the sport the way the U.S. victory in the 1999 World Cup boosted the sport in America. That game ended with Brandi Chastain's knee-sliding, sports bra-revealing celebration after the penalty shootout that sealed the U.S. win over China at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

England's Chloe Kelly reprised that scene in the closing minutes of Sunday's final, when she ripped off her jersey to celebrate her tie-breaking goal in the closing minutes of the win over Germany.

Kelly joked about her ecstatic celebrations when she spoke to the crowd Monday, saying: "The shirt's staying on!"

"I'm proud to wear this badge," Kelly told the crowd, referring to the England shield on her team shirt.

"But I'm even more proud to share the pitch with such an unbelievable group of players."

Cities face crisis as fewer kids enroll and schools shrink

By MILA KOUMPILOVA and MATT BARNUM of Chalkbeat, and COLLIN BINKLEY of The Associated Press
Chalkbeat and Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — On a recent morning inside Chalmers School of Excellence on Chicago's West Side, five preschool and kindergarten students finished up drawings. Four staffers, including a teacher and a tutor, chatted with them about colors and shapes.

The summer program offers the kind of one-on-one support parents love. But behind the scenes, Principal Romian Crockett worries the school is becoming precariously small.

Chalmers lost almost a third of its enrollment during the pandemic, shrinking to 215 students. In Chicago, COVID-19 worsened declines that preceded the virus: Predominantly Black neighborhoods like Chalmers' North Lawndale, long plagued by disinvestment, have seen an exodus of families over the past decade.

The number of small schools like Chalmers is growing in many American cities as public school enrollment declines. More than one in five New York City elementary schools had fewer than 300 students last school year. In Los Angeles, that figure was over one in four. In Chicago it has grown to nearly one in three, and in Boston it's approaching one in two, according to a Chalkbeat/AP analysis.

Most of these schools were not originally designed to be small, and educators worry coming years will bring tighter budgets even as schools are recovering from the pandemic's disruption.

"When you lose kids, you lose resources," said Crockett, the Chalmers principal. "That impacts your ability to serve kids with very high needs."

A state law prohibits Chicago from closing or consolidating schools until 2025. And across the U.S., COVID-19 relief money is helping subsidize shrinking schools. But when the money runs out in a few years, officials will face a difficult choice: Keep the schools open despite the financial strain, or close them, upsetting communities looking for stability for their children.

"My worry is that we will shut down when we have all worked so hard," said Yvonne Wooden, who serves on Chalmers' school council. Her children went to the pre-K through eighth-grade school, and two grandchildren attend now. "That would really hurt our neighborhood."

The pandemic accelerated enrollment declines in many districts as families switched to homeschooling, charter schools and other options. Students moved away or vanished from school rolls for unknown reasons.

Many districts like Chicago give schools money for each student. That means small schools sometimes struggle to pay for fixed costs — the principal, a counselor and building upkeep.

To address that, many allocate extra money to small schools, diverting dollars from larger schools. In Chicago, the district spends an average of \$19,000 annually per student at small high schools, while students at larger ones get \$10,000, according to the Chalkbeat/AP analysis.

"I love small schools, but small schools are very expensive," Chicago schools chief Pedro Martinez told the school board recently. "We can get some really creative, innovative models, but we need the funding."

At the same time, these schools are often stretched thin. Very small schools offer fewer clubs, sports and arts programs. Some elementary schools group students from different grades in the same classroom, although Martinez has vowed that won't happen next year.

Manley Career Academy High School on Chicago's West Side illustrates the paradox. It now serves 65 students, and the cost per student has shot up to \$40,000, even though schools like Manley offer few elective courses, sports and extracurricular activities.

"We're spending \$40,000 per pupil just to offer the bare minimum," said Hal Woods of the advocacy group Kids First Chicago, which has studied declining enrollment in the district. "It's not really a \$40,000-per-pupil student experience."

Small schools are popular with families, teachers and community members because of their tight-knit, supportive feel. Some argue districts should pour more dollars into these schools, many in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods hard hit by the pandemic. Schools serve as community hubs and points

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of local pride even as they lose students — as is the case in North Lawndale.

Race also looms large. Nationally, schools with more students of color are more likely to be closed, and those in affected communities often feel unfairly targeted.

The prospect of closing schools is particularly fraught in Chicago, where 50 schools were shuttered in 2013, most in predominantly Black neighborhoods. The move frayed trust between residents and the district and, according to University of Chicago research, markedly disrupted learning for low-income students.

In Boston, where the district had been losing students well before the pandemic, families are skeptical of closures.

Among the schools most at risk is P.A. Shaw Elementary School in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood. Revived from a previous closure in 2014, the school had just over 150 students last year, down from 250 in 2018. After making plans to eliminate two classrooms earlier this year — seen by some as a harbinger of closure — the district faced blowback from parents and teachers.

Parents rallying behind the school included Brenda Ramsey, whose 7-year-old daughter, Emersyn Wise, is entering second grade. When Ramsey became homeless and went to stay with family during the pandemic, teachers from Shaw drove half an hour to deliver schoolwork. Later, the school's staff helped Ramsey find permanent housing.

Ramsey, 32, still remembers the joy she felt when she and her two daughters first visited Shaw.

"The principal looked like them — she was a young Black woman who was excited to see them," she said. "They were really big on family engagement, family involvement, and that's just something you don't see that often."

Now, with the school's fate in question, Ramsey is debating whether to keep Emersyn there.

Ramsey's dilemma illustrates what the district calls its "cycle of declining enrollment": Schools' enrollment falls, leading to financial instability — which prompts even more families to leave. The problem is often worse at schools with more students of color.

And when schools face closure, it's "devastating" for families, said Suleika Soto, acting director of the Boston Education Justice Alliance, which advocates for underrepresented students.

"It means you have to uproot," she said. "And then if parents don't like it, then they'll remove their children from the public school system, which again adds to the toxic cycle."

Nevertheless, some urban school districts that are losing students, including Denver, Indianapolis, and Kansas City, Missouri, are considering school closures. Earlier this year, the Oakland, California, school board voted to close several small schools despite furious protests.

"School budgets have been cut as a way to keep more schools open," said former Oakland board member Shanthi Gonzales, who resigned in May soon after voting to support school closures. "There are really awful tradeoffs."

Elsewhere, leaders — buoyed by federal COVID-19 relief funds — have continued to invest in these schools.

Chicago will use about \$140 million of the \$2.8 billion in COVID-19 relief it got to help prop up small schools this school year, officials said. Martinez, who took over as schools chief last fall, has sidestepped talk of closures, saying he wants to study how the district can make its campuses more attractive to families — and push for more money from the state.

In Los Angeles and New York City, officials say they're focused on luring students back into the system, not school closures.

But federal relief money will run out soon: districts must budget that money by September 2024. When it does, districts may be hard pressed to keep all of their small schools afloat.

"It's a huge problem," said Bruce Fuller, an education researcher at University of California, Berkeley. "It's going to be increasingly difficult for superintendents to justify keeping these places open as the number of these schools continues to rise."

High-risk Colombians say GPS devices only add to dangers

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

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The bulletproof vehicles that Colombia's government assigns to hundreds of high-risk individuals are supposed to make them safer. But when an investigative reporter discovered they all had GPS trackers, she only felt more vulnerable — and outraged.

No one had informed Claudia Julieta Duque — or apparently any of the 3,700-plus journalists, rights activists and labor and indigenous leaders who use the vehicles — that the devices were keeping constant tabs on their whereabouts. In Duque's case, it happened as often as every 30 seconds. The system could also remotely cut off the SUV's engine.

Colombia is among the world's most dangerous countries for human rights defenders — with more than 500 killed since 2016. It is also a country where right-wing extremists have a track record of infiltrating national security bodies. For Duque, the GPS revelation was chilling: Movements of people already at risk of political assassination were being tracked with technology that bad actors could weaponize against them.

"It's something super invasive," said Duque, who has been a persistent target of rogue security agents. "And the state doesn't seem to care."

The government agency responsible has said the trackers were installed to help prevent theft, to track the bodyguards who often drive the vehicles and to help respond to dangerous situations.

For a decade, Colombia had been installing trackers in the armored vehicles of at-risk individuals as well as VIPs, including presidents, government ministers and senators. The agency's director made that disclosure after Duque learned last year through a public records request that the system was recording her SUV's location an average of five times an hour.

The director dismissed privacy concerns and called the practice "fundamental" to guaranteeing security.

Considering the tracker a danger to her and her sources, Duque pressed for details on its exact features. But the National Protection Unit, known as UNP in Spanish, offered little. She then demanded the agency remove the device. It refused. So in February, Duque returned the vehicle, left the country and filed a legal challenge.

Now back in Bogotá, she is hoping for satisfaction when Gustavo Petro, Colombia's first leftist president, takes office Aug. 7.

Petro's domestic security transition team did not respond to questions from The Associated Press on the matter.

Whatever action the new administration takes will reflect on its avowed commitment to human rights and its ability to reform a national security establishment long run by bitter political foes.

The UNP is a pillar of that establishment. It employs, mostly as bodyguards, dozens of ex-agents of the disgraced DAS domestic security agency, which was dissolved in 2011 after the government of former President Alvaro Uribe abused it to spy on Supreme Court justices, journalists and political opponents.

Prominent among them were Petro himself — and Duque.

She was surveilled, threatened and bullied by DAS operatives after uncovering evidence that the 1999 assassination of beloved humorist and peace activist Jaime Garzon was a crime of the state. Duque's reporting eventually helped convict a former DAS deputy director in the killing, and three other ex-DAS officials have been convicted of psychological torture for threatening the lives of Duque and her daughter.

Trials against eight others are pending. Through it all, threats forced her into temporary exile nearly a dozen times.

The questions about the GPS devices added to growing concerns about an agency that once ranked among Latin America's most effective in human rights protection. Adam Isacson, an analyst with the Washington Office on Latin America, said the UNP became less responsive, more politicized and more penetrated by criminality under the outgoing conservative government.

"With social leaders being killed nearly every other day during the past four years, this was the worst time for the unit to fall into disarray," he said. Right-wing death squad activity spiked following a historic 2016 peace pact with leftist rebels.

Duque says she was tipped to the GPS trackers in early 2020 when she learned of a planned attempt on her life, but when she asked about them, the government stonewalled for a year.

When she finally got documents with the aid of the InterAmerican Human Rights Commission, they

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showed her location was recorded 25,183 times over 209 days from February to August of last year alone. A software manual described a panoply of other control options, including remotely operating cameras and door locks managed through vehicles' computers.

Duque asked if any such features were active in the government-leased vehicles but said she got no answer. The general manager of the company that provides the GPS software told the AP that it only tracks location and speed and enables engine cutoff.

A 2021 contract with the vehicle-leasing company obtained by Duque stipulates that a UNP official must approve any engine cutoff and that collected data be kept a minimum of two years. Nothing in the contract supports the claim made by the UNP that the system tracks bodyguards and enables quick reactions in dangerous situations.

UNP officials declined to respond to questions from the AP. There is no evidence the GPS tracking led to any harm to any of the people under protection.

Agency officials took offense last year when Duque questioned their intentions.

"We don't persecute or follow anyone illegally," Director Alfonso Campo tweeted in October. "The information compiled by GPS is private" and only handed over to a judge or judicial authority when required in a case or for security reasons. The AP asked the chief prosecutor's office if had made any requests, but it did not respond.

Privacy experts consider the Colombian government's tracking illegal and disproportionate and say it poses an unnecessary hacking risk.

Under the country's 2012 privacy law, affected individuals must consent for such data to be retained. But they were never asked, said Emmanuel Vargas, a privacy law expert helping Duque.

There is no indication that GPS helped protect the indigenous leader Miller Correa, who was kidnapped and killed in mid-March while driving alone on a rural highway. The tracker served afterward to retrieve his government-issued car, which was not armor-plated.

A June 2021 letter from the government to the InterAmerican commission said the UNP took "all measures necessary" to ensure data on protected individuals was "not accessible to (agency) functionaries." But in a December letter to Duque, the agency indicated it does not directly administer the data-protection efforts. A contractor is responsible.

After Duque publicized her findings, several other high-risk Colombians publicly voiced distrust of their government-provided security details.

One was investigative journalist Julian Martinez, whose book about the infiltration of DAS by corrupt narco-paramilitaries won a 2017 national journalism award.

Martinez's government-assigned bodyguards didn't just spy on him after he published articles on alleged drug corruption involving the outgoing government. He accuses them of collecting material for a smear campaign organized by their boss – an outside contractor and former DAS official.

In February, Martinez's armored vehicle was attacked in Bogota by armed men who were reportedly repelled by his bodyguards. He was nearby at the time, and no one was hurt. Martinez doesn't believe it was a robbery attempt, as investigators have said they suspect.

"The protection scheme has become a scheme of control," he said from Argentina, where he fled last month after denouncing an alleged plot to strip him of protection by claiming he was abusing it.

Alberto Yepes, a leading rights activist who assists victims of extrajudicial killings by Colombia's military, is certain the UNP is being used to spy on him. He suspects cellphone circuitry he discovered in September in his government-provided vehicle could be used to eavesdrop on conversations.

Yepes is not sure Petro can succeed in overhauling the protection unit due to the heavy involvement of contractors with military backgrounds.

"It will be difficult for the new government to change," he said. "They're going to have to negotiate."

Secret ingredient from summer corn lifts Cajun maque choux

By CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL Christopher Kimball's Milk Street

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The star of maque choux, one of the classic dishes of Louisiana's Cajun country, is fresh summer corn. Naturally sweet kernels are in delicious balance with a savory mix of vegetables and crawfish. But it can veer to the heavy side, thanks largely to the addition of cream.

To lighten the recipe for our book "Milk Street Tuesday Nights," which limits recipes to 45 minutes or less, we utilize an element that most cooks throw out — the corn cobs. Instead of weighing down the dish with dairy, which tends to dull other flavors, we extract the "milk" of the corn. After cutting the kernels off, we use the back of the knife to scrape the cobs, releasing their starchy liquid to add rich, creamy body that doesn't overwhelm other ingredients.

Pronounced "mock shoe," which is said to be a French inflection of a Native American word, this Creole classic usually is made with crawfish and/or tasso ham. Both are hard to come by, so we opted for andouille sausage for its smoky, meaty flavor. We also swapped the standard green bell pepper for a poblano chili, which has an earthy flavor and mild heat.

Stirring a tablespoon of cider vinegar into the finished hash brightened it even more.

Maque Choux with Andouille Sausage

3 ears of corn, husks and silk removed

1 tablespoon grapeseed or other neutral oil

6 ounces andouille sausage, halved lengthwise and cut into ½-inch pieces

2 tablespoons salted butter

1 small yellow onion, finely chopped

1 small red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded and finely chopped

1 poblano chili, stemmed, seeded and finely chopped

Kosher salt and ground black pepper

2 medium garlic cloves, minced

½ teaspoon dried thyme

1 tablespoon cider vinegar

4 scallions, thinly sliced

Using a chef's knife, cut the kernels from the ears of corn. Set aside. One at a time, stand each stripped cob in a wide bowl, then use the back of the knife to scrape from top to bottom all around it, allowing the liquid to fall into the bowl. Add the kernels to the bowl and set aside.

In a 12-inch skillet over medium-high, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the sausage and cook, stirring, until well browned, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate and discard any fat in the skillet.

Set the skillet over medium and melt the butter. Add the onion, bell pepper, poblano chili and ½ teaspoon salt. Cook, scraping up any browned bits and stirring occasionally, until the vegetables soften, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in the garlic and thyme, then cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Increase to medium-high and add the corn kernels and liquid, ¾ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Cook, stirring, until the corn is crisp-tender, 3 to 5 minutes.

Return the sausage to the skillet, stir and cook until heated through, about 1 minute. Stir in the vinegar, then taste and season with salt and pepper. Stir in the scallions.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For more recipes, go to Christopher Kimball's Milk Street at 177milkstreet.com/ap

Today in History: Aug. 2, Iraq invades Kuwait

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Aug. 2, the 214th day of 2022. There are 151 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 2, 1923, the 29th president of the United States, Warren G. Harding, died in San Francisco; Vice President Calvin Coolidge became president.

On this date:

In 1776, members of the Second Continental Congress began attaching their signatures to the Declara-

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tion of Independence.

In 1873, inventor Andrew S. Hallidie (HAH'-lih-day) successfully tested a cable car he had designed for the city of San Francisco.

In 1876, frontiersman "Wild Bill" Hickok was shot and killed while playing poker at a saloon in Deadwood, Dakota Territory, by Jack McCall, who was later hanged.

In 1921, a jury in Chicago acquitted several former members of the Chicago White Sox baseball team and two others of conspiring to defraud the public in the notorious "Black Sox" scandal. Opera singer Enrico Caruso, 48, died in Naples, Italy.

In 1922, Alexander Graham Bell, generally regarded as the inventor of the telephone, died in Nova Scotia, Canada, at age 75.

In 1934, German President Paul von Hindenburg died, paving the way for Adolf Hitler's complete takeover.

In 1939, Albert Einstein signed a letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt urging creation of an atomic weapons research program.

In 1945, President Harry S. Truman, Soviet leader Josef Stalin and Britain's new prime minister, Clement Attlee, concluded the Potsdam conference.

In 1974, former White House counsel John W. Dean III was sentenced to one to four years in prison for obstruction of justice in the Watergate cover-up. (Dean ended up serving four months.)

In 1980, 85 people were killed when a bomb exploded at the train station in Bologna, Italy.

In 1985, 137 people were killed when Delta Air Lines Flight 191, a Lockheed L-1011 Tristar, crashed while attempting to land at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, seizing control of the oil-rich emirate. (The Iraqis were later driven out in Operation Desert Storm.)

Ten years ago: Kofi Annan resigned as peace envoy to Syria, blaming the Syrian government's intransigence, the growing militancy of Syrian rebels and a divided U.N. Security Council that he said failed to forcefully back his effort. Gabby Douglas became the third American in a row to win gymnastics' biggest prize when she claimed the all-around Olympic title; Michael Phelps added to his medal collection with his first individual gold medal of the London Games in the 200-meter individual medley.

Five years ago: Former Notre Dame football coach Ara Parseghian died at his home in Granger, Indiana, at the age of 94. The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed above 22,000 for the first time, after stocks spent five months gradually moving higher.

One year ago: The U.S. finally reached President Joe Biden's goal of getting at least one COVID-19 shot into 70% of American adults -- a month late and amid a fierce surge by the delta variant. Louisiana reinstated a mask mandate in all indoor locations, as the state saw the highest per capita COVID-19 growth in the nation. The Biden administration expanded efforts to help at-risk Afghan citizens flee Taliban violence ahead of a U.S. military pullout at the end of the month; more Afghans would be eligible for refugee status in the United States. San Francisco's iconic cable cars were chiming their bells and rolling again on the city's hills after being sidelined for 16 months by the pandemic.

Today's Birthdays: Rock musician Garth Hudson (The Band) is 85. Singer Kathy Lennon (The Lennon Sisters) is 79. Actor Joanna Cassidy is 77. Actor Kathryn Harrold is 72. Actor Butch Patrick (TV: "The Munsters") is 69. Rock music producer/drummer Butch Vig (Garbage) is 67. Sen. Jacky Rosen, D-Nev., is 65. Singer Mojo Nixon is 65. Actor Victoria Jackson is 63. Actor Apollonia is 63. Actor Cynthia Stevenson is 60. Actor Mary-Louise Parker is 58. Rock musician John Stanier is 54. Writer-actor-director Kevin Smith is 52. Actor Jacinda Barrett is 50. Actor Sam Worthington is 46. Actor Edward Furlong is 45. TV meteorologist Dylan Dreyer (TV: "Today") is 41. Actor Marci Miller is 37. Singer Charli XCX is 30. Actor Hallie Eisenberg is 30.