

# Groton Daily Independent

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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



## 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**

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

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## GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT 06-6

### 2022-2023 Groton Area School District Back to School Information

#### **Groton Area School District 06-6 – “Mission Statement”**

Each school will foster a school climate conducive to learning by encouraging good behavior and citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards. Teachers will employ strategies and approaches to instruction to meet the needs of all children assigned to them. With proper motivation and instruction, all children can learn!

#### **Teacher Qualifications**

All teachers of core academic subjects must hold at least a bachelor's degree, have full state certification, and demonstrate knowledge in the core academic subject they teach. For information regarding the qualifications of your child's teachers, you may contact the superintendent's office at 397-2351.

#### **Registration and Schedule Changes**

Anyone new to the District should contact the respective building principal(s) as soon as possible. Middle School and High School Schedule changes can be made on Thursday, August 18, 2022 from 9:00 AM to 3:30 PM.

#### **School Supply Lists**

Students' school supply lists for the elementary school (preschool – grade 5) are posted on the District's web site at [www.grotonarea.com](http://www.grotonarea.com) under the District Info Heading. Students in the middle school (grades 6-8) will be required to have the same color notebook, folder, and book cover for each class. Math will be green; English, blue; reading, red; science, purple; and social studies, black. The students can choose their own colors for PE, art, health, and computer classes.

#### **6th Grade Welcome Walk – Friday, August 19, 2022**

Groton Area Middle School is hosting a 6th Grade Welcome Walk on Friday, August 19, 2022 from 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM. Students and their parents are invited to come get a class schedule and other important information from the school office, find the student locker and classrooms, and begin to learn the new building.

#### **Tablet PCs or Ipads Issued to All Students**

Prior to being issued their tablet PC, students and their parents must sign and return the following documents: Laptop Computer Protection Agreement, the Student Pledge, E-mail Acceptable Use Agreement, the Groton Area School District Network/Internet agreement, and the Parental Consent to Publish Student Photos/Work. Required forms can be picked up in the School Office or will be sent home with students on the first day of classes.

#### **First Day of School – Wednesday, August 24**

The first day of school is on Wednesday, August 24. Buses will run and school lunch will be served. Each route driver will contact parents to confirm bus arrival times. Other bus route questions may be referred to Transportation Director, Damian Bahr, at (605) 397-8117. The GRASP (OST) program at the elementary school will be available on the first day of school.

#### **Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten**

The District offers all-day, every day kindergarten classes. Children may enter kindergarten if they are 5 years of age on or before September 1 of the year in which they are to enter school. The District offers a junior kindergarten program each day from 12:15PM – 3:22 PM for students that are eligible to attend kindergarten, but are not quite ready for kindergarten. Students enrolling in first grade must be 6 years of age on or before September 1 of that school year.

#### **Non-Resident Enrollment**

For out-of-district students, applications to open enroll may be accepted throughout the school year. Applications are available from any school district administrative office. All open enrollment requests and related questions should be referred to school superintendent, Joe Schwan, at (605) 397-2351.

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## 2022-2023 School Hours

Groton Area Elementary	8:15 AM	Arrival Time (Supervision)
	8:21 AM – 3:22 PM	Classes in Session
Groton Area MS/HS	8:25 AM	First Bell
	8:30 AM – 3:30 PM	Classes in Session

## GRASP (OST) Program

The GRASP program services children in junior kindergarten through grade five with before and after-school homework help, supervised learning activities, and snacks. The GRASP program will be held in the Groton Area Elementary School from 7:00 AM - 8:00 AM and 3:22 PM – 6:00 PM each day that school is in session. Rates are \$2.75 per hour, per child. Any OST questions or registrations may be directed to Elementary Principal, Mr. Brett Schwan, at (605) 397-2317.

## K-12 Breakfast and Lunch Program

For the past two years the federal government has provided school meals at no cost to all students regardless of income eligibility. Congress has declined to extend that program into the 2022-2023 school year. As a result, only those families who qualify for free and reduced priced meal benefits will receive them. Guidelines for 2022-2023 applications for free and reduced priced meals were mailed out the week of August 1st. Parents are encouraged to apply for free and reduced priced meals if there is a possibility they may qualify.

The school provides breakfast and lunch for all students each day school is in session. All meals are on a cash basis (i.e. pay as you go), while recognizing the provisions for free and reduced price meals. Prices are as follows:

Groton Area Elementary:

Daily Breakfast	\$2.50
Daily Lunch	\$3.00

Prices for second servings at the elementary are \$1.00.

Groton Area Middle School/High School:

Daily Breakfast	\$3.00
Daily Lunch	\$3.75

Prices for second servings at the middle/high school are \$1.25.

## Activity Tickets

Activity tickets are intended to admit all students to regularly scheduled home activities or events, with about the only exceptions being tournaments and the Pops Concert. Students in grades 1-5 may purchase an activity ticket, if they wish. All students who participate in activities for which an activity stipend is paid are required to purchase an activity ticket as a condition of participation since they are the primary beneficiaries of the activity programs. For example, staff activity stipends include: all sports, marching band, forensics, cheerleading, drama, oral interp, DI, FFA, FCCLA, FBLA etc.

Activity Ticket prices for 2022-2023 are as follows:

Grades 1-5	\$25.00
Grades 6-12	\$30.00
Adults	\$45 (10 events)
Adults – All Events	\$75.00

Admission Prices:

Adults = \$5.00; \$6.00 for double headers
Students, Grades 1-12 = \$4.00

## School Cancellations

All school cancellations or early dismissals due to inclement weather or emergencies will be sent out via the Apptegy Messenger System. Within minutes, Apptegy automatically sends a pre-recorded message to every recipient on a selected list. Parents will be asked to provide phone numbers and e-mail addresses

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(when available) to the school so that a selected calling list can be created. Emergency cancellations will be broadcast over TV stations KSFY, KDLT, and KELO as well as the District Facebook page and website, [www.grotonarea.com](http://www.grotonarea.com), and by push notifications on the District app (Groton Area Tigers, SD).

## **Groton Area Tigers, SD Mobile App**

The Groton Area School District has a mobile application available for both Apple and Android devices. Search "Groton Area Tigers, SD" in your app store and download the free app. Be sure to set up the app to allow push notifications to receive timely and important updates from your child's school. The app includes event calendars, athletics schedules, staff contacts, school menus, access to up-to-date news and information and access to archived documents.

## **Immunization Requirements (SDCL 13-28-7.1)**

State law requires that any pupil entering school or an early childhood program in the state shall, prior to admission, be required to present the appropriate school authorities certification from a licensed physician that the new child has received or is in the process of receiving adequate immunization against poliomyelitis, diphtheria, pertussis, rubeola, rubella, mumps, tetanus, and varicella, according to recommendations provided by the Department of Health. The Department of Health may modify or delete any of the required immunizations. As an alternative to the requirement for a physician's certification, the pupil may present:

- 1) Certificate from a licensed physician stating the physical condition of the child would be such that immunization would endanger the child's life or health; or
- 2) A written statement signed by one parent or guardian that the child is adherent to a religious doctrine whose teachings are opposed to such immunization; or
- 3) A written statement signed by one parent or guardian requesting that the local health department give the immunization because the parents or guardians lack the means to pay for such immunization.

Students enrolling in 6th grade are required to get one dose of Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis (Tdap) vaccine and one dose of Meningococcal vaccine on or after their 11th birthday.

## **Harassment and Bullying Policies**

The district has harassment & bullying policies in place in both buildings. Bullying among students can be defined as intentional, repeated hurtful acts, words or other behavior, such as name-calling, threatening and/or shunning committed by one or more students against another. This definition also includes "cyber-bullying" which is the sending or posting of cruel or harmful texts or images using the Internet or other digital media such as cell phones, etc. For a complete copy of the district's harassment or bullying policy, please contact the building principal.

## **Grievance Procedure**

In an effort to maintain effective communications, if you have a particular concern about your child's progress or about what is happening on the bus, at school, in a class or activity, first discuss it with the driver, teacher, or director of the activity. If your concern or grievance remains unresolved at that level, or if there is a need to share your concern, contact the principal in charge of the school in which your child attends. If the concern/grievance remains unresolved at that level, contact the superintendent. If school policy is at issue or if the concern/grievance remains unresolved, you may request that the superintendent include the subject on the school board meeting agenda. To maintain confidentiality, student matters may be confined to an "executive session" with the Board and administration.

## **Complaint Policy for Federal Programs and Homelessness Policy**

A parent, student, employee, or district stakeholder who has a complaint regarding the use of federal funds and is unable to solve the issue, may address the complaint in writing to the district's superintendent. Disputes addressing the enrollment, transportation, and other barriers to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness are also addressed under this procedure. For a copy of the complete policy, contact the school superintendent or refer to the District web site.

## **Child Find**

Parents or guardians are to be informed that the Groton Area School District 06-6 continuously conducts a "Child Find" search to identify and evaluate District children ages 0-21, with special education needs.



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Persons who know of a child with un-served education needs may refer the child, by name, to the appropriate building principal. With the parent or guardian's consent, an evaluation will be made. After the evaluation has been completed, a placement committee will meet with the parent or guardian to determine if special assistance is needed.

## **Title I**

The federal government provides funding to states each year for Title I services. The goal of Title I is to provide extra help in math and reading for eligible students. Students are selected for the program based on information provided by classroom teachers, parents, and achievement test results. Title I services in our district are provided to students in grades K-5, with a strong emphasis on students in grades K-3.

### **Title I Right to Know – Teacher Certification**

As a parent or guardian of a student attending a school that is receiving Federal Title I dollars (Groton Area Elementary), you have the right to know the professional qualifications of the teacher(s) and instructional paraprofessionals who instruct your child. We are happy to provide this information to you. At any time, you may ask:

1. Whether the teacher met state qualifications and certification requirements for the grade level and subject he/she is teaching; 2. Whether the teacher received an emergency or conditional certificate through which state qualifications were waived, and; 3. What undergraduate or graduate degrees the teacher holds, including graduate certificates and additional degrees, and major(s) or area(s) of concentration.

You may also ask whether your child receives help from a paraprofessional. If your child receives this assistance, we can provide you with information about the paraprofessional's qualifications.

### **Federal Compliance Notice**

Students, their parents, and employees of the Groton Area School District #06-6 are hereby notified that this school district does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, national origin, color, age, disability or religion in employment practices and educational activities. To ensure compliance with Section 427 of GEPA, effective steps shall be taken to remove potential barriers so as to ensure equity of access and participation in grant programs and to achieve high standards. Any person having inquiries concerning compliance or application of Title VI, Affirmative Action, Title IX, Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act is directed to contact Federal Program compliance coordinator, Joe Schwan, Superintendent, Groton Area School District 06-6, Phone 397-2351 or, Department of Education, Civil Rights Office, 8930 Ward Parkway, Suite 2037, Kansas City, MO 64114; Phone: (816) 268-0550; TTD (800) 4370-0833; FAX: (816) 823-1404; Web link: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html?src=mr>

### **FERPA Notification of Rights**

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) affords parents and students who are 18 years of age or older ("eligible students") certain rights with respect to the student's education records. These rights are:

1. The right to inspect and review the student's education records within 45 days after the day the Groton Area School District receives a request for access.

Parents or eligible students should submit to the school principal a written request that identifies the records they wish to inspect. The school official will make arrangements for access and notify the parent or eligible student of the time and place where the records may be inspected.

2. The right to request the amendment of the student's education records that the parent or eligible student believes are inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the student's privacy rights under FERPA.

Parents or eligible students who wish to ask the Groton Area School District to amend a record should write the school principal, clearly identify the part of the record they want changed, and specify why it should be changed. If the school decides not to amend the record as requested by the parent or eligible student, the school will notify the parent or eligible student of the decision and of their right to a hearing regarding the request for amendment. Additional information regarding the hearing procedures will be provided to the parent or eligible student when notified of the right to a hearing.

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3. The right to provide written consent before the school discloses personally identifiable information (PII) from the student's education records, except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosure without consent.

One exception, which permits disclosure without consent, is disclosure to school officials with legitimate educational interests. A school official is a person employed by the school as an administrator, supervisor, instructor, or support staff member (including health or medical staff and law enforcement unit personnel) or a person serving on the school board. A school official also may include a volunteer or contractor outside of the school who performs an institutional service of function for which the school would otherwise use its own employees and who is under the direct control of the school with respect to the use and maintenance of PII from education records, such as an attorney, auditor, medical consultant, or therapist; a parent or student volunteering to serve on an official committee, such as a disciplinary or grievance committee; or a parent, student, or other volunteer assisting another school official in performing his or her tasks. A school official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibility.

Upon request, the school discloses education records without consent to officials of another school district in which a student seeks or intends to enroll, or is already enrolled if the disclosure is for purposes of the student's enrollment or transfer.

4. The right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures by the Groton Area School District to comply with the requirements of FERPA. The name and address of the Office that administers FERPA are:

Family Policy Compliance Office  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202

## **Student Directory Information**

The Groton Area School District routinely discloses names, addresses, and telephone numbers to the South Dakota Board of Regents, South Dakota Technical Institutions, and upon request, to military recruiters, subject to a parent's or eligible student's request not to disclose such information without written consent. Parents or eligible students who wish to opt-out of the disclosure of this information may contact the school office for the appropriate document or may obtain it here: <https://bit.ly/3fFyC58>

## **Notice of Nondiscrimination**

Applicants for admission and employment, students, parents, employees, and all professional organizations holding negotiated agreements or professional agreements with the school district are hereby notified that this district does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, age, gender, disability, national origin, or ancestry in admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its programs and activities.

## **Section 504**

Section 504 is the part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that applies to persons with disabilities. Section 504 is a civil rights act that protects the civil and constitutional rights of persons with disabilities. It states that no person with a disability can be excluded from or denied benefits of any program receiving federal financial assistance. Section 504 and special education are two separate services.

## **Notification of Asbestos in School Building(s)**

In compliance with the Asbestos-Containing Materials in Schools Rule, the Groton Area School District had its school buildings inspected on 3/19/2019 by an asbestos inspector, accredited by the state of South Dakota. During that inspection, areas of suspected asbestos (ACBM) were identified and inspected. The Groton Area School District has an Asbestos Management Plan which provides information on the periodic monitoring of the condition of asbestos (ACBM) remaining in the school buildings. Anyone that would like to see the Asbestos Management Plan can contact a building principal or superintendent.

## Tear Off the Rearview Mirror

By Bryan Golden

When driving in your car, the rearview mirror lets you see what is coming up behind you. On the road, vehicles in back of you can follow too closely, hit you, or pass you. But if you try driving by looking only in the mirror you won't get very far before you crash.

The highway of life is different. On this road, the events behind you stay behind you and move farther away with each passing day. Yet there are people who are obsessed with looking backward rather than forward. Although they would never try this stunt while driving, they habitually refuse to look through the front windshield of life.

There are only 24 hours in each day. Therefore, any time spent looking behind you, into the past, robs you of time to look forward into the future. The fascination with the past stems from the desire to change history. As intriguing as this concept might be, the chances of accomplishing this are zero.

Yet, people get caught in a quagmire of what could have been if only they had done this or that. Thoughts of could have, should have, or would have seize hold of the mind and clog it with useless and pointless activity.

The value of the past is that it can teach you what to change, refine, and improve when moving forward. But when you dwell in the past, forward movement stops. Although most people would make at least subtle changes, if they could do things over, there are no do overs.

As you age, the speed at which you move down life's highway seems to increase yearly. As this perceived velocity grows, obsessing with the past can be very disconcerting. You don't know where the time has gone and the reality of mortality becomes clearer.

This phenomenon of the accelerated passage of time is another reason why all of your attention, energy, and effort should be focused forward. Only with this directional orientation can you fully realize the potential of each day.

Imagine how boring life would be if each day was spent watching a video of what you did yesterday. You wouldn't have time to do anything new. This is exactly how people spend their time when they get trapped in the past by looking only in their rearview mirror.

Being consumed with what has already transpired causes a great deal of stress, anxiety, and even depression. You feel powerless to change what has already happened, because you are. The only control you have is what direction to go while moving forward. You can't go backward, but you can stagnate.

An acceptance of the past is the first step to being at peace with yourself. You may not like what has transpired, but you can't change it. Learn from the past. Repeat those things that produced desirable results and avoid behavior that didn't.

It's easy and tempting to second-guess yourself. Others will also throw in their opinion of what you should or shouldn't have done. This combined with your own tendency to analyze, over assess, and redo the past makes it difficult to stay focused on moving forward.

But move forward you must. For to live in or dwell in the past ensures that you will squander the present and short change your future. Whenever you find yourself drawn to the past, remind yourself that you are wasting time and immediately try to refocus on the present. You will realize that more time than you had thought is spent looking in life's rearview mirror.

With consistent practice you will be able to reverse your orientation so that a minimum amount of time is spent looking backwards. Tear off the rearview mirror and devote yourself to looking forward. The results will be a happier and more rewarding life.

Bryan is the author of "Dare to Live Without Limits." Contact Bryan at [Bryan@columnist.com](mailto:Bryan@columnist.com) or visit [www.DareToLiveWithoutLimits.com](http://www.DareToLiveWithoutLimits.com) Copyright 2022 Bryan Golden

## First Two Human West Nile Virus Detections of 2022 Reported in Minnehaha and Spink Counties

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, the South Dakota Department of Health confirmed South Dakota’s first two human West Nile virus (WNV) detections of the 2022 season, in residents of Minnehaha and Spink Counties. South Dakota has reported more than 2,681 human cases and 47 deaths since WNV was first reported in 2002.

“West Nile Virus is an infection most commonly spread through mosquito bites,” said Dr. Joshua Clayton, state epidemiologist. “The rate of severe infection that includes swelling of the brain and spinal cord with symptoms of stiff neck, confusion, and muscle weakness is highest in South Dakota and other Midwest states. Raising awareness of human cases can ensure residents and visitors alike take action to reduce their risk.”

Individuals and families can reduce their risk by taking the following actions:

- Apply mosquito repellents (DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, 2-undecanone, param-menthane-diol, or IR3535) to clothes and exposed skin. Limit exposure by wearing pants and long sleeves in the evening;
- Limit time outdoors from dusk to midnight when mosquitoes are most active. *Culex tarsalis* are the primary carrier of WNV in South Dakota;
- Remove standing water that gives mosquitoes a place to breed. Regularly change the water in bird-baths, outside pet dishes, and drain water from other flowerpots and garden containers and stay away from areas near standing water; and
- Support local mosquito control efforts.

These precautions are especially important for people at high risk for WNV, including individuals over 50, pregnant women, organ transplant patients, individuals with cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure or kidney disease, and those with a history of alcohol abuse. People with severe or unusual headaches should see their physicians.

“Nearly 200 South Dakota cities, counties, and tribes received grant funding from the department in May to control mosquitoes and prevent this virus,” added Dr. Clayton.

Visit the department’s website for more information about WNV and to learn about which jurisdictions received grant funding. Additionally, the department’s surveillance page includes which counties have reported cases.

### West Nile Update – South Dakota, August 3, 2022

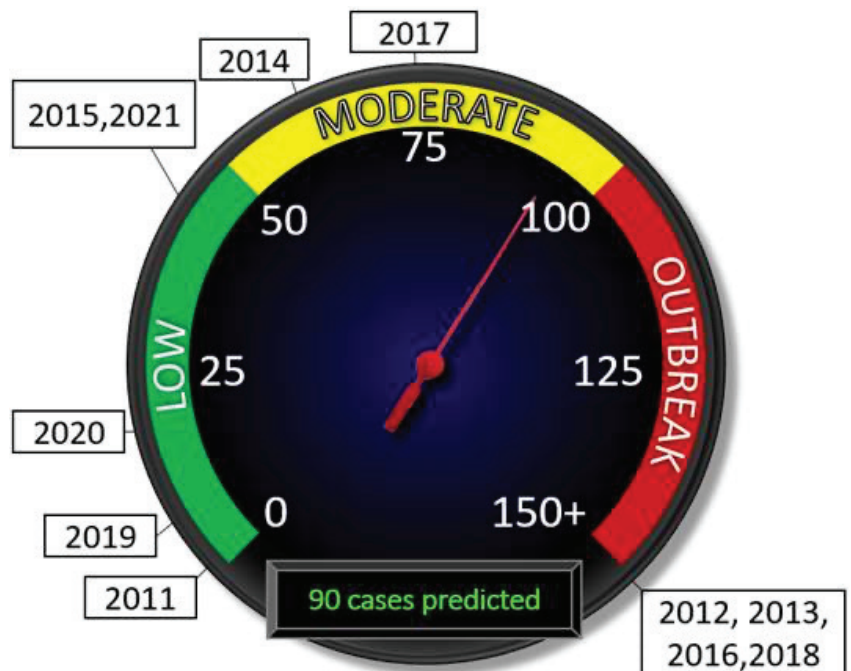
SD WNV (as of August 3):

2 human viremic blood donors (Minnehaha, Spink)

7 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of July 26): 30 cases (AL, AZ, CA, IN, LA, MN, MS, ND, PA, TX) and 4 deaths

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2022, South Dakota (as of August 3)





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#546 in a series

## Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

This surge seems to be leveling off a bit—leveling off at a very high level, but leveling off all the same. We're still showing a seven-day new-case average of 1211,413 at midday today, which is really a lot; and that high average has pushed us over the 91-million mark with a total reported cases of 91,296,123. Here's the recent history:

- March 3 – 79 million – 15 days
- March 31 – 80 million – 28 days
- April 27 – 81 million – 27 days
- May 11 – 82 million – 14 days
- May 20 – 83 million – 9 days
- May 31 – 84 million – 11 days
- June 8 – 85 million – 8 days
- June 17 – 86 million – 9 days
- June 27 – 87 million – 10 days
- July 7 – 88 million – 10 days
- July 14 – 89 million – 7 days
- July 21 – 90 million – 7 days
- July 29 – 91 million – 8 days

Of course, cases are known to be wildly underreported, so we're having to rely more and more on other metrics. Hospitalizations are very high too, currently at 43,966 with ICU admissions rising proportionate to the overall hospital admissions. We're now solidly over 400 deaths a day with a seven-day average at midday of 446 and a pandemic total of 1,026,937. In the US, we currently account for something like one in six Covid-19 deaths even while we have only one in 25 of the world's population.

BA.5 continues to increase as a proportion of new cases. In just eight weeks, it's gone from the occasional case to accounting for about 80 percent of them. It is driving everything at the moment—test positivity, raw number of cases, hospitalizations, ICU admissions, deaths. We're seeing around twice as many reinfections now as we saw with BA.2 in May. While the average reinfection occurs around 9 months after the last one, some people are experiencing reinfection within just a few weeks of the prior one; in general, the risk for reinfection rises as time passes after the last time. The overall risk of becoming infected is increasing across the country. Reported cases are rising in 28 of the 56 states and US territories we're tracking and rising by at least 10 percent in two weeks in over two-thirds of those. There is particular growth in the West, the Great Plains, and the South. Hospitalizations have risen by six percent in the past two weeks.

Here's the thing: We're all sick of this. We all just want to go back to "normal," whatever that's supposed to be. But if we do go back to 2019-normal, this virus is going to continue to spread, continue to mutate, and continue to kill folks—maybe you or me. I can't sugarcoat that. Thing is, even if you're OK with the person killed being anyone but you, there's no guarantee it won't be you—and I'm pretty sure you're not OK with that. We're at very high numbers of new infections (even as we recognize that reporting is not capturing anything like all of the cases), hospitalizations which have doubled since May, and deaths which are over 400 per day. Dr. Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota and one of the country's preeminent epidemiologists, told the New York Times, "We've had a shift in our baseline. Earlier in the pandemic, we would never have accepted these numbers." At this point, most of the folks I know don't care about the numbers; they just want to have "normal." Worse, none of this recognizes the very real risks of long-Covid and its attendant long-term disabilities (more on that in a bit) or to pretty much anyone who becomes infected, whether or not those folks are at risk for life-threatening consequences.

What do you do? That is, what do you do if you want to have some sort of a life and still protect yourself while this thing resolves? There's still a lot we don't know, but we do have some basic principles courtesy of the NYT.

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(1) Get all the vaccinations, including boosters for which you're eligible. Most—more than half—of us haven't done even that. This means, for those who are not immunocompromised, two doses of an mRNA vaccine followed by a booster. If you're over 50, you should have a second booster, and there's no time like the present to get that taken care of. Do it soon, and you'll be protected through this summer surge and then eligible again later in the fall for a potential winter surge. It would be a shame to get sick before those fall vaccines become available.

(2) Keep an eye on your community risk. The CDC tracker, available at [https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/...](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/), is an excellent way to evaluate that risk. Additionally, now that official new-case numbers bear little resemblance to real-world numbers, pay attention to what you're hearing from your community; so if you're hearing about a lot of infections among your acquaintance group, err on the side of believing it. If things start to look ugly, be sure to put on a mask and take precautions.

(3) Wear a mask in public spaces. Unfortunately these days with this latest variant, that means outdoors as well as indoors if there is crowding and/or limited air. If you have an outdoor picnic, consider inviting fewer guests and spreading out. At big outdoor events, we should be back to wearing a mask. I don't like that anymore than you do, but times have changed.

(4) Test before and three to five days after social gatherings. Tests are available at no cost from the federal government and also through your health insurance up to eight per month per household member. Medicare is now covering up to eight tests per month per covered person at no cost. If you've received all you can get from the government and don't have health insurance, check with your local health department or community health center; free tests are available to the public. Stock up and use them. Remember to run your tests in series a couple of days apart.

Here's a thing that's been going around social media: that a Swedish study shows the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine changes your DNA. Sigh. I do not love taking the garbage out, but folks keep hauling it in and dumping it in front of me, so here we go.

In order to deal with this one, we need to lay a little groundwork. We've talked a number of times over the course of our two and a half year-long conversation about nucleic acids, that is, DNA and RNA. Here's the short version: DNA is what we call an information-rich molecule in that it can convey information—a lot of information—in fact, everything you need to know to construct a human being, the unique human being that is you. It is a very large molecule built out of a long chain of similar building blocks (something biochemists call a polymer), and those building blocks (called nucleotides) come in four varieties. The short names for these four kinds of nucleotides are A, C, T, and G, each of which stands for a chemical name we don't have to care about today. DNA hangs out in the nucleus, a separate, membrane-enclosed compartment in your cells, just waiting around for two kinds of events: (1) cell reproduction, which would require making a new copy of the DNA using the old one as a template (for accuracy) so that there are now two copies, one full copy for each of the two new cells that will result from the reproduction event, and (2) transcription, which makes an mRNA copy based on the DNA template to direct protein synthesis in the cell. Those proteins coded in the DNA are what controls every single thing about that unique human being.

There is a process which does not occur normally in cells, but that can occur if the cell is infected or we manipulate conditions in the lab to force it along, called reverse transcription. That involves using the mRNA as a template to direct the synthesis of new DNA—called reverse because it is opposite the usual direction of things. It happens in some RNA virus infections like HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) because those viruses have an enzyme called reverse transcriptase which enables the process. The new DNA resulting from reverse transcription can then be incorporated into the DNA of the host cell. This is a bad thing because it can alter normal cell functioning, and it is one of many reasons HIV infection can be so destructive.

So there actually was a Swedish research team at Lund University which published a paper in *Current Issues in Molecular Biology* back in April of this year. What they did was to take a human liver carcinoma (cancer) cell line and alter the way those work, then manipulate a set of conditions to cause reverse transcription based on viral mRNA to occur; and what they found was that in this very particular circumstance, SARS-CoV-2 mRNA could be used as a template to produce DNA in these carcinoma cells. The usual sus-

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pects (three doctors who've been spreading disinformation about the vaccines for well over a year now) jumped all over this and began to broadcast that the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine "reverse transcribes and installs DNA into the human genome."

Except the research they're citing didn't show anything like this. At all. Let's recap: (1) The cells in question were cancer cells, not normal ones, and because they're cancer cells, are more genetically unstable than our normal cells; (2) the cells were manipulated in the lab to make them susceptible to reverse transcription; (3) the cells were placed into an artificial set of conditions that don't exist inside a person; (4) the DNA produced was not incorporated into the DNA of the altered liver cells anyhow. The Swedish study authors said, "there is no reason for anyone to change their decision to take the vaccine based on this study."

Dr. Bethany Moore, chair of the microbiology and immunology department at the University of Michigan, said, "Where that paper was getting a lot of press was the idea that those pieces of DNA were then getting incorporated into the genome [the cell's DNA], and there's absolutely no evidence that that happened." We also don't know whether that would have any consequences if it did happen. She also pointed out how different the cells in the lab were from the cells in our bodies.

And Dr. David Strain, senior clinical lecturer at the University of Exeter Medical School in England, told the AP, "These cells have had the normal protections of the immune system removed." That's going to have a significant effect on the ability of these results to be generalized to living, breathing humans. He added that unlike with the cells in the lab study, our bodies' protections work to stop imported genetic material from being incorporated into our own DNA. So that incorporation didn't happen in this experiment and is even less likely to happen inside a living host—whole lot of nothing here at the moment. There's a big "calm down" due here.

And as long as this is garbage day, I have another one for you. A reader posted a link to a TikTok clip in the comments on one of my posts. I responded to it there, but since I know not everyone reads all the comments, hoping breathlessly for more words of wisdom from me, I thought I'd reproduce parts of that response here.

So the clip was audio only, and the visual was a still of a Fox News interview between Fox host Neil Cavuto and Dr. Deborah Birx, late of the White House Coronavirus Response Team. Overlaying the photo is a "quote" attributed to Birx and the attribution, thus: "I knew the vaccine would not protect you." Deborah Birx." Clicking "Play" gets you an audio clip from that interview. I do not have a date for it; none was provided, and I didn't care enough to go looking.

I will tell you up front that the words on the screen for this TikTok are not an accurate rendering of Dr. Birx's comments to Mr. Cavuto, and they lack context in a way that makes it seem she was saying just what she was NOT saying. This is how it went: Cavuto mentioned the President and other people who've been infected despite their vaccination status and followed up with a question to Birx asking what she would say to unvaccinated people who are wondering in light of these infections why they should bother to get vaccinated. Here is her response in full.

"Well, if you're across the South and you're in the middle of this wave, what's gonna save you right now is Paxlovid. But once we get through this wave, during the lull, you should get vaccinated and boosted because we do believe it will protect you particularly if you're over 70.

"I knew these vaccines were not gonna protect against infection, and I think we overplayed the vaccines and it made people then worry that it's not gonna protect against severe disease and hospitalization. It will, but let's be very clear: 50 percent of the people who died from the Omicron surge were older, vaccinated.

"So that's why I'm saying even if you're vaccinated and boosted, if you're unvaccinated, right now, the key is testing and Paxlovid. It's effective, it's a great antiviral, and really, that is what's gonna save your lives right now if you're over 70."

I have a number of issues with this TikTok post. First, that "quote" on the screen does not contain her exact words, even though when you put something in quotation marks, you are labeling it as the person's actual words. Dr. Birx said, "I knew these vaccines were not gonna protect against infection." The "quote said, "I knew the vaccine would not protect you," which does not reproduce what she said and

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further—importantly—leaves out the next words that came right after, “against infection,” which is critical context, particularly since she went on to say she thought people were worried the vaccine wouldn’t protect against severe disease and hospitalization, following that up with, “It will.” She very specifically said the vaccine will protect you. The title on the screen also leaves out that, prior to this comment, she said she everyone “should” get vaccinated.

So she said the vaccine would not protect you against this one specific thing: infection, but did say it will protect you against severe disease and hospitalization and urged people to get vaccinated. When you assert she said, “I knew the vaccine would not protect you,” you are significantly misrepresenting her words and clear intent, and it becomes obvious your intent is to mislead.

It is also important context that Dr. Birx was emphasizing what people should do right now in the middle of a surge when she talked about testing and Paxlovid. Three times she said “right now” to refer to those as the best course if you become infected in the moment; never did she say or intimate that these constitute a reasonable substitute for vaccination now or in the future. None of her advice about relying on Paxlovid and testing during a surge was suggesting you should therefore skip vaccination or that it’s pointless to bother. Not at all. The person who posted this clip with the “quote” they used is cherry-picking her words to make them mean just what she did not mean, that is, to deceive.

Consider this: Let’s suppose I say, “My neighbors are close and have pigs, so I take garden trash for them to munch on. Last time I visited the pigs, I could see they’re getting nice and fat, and oh, the smell is strong in this heat.” Now supposin’ you want to make trouble between me and my neighbors, so you select from that quote and send it to them with a “See what Marie’s saying about you” message. Here’s what you send: “My neighbors are pigs. They’re getting fat, and oh, the smell is strong in the heat.” Those are all my words, right? They’re in the order I said them too. And I think we can all agree this would not be OK. I rest my case.

(I don’t think my neighbors read these posts, but just in case and for the record, I like my neighbors very much. They’re neither fat nor smelly. Their pigs smell fine too, actually.)

Further, I’ll give some context to Birx’s comment that 50 percent of those who died in the Omicron surge were vaccinated and older. Two-thirds of the people who died in that surge were old; that’s because this virus preferentially kills old people—just a fact of life; our immune systems—vaccinated or not—aren’t as robust as younger people’s. Since most old people (close to 97 percent) have received at least one dose, it makes sense that a whole lot of those deaths are going to be vaccinated people. But here’s what’s interesting about that: More than three-quarters (76 percent) of senior citizens in the US are fully vaccinated and boosted, yet three-quarters of the dying was done by the rest of seniors--the quarter of them who didn’t have booster doses. This is not the picture of an ineffective vaccine, one that “would not protect you.”

We may have some new insight into the cardiac complications of Covid-19. A presentation at the American Heart Association’s Basic Cardiovascular Sciences Scientific Sessions 2022 addressed work done with infected mouse hearts and the effect of SARS-CoV-2 spike protein on the organs. The research team at Masonic Medical Research Institute found that the spike protein caused heart dysfunction, enlargement, and inflammation. Apparently, once the cardiac cells were infected, a protein called Toll-like receptor-4 (TLR4) was produced and then interacted with the spike protein. At that point, TLR4 signaled inflammatory responses to invading pathogens.

I’ve read a paper in Nature Microbiology from a team at the Swiss Institute of Technology in Lausanne, which has been looking for monoclonal antibodies to deal with the array of Omicron subvariants. An earlier-identified monoclonal called P5C3 was known to be potent and broadly active, neutralizing all of the variants of SARS-CoV-2 up to Omicron’s BA.2. Then this research team identified and is investigating a new monoclonal antibody named P2G3. It has activity against a wide array of SARS-CoV-2 variants too, including BA.4 and BA.5. The team then established that P5G3 can work with P2G3 to block spike without either getting in the other’s way. Then they conducted lab experiments with prospective mutations which would escape one or the other of these two antibodies, only to find that each cross-neutralized the other’s escape mutants, so as a team, they offer enormous breadth and effectiveness into the future. It appears the binding epitope for P2G3 is a large region of receptor-binding domain (RBD) that is highly conserved;



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what this means is the specific location on the spike protein to which these antibodies bind is the same part of the spike that attaches to host cells to infect them so that antibody binding it is going to prevent the virus from entering cells. What's more, this particular epitope is very large and doesn't seem to be able to mutate without compromising the virus. In other words, future variants that are viable pathogens are quite unlikely to be able to escape P2G3. The research group did identify some mutants capable of escaping neutralization by the pair of monoclonal antibodies, but these mutants, according to the paper, "are extremely rare in the wild (suggesting reduced fitness)" and "have reduced infectivity," likely because a mutation at a location necessary to achieve escape reduces the virus's host-cell-binding affinity. So the only mutations likely to be able to escape this antibody combination are highly unlikely to arise and persist in nature.

These antibodies were evaluated by electron-microscopic analysis of their structures, by lab tests for binding, and by testing in hamster and macaque models. An extended half-life version of P2G3 and P5C3 has been developed, and the researchers are speculating they'll be looking at something that can be provided for prophylaxis in immunocompromised individuals with two to three injections per year. A company has plans to start testing this antibody combination in humans this month. We'll see how those work out.

I also ran across a report on long-term disability associated with long-Covid or post-acute sequelae of Covid (PASC), a condition characterized by prolonged persistence of symptoms after Covid-19's acute stage has resolved. We know you can develop it even if your symptoms were mild or pass unnoticed; but we don't know for sure yet what percentage of individuals develop the condition or how long it may last. There are cases that have lingered for several months to a couple of years, but we don't have longer history so that we can begin discovering whether it is a permanent thing or what proportion of cases last six months, a year, whatever. Only time and study will help with that.

Something that is emerging is an estimate of the number of Americans rendered unable to return to full-time—or for some, any—employment by the condition. This assumes greater importance on a national economic level at this time given how fragile the economy has been just lately. Employers are finding it difficult or impossible to staff up to full levels, and it's impossible to dismiss the effects of long-Covid on the labor supply. Drawing on survey data from the Census Bureau, the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, and The Lancet, Katie Bach, a senior fellow with the Brookings Institution told NPR she has a conservative estimate that 4 million full-time equivalent workers are sidelined by long-Covid. That's 2.4 percent of the working population, according to Bach—a lot.

Of course, in addition to the big-picture economic effects on the worker shortage, there are the personal effects on the people so afflicted. You lose your job; you lose your income and ability to pay your bills. It's difficult to qualify for disability benefits in normal times; it's orders of magnitude more difficult when you have a condition no one had ever heard of two or so years ago for which there is no specific diagnostic test and about which too little is known to make projections about how long the disability might last. Many, many employees returning to work after a bout with Covid-19 were terminated for failing to meet productivity goals or keep up with workload or for excessive absences; employers did not offer accommodations as they are required to do by the Americans with Disabilities Act, although to be fair, not everyone recognized this as a disability from the beginning. The goal of these accommodations is to get workers back on track to productive employment, but so many have already been left behind that may never get on track again. Further, we are all aware that disability benefits don't come close to matching anyone's income prior to the disability, so the persons involved generally suffer significant financial limitations, maybe for life. This seems like an individual and societal disaster in the making, and I don't know that we're giving it much attention yet.

And that's it for tonight. Please be careful to keep yourself and others safe. We'll talk again.

## Fraud and weak USDA oversight chip away at integrity of organic food industry

By: Bart Pfankuch August 3, 2022

Trey Wharton of Sioux Falls has made numerous sacrifices in his life in order to maintain a healthful lifestyle centered around a vegan diet and consistent consumption of organic foods.

To afford organic products that are sometimes double or triple the cost of conventionally grown foods, Wharton works two jobs, doesn't take vacations and drives a dented SUV.

"I'm investing in this vessel," Wharton said, pointing at himself, "rather than in that vessel," he added, motioning toward his 2011 Honda. "I pay more and sacrifice to invest my money in the foods I want."

Wharton, 31, acknowledges that he is forced to trust the organic industry to uphold its promise that the foods are minimally processed, are grown without chemicals or additives, and are truly more healthful than non-organics.

"I don't have a place in that system, so I have to trust them," Wharton said.

Like other consumers who buy organic, Wharton sometimes wonders and worries if he's actually getting what he believes he is buying. He is well aware of a few high-profile cases of organic food fraud — including a notorious, multimillion-dollar fake organic grain scheme perpetrated in South Dakota from 2012 to 2018 — in which unscrupulous producers made millions of dollars by illegally selling conventional grains packaged and sold as organic.

In the 2018 case, farmer Kent Duane Anderson of Belle Fourche made \$71 million in fraudulent income by selling thousands of tons of conventionally grown grain falsely labeled as organic, and used the proceeds to buy an \$8 million yacht, a \$2.4 million home in Florida, and a Maserati, among other extravagant items, according to a federal indictment. Anderson is now in federal prison.

In July 2022, a Minnesota farmer was charged by federal prosecutors in a \$46 million grain fraud scheme.



**Trey Wharton of Sioux Falls has made many financial sacrifices in order to afford to buy organic foods that are part of his vegan diet.**

Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch

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**Organic foods, including grains such as these oat bran flakes, can cost double or even triple the price of non-organic foods grown with pesticides and fertilizers and yet look exactly the same, making the industry an attractive target for fraudsters. This organic oat bran at the Sioux Falls Food Co-op cost \$4.49 a pound, while conventional oat bran at Walmart in Sioux Falls cost \$1.95 a pound.**

Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch

by pushing for more stringent requirements and stronger enforcement of existing rules to protect the industry's reputation long term.

At the policy level, the organic industry has been pushing for more regulation and oversight from the USDA and Congress to protect the integrity of the industry as it grows and evolves, said Reana Kovalcik, director of public affairs at the Organic Trade Association, a business group representing the organic industry in Washington, D.C.

The group that represents organic farmers, processors and retailers is pushing for new rules and programs to improve transparency, oversight and enforcement of national organic regulations and processes, Kovalcik said.

"It's kind of unique for an agriculture industry to say, 'Hey, please regulate us more,' but that's exactly what the organic industry is asking for," she said. "The industry wants to make sure everything is as buttoned up as it needs to be for producers who are doing this extra work to get a price premium, and for consumers who are paying that premium price."

The organization has separate regulatory and congressional packages it has been pushing for years, but both are bogged down in Washington, Kovalcik said.

One element of the proposals deals with increasing fraud protections within the industry, she said.

As hard as the organic industry tries to police itself and protect its integrity, Kovalcik said she still hears

In a federal indictment, authorities say James Clayton Wolf bought conventionally grown grain and resold it as organic over a period of about six years. Wolf has pleaded not guilty and will fight the allegations in court, his lawyer told News Watch.

Those cases of fraud or alleged fraud have caused uncertainty and mistrust among some consumers in an industry that relies largely on the honesty of producers, processors and packagers to maintain the integrity of the industry and, ultimately, to allow consumers to feel confident they are actually getting organic products for which they pay a premium price.

"If there's more money in it, there's more people looking at the dollars aspect and not the moral aspect," said Charlie Johnson, a longtime organic farmer who grows soybeans, corn, oats and alfalfa southwest of Madison, S.D. "Those types of people and operations need to be pointed out and prosecuted, because they can bring down all of us if we don't keep the system clean and honorable."

In many ways, the organic food industry in America — which topped \$63 billion in sales in 2021 — is responding to negative publicity from fraud cases and other weaknesses in the organic regulatory system



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people speak about Randy Constant, the Missouri corn and soybean grower who perpetrated the largest organic grain-fraud scheme in U.S. history. Constant was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2019 for generating \$142 million in fraudulent organic grain sales, which he spent on an extravagant lifestyle. Constant took his own life after being sentenced.

"It's really in the interest of the entire organic industry to keep our regulations current, modern and transparent for the good of producers, retailers and consumers," she said. "The organic seal was all about trust and integrity; that's why we have seals, and the organic industry takes that very seriously."

Wharton, meanwhile, said he will continue to buy organic and trust that sufficient safeguards and oversight are in place to ensure organic practices are followed and that organic labeling is accurate.

"It's like when they build a house," he said. "You have to trust at some level that what they are doing is up to code."

## SOUTH DAKOTA LAGS OTHER GREAT PLAINS STATES IN ORGANIC FARMING

Here is a look at the number of certified organic crop, livestock or combined farms in South Dakota and in other states as well as the U.S. as a whole in 2019. The chart shows number of certified farms, value of organic goods sold, percent of sales increase from 2017-2019, and national ranking in number of farms.

State	Farms	Value	% Chh	U.S. rank
Iowa	1,066	\$145 million	+52%	5th
Minn.	996	\$114 million	+12%	8th
Neb.	358	\$185 million	+173%	22nd
Mont.	342	\$66 million	+162%	23rd
N.Dak.	200	\$113 million	+108%	31st
S. Dak.	124	\$14 million	+42%	38th
Wyo.	82	\$16 million	+45%	42nd
Calif.	5,077	\$3.6 billion	+27%	1st
U.S.	28,000	\$63 billion	+2%	—

Sources/notes: Organic Trade Association and USDA 2019 Agricultural Census; U.S sales increase shown is for one year (2020-21); some numbers are rounded.

## Billion-dollar industry attractive to fraudsters

As in any industry, the lure of making big money through fraud is enticing to unscrupulous farmers and suppliers who are willing to risk prison to take advantage of weaknesses in the organic system to defraud consumers.

The enticement to commit outright fraud, or just to cut corners or manipulate the system in small ways, is high in the organic industry, where more expensive, more carefully produced final products look exactly the same on the shelves as products that are cheaper and produced with far less-stringent standards and more chemicals and additives.

On a basic level, organic foods are non-genetically modified crops grown in soil without chemical additives such as fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides; and non-genetically modified livestock raised on mostly organic feed without added hormones or antibiotics.

The USDA describes organic farming as "the application of a set of cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that support the cycling of on-farm resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. These include maintaining or enhancing soil and water quality; conserving wetlands, woodlands, and wildlife; and avoiding use of synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering."

The USDA sets forth a host of operating and labeling regulations, including lists of allowable and non-allowable food additives and agricultural practices, as part of its National Organic Program that was established through the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990.

USDA workgroups within the larger program work continuously to consider requests to modify the program



and consider new allowable substances and practices to keep the program up to date, though many people and groups in the organic industry say the USDA is too lenient and too slow to react to industry changes.

Furthermore, the organic food industry is relatively new in comparison to the conventional food industry, so regulations have come more slowly and with less consistency and lower government investment and intervention.

For example, the USDA is responsible for setting product-safety and production guidelines for both the conventional and organic food industries. But while the USDA is responsible for regulating and enforcing the rules in most conventional agricultural processes — the meat industry, for example — the USDA outsources the certification and regulatory functions of the organic food industry. In the organic world, producers who want to label their products as organic must become certified by one of about 80 independent groups or agencies, many of them nonprofit groups devoted to promoting organic agriculture. Typically, those agencies inspect producers they certify only once a year, and they are paid for their certification services, creating a potential incentive to maintain a high number of certified producers.

The organic food industry has exploded in roughly the past 30 years as a growing number of Americans and people around the world seek more healthful foods grown with fewer chemicals and less-invasive agricultural practices.

Sales of organic foods have roughly quadrupled in the past 15 years, from about \$16 billion nationally in 2016 to more than \$63 billion in 2021, according to the Organic Trade Association.

South Dakota has been slower than other states to take advantage of the exploding organic market, and is ranked 38th of the 50 states in the number of organic farms. South Dakota's 124 certified organic farms and related businesses generated \$14 million in product sales in 2019, a 42% increase over 2017. However, acres of farmland devoted to organics in South Dakota still make up less than 1% of the overall agricultural land in the state.

## Organic system relies on 'checks and balances'



**Angela Jackson**

Angela Jackson has obtained a close-up view of the organic foods industry from two distinct vantage points: as a producer who owns and operates Prairie Sun Organics certified poultry and crop farm in Vermillion; and as someone with more than a decade of experience as an organic expert and consultant who has certified and audited organic farms in 36 countries.

"I have spent my life working with verifying bodies, working as an inspector, making sure that things are done right and bringing integrity to the system," she said.

And yet, Jackson is aware of the concerns over the integrity of the organic agriculture system in the U.S. and in other countries.

"Within organics, there are people that really know the system and are experts at finding the loopholes in the system and they take advantage of that," Jackson said. "But 99.9 percent of the time, farmers do a fantastic job, and the good news is that the bad guys get caught, which tells me that the system is working."

Jackson noted that the certification agencies and most of their employees are well trained in identifying

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and rooting out fraud or potential fraud. While she acknowledges that more oversight would be good for the industry, she added that organic foods are actually more highly regulated and monitored than conventional foods.

Annual inspections of producers seeking organic certification typically include a review of paperwork, a tour of the farm and farm operations, and testing of products and equipment for the presence of non-allowed substances such as pesticides, she said. Reports developed by on-site inspectors, she said, are then reviewed and audited by another certifier to ensure accuracy.

"To be qualified to be an inspector is arduous," she said.

One weak point in the regulatory oversight process, Jackson said, is that most of the testing of organic crops is done to look for genetically modified organisms, which are not allowed. More direct testing of products for the presence of pesticides could be done in the inspection process, she said.

Jackson added that there is a difference between "compliance," which is following both the letter and spirit of organic regulations, and "ethics," which puts more onus on the farmer to do what is right even if the rules don't necessarily call for it.

Jackson said some farmers and livestock producers are beginning to find loopholes in the organic requirements that have been in place for decades, including the growth of hydroponic crops that never touch actual soil. Some farms risk cross-contamination of organic and non-organic products through "dual production" farms, which grow or raise both types of products on the same farm and open the door to reduced integrity of the organics produced there.

"What we're losing in organics is the ethics piece, and the ethics are getting watered down," she said. "The compliance piece is still there, but unfortunately some farms are putting corporate interests first, and it's all about money to them."

However, Jackson said, the majority of organic farms in the U.S. are both compliant and ethical in how crops are grown and how animals are raised and treated.

But even as she is aware of the weaknesses within the organic certification and regulatory system, Jackson is confident that consumers who desire organic products can rely on the systems in place to ensure safety and authenticity.

She also urged a consumer who questions the validity of a claim of organic on any product to take a picture of the product and submit it to the USDA for investigation. Getting to know local food producers personally is another good way consumers can ensure they are getting the organic products they expect, she said.



**South Dakota organic farmer Charlie Johnson met recently with Abby Lundrigan of the Real Organic Project to review details of Johnson's operation to determine if his operation will be certified under the guidelines of the non-profit organization.** Photo: Bart Pfankuch,

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**Organic farmer Charlie Johnson inspects a field in his farm southwest of Madison, S.D. Johnson is a leading producer and advocate for organic farming and organic foods in South Dakota.** Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch

"Could there be more enforcement officers with the USDA, and could there be more auditors like me doing this work, yes, there could be," she said. "But generally, organic farmers have a heart to do the right thing, and there's checks and balances in the system so it works very well."

"You can be assured that when you buy a product, it has 95% less pesticides than a conventional product, because we can never get to 100%," she said. "More than 90% of the time, however, we have total confidence, and if it's made in the USA, and it's certified in the USA, you can be highly confident the organic product is what it says it is."

## Organic industry focuses on integrity

In many ways, the organic food industry is taking new steps on its own to further protect the relationship of trust it has with consumers, to assure them what they're buying is what they're getting.

Abby Lundrigan is driving across the American Midwest to meet with organic farmers to examine their practices to see if they qualify for a so-called "add on" organic certification.

Lundrigan, a former organic farm manager, is a certification liaison for the Real Organic Project, a Vermont-based nonprofit organization that seeks to provide organic farmers who meet their standards a way to further identify their products as approved by the organization.

The add-on labeling — provided free to qualifying farmers — is one way some organic producers are trying to retain and bolster their integrity and credibility with consumers at a time when the organic industry has been plagued by occasional cases of fraud, sidestepping of basic organic farming principles and watering down of federal organic standards.

The group's literature said it was created because while USDA organic certification is important, it has become weakened to the point where many organic farmers feel it can be manipulated or abused by farms and operators who don't follow some of the original tenets of organic farming.

For example, the group points out that the USDA allows organic certification of farms that use hydroponics, or soil-less growing methods, and allows certification of cattle and poultry farms known as confinements, where animals are not allowed onto pasture land and are not free to move about in the outside air.

"The growing failure of the USDA to serve and protect organic farming was the catalyst that united us," the group says in its literature. "The farmers of the Real Organic Project have created an add-on label to USDA organic to differentiate organic food produced in concert with healthy soils and pastures."

The group further states: "As organic succeeded, the same big players in chemical ag became the big players in the organic industry, and with this big tent, we suddenly found the tent changing. Soon we could barely recognize as 'organic' much of what was being sold under our label."



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Since launching in 2018, the Real Organic Project has certified more than 850 farms to use its add-on labeling.

Lundrigan said that while outright fraud within the organic industry may be rare, examples of minor manipulations of the system, though still rare, are more common than Real Organic Project would like.

“Once the organic industry became a multibillion-dollar industry, somehow a lot more organic food ended up on the shelves but somehow there’s not any more organic farmers producing it,” she said.

High-profile incidents of organic-grain fraud not only hurt consumers who didn’t get the organic grain they assumed they did, but also cause fundamental damage to the reputation of the industry and farmers who are doing things right, Lundrigan said.

“I think customers are starting to learn that when they go to the store, that flour they are paying more for isn’t necessarily grown the way they think it was,” she said. “And as people are starting to think that, it’s really harmful to organic farmers that are really doing it the right way and are suffering from that growing mistrust or erosion of trust.”

On a recent trip to South Dakota that included a visit to Charlie Johnson’s farm, Lundrigan said she knew of organic milk producers who mixed organic milk with conventional milk and labeled it organic. She told of berry producers whose plants never touched soil yet were allowed to be labeled organic.

Real Organic Project, she said, will not certify hydroponic farms or those that raise animals in confinement. And some grain operators and handlers do not do a good enough job of cleaning out residue from conventional grain before storing organic grain in elevators, she said.

Real Organic Project requires that crops be grown in real soil that is well managed, and requires that livestock and poultry live in pastures rather than in confined spaces. And while the USDA requires that organic cattle consume at least 30% organic feed, Real Organic requires 50% organic feed for cattle to qualify, Lundrigan said.

The add-on label, Lundrigan said, “is free and meant to distinguish farms that are legitimately organic. It’s a label largely focused on that trust element we need to have with consumers, a trust element that is foundational to the success of the organic industry.”



**Charlie Johnson and his family have placed signs in the ditches along their organic crop fields to prevent other farmers or contractors from mistakenly applying fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides to their crops.** Photo:

Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch

## Putting the farmer back in farming

It only takes a few hours of visiting with Charlie Johnson and driving in a pickup around his farm in Lake County, S.D., to realize why organic grains cost more than conventionally grown grains at the wholesale and retail levels.



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Johnson and his family members have been growing and harvesting organic grains since the 1980s, and Johnson has emerged as a leader in mastering the processes of organic farming and as a promoter of the organic-farming lifestyle and its values.

On a more philosophical level, Johnson sees organic farming as a return to the roots of agriculture — in which farmers didn't rely on chemicals, huge machines or vast economies of scale to drive production and profits, but rather lived on the land, spent many hours working the land, and used their minds to determine the most efficient, purest way to grow healthy crops.

"In modern agriculture, we've taken the farmer out of farming," Johnson said. "If we want more community here, more churches, more schools, and a healthy economic environment, organic farming will promote that because it requires human and farmer input. It's about consumers supporting a family-friendly, community-friendly, soil-friendly and health-friendly approach to farming, and they want to put their dollars behind that."

To uphold that strong connection between earth, farmer and consumer takes a lot of thought, planning and hard work.

Johnson has 65 separate fields of crops on his 1,600 tillable acres, and he uses a six-year rotation of crops, in which each year a field has a different crop grown on it to promote soil health.

Instead of herbicides, he must drive a cultivator over his crops to remove as many weeds as possible from the land between crop rows. About 5% of his land is preserved as buffer strips and shelter belts that form a natural barrier between croplands and between his organic crops and those of neighboring conventional farms to block chemical drift. Signs are placed in ditches along his crops so pesticide contractors hired by conventional farmers do not apply chemicals to Johnson's crops by mistake.

Johnson has no doubt that the resulting products are not only different, but also better than conventionally grown crops.

"I just think organic foods are simply better; they're very much richer and better in quality and in food density," he said.

His efforts make it slower to develop yields but he's rewarded with higher prices when he sells them to a certified organic wholesaler. In mid-July 2022, Johnson was able to sell soybeans for more than \$30 a bushel while conventional soybeans were bringing about \$14 a bushel. His organic corn was selling for about \$10 a bushel compared with the roughly \$6.50 per bushel price being paid for conventional corn.

While Johnson acknowledges he has been successful in organic farming, and makes "a decent living," he is still eager to learn more and try new things.

He is working with researchers and students from South Dakota State University to plant numerous small test plots on his land to see which crops grow best in particular conditions and settings. He is trying a new way to regenerate soil by cutting down and mulching small alfalfa plots and leaving the crop to decompose where it lies. He hosts regular farm tours and visits to educate the public about his operation and the value of organic farming.

"Putting the whole argument that organic is better for the environment off to the side, I would say it's more community-friendly, because what you do in organic farming has a greater emphasis on the farmer and the farm and the management of the land."

In mid-July, Johnson answered a series of questions from Lundrigan, of the Real Organic Project, and gave her a pickup-truck tour of his farm. After the initial examination, Lundrigan said, it appeared that Johnson Farms was highly likely to qualify for the add-on organic label.

## Epilogue: Wharton's sacrifices take a toll

In mid-July 2022, a South Dakota News Watch reporter met and spoke with Trey Wharton as he arrived at the Sioux Falls Food Co-op to purchase some organic foods for the next few days.

Wharton told of some of the financial and lifestyle sacrifices he had made to keep up his more expensive organic vegan diet.

"I sacrifice having money to go on fun trips I see everyone on social media doing, being able to have enough to keep up with rent and bills, not being able to save money, and not being able to buy fun things like roller blades or new research books," he wrote in a Facebook message. "I'm always living day-to-day, buying food for the day or maybe the next two days based on the amount of tips I get and how far I can stretch my paychecks."

Two weeks later, when News Watch contacted Wharton to clarify a few things, the 31-year-old shared some bad news.

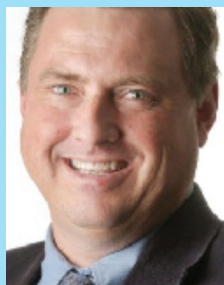
Although Wharton said he has a full-time job as a delivery driver for Pizza Ranch in Sioux Falls and works part time as a package handler for UPS at the Sioux Falls airport, the pay from his 55-hour work week wasn't enough to pay the rent.

"I'm now living in my car because my rent was behind and they non-renewed my lease so I'm now living the 'van life,'" Wharton wrote to News Watch. "But at least I have my health. Ha."

Asked if he was willing to share news of his recent homelessness with the public, Wharton wrote back that he is willing to give up basic comforts in order to sustain his healthful diet, including living for a spell in his 2011 Honda CRV.

"I'm cool with it — it shows the math of how hard it is to eat this way," he wrote, "and what someone might need to sacrifice to try and regain their own health."

### ABOUT BART PFANKUCH



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

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## Books!

Sometimes the things I learn with continuing education makes my head spin. I am in Plymouth, Minn., attending the Summer Institute of Theology at Free Lutheran Bible College. One of the classes talks about how to learn and how to teach. Then out of the clear blue sky, the instructor says that people will comprehend more by reading a book than by reading it on a digital device. The thought then crossed my mind - but the schools are pushing for digital learning over books. I hate to say it, but I was also one of those in favor of digital reading. Until now.

According to an article in the Los Angeles Times written by Naomi S. Baron, a professor emerita of linguistics at American University and author of "How We Read Now: Strategic Choices for Print, Screen, and Audio.", she said, "People tend

to put more effort into reading print than reading digitally."

Educational psychologist Patricia Alexander, a literacy scholar at the University of Maryland said in The Hechinger Report, "If I'm only trying to learn something that's going to be covered on a test and the test is shallow in nature, then [digital] is just fine." If, on the other hand, you hope to dive in deeply and gather imperishable pearls, spring for the book."

Now I'm not going to get into the firing line as both sides will have their case. However, there are a few things to consider.

Part of learning is repetition, repetition, repetition. And that means studying, reading and comprehending. One of the classes I'm taking is Adult Catechesis by Dr. Jason Gudim. Catechesis, in Greek, means to sound back and forth - to echo. A teacher teaches. A student answers. To go further, a teacher teaches a subject, and then goes back and reviews, and then continues, and then reviews. That's how we best learn the material. No - it's best how we comprehend and retain the material.

When I used to preach at the nursing home, there was always something that amazed me. Not everyone was comprehending what I was saying. Not everyone was really listening. But I tell you what, as soon as I started with the Lord's Prayer, EVERYONE chimed in. It was something that was learned and learned and learned.

So what does that have to do with print vs. digital? Dr. Gudim said when you read a book, you touch it, you see it, you can smell it - the senses are all at play. When you read it digitally, he said your eyes are looking at the light more so than the words.

When you are reading a book or a newspaper, chances are you are looking at the whole thing. When you read something on-line, chances are you are skimming and not really taking it all in.

Now this may seem odd coming from someone who was pushing the digital world, but I'm thinking of taking a step backwards (or forwards, depending on how you look at it), and start to get the feel, sense and visual of a real book.

I had a PDF that I had to read. There was just one chapter. I read it. But to be honest, I'm not sure what I read. I know when I put my sermons together, I will assemble it on the computer, but when it comes time to review it, I have to print it off and read it from the paper. Reading it from the iPad just doesn't cut it. I always thought that doing a sermon from an iPad would be easier. It's not. On paper, I can make notations on the side, highlight things, draw arrows, cross things out, and whatever else needs to be done.

Let's take another example. I have been printing the readings in the bulletin. I'm guessing that many churches have inserts with the readings. I go to Biblegateway.com, enter the reading I want and then copy it into the bulletin. We reading from the bulletin the readings.

Now let's try the real Bible. You open the page to the reading - oh - where is that book in the Bible? I know it's in this area somewhere. So you're (okay, so I'm) fumbling around just trying to find where the book is at in the Bible. Then you finally find it. You open it up to the reading and what do you see? On the computer, all you see is what you typed in. In the actual book, you not only see what you're suppose to read, but your eyes will gleam over the extra parts. You might even go to the very beginning of that book to get more information about the author and when it was written. You might glance a few scriptures



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before and after your reading. You're taking in more information. As a reader in the church, you might actually have more information to provide. But maybe, you might Google something to help SUPPLEMENT your learning. That's where the digital word shines. You can quickly do some research and get more background, but don't make it your primary learning tool.

As members of the congregation, you should bring your own Bible to church and follow along - you might even make a notation in YOUR Bible to help you remember something. I know at Buffalo Lake, many bring their own Bibles and boy, some of them are really worn. That's amazing.

Then some might say, "well, my version is different than their version." So. That's a good thing. Some versions have different perspective on the readings.

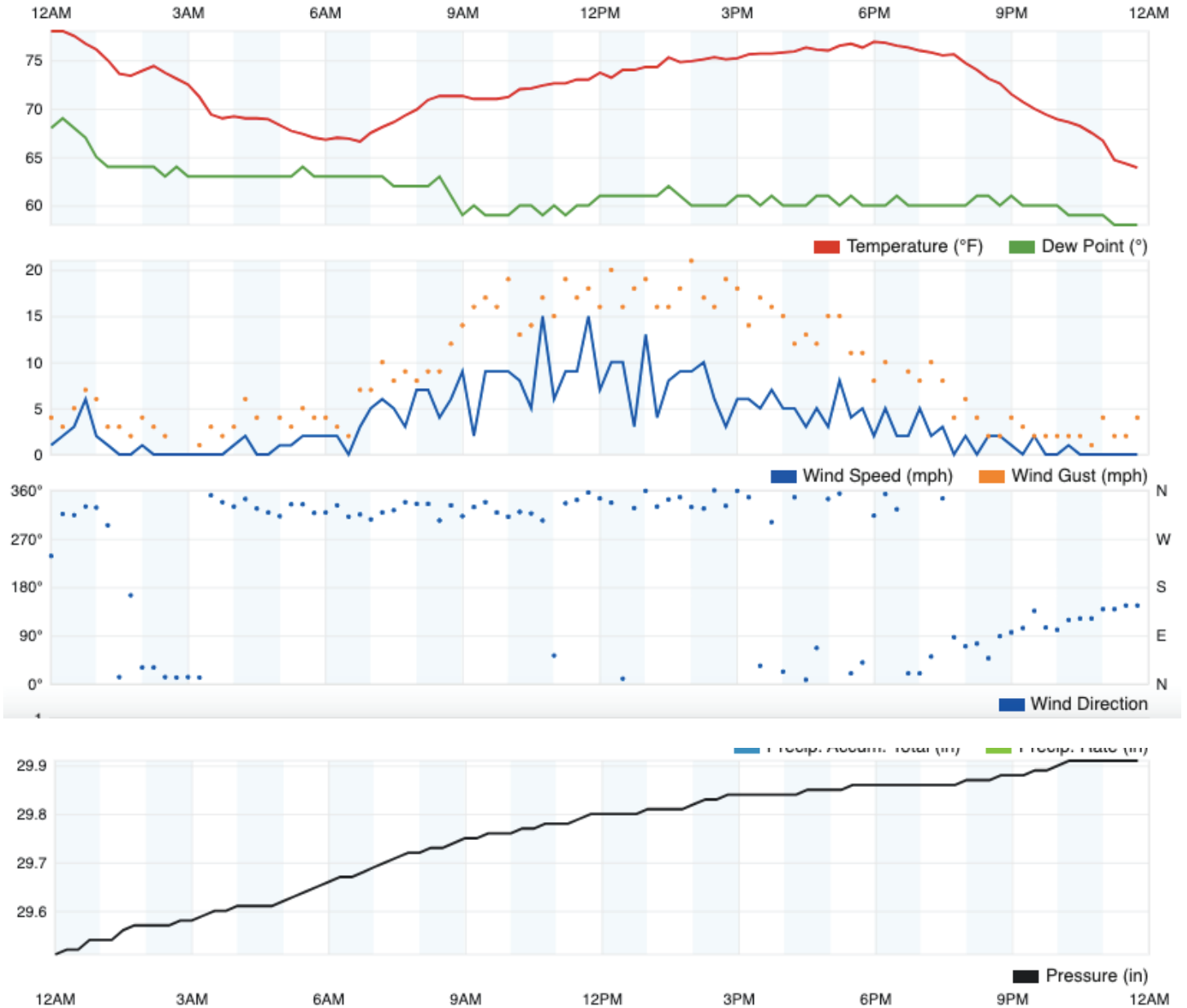
Now I'm going to even go further. Go the library and find a book to read. The Wage Memorial Library in Groton has many good and interesting books. (And don't forget to get one of their neat bookmarks) And yes, if you have not read a book for a while, it will take some time to get back into the rhythm of reading. Our professor said he could read and comprehend books better today than he could five years ago.

So for the readers in the church, bring your Bible and read from it. For those of you sitting in the pews, bring your Bible to follow along. Encourage your children to do the same thing. Make reading the Bible a world of experience. God will love it!

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



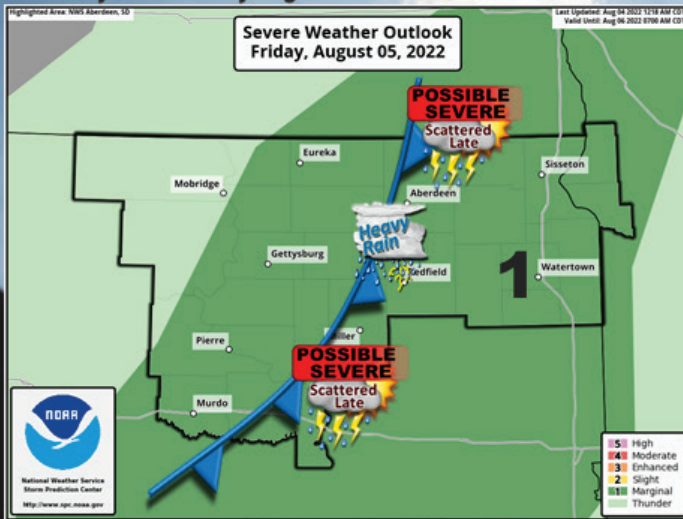
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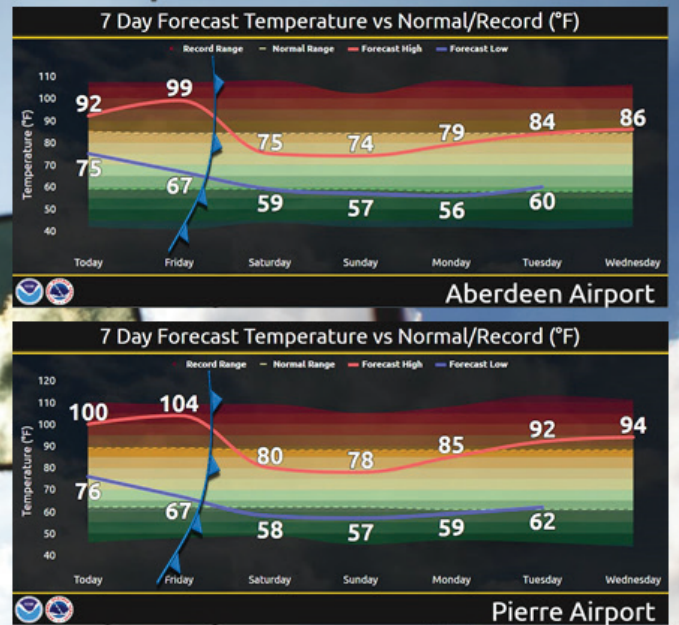
Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Sunny then Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Breezy. Sunny then Chance T-storms	T-storms Likely	Chance T-storms
High: 91 °F	Low: 74 °F	High: 100 °F	Low: 66 °F	High: 75 °F

## The Temperature Tug-Of-War

The Next Chance For Rain Friday Afternoon Through Friday Night Could Bring Severe Storms And Torrential Heavy Rainfall  
**Friday And Friday Night's Severe Weather Potential**



## Aberdeen And Pierre's 7-Day Temperature Forecasts At A Glance



Updated: 8/4/2022 5:10 AM CST

Warmer air starts back into the region today into Friday. Another cold front forecast to make its way through the northern plains Friday afternoon through Friday night, will set the stage for much cooler conditions over the weekend. After a cooler Saturday and Sunday, warmer air starts to creep back into the forecast by the middle of next week. The 7 day forecast has a couple of chances for showers and thunderstorms, the first being Friday afternoon through Friday night with the cold front that moves through. Some of the thunderstorms could become severe and produce heavy rainfall. The second chance for rain shows up by later in the day Saturday and continues into Saturday night. The rest of the forecast looks to be dry.



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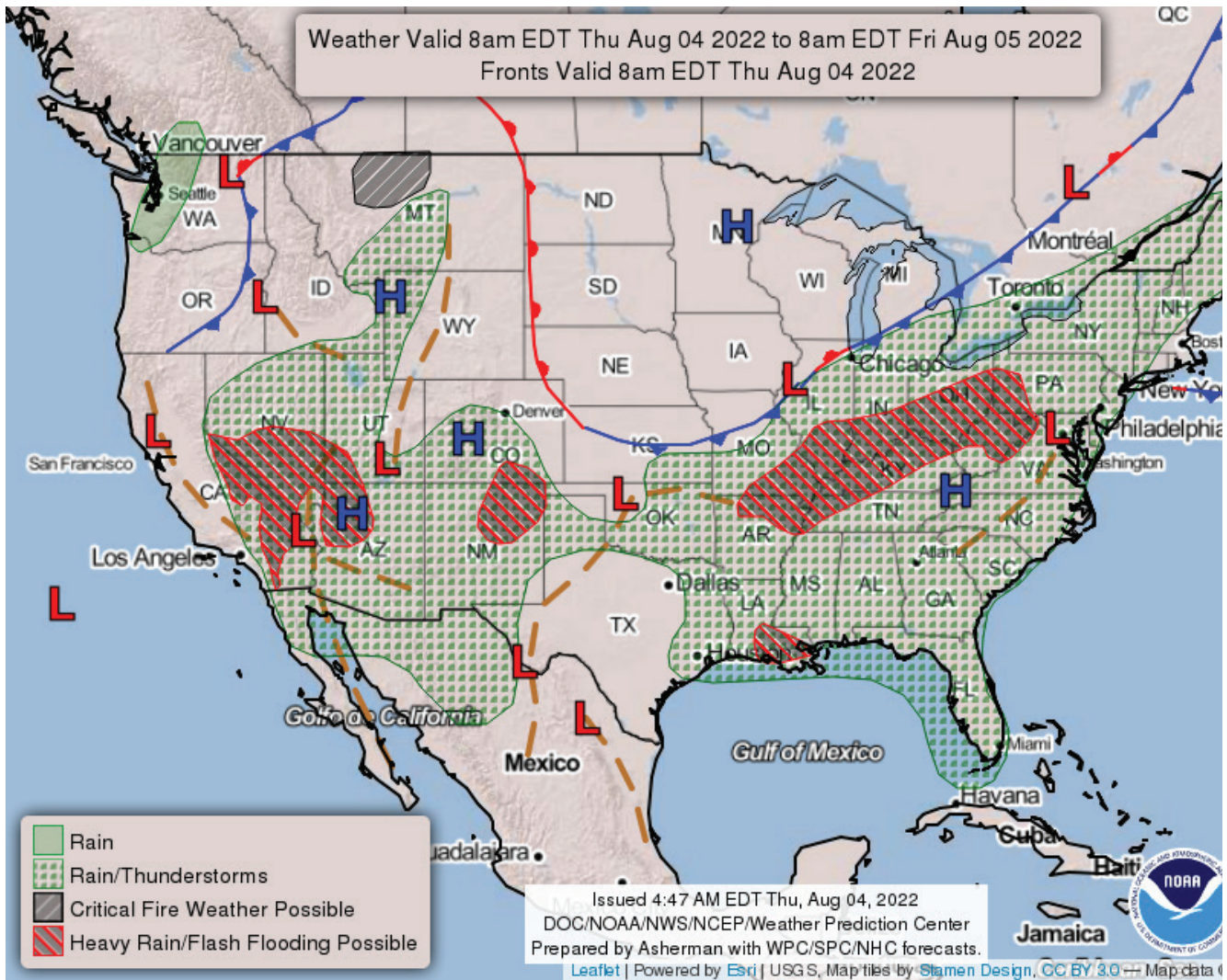
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 78 °F at 12:23 AM**  
**Low Temp: 63 °F at 11:59 PM**  
**Wind: 21 mph at 1:54 P**  
**Precip: 0.00**

Day length: 14 hours, 39 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 107 in 1934  
Record Low: 42 in 2017  
Average High: 85°F  
Average Low: 59°F  
Average Precip in Aug.: 0.30  
Precip to date in Aug.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 14.40  
Precip Year to Date: 14.54  
Sunset Tonight: 8:58:11 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:19:58 AM



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## Today in Weather History

August 4, 1960: At Draper in Jones County, three-inch hail caused substantial damage to roofs, building windows and automobiles. Losses estimated at 100,000 dollars. About 1,000 chickens and turkeys killed on nearby farms.

August 4, 2000: Tennis ball size hail along with high winds caused a lot of damage throughout Selby. Many east and north windows were broken along with many vehicle's windshields. Also, many cars were dented, house siding was damaged, gardens were destroyed, and many acres of crops around Selby were destroyed. Softball hail broke windows and caused extensive damage to a few vehicles and homes west of Faulkton. Baseball size hail and high winds had broken out about every window on all of the buildings at the Brentwood Colony in Edmunds County. The large hail and strong winds also damaged many of the buildings.

1882 - A vivid aurora was visible from Oregon to Maine, down the east coast as far as Mayport FL, and inland as far as Wellington KS. Observers at Louisville KY noted merry dancers across the sky, and observers at Saint Vincent, MN, noted it was probably the most brilliant ever seen at that location. (The Weather Channel)

1930 - The temperature at Moorefield, WV, soared to 112 degrees to establish a state record, having reached 110 degrees the previous day. Widespread drought after April of that year caused some towns to haul water for domestic use, and many manufacturing plants were barely operational. (The Weather Channel)

1961 - Spokane, WA, reached an all-time record high of 108 degrees. Kalispell, MT, set an all-time record with a reading of 105 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1980 - A record forty-two consecutive days of 100 degree heat finally came to an end at the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. July 1980 proved to be the hottest month of record with a mean temperature of 92 degrees. There was just one day of rain in July, and there was no measurable rain in August. There were 18 more days of 100 degree heat in August, and four in September. Hot weather that summer contributed to the deaths of 1200 people nationally, and losses from the heat across the country were estimated at twenty billion dollars. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A cold front brought relief from the heat to a large part of the Midwest, while hot weather continued in the south central and eastern U.S. Morning thunderstorms in Nebraska deluged the town of Dalton with 8.71 inches of rain, along with hail three inches in diameter, which accumulated up to four feet deep near the town of Dix. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from eastern Iowa to Lower Michigan during the afternoon and evening hours, producing golf ball size hail and spawning several tornadoes. A thunderstorm at Maquoketa, IA, produced wind gusts to 75 mph. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from eastern Nebraska and northeastern Kansas to the Great Lakes Region, with 150 reports of large hail or damaging winds during the afternoon, evening, and nighttime hours. Thunderstorms produced tennis ball size hail at Claremont, MN, and wind gusts to 75 mph at Milwaukee, WI. Thunderstorms representing what once was Hurricane Chantal produced five inches of rain at Grant, MI, and deluged Chicago, IL, with more than three inches of rain in three hours. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2008: Severe storms moved across northern Illinois and Indiana with tornadoes and stiff winds reported. With tornado sirens blaring, the game at Wrigley Field between Cubs and Astros was stopped as fans were told to evacuate to the lower concourse. Passengers at O'Hare International Airport were evacuated to lower levels of buildings as well. An estimated 350 flights were canceled. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the National Weather Service Office in Chicago.

2009: The strongest tornado to hit Quebec since the same date in 1994 ripped through Mont-Laurier. The F2 tornado tore through the small western Quebec town severely damaging about 40 homes. Two men were taken to the hospital with minor injuries.



Our Daily Bread.

Love God. Love Others.

## The Privilege of Stewardship

### Scripture: Genesis 1:20–21, 24–28 (NIV)

20 And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." 21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

24 And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,<sup>[a]</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

### Insight By: Tim Gustafson

In Genesis 1:28, God commissioned human beings with the task of caring for His creation. But we've turned away from worshiping the Creator and have worshiped the creation instead. The apostle Paul noted that even though humanity "knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). As a result, they worshiped images of humans and animals instead of God (vv. 22–23). Stewardship of creation is ordained by God. Worship of that creation instead of the Creator is an affront to Him.

While on vacation, my husband and I walked along the beach and noticed a large, square patch of sand blocked off by a makeshift fence. A young man explained that he worked around the clock with a team of volunteers committed to guarding the eggs in each sea turtle's nest. Once the hatchlings emerge from their nest, the presence of both animals and humans threaten and decrease their chance of survival. "Even with all our efforts," he said, "scientists estimate that only one out of every five thousand hatchlings reach adulthood." These bleak numbers didn't discourage this young man, however. His passion for selflessly serving the hatchlings deepened my desire for respecting and protecting sea turtles. Now I wear a sea turtle pendant that reminds me of my God-given responsibility to care for the creatures He's made.

When God created the world, He provided a habitat in which each creature could live and thrive (Genesis 1:20–25). When He created His image-bearers, God intended for us to "rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (v. 26). He helps us serve Him as responsible stewards who use our God-given authority to care for His vast creation.

**Prayer:** Loving Creator and Sustainer of all, please show me tangible ways I can fulfill my responsibility as a steward of Your creation and inspire others to care for the world You've entrusted to us. Amen.



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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

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## News from the Associated Press

### Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press

### Yankton Press & Dakotan. August 1, 2022.

#### Editorial: COVID Continues To Be Evolving Issue

More than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, we are continually discovering just how long the road in front of us may well be.

On Saturday, the White House announced that President Joe Biden — who had recently tested positive for COVID and then, after treatment with Pfizer's Paxlovid medication, tested negative four days in a row — had tested positive again and had returned to COVID protocols prescribed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). White House officials said Biden had not exhibited any symptoms and felt fine, but the new positive reading came up through routine testing.

It adds more questions to the COVID riddle, especially regarding Paxlovid, an antiviral pill treatment that has proven effective with COVID patients who are at high risk, especially those who have not been vaccinated.

However, Biden has been vaccinated and boosted, but he is the latest person to potentially have "rebound" COVID, which is the return of positive test results after the Paxlovid treatment had been discontinued. Infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci also tested positive for COVID several weeks ago, only to get a "rebound" positive after ending his Paxlovid regimen. In fact, it was reported he encountered even worse symptoms the second time and took another round of Paxlovid to deal with it.

Meanwhile, we're dealing with another variant, BA.5, that has caused infection numbers to rise across the country this summer, although it doesn't appear to be as bad (so far) as the omicron surge last winter.

Still, at a time when many people appear to be taking a "living with COVID" attitude to the pandemic — as South Dakota News Watch described it in a story published in Saturday's Press & Dakotan — South Dakota recorded nine new COVID-related deaths last week. Also, 55 of the state's 66 counties (including seven of the eight counties in the Yankton area) were listed at high community spread.

"Each new variant means the virus has an opportunity to further evade the community-wide immunity that has developed (through vaccination or previous infection)," state epidemiologist Dr. Joshua Clayton told South Dakota News Watch. "The BA.5 subvariant appears to better evade the human immune response, which will likely result in more COVID-19 infections. This is because people will have a harder time fighting off the virus, even though they have been infected or vaccinated. The BA.5 variant may also result in more people becoming hospitalized or dying if they become infected with COVID-19."

So, questions remain — or more precisely, the problem evolves with the subvariants. And those problems range from long COVID to "rebound" COVID to the changing attitude of an American public yearning to move on from the pandemic siege mentality.

Ultimately, all this is a reminder that, while we may see ourselves nearer to the end than the beginning when it comes to COVID-19, the fight appears increasingly likely to be with us for a long time to come.

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) \_ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

01-02-11-23-30

(one, two, eleven, twenty-three, thirty)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America



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13-20-35-42-43, Star Ball: 8, ASB: 2

(thirteen, twenty, thirty-five, forty-two, forty-three; Star Ball: eight; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$17,840,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 36,000,000

Powerball

09-21-56-57-66, Powerball: 11, Power Play: 2

(nine, twenty-one, fifty-six, fifty-seven, sixty-six; Powerball: eleven; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000,000

## Oglala Sioux ban missionary, require ministries to register

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Oglala Sioux Tribe is requiring churches and missionaries to register with the tribe before entering the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota after an evangelist was banned from entering the reservation for distributing a pamphlet that disparaged traditional Lakota spirituality.

The tribal ordinance, which does not apply to local churches and ministries run by tribal members, was passed in late July amid concern from some tribal council members over Christian ministries evangelizing on the reservation, working with children as well as a history of abuse against Native Americans by some churches. The tribe's leadership has insisted it remains open to all religions, in keeping with its Bill of Rights, but the action showed significant pushback against some Christian missionary groups.

"The history of abuses by the churches on Indigenous peoples has caused generational trauma to Indigenous peoples across the world," the tribal council stated in its ordinance.

The council's actions were prompted by a South Dakota group called Jesus is King Missions creating a pamphlet that called Tunkasila a false god or demon, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported. It also claimed that the late Lakota medicine man Nicholas Black Elk, who converted to Catholicism and continued to practice Lakota ceremonies, had a "racist vision."

"According to the Bible, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but by him," said Michael Monfore, a missionary with the group. "I know that may not be considered politically correct, or it might be considered intolerant or bigoted, but that's what Christ said."

The tribe has banned Monfore from entering the reservation.

## South Dakota ethics board pushes ahead in Noem investigation

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota government ethics board on Wednesday pressed forward with its investigation of two complaints against Gov. Kristi Noem, resisting an effort from the Republican governor to see them dismissed and extending the time it has to examine the allegations.

Noem, a potential 2024 White House contender, is under scrutiny from the state's Government Accountability Board for allegations that she misused the powers of her office by interfering in her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license and flying on state-owned airplanes to political events. She has denied any wrongdoing.

As attorney general, Jason Ravensborg last year filed the complaints against Noem. Ravensborg, a fellow Republican, was removed from office through impeachment in June for his conduct surrounding an unrelated car crash in which he killed a pedestrian. He has continued to bring the complaints as a private citizen.

After meeting in a closed-door executive session for roughly one hour, the board's three retired judges who are evaluating the complaints voted unanimously to deny the governor's requests to dismiss the complaints. They then voted to give themselves a 60-day extension "for further investigation" to evaluate the merits of the complaints.

Ravensborg said he was "pleased" the board had continued with its investigation, adding that "the people of South Dakota deserve to know the truth of these two matters."

Noem's office said it would be a violation of state law to comment on the board's actions, referring to

a statute that holds the board's files are confidential unless the board decides to hold a contested case hearing.

The governor's requests to the board, as well as the presence of an attorney for Noem for the first time, showed a willingness to take action to see the allegations dismissed. The board has broad powers, and if it decides the complaints have merit, could refer them for criminal investigation, subpoena evidence and witnesses or eventually hold a contested case hearing.

The Government Accountability Board has taken steps to insulate itself from conflicts of interest while it takes up an issue that involves the state's most powerful political figures. Noem's appointee to the board, former state Supreme Court Chief Justice David Gilbertson, recused himself from evaluating the complaints. The board's attorney, Katie Mallery, was recused from advising the board because she works in the attorney general's office.

If the board decides laws may have been violated, state law calls for it to refer a criminal investigation to the Division of Criminal Investigation. That would put the investigation under the oversight of the interim attorney general, Mark Vargo, who was appointed by Noem after Ravensborg was removed. The board could also choose to subpoena witnesses or hold a contested case hearing if it instead finds possible "misconduct" rather than criminality.

Vargo said in a statement, "Decisions regarding recusal, either of DCI or the office in general, will be made when the issue squarely presents itself, not in advance of a possible, hypothetical situation."

It's not always the case that a prosecutor should recuse themselves from an investigation into someone who appointed them, said Kathleen Clark, a law professor who specializes in government ethics at Washington University in St. Louis. But, she said, the timing of Vargo's appointment — while the board's investigation was already underway — added an additional reason for recusal.

"It seems to me that failure to recuse would undermine the credibility of any decision in Noem's favor, particularly because she appointed this attorney general after this investigation already started," Clark said.

Noem has also forged a political partnership with the likely next attorney general, Republican Marty Jackley, with the pair exchanging endorsements earlier this year.

Ravnsborg showed an increasing willingness to bring the complaints against Noem after they fell out over his fatal car crash and she pushed hard for his impeachment.

Ravnsborg's first complaint came after The Associated Press reported that the governor took a hands-on role in a state agency soon after it had moved to deny her daughter, Cassidy Peters, an appraiser license in 2020. A Republican-controlled legislative committee concluded that Peters' application received special treatment, but did not say whether Noem's actions were appropriate.

The director of the Appraisal Certification Program, Sherry Bren, was pressured to retire soon after Peters received her license and eventually received a \$200,000 settlement from the state to withdraw an age discrimination complaint.

The former attorney general's other complaint was sparked after news website Raw Story found that Noem in 2019 used a state airplane to travel to events hosted by political organizations including the National Rifle Association and the Republican Jewish Coalition. South Dakota law bars state airplanes from being used for anything other than state business.

Noem has said she was traveling to the events as an ambassador for the state.

## How the climate deal would help farmers aid the environment

By MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — The climate deal reached last week by Senate Democrats could reduce the amount of greenhouse gases that American farmers produce by expanding programs that help accumulate carbon in soil, fund climate-focused research and lower the abundant methane emissions that come from cows.

The bill includes more than \$20 billion to improve the agriculture sector's impact on the environment, mostly by expanding existing U.S. Department of Agriculture programs that help farmers change to better practices. Farmers would be paid to improve the health of their soil, withstand extreme weather and

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protect their land if the bill is enacted.

The roughly \$370 billion climate and energy spending deal would bring the country closer to cutting greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030, according to new analyses. That is something many scientists say is important, and that President Joe Biden promised. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W. Va., a long-time hold-out on climate legislation, endorsed measures that would benefit electric vehicles, renewable energy and climate-friendly farming. Agriculture is responsible for 11% of the country's climate-warming emissions.

The funding would expand programs favored by both environmental groups and the agricultural sector, said Ben Thomas, who focuses on agriculture at the Environmental Defense Fund.

"They are voluntary, they are incentive-based, they get results in terms of implementing conservation practices on working lands," said Thomas. "It's great to see."

Thomas said historically, the agricultural sector has not aggressively tackled its contribution to climate change, but that hesitation has shifted in recent years and more money will accelerate progress. There's a lot of potential, he said.

"It is worth taking very, very seriously," Thomas said.

Cows belch an enormous amount of methane and agriculture is responsible for more than one-third of human-caused methane emissions, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This is a way that people's diets — if they are high in meat or dairy — contribute to greenhouse gas buildup. The bill directs funds towards altering what cows eat to reduce those emissions.

On farms, soil can hold or sequester carbon if it is left undisturbed and covered by a crop. Money from the bill will expand programs that help farmers turn their soil less, implement climate-friendly crop rotation practices and plant cover crops that aren't for harvest but improve soil health.

"The historic funding validates the fact that these practices are important," said Ranjani Prabhakar, an agriculture and climate policy specialist at the environmental group Earthjustice

Cover crops, for example, are only used by a fraction of farmers. If their use were to triple — from around 5% of cropland to 15% — it could remove the equivalent of 14 megatons of carbon dioxide per year, roughly the total annual emissions of New Hampshire, according to Kevin Karl, a food and climate researcher at Columbia University.

"The adoption rate is so low," Karl said. "There's a lot of potential improvement."

Federal officials already offer farmers help with a variety of environmentally-focused issues including irrigation and fertilizer use. One program helps fund conservation easements for agricultural land.

Dan Sheafer works on nitrogen research with the Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association and operates a 20-acre farm. He plants cover crops and keeps soil disturbance to a minimum — practices that benefit soil health and reduce soil erosion. But he said cover crops also have drawbacks, requiring farmers who want an environmental benefit to change their practices.

"There's just more time involved with doing cover crops," he said.

The bill also includes money for research. While it is clear that managing soil properly can capture carbon, more needs to be known about important questions like how long sequestered carbon stays in soil.

Kaiyu Guan, a professor focused on climate and agriculture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, said some people believe farmers don't pay enough attention to climate change.

"I think farmers shouldn't be blamed, they actually should be incentivized," Guan said. "Not only are they doing this to be part of the solution to help the climate, they are doing this to help their land."

The Associated Press receives support from the Walton Family Foundation for coverage of water and environmental policy. The AP is solely responsible for all content. For all of AP's environmental coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/climate-and-environment>

## After Supreme Court ruling, it's open season on US gun laws

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court ruling expanding gun rights threatens to upend firearms restrictions across the country as activists wage court battles over everything from bans on AR-15-style

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guns to age limits.

The decision handed down in June already has led one judge to temporarily block a Colorado town from enforcing a ban on the sale and possession of certain semi-automatic weapons.

The first major gun decision in more than a decade, the ruling could dramatically reshape gun laws in the U.S. even as a series of horrific mass shootings pushes the issue back into the headlines.

"The gun rights movement has been given a weapon of mass destruction, and it will annihilate approximately 75% of the gun laws eventually," said Evan Nappen, a New Jersey gun rights attorney.

The court battles come as the Biden administration and police departments across the U.S. struggle to combat a surge in violent crime and mass shootings, including several high-profile killings carried out by suspects who purchased their guns legally.

And given the sheer number of cases now working through the courts, a lot more time will be spent in courtrooms no matter who wins.

"We will see a lot of tax dollars and government resources that should be used to stop gun crime being used to defend gun laws that are lifesaving and wildly popular," said Jonathan Lowry, chief counsel and vice president at Brady, the gun control group.

Congress broke through years of deadlock to pass a modest gun violence prevention package weeks ago, and the House voted to renew a ban on high-powered semi-automatic weapons, though that effort is likely doomed in the Senate as Republicans push back on firearms restrictions and say recent spikes in gun violence should be met with a stepped-up police response.

The Supreme Court decision struck down a New York law requiring people to demonstrate a particular need to get a license to carry a concealed gun in public, saying it violates Second Amendment rights. Several other states including California, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island have similar laws expected to be directly impacted by the ruling.

In Massachusetts, for example, police chiefs can no longer deny or impose restrictions on licenses just because the applicant doesn't have a "good reason" to carry a gun. New York quickly passed a new concealed-weapon law, but Republicans there predict it will also end up being overturned.

In its New York ruling, the high court's conservative majority also changed a test lower courts had used for evaluating challenges to gun laws.

Judges should no longer consider whether the law serves public interests like enhancing public safety, the opinion authored by Justice Clarence Thomas said. Instead, they should only weigh whether the law is "consistent with the Second Amendment's text and historical understanding."

"Basically, the Supreme Court has given an invitation for the gun lobby to file lawsuits against virtually every gun law in America," Lowry said.

The Supreme Court has ordered lower courts to take another look at several other cases under the court's new test. Among them: laws in California and New Jersey that limit the amount of ammunition a gun magazine can hold and a 2013 ban on "assault weapons" in Maryland.

Gun rights groups are also challenging similar bans in California, New York, New Jersey and Delaware.

"The rifles at issue in this case are the sorts of bearable arms in common use for lawful purposes that responsible and peaceable people across the United States possess by the millions. And they are, moreover, exactly what they would bring to service in militia duty, should such be necessary," a New Jersey lawsuit brought in June by the Firearms Policy Coalition says, referencing the language of the Second Amendment.

The ruling also has come up in challenges to restrictions on gun possession for 18- to 20-year-olds in Texas and Pennsylvania. And it has been cited in a case challenging a federal ban on gun possession for people convicted of nonviolent crimes punishable by more than a year behind bars, as well as a prohibition on concealed guns on the subway in Washington, D.C.

In addition, a gun rights group is suing Colorado over the state's 2013 ban on magazines that hold more than 15 rounds, saying the high court ruling reinforces the group's argument that it infringes on Second Amendment rights. And the ruling has public defenders in New York City asking judges to drop gun possession cases.



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Not all those lawsuits will necessarily be successful. The Texas attorney general, for example, argues the Supreme Court ruling doesn't affect the state's age limit law, and more state and local governments can certainly defend their gun laws as being in line with U.S. history.

Adam Skaggs, chief counsel and policy director at the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, predicted that when the dust settles, only laws "along the margins" will eventually be struck down.

"Most judges are going to see these for what they are, which is overreaching and lacking in any merit," he said.

Backers of gun restrictions can also look to a concurring opinion from Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

Joined by Chief Justice John Roberts, Kavanaugh stressed that the Second Amendment does allow for a "variety" of gun regulations. He cited the use of background checks and mental health records as part of a licensing process to carry a gun and noted that states can forbid the carrying of firearms in "sensitive places" such as schools and government buildings.

But the Colorado decision handed down last month, while still early in the process, was a rosy sign for gun rights groups.

U.S. District Court Judge Raymond Moore, who was nominated by President Barack Obama, said he was sympathetic to the town's goal of preventing mass shootings like the one that killed 10 people at a grocery store in nearby Boulder last year. But Moore said he didn't know of "historical precedent" for a law banning "a type of weapon that is commonly used by law-abiding citizens for lawful purposes," so the gun rights groups have a strong case against the ordinance.

Encouraged by that decision, Taylor D. Rhodes, the executive director of the Rocky Mountain Gun Owners, told The Associated Press that his group was considering going after other gun measures in Colorado, where Democrats hold the majority in the state legislature and the governor's office.

Referring to the Supreme Court's ruling, Rhodes said: "The Bruen decision gave us a 4-ton wrecking ball."

## China claims 'precision missile strikes' in Taiwan Strait

By JOHNSON LAI Associated Press

KEELUNG, Taiwan (AP) — China says it conducted "precision missile strikes" in the Taiwan Strait on Thursday as part of military exercises that have raised tensions in the region to their highest level in decades.

China earlier announced that military exercises by its navy, air force and other departments were underway in six zones surrounding Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

The drills were prompted by a visit to the island by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi this week and are intended to advertise China's threat to attack the self-governing island republic. Along with its moves to isolate Taiwan diplomatically, China has long threatened military retaliation over moves by the island to solidify its de facto independence with the support of key allies including the U.S.

"Long-range armed live fire precision missile strikes were carried out on selected targets in the eastern area of the Taiwan Strait," the Eastern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army, the ruling Communist Party's military wing, said in a statement on its social media platform.

"The expected outcome was achieved," it added. No other details were given.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry said it tracked the firing of Chinese Dongfeng series missiles beginning around 1:56 p.m. Thursday. It said in a statement it used various early warning surveillance systems to track the missile launches, which were directed at waters northeast and southwest of Taiwan.

The defense ministry also said they tracked long-distance rockets and ammunition firing in outlying islands in Matsu, Wuqiu and Dongyin.

Earlier during the day, Taiwan's Defense ministry said its forces were on alert and monitoring the situation, while seeking to avoid escalating tensions. Civil defense drills were held last week and notices were placed on designated air raid shelters months ago.

China's "irrational behavior" intends to alter the status quo and disrupt regional peace and stability, the ministry said.

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"The three service branches will combine efforts with all the people to jointly safeguard national security and territorial integrity" while adapting to the situation as it develops, the statement said.

China's official Xinhua News Agency reported the exercises were joint operations focused on "blockade, sea target assault, strike on ground targets, and airspace control."

Ma Chen-kun, a professor at Taiwan's National Defense University, said the drills were aimed at showing off the Chinese military's ability to deploy precision weapons to cut off Taiwan's links with the outside and facilitate the landing of troops.

The announced drills are "more complete, and if the People's Liberation Army actually invades Taiwan in an all-out invasion, the concrete actions it will take, it's all in this particular exercise," Ma said.

"The main thing is they will cut off Taiwan's links to the outside world, from their sea, they would suppress the coastal defense firepower," he said.

Meanwhile, the mood in Taiwan was calm.

In Keelung, a city on the northern coast of Taiwan and close to two of the announced drill areas, swimmers took their morning laps in a natural pool built in the ocean.

Lu Chuan-hsiung, 63, was enjoying his morning swim, saying he wasn't worried. "Because Taiwanese and Chinese, we're all one family. There's a lot of mainlanders here, too," he said.

"Everyone should want money, not bullets," he quipped, saying the economy wasn't doing so well.

Those who have to work on the ocean were more concerned. Fishermen are likely to be the most affected by the drills, which cover six different areas surrounding Taiwan, part of which come into the island's territorial waters.

Most fishermen will continue to try to fish, as it is the season for squid.

"It's very close. This will definitely impact us, but if they want to do this, what can we do? We can just avoid that area," said Chou Ting-tai, who owns a fishing vessel.

While the U.S. has not said it would intervene, it has bases and forward-deployed assets in the area, including aircraft carrier battle groups.

On Thursday, the U.S. Navy said its USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier was operating in the Philippine Sea, east of Taiwan, as part of "normal scheduled operations."

U.S. law requires the government to treat threats to Taiwan, including blockades, as matters of "grave concern."

The drills are due to run from Thursday to Sunday and include missile strikes on targets in the seas north and south of the island in an echo of the last major Chinese military drills aimed at intimidating Taiwan's leaders and voters held in 1995 and 1996.

While China has given no word on numbers of troops and military assets involved, the exercises appear to be the largest held near Taiwan in geographical terms.

The exercises involved troops from the navy, air force, rocket force, strategic support force and logistic support force, Xinhua reported.

## In S. Korea, Pelosi avoids public comments on Taiwan, China

By HYUNG-JIN KIM AND HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — After infuriating China over her trip to Taiwan, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi met South Korean political leaders in Seoul on Thursday but avoided making direct public comments on relations with Beijing and Taipei that could further increase regional tensions.

Pelosi, the first House speaker to visit Taiwan in 25 years, said Wednesday in Taipei that the American commitment to democracy in the self-governing island and elsewhere "remains ironclad." In response, China on Thursday began military exercises, including missile strike training, in six zones surrounding Taiwan, in what could be the biggest of their kind since the mid-1990s.

After visiting Taiwan, Pelosi and other members of her congressional delegation flew to South Korea — a key U.S. ally where about 28,500 American troops are deployed — on Wednesday evening, as part of an Asian tour that included earlier stops in Singapore and Malaysia.

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She met South Korean National Assembly Speaker Kim Jin Pyo and other senior members of Parliament on Thursday. After that hour-long meeting, Pelosi spoke about the bilateral alliance, forged in blood during the 1950-53 Korean War, and legislative efforts to boost ties, but didn't directly mention her Taiwan visit or the Chinese protests.

"We also come to say to you that a friendship, a relationship that began from urgency and security, many years ago, has become the warmest of friendships," Pelosi said in a joint news conference with Kim. "We want to advance security, economy and governance in the inter-parliamentary way."

Neither Pelosi nor Kim took questions from journalists.

Kim said he and Pelosi shared concerns about North Korea's increasing nuclear threat. He said the two agreed to support their governments' push for denuclearization and peace on the Korean Peninsula based on both strong deterrence against North Korea and diplomacy.

Pelosi and her delegation later spoke by phone with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on the alliance, foreign policy and other issues. Yoon is on vacation this week, but critics accuse him of intentionally shunning a face-to-face meeting with Pelosi in consideration of ties with China, South Korea's biggest trading partner. Yoon's office said it had reviewed national interests.

During the phone conversation, Pelosi and other members of her congressional delegation didn't bring up the Taiwan issue, and Yoon also didn't raise the matter, Yoon's office said.

In recent years, South Korea has been struggling to strike a balance between the United States and China as their rivalry has deepened. Yoon, a conservative, took office in May with a vow to boost South Korea's military alliance with the United States and take a tougher line on North Korean provocations.

Later Thursday, Pelosi was to visit a border area with North Korea that is jointly controlled by the American-led U.N. Command and North Korea, South Korean officials said. If that visit occurs, Pelosi would be the highest-level American to go to the Joint Security Area since then-President Donald Trump visited in 2019 for a meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Yoon said Pelosi's visit to the JSA would demonstrate "a strong deterrence against North Korea" by the allies, said Kim Tae-hyo, a deputy presidential national security adviser.

Sitting inside the 4-kilometer (2.5-mile) -wide Demilitarized Zone, a buffer created at the end of the Korean War, the JSA is the site of past bloodshed and a venue for numerous talks. U.S. presidents and other top officials have often traveled to the JSA and other border areas to reaffirm their security commitment to South Korea.

Any statement critical of North Korea by Pelosi is certain to draw a furious response from it. On Wednesday, the North's Foreign Ministry slammed the United States over her Taiwan trip, saying "the current situation clearly shows that the impudent interference of the U.S. in internal affairs of other countries ... (is) the root cause of harassed peace and security in the region."

The Chinese military exercises launched Thursday involve its navy, air force and other departments and are to last until Sunday. They include missile strikes on targets in the seas north and south of the island in an echo of the last major Chinese military drills aimed at intimidating Taiwan's leaders and voters in 1995 and 1996.

China's official Xinhua News Agency said the exercises are joint operations focused on "blockade, sea target assault, strike on ground targets, and airspace control." Taiwan has put its military on alert and staged civil defense drills, while the U.S. has numerous naval assets in the area.

China already has flown fighter jets and other war planes toward Taiwan, and blocked imports of citrus and fish from Taiwan.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry called the Chinese drills "unreasonable actions in an attempt to change the status quo, destroy the peace and stability of the region."

Pelosi's Taiwan visit has angered China because it views the island as a breakaway province to be annexed by force if necessary. China views visits to Taiwan by foreign officials as recognizing its sovereignty.

"Today the world faces a choice between democracy and autocracy," Pelosi said in a short speech during a meeting with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen on Wednesday. "America's determination to preserve democracy, here in Taiwan and around the world, remains ironclad."

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The Biden administration and Pelosi have said the United States remains committed to the "one-China policy," which recognizes Beijing as the government of China but allows informal relations and defense ties with Taipei. The administration discouraged but did not prevent Pelosi from visiting.

National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby sought to tamp down fears. He told ABC's "Good Morning America" on Wednesday that U.S. officials "don't believe we're at the brink now, and there's certainly no reason for anybody to be talking about being at the brink going forward."

Addressing Beijing's threats, Pelosi said in Taiwan she hopes it's clear that while China has prevented Taiwan from attending certain international meetings, "that they understand they will not stand in the way of people coming to Taiwan as a show of friendship and of support."

Pelosi noted that congressional support for Taiwan is bipartisan, and she praised the island's democracy. She stopped short of saying that the U.S. would defend Taiwan militarily and emphasized that Congress is "committed to the security of Taiwan, in order to have Taiwan be able to most effectively defend themselves."

Tsai pushed back firmly against Beijing's military exercises, parts of which Taiwan says will enter its waters. "Facing deliberately heightened military threats, Taiwan will not back down," Tsai said at her meeting with Pelosi. "We will firmly uphold our nation's sovereignty and continue to hold the line of defense for democracy."

On Thursday, the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations called for calm in the Taiwan Strait, which separates mainland China and Taiwan, and urged the avoidance of any "provocative action." ASEAN foreign ministers, who are meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, for a regional forum, said they were concerned the situation could "destabilize the region and eventually could lead to miscalculation, serious confrontation, open conflicts and unpredictable consequences among major powers."

Pelosi's focus has always been the same, she said, going back to her 1991 visit to Beijing's Tiananmen Square, when she and other lawmakers unfurled a small banner supporting democracy two years after a bloody military crackdown on protesters at the square. That visit was also about human rights and what she called dangerous technology transfers to "rogue countries."

Pelosi's trip heightened U.S.-China tensions more than recent visits by other members of Congress because of her position as leader of the House of Representatives. The last House speaker to visit Taiwan was Newt Gingrich in 1997.

China and Taiwan, which split in 1949 after a civil war, have no official relations but multibillion-dollar business ties.

## Bank of England likely to raise interest rates — maybe a lot

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The Bank of England is likely to announce its biggest interest rate increase in more than 27 years on Thursday as it seeks to rein in accelerating inflation driven by the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Most economists expect the bank's monetary policy committee to approve a half-percentage point increase after Gov. Andrew Bailey said two weeks ago that the United Kingdom's central bank would "act forcefully" if the inflation picture worsened. That would push the bank's key interest rate to 1.75%, the highest since the depths of the global financial crisis in December 2008.

The Bank of England has been criticized for moving too slowly to combat inflation, which accelerated to a 40-year high of 9.4% in June and has driven a cost-of-living crisis. While the central bank has approved five consecutive rate increases since December, none has been more than a quarter-point.

By contrast, the U.S. Federal Reserve increased its key rate by three-quarters of a point in each of the past two months to a range of 2.25% to 2.5%. Even the European Central Bank's first increase in 11 years was a larger-than-expected half-point hike last month.

"After a number of central banks across the world have picked up the pace of their tightening cycle, the



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Bank of England is starting to look like something of a laggard when it comes to raising rates," said Luke Bartholomew, senior economist at abrdn. "We expect this impression to be somewhat corrected ... with the bank hiking interest rates by half a percent."

The last time the U.K. approved a similar rate increase was December 1994, when interest rate decisions were still made by the government's treasury chief in consultation with the central bank governor.

Central banks worldwide are struggling to control surging inflation without tipping economies into recession that were just beginning to recover from the coronavirus pandemic. Higher interest rates raise borrowing costs for consumers, businesses and the government, which tends to reduce spending and ease rising prices. But such moves are also likely to slow economic growth.

The International Monetary Fund last week cut its outlook for global economic growth, citing higher-than-expected inflation, continuing COVID-19 outbreaks in China and further effects from the war in Ukraine. The U.K. economy is likely to expand just 0.5% next year, the slowest growth rate among the world's advanced economies, the IMF said.

The landscape is especially complicated for central banks because many of the factors driving inflation are beyond their control, particularly food and energy prices that have soared due to uncertainty surrounding Russia's invasion.

But those external pressures are now becoming embedded in the U.K. economy, with public- and private-sector workers demanding wage increases to prevent inflation from eroding their living standards.

"This explains why at the MPC's last meeting we adopted language which made clear that if we see signs of greater persistence of inflation, and price and wage setting would be such signs, we will have to act forcefully," Bailey said in speech last month. "In simple terms, this means that a 50 basis point increase will be among the choices on the table when we next meet."

Economists also are anticipating the bank's updated economic forecasts amid indications that the surge in inflation is likely to last longer and peak at a higher level than previously expected.

In June, the bank forecast that inflation would peak at slightly above 11% in October. But some economists now suggest it could reach 15% early next year as Russia curtails natural gas shipments to Europe.

"With gas prices continuing to reach record levels, both households and businesses will see large increases in their energy bills throughout the winter and into 2023," said Jack Leslie, senior economist at the Resolution Foundation, a think tank focused on the living standards of low- and middle-income families. "How long this high inflation will last is hugely uncertain, but the cost-of-living crisis looks set to last longer and hit households harder than previously anticipated."

But even with all the pressure for a big increase in interest rates, some economists think the Bank of England will remain cautious as it seeks to protect economic growth.

Dean Turner, an economist at UBS Global Wealth Management, said he is sure the bank will raise rates, just not by how much.

"What is a central banker to do?" he asked. "Should they be prioritizing current inflation, most of which is driven by factors beyond the control of the Bank of England, or the faltering growth backdrop? I do not envy them."

## **EXPLAINER: Why is China staging drills around Taiwan?**

BEIJING (AP) — China is staging live-fire military drills in six self-declared zones surrounding Taiwan in response to a visit by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to the island Beijing claims as its own territory.

China has warned aircraft and ships to avoid the areas during the exercises, which run through Sunday. The drills appear to be a rehearsal for a potential blockade and invasion of the island that would almost certainly draw in Taiwan's chief supporter, the United States, along with American allies including Japan and Australia.

China's 2 million-strong military is the world's largest and its navy has more ships than the U.S. Taiwan's armed forces can't compare in numbers, but it has vowed to resist coercive measures to impose Chinese Communist Party rule over the self-governing island democracy.

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"It will take some hard diplomacy to reestablish a stable equilibrium," said Stanford University political scientist Kharis Templeman. "I don't know how this confrontation will ultimately play out, but I think we are in for a rocky few weeks."

The following is a look at the issues surrounding the escalation of tensions.

## WHAT IS CHINA DOING IN SEAS AND SKIES AROUND TAIWAN?

China says it has begun exercises involving warplanes, navy ships and missile strikes in six zones surrounding Taiwan. Those lie as little as 20 kilometers (12 miles) off the island's coast, potentially infringing on Taiwan's territorial waters. Few details have been given by Beijing, but it has described the drills as punishment for the U.S. allowing Pelosi's visit to proceed, even though President Joe Biden did not have the authority to prevent her traveling to the island.

Live-fire exercises are a test of a military's ability to perform missions under conditions most resembling actual warfare. In this case, they are designed to show the level of force China could unleash against Taiwan if Beijing decided to make good on the pledge to seize control of the island and punish those supporting its independence.

The exercises are thought to be the largest and most threatening toward Taiwan since Beijing launched missiles into waters north and south of the island in 1995 and 1996 in response to a visit to the U.S. by then-President Lee Teng-hui. China regularly sends warplanes into Taiwan's air defense identification zone and has at times crossed the middle line of the Taiwan Strait dividing the sides, but has stopped short of direct incursions or attacks that could spark a regional conflict.

## WHY IS CHINA TAKING THESE ACTIONS AND WHAT DOES IT HOPE TO ACHIEVE?

China has increasingly forcefully declared that Taiwan must be brought under its control by force if necessary and in defiance of Washington and other backers of the island's democracy. Pelosi's visit came at a particularly sensitive time when Chinese President and head of the armed forces Xi Jinping is preparing to seek a third five-year term as leader of the ruling Communist Party. Xi has named no successor and he's accumulated vast powers despite criticism of his handling of the economy, partly as a result of his hardline approach to COVID-19 and a marked downturn in relations with the West.

Xi has said Taiwan's fate cannot remain unsettled indefinitely and U.S. military officials have said China may seek a military solution within the next few years. China's constitution incorporates Taiwan in its national territory and its 2005 anti-secession law threatens invasion if "possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted," seen to apply in the case of a formal declaration of independence or foreign intervention.

China insists that Taiwan accept its contention that the island is a part of China, whose sole legitimate government sits in Beijing. In the face of China's military threats and relentless campaign to isolate Taiwan diplomatically, islanders overwhelmingly support the status quo of de facto independence. That sentiment has been further reinforced by Beijing's ruthless crackdown on political rights and free speech in Hong Kong, which China has long touted as a model for its future governance of Taiwan.

## WHAT HAS BEEN THE RESPONSE FROM TAIWAN AND THE U.S.?

Taiwan has put its military on alert and staged civil defense drills. While its air force, navy and 165,000-member armed forces are a fraction of the size of China's, they have been bolstered by high-tech weaponry and early-warning systems intended to make a Chinese invasion as difficult as possible. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which China has tacitly supported, has also served as a wakeup call to Taipei, which is now looking to overhaul training and tactics.

Numerous U.S. naval and other military assets are currently deployed in areas close to Taiwan, including the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and its battle group. Washington has comprehensively rejected China's claims that the Taiwan Strait is sovereign Chinese territory and maintains the right to sail past Chinese outposts in the South China Sea, despite Chinese protests.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND HOW LONG WILL TENSIONS PERSIST?

It remains unclear whether China will seek to keep tensions at a high pitch even after the end of the current round of exercises. Spokespeople from the Foreign and Defense Ministries, the Cabinet's Taiwan

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Affairs Office and other departments have vowed President Tsai Ing-wen's administration and the U.S. government will pay a price over Pelosi's visit, but have not given details on how and when that objective will be achieved.

Following the visit, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told U.S. National Public Radio that "the possibility of some kind of incident is real," given the scale of the Chinese exercises.

"And we believe that what China is doing here is not responsible. We believe that it is escalating tensions unnecessarily," Sullivan said.

The long-standing modus vivendi between Washington and Beijing is being "seriously challenged" by both sides, said Templeman, the Stanford University political scientist.

Washington has pushed back against Beijing with high-level visits, a relaxation of official contact restrictions and arms sales.

"Washington as a whole has become much less concerned about offending China and much less deferential to Beijing's demands related to Taiwan," Templeman said.

## **Analysis: Iran now speaking openly on nuclear bomb prospects**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iranian officials now speak openly about something long denied by Tehran as it enriches uranium at its closest-ever levels to weapons-grade material: The Islamic Republic is ready to build an atomic weapon at will.

The remarks could be bluster to force more bargaining-table concessions from the U.S. without planning to seek the bomb. Or, as analysts warn, Iran could reach a point like North Korea did some 20 years ago where it decides having the ultimate weapon outweighs any further international sanctions.

All this could be put to the test Thursday as Iran, the U.S. and the European Union prepare for a snap summit that appears to be a last-ditch effort in Vienna to revive Tehran's tattered nuclear deal amid the new pressure. That includes one Iranian video online suggesting the country's ballistic missiles could "turn New York into a heap of rubble from hell."

Hyperbole aside, the language taken as a whole marks a distinct verbal escalation from Tehran.

"In a few days we were able to enrich uranium up to 60% and we can easily produce 90% enriched uranium. ... Iran has the technical means to produce a nuclear bomb but there has been no decision by Iran to build one," Kamal Kharrazi, an adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, told Al Jazeera in mid-July. Uranium enriched at 90% is considered weapons-grade.

Ataollah Mohajerani, a culture minister under reformist President Mohammad Khatami, then wrote in Iran's Etemad daily newspaper that Kharrazi's announcement that Iran could make a nuclear weapon provided a "moral lesson" for Israel and President Joe Biden.

And finally Mohammad Eslami, the head of Iran's civilian nuclear agency, made his own reported comment about a potential military aspect to Iran's program.

"As Mr. Kharrazi mentioned, Iran has the technical ability to make an atomic bomb, but there is no such plan on the agenda," Eslami said Monday, according to the semiofficial Fars news agency.

Eslami's agency later said he had been "misunderstood and misjudged" — likely a sign Iran's theocracy didn't want him to have been so specific. Eslami's threat also carries more weight than others as he's directly worked for Iranian defense agencies linked to Iran's military nuclear program — including one that secretly built uranium-enriching centrifuges with Pakistani nuclear proliferator A.Q. Khan's help.

But by 2003, Iran had abandoned its military nuclear program, according to U.S. intelligence agencies, America's European allies and IAEA inspectors. The U.S. had just invaded Iraq, citing later-debunked claims of Saddam Hussein hiding weapons of mass destruction. America already was at war in Afghanistan, another nation neighboring Iran.

Libya under then-dictator Moammar Gadhafi gave up its own nascent military atomic program that relied on the same Pakistani-designed centrifuges that Tehran bought from Khan.

Ultimately, Iran reached its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, which saw it receive economic sanc-

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tions relief while it drastically curtailed its program. Under the deal, Tehran could enrich uranium to 3.67%, while maintaining a stockpile of uranium of 300 kilograms (660 pounds) under constant scrutiny of IAEA surveillance cameras and inspectors.

But then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord in 2018, saying he'd negotiate a stronger deal including Tehran's ballistic missile program and its support of regional militant groups. He didn't. Attacks on land, at sea and in the air raised tensions across the wider Mideast. And Iran after a year began breaking the deal's terms.

As of the last public IAEA count, Iran has a stockpile of some 3,800 kilograms (8,370 pounds) of enriched uranium. More worrying for nonproliferation experts, Iran now enriches uranium up to 60% purity — a level it never reached before that is a short, technical step away from 90%. Those experts warn Iran has enough 60%-enriched uranium to reprocess into fuel for at least one nuclear bomb.

Iranian diplomats for years have pointed to Khamenei's preachings as a binding fatwa, or religious edict, that Iran wouldn't build an atomic bomb.

"We do not need nuclear bombs. We have no intention of using a nuclear bomb," Khamenei said in a November 2006 speech, according to a transcript from his office. "We do not claim to dominate the world, like the Americans, we do not want to dominate the world by force and need a nuclear bomb. Our nuclear bomb and explosive power is our faith."

But such edicts aren't written in stone. Khamenei's predecessor, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued fatwas that revised his own earlier pronouncements after he took power following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. And anyone who would follow the 83-year-old Khamenei as the country's supreme leader could make his own fatwas revising those previously issued.

For now though, it appears Iran will continue to lean into the atomic threat. Public opinion appears to be shifting as well.

A July telephone survey by IranPoll, a Toronto-based firm, suggests about a third of the Iranian public now support abandoning the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons and pursuing the bomb. A September 2021 poll found less than one in 10 respondents supported such a move.

The margin of error for the firm's two polls of 1,000 respondents was around 3 percentage points.

A video recently posted online by an account believed to be associated with Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard bluntly made the missile threat on New York. It described Iran as being "one step away from a nuclear breakthrough and from joining (other countries) that have nuclear weapons."

The video's title? "When Will Iran's Nuclear Bombs Be Awakened From Their Slumber?"

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EDITOR'S NOTE — Jon Gambrell, the news director for the Gulf and Iran for The Associated Press, has reported from each of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Iran and other locations across the world since joining the AP in 2006. Follow him on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP](https://www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP).

## **Palestinians left in tense limbo by Israeli expulsion order**

By SAM McNEIL Associated Press

AL-FAKHEET, West Bank (AP) — After repeatedly rebuilding his home only to have it demolished by Israeli soldiers, Mohammed Abu Sabaha has a new plan to remain on the land — he is moving into a cave.

Abu Sabaha is among some 1,000 Palestinians at risk of expulsion from an arid region of the occupied West Bank that the Israeli military has designated as a live-fire training zone. Israel's Supreme Court upheld their expulsion in May after a two-decade legal battle.

Most residents of the area, known as Masafer Yatta, have remained in place since the ruling, even as Israeli security forces periodically roll in to demolish structures. But they could be forced out at any time, and rights groups fear Israel will do it gradually to evade international scrutiny.

The entrance to Abu Sabaha's cave is surrounded by the ruins of homes and animal pens that the soldiers demolished in earlier raids. The coo and cackle of chickens can be heard from inside a wrecked coop. A set of stone steps leads down into the cave, where he has strung up electrical lights, but it will take time



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to turn it into a home for his wife, parents and six children.

"We have suffered a lot because of this ruling. Especially the kids, who were born here," he said, standing in the dimly lit cave. "They fled demolitions, then went back when we rebuilt, so many times."

When the army isn't demolishing homes it is staging training exercises nearby. Tanks throw up dust clouds and heavy machine-gun fire and explosions echo across the desert hills. Abu Sabaha says his 3-year-old daughter Zeynab tenses up every time she sees them.

"She's always afraid they will come to destroy once again," he said.

The military declared this part of Masafer Yatta a firing and training zone in the early 1980s. Israeli authorities said the residents — Arab Bedouin who practice a traditional form of agriculture and animal herding — only used the area part of the year and had no permanent structures there at the time. In November 1999, security forces expelled some 700 villagers and destroyed homes and cisterns. The legal battle began the following year.

The families say they have been there for decades — from long before Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war — and have nowhere else to live. Some residents have traditionally resided in caves part of the year, as they graze sheep and goats in different areas.

Israel's Supreme Court sided with the state in May, after the villagers rejected a compromise that would have allowed them to enter at certain times and practice agriculture for part of the year.

Since then, the army has demolished several structures and seized vehicles, setting up roadblocks and checkpoints to limit movement, according to Nidal Younes, head of the local council.

"All of this is within the framework of occupation, to frighten, to scare, to make people's lives extremely difficult to force them to leave," he said.

Masafer Yatta is in the 60% of the occupied West Bank known as Area C, where the Israeli military exercises full control under interim peace agreements reached with the Palestinians in the 1990s. Palestinian structures built without military permits — which residents say are nearly impossible to obtain — are at risk of demolition.

Area C is also home to several Jewish settlement outposts that are protected by the army despite being built without Israeli authorization. Nearly 500,000 settlers live in communities across the West Bank, most of which were planned and approved by the government. Many resemble small towns or suburbs, with apartment blocks, shopping malls and factories.

The Palestinians and the international community view the settlements as a major obstacle to resolving the century-old conflict because they absorb and divide up the land on which a future Palestinian state would be established alongside Israel.

Israel officially considers the West Bank disputed territory subject to negotiations, but every government since 1967 has expanded settlements, and the country's dominant right-wing parties are opposed to Palestinian statehood. One of the Supreme Court justices who issued the ruling on Masafer Yatta is a settler.

Eugene Kontorovich, a legal scholar at Israel's Kohelet Policy Forum, a right-wing think tank, said Israel could not allow "private squatters to determine the uses of state land" and was justified in barring people from entering a military firing range.

"The technical, legal justification is that it's not their land," he added.

Rights groups say several other Palestinian communities across the West Bank could face similar threats of expulsion if the international community does not pressure Israel over Masafer Yatta. Israel has declared firing zones in 20% of the West Bank, affecting some 5,000 Palestinians from 38 communities, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Dror Sadot, a spokeswoman for the Israeli rights group B'Tselem, said Israel would likely implement a "quiet transfer" in which it gradually makes life so difficult that families trickle out on their own.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, which has been waging a legal battle on behalf of the residents of Masafer Yatta for more than two decades, has filed another petition against the Supreme Court ruling.

Roni Pelli, an attorney with the group, said the "terrible ruling" goes against international law, which prohibits the transfer of civilians out of occupied territory.

"The legal consequence is that international humanitarian law is no longer relevant in the West Bank

because the military commander can issue any order he wants," she said.

"You don't have to put people on trucks to force them from the land," she added. "I am really, really worried that it might become a humanitarian disaster."

## Closing arguments in Brittney Griner's drug case in Russia

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Closing arguments in Brittney Griner's cannabis possession case in Russia are set for Thursday, nearly six months after the American basketball star was arrested at a Moscow airport in a case that has reached the highest levels of U.S.-Russia diplomacy.

Griner faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted. Although a conviction appears almost certain, given that Russian courts rarely acquit defendants and Griner has acknowledged that there were vape canisters with cannabis oil in her luggage, judges have considerable latitude on sentencing.

Lawyers for the Phoenix Mercury center and two-time Olympic gold medalist have pursued strategies to bolster Griner's contention that she had no criminal intent and that the canisters ended up in her luggage due to hasty packing. They have presented character witnesses from the Russian team that she plays for in the WNBA off-season and written testimony from a doctor who said he prescribed her cannabis for pain treatment.

It's not clear when the verdict will be announced. If she does not go free, attention will turn to the high-stakes possibility of a prisoner swap.

Before her trial began in July, the State Department designated her as "wrongfully detained," moving her case under the supervision of its special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, effectively the government's chief hostage negotiator.

Then last week, in an extraordinary move, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken 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 over Griner is at odds with U.S. efforts to isolate the Kremlin.

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.

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."

## Months into war, Ukraine refugees slow to join EU workforce

By KAREL JANICEK and JOVANA GEC Associated Press

PRAGUE (AP) — Liudmyla Chudyjovych used to have a career as a lawyer in Ukraine and big plans for the future. That was before the Russian invasion forced the 41-year-old woman to put her daughter's safety first, and leave both her job and home behind.

Since fleeing the town of Stryj in western Ukraine in May, Chudyjovych has found a new job in the Czech Republic. But instead of practicing law, she's had to settle for work as a housekeeper at a hotel in the capital, Prague.

"It's just a different stage of my career," she said. "That's simply how it is."

One of the millions of refugees who have fled Ukraine since the Feb. 24 Russian invasion, Chudyjovych considers herself lucky to have a job at all. Not fluent enough in either Czech or English, Chudyjovych

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said she didn't mind the work as long as she and her daughter are safe.

Although the European Union introduced regulations early in the war to make it easier for Ukrainian refugees to live and work in its 27 member nations while they decide whether to seek asylum or return home, many are only now starting to find jobs — and many are still struggling.

Some 6.5 million Ukrainians, have entered the EU since February, according to Frontex, the EU Border and Coast Guard Agency, streaming into neighboring countries before many moved on to more prosperous nations in the West. Around half have since returned to Ukraine.

Only a relatively small number of those who stayed had entered the EU labor market by mid-June, according to the European Commission.

A recent Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report looking at the potential impact Ukrainian refugees will have on the EU workforce projected it will be about twice as large as the 2014-2017 inflow of refugees, which included many fleeing war in Syria.

The study estimated the Czech Republic, which has the lowest unemployment rate in Europe, would add the most Ukrainians to its workforce by the end of the year, with an increase of 2.2%, followed by Poland and Estonia. About 1.2 million workers would be added to the European workforce overall, mainly in service occupations, the report said.

Still, the influx is unlikely to drive down wages or boost unemployment in European countries, many of which face labor shortages due in part to their aging populations.

"Considering the labor needs of the main host countries, a negative impact in terms of employment or wages for the resident population ... seems very unlikely," the report concluded.

The EU effort to help the Ukrainians has won praise from the U.N. Refugee Agency and other rights groups dealing with migration. But they also note a major difference in the treatment of people fleeing wars or poverty in the Middle East, Africa or Asia, who often have to wait years before overcoming the hurdles for acquiring residency papers or work permits.

Still, there are many challenges ahead for Ukrainian refugees looking for work.

In addition to language barriers, skilled workers from Ukraine often lack documentation to prove their professional credentials to get better-paid employment. Their diplomas may not be recognized in their host countries, meaning many have to take language and training courses before they can seek professional opportunities.

Because men between the ages of 18 and 60 are banned from leaving Ukraine, many refugees are women with children, which can be an additional obstacle for trying to find work. Many women are still weighing their options and might decide to return home for the start of the school year in September, officials say, despite the war being far from over.

In Poland, which has taken in about 1 million Ukrainian refugees, more than any other EU nation, just over a third have found work, according to the Polish minister of labor and social policy, Marlena Malag. Some have gotten jobs as nurses or Ukrainian language teachers in Polish schools, while others are working as housekeepers or waitresses.

In Portugal, some of the country's largest companies have special job recruitment programs for Ukrainians, while the Institute for Employment and Professional Training offers free Portuguese language classes.

In Germany, about half of some 900,000 Ukrainian refugees have registered with the country's employment agency, though no figures are available on how many have actually found jobs. The Mediendienst Integration group, which tracks migration in Germany, says about half have university degrees, but doesn't specify how many have been able to work in their professional fields.

Natalia Borysova was chief editor of a morning TV show in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv before fleeing with her daughters, 11 and 13, in March, and settling in the German city of Cologne. She applied for low-paying jobs such as housekeeping, but ultimately decided to turn them down to focus on learning German.

"I'm an optimist and I am sure that I will find a job after learning the language," the 41-year-old said via WhatsApp. "Perhaps on a different level than in Ukraine, but in the same field. Now it just doesn't make

sense for me to work for the minimum wage.”

Borysova, like other Ukrainian refugees, receives an allowance from the German government that helps the family pay for food and housing, but said she wants to return to work as soon as she masters German.

Chudyjovych is among some 400,000 Ukrainians in the Czech Republic who have registered for special long-term visas that grant access to jobs, health care, education and other benefits. Nearly 80,000 have already found work, the government said.

At the Background café in Prague’s Old Town, 15 Ukrainian refugees work with the Czech staff as part of a project sponsored by the Mama Coffee chain. The refugees also receive free language classes and other programs.

Lisa Himich, 22, from Kyiv, likes it and says “it feels like home here.”

For Chudyjovych, working as a housekeeper is far better than living in fear and under the constant sound of air raid sirens.

“I thought I would miss Ukraine and be homesick but that hasn’t happened at all,” Chudyjovych said. “It’s peaceful here and I feel like a human being.”

## Firefighters partially surround deadly California fire

By HAVEN DALEY and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

KLAMATH RIVER, Calif. (AP) — Firefighters have gotten their first hold on California’s deadliest and most destructive fire of the year and expected that the blaze would remain stalled through the weekend.

The McKinney Fire near the Oregon border was 10% contained as of Wednesday night and bulldozers and hand crews were making progress carving firebreaks around much of the rest of the blaze, fire officials said at a community meeting.

The southeastern corner of the blaze above the Siskiyou County seat of Yreka, which has about 7,800 residents, was contained. Evacuation orders for sections of the town and Hawkinsville were downgraded to warnings, allowing people to return home but with a warning that the situation remained dangerous.

About 1,300 residents remained under evacuation orders, officials said.

The fire didn’t advance on Wednesday, following several days of brief but heavy rain from thunderstorms that provided cloudy, damper weather.

“This is a sleeping giant right now,” said Darryl Laws, a unified incident commander on the blaze.

In addition, firefighters expected Thursday to fully surround a 1,000-acre (404-hectare) spot fire on the northern edge of the McKinney Fire.

The fire broke out last Friday and has charred nearly 90 square miles (233 square kilometers) of forestland, left tinder-dry by drought. More than 100 homes and other buildings have burned and four bodies have been found, including two in a burned car in a driveway.

The blaze was driven at first by fierce winds ahead of a thunderstorm cell. More storms earlier this week proved a mixed blessing. A drenching rain Tuesday dumped up to 3 inches (7.6 centimeters) on some eastern sections of the blaze but most of the fire area got next to nothing, said Dennis Burns, a fire behavior analyst.

The latest storm also brought concerns about possible river flooding and mudslides. A private contractor in a pickup truck who was aiding the firefighting effort was hurt when a bridge gave out and washed away the vehicle, Kreider said. The contractor had non-life-threatening injuries, she said.

However, no weather events were forecast for the next three or four days that could give the fire “legs,” Burns said.

The good news came too late for many people in the scenic hamlet of Klamath River, which was home to about 200 people before the fire reduced many of the homes to ashes, along with the post office, community center and other buildings.

At an evacuation center Wednesday, Bill Simms said that three of the four victims were his neighbors. Two were a married couple who lived up the road.

“I don’t get emotional about stuff and material things,” Simms said. “But when you hear my next-door



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neighbors died ... that gets a little emotional."

Their names haven't been officially confirmed, which could take several days, said Courtney Kreider, a spokesperson with the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office.

Simms, a 65-year-old retiree, bought his property six years ago as a second home with access to hunting and fishing. He went back to check on his property Tuesday and found it was destroyed.

"The house, the guest house and the RV were gone. It's just wasteland, devastation," Simms said. He found the body of one of his two cats, which he buried. The other cat is still missing. He was able to take his two dogs with him to the shelter.

Harlene Schwander, 82, lost the home she had just moved into a month ago to be closer to her son and daughter-in-law. Their home survived but her house was torched.

Schwander, an artist, said she only managed to grab a few family photos and some jewelry before evacuating. Everything else — including her art collection — went up in flames.

"I'm sad. Everybody says it was just stuff, but it was all I had," she said.

California and much of the rest of the West is in drought and wildfire danger is high, with the historically worst of the fire season still to come. Fires are burning in Montana, Idaho and Nebraska and have destroyed homes and threaten communities.

Scientists say 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. California has seen its largest, most destructive and deadliest wildfires in the last five years. In 2018, a massive blaze in the Sierra Nevada foothills destroyed much of the city of Paradise and killed 85 people, the most deaths from a U.S. wildfire in a century.

In northwestern Montana, a fire that has destroyed at least four homes and forced the evacuation of about 150 residences west of Flathead Lake continued to be pushed north by winds on Wednesday, fire officials said.

Crews had to be pulled off the lines on Wednesday afternoon due to increased fire activity, Sara Rouse, a public information officer, told NBC Montana.

There were concerns the fire could reach Lake Mary Ronan by Wednesday evening, officials said.

The fire, which started on July 29 in grass on the Flathead Indian Reservation, quickly moved into timber and charred nearly 29 square miles (76 square km).

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.

And a wildfire 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.

## Jill Biden carries out new mission in 2nd year as first lady

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jill Biden barnstormed the country during her debut year as first lady as if on a one-woman mission to help her husband's administration tackle the problem of the moment: getting people vaccinated and boosted against the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

New headwinds blowing in year two — President Joe Biden's low standing with the public and November elections that could put Republicans back in control of Congress — have set her on a fresh mission: working to help elect Democrats who can help her husband.

She's making no secret of her frustration with Washington.

"Joe truly believes in working with Congress and getting things done, but obviously the Republicans are pulling together and they're not budging. They are not budging," the first lady said at one of four fundraisers she headlined in the past month.

"Who would think that AR-15s make any sense for anything? Who doesn't believe in the need to deal with climate change?" she said at a July fundraiser in Nantucket, Massachusetts, referencing Republican opposition to the president's call for an assault weapons ban and more spending on climate change.

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With school out for the summer, the teacher-first lady was free to travel again in her role as the president's chief surrogate, highlighting administration accomplishments and showing a more political side while testing possible fall campaign messages before audiences big and small.

She put a voice to the urgency she and the president feel over unfinished aspects of his agenda.

After accompanying him to the scene of deadly mass shootings at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, and an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, the first lady — a community college professor — urged audiences to demand tougher gun laws from Congress.

"We need to fight, now, for the lives of our children and for the safety of our schools," she told the National PTA Convention in June, shortly after they visited Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, where 19 pupils and two teachers were killed by a man firing an AR-15.

Congress represents "the will of the people," she said, "and that's why we need the people to speak up. Parents and teachers. All of us."

She raised the gun issue later at the American Federation of Teachers convention in Boston in July, saying that "we believe that AR-15s, the weapon that tore apart 19 children and two teachers in their classroom, have no place on our streets."

And she turned the Supreme Court's decision overturning the constitutional right to an abortion into an argument for sending more Democrats to Congress come November. President Biden has promised to sign a bill enshrining the right to an abortion in federal law, but there isn't enough support for it in Congress, where Democrats have slim majorities.

"All of us have a teacher voice for when things go off the rails and now is the time to use it," she said in Boston.

In Nantucket, the first lady defended her spouse of 45 years, saying "he's just had so many things thrown his way" that weren't expected, including the abortion ruling and Russia's war against Ukraine.

"He had so many hopes and plans for things he wanted to do, but every time you turned around, he had to address the problems of the moment," she told a group of about two dozen donors.

She said she also had become "first lady of the moment," reacting to problems and not pushing her separate agenda.

Tammy Vigil, a Boston University communications professor, said it is typical for a first lady to defend the president and, for that reason, complaints about Republican opposition sound better coming from her than from President Biden. He would risk undermining his authority and appear "whiny" if he were to sound off about GOP roadblocks more often than he has, she said.

"If it's going to be said, she's the better person to say it," said Vigil, who wrote a book about former first ladies Michelle Obama and Melania Trump.

Jill Biden's summer has been busy — and uncharacteristically bumpy at times.

She went on a pair of solo foreign trips in May, traveling to Romania and Slovakia in eastern Europe to meet Ukrainian refugees. The trip included an unannounced detour into western Ukraine to meet first lady Olena Zelenska. She also traveled through Ecuador, Panama and Costa Rica.

But by June, she had upset AIDS activists by hosting a White House event to unveil a postage stamp honoring first lady Nancy Reagan. Activists noted the Reagans' indifference toward gays and lesbians at the start of the AIDS crisis, which exploded during Ronald Reagan's presidency.

Last month, she was forced to apologize, through a spokesperson, for offending Latinos by describing their diversity as "distinct as the bodegas of the Bronx, as beautiful as the blossoms of Miami and as unique as the breakfast tacos here in San Antonio."

The National Association of Hispanic Journalists tweeted in response: "We are not tacos."

The first lady was also heckled last month on her way into a Connecticut ice cream parlor. A man in the sidewalk crowd shouted, "Your husband is the worst president we ever had" and "You owe us gas money." A new CNN poll recorded her favorability rating at a low 34%, though only 29% have an unfavorable opinion of her. An additional 28% said they have no opinion of the first lady and 9% said they hadn't heard enough of her.

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The president's positive COVID-19 tests have forced the couple to remain apart for about two weeks while he isolates at the White House and she stays at their home in Wilmington, Delaware.

She had welcomed Zelenska to the White House just before the president's diagnosis.

Jill Biden, 71, is the first first lady to work outside of the White House. She is expected to resume teaching in September and juggle those demands with campaigning. She signed a new contract with Northern Virginia Community College on the morning of her speech to the AFT, she said.

So far this year, she's done seven fundraisers for the Democratic National Committee, and the party is happy to have her.

"Jill Biden is one of the Democratic Party's most important surrogates because she drives excitement from grassroots supporters across the country," Democratic Party Chairman Jaime Harrison said in a statement to The Associated Press. "We're grateful for the first lady's commitment to electing Democrats up and down the ticket."

Robert Watson, a history professor at Lynn University, said modern first ladies have become effective fundraisers in their own right, popular with the party faithful, especially women. He said it would be surprising not to see more of Jill Biden in the runup to the Nov. 8 elections.

"She is a strong defender," said Watson, who studies the presidency. "Nobody's interested in asking about her holiday cookie recipe."

Whatever the outcome, the Bidens still have a happy occasion to look forward to after the election: the first White House wedding in nearly a decade.

Granddaughter Naomi Biden is set to marry Peter Neal on the South Lawn on Nov. 19.

## **Gabby Petito's legacy: \$100K gift to domestic abuse hotline**

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Even in hindsight, Nichole Schmidt can't be sure if anything could have been done to save her daughter Gabby Petito from a messy and violent relationship that ended in murder nearly a year ago in the western wilderness.

But there is work to do, she said, to keep alive the memory of her daughter, who was found strangled last September in the outskirts of Wyoming's Grand Tetons after a cross-country trip turned into a high-profile missing person's case, then into tragedy and grief.

Through a \$100,000 donation from the Gabby Petito Foundation, Schmidt is now partnering with the National Domestic Violence Hotline to help others survive turbulent and violent relationships.

"I think Gabby's story touched a lot of people and she's saving lives. I get people messaging me all the time that they were inspired by her to get out of a relationship," Schmidt said during an interview with The Associated Press.

The anti-violence hotline takes calls from thousands of people each year, most of them women looking for help leaving physically or emotionally abusive relationships.

To date this year, more than 440,000 callers have sought help from the hotline — up about a third from the same period last year.

The big increase in calls has led to a longer wait time for a counselor, going from 7 minutes to more than 17 minutes, according to Katie Ray-Jones, the hotline's chief executive officer.

"That is a substantial increase really overwhelming our services," Ray-Jones said. "We need to increase the number of advocates."

The Petito Foundation's donation, as well as a \$200,000 gift from another family, will go toward reducing wait times and expanding the hotline's "Hope Can't Wait" initiative.

Investigators believe Petito's boyfriend, Brian Laundrie, killed her in late August last year while the couple were on a cross-country trip in a van.

Petito's disappearance launched a massive search. Amateur sleuths scoured social media for clues. It also again brought scrutiny of authorities and the news media, both of which have been criticized for focusing more attention on missing white women than on women of color.

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"We were seeing a lot of media coverage about a young white woman who had gone missing," Ray-Jones acknowledged during a joint interview with Schmidt. But she said public response came from diverse groups, including from some families of color.

Laundrie killed himself in a Florida swamp, leaving behind a notebook that authorities said contained a confession.

Earlier this year, an independent investigation found that police in Moab, Utah, made "several unintentional mistakes" when they came across Petito and Laundrie during a traffic stop last summer. Officers investigated a fight between the couple but ultimately let them go under the agreement they spend the night apart.

In the report, police said it was very likely that Petito "was a long-term victim of domestic violence, whether that be physically, mentally, and/or emotionally."

Schmidt said she still has so many unanswered questions about what went wrong.

"Looking back, I didn't really see any signs. I think the only two people that will ever know what happened in that relationship was Gabby and Brian. And we can guess and we can make assumptions but we don't really know what happened," she added. "Most likely the scenario ended that way because something was happening for a while."

For now, she said, the work goes on to help others survive domestic violence.

"I know that I can use this tragedy to help save so many," Schmidt said. "It's her legacy."

## Jurors to visit still bloodstained Parkland school building

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Jurors in the trial of Florida school shooter Nikolas Cruz are expected to walk through the still blood-spattered rooms of Parkland's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Thursday in a visit to the three-story building where he murdered 14 students and three staff members four years ago.

The seven-man, five-woman jury and 10 alternates will be bused under heavy security the 30 miles (48 kilometers) from the Broward County Courthouse in downtown Fort Lauderdale to the suburban school. Law enforcement plans to seal off the area around the school and aircraft may be barred from flying overhead to prevent protesters from interrupting the proceedings and to protect the jurors' safety.

The panelists and their law enforcement escorts will be accompanied into the building by Circuit Judge Elizabeth Scherer, prosecutors and Cruz's attorneys. Cruz will not be present, according to one of his attorneys. Prosecutors, who are winding up their case, are hoping the visit will help prove that the former Stoneman Douglas student's actions were cold, calculated, heinous and cruel; created a great risk of death to many people and "interfered with a government function" — all aggravating factors under Florida's capital punishment law.

Under Florida court rules, neither the judge nor the attorneys are allowed to speak to the jurors — and the jurors aren't allowed to converse with each other — when they retrace the path Cruz followed on Feb. 14, 2018, as he methodically moved from floor to floor, firing down hallways and into classrooms as he went. The jurors have already seen surveillance video of the shooting and photographs of its aftermath.

Journalists will not be allowed inside until after the jurors leave, and will not be allowed to carry cameras.

The building has been sealed and surrounded by a chain-link fence since shortly after the massacre. Known both as the freshman and 1200 building, it looms ominously over the school and its teachers, staff and 3,300 students, and can be seen easily by anyone nearby. The Broward County school district plans to demolish it whenever the prosecutors approve. For now, it is a court exhibit.

"When you are driving past, it's there. When you are going to class, it's there. It is just a colossal structure that you can't miss," said Kai Koerber, who was a Stoneman Douglas junior at the time of the shooting. He is now at the University of California, Berkeley, and the developer of a mental health phone app. "It is just a constant reminder ... that is tremendously trying and horrible."

Cruz, 23, pleaded guilty in October to 17 counts of first-degree murder; the trial is only to determine if



he is sentenced to death or life without parole.

The building's interior has been left nearly intact since the shooting: Bloodstains still smear the floor, and doors and walls are riddled with bullet holes. Windows in classroom doors are shot out. Rotted Valentine's Day flowers, deflated balloons and other gifts are strewn about. Only the bodies and personal belongings such as backpacks have been removed.

Miami defense attorney David S. Weinstein said prosecutors are hoping the visit will be "the final piece in erasing any doubt that any juror might have had that the death penalty is the only recommendation that can be made."

Such site visits are rare. Weinstein, a former prosecutor, said in more than 150 jury trials dating back to the late 1980s, he has only had one.

One reason for their rarity is that they are a logistical nightmare for the judge, who needs to get the jury to the location and back to the courthouse without incident or risk a mistrial. And in a typical case, a visit wouldn't even present truthful evidence: After law enforcement leaves, the building or public space returns to its normal use. The scene gets cleaned up, objects get moved and repairs are made. It's why judges order jurors in many trials not to visit the scene on their own.

Craig Trocino, a University of Miami law professor who has represented defendants appealing their death sentences, said the visit — combined with the myriad graphic videos and photos jurors have already seen — could open an avenue for Cruz's attorneys if they find themselves in the same situation.

"At some point evidence becomes inflammatory and prejudicial," he said. "The site visit may be a cumulative capstone."

Cruz's attorneys have argued that prosecutors have used evidence not just to prove their case, but to inflame the jurors' passions.

Prosecutors are expected to rest their case shortly after the visit.

## **Suspect mistakenly freed in Lady Gaga's dog theft recaptured**

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A suspect mistakenly released from a Los Angeles County jail where he was being held on suspicion of shooting Lady Gaga's dog walker and stealing her French bulldogs has been recaptured, authorities said.

James Howard Jackson, 19, was arrested Wednesday nearly five months after he was released from jail while awaiting trial "due to a clerical error," the county Sheriff's Department said in a statement.

Jackson was one of five people arrested in connection with the Feb. 24, 2021, attack in Hollywood.

Last month, the U.S. Marshals Service announced a reward up to \$5,000 for information leading to his arrest.

Jackson's arrest comes as one of three men charged in the case pleaded no contest to second-degree robbery.

Jaylin Keyshawn White, 20, was immediately sentenced to four years in state prison, Deputy District Attorney Michele Hanisee told NBC4.

Prosecutors said Jackson and two other alleged gang members had driven around looking for expensive French bulldogs to steal, then spotted, tailed and robbed Ryan Fischer as he walked Lady Gaga's dogs near the famed Sunset Boulevard. Fischer was with the pop star's three dogs named Asia, Koji and Gustav.

During a violent struggle, Fischer was hit, choked and then shot in an attack captured by the doorbell camera of a nearby home.

The video captured Fischer screaming, "Oh, my God! I've been shot!" and "Help me!" and "I'm bleeding out from my chest!"

Fischer lost part of a lung. About a month after the crime, he posted on Instagram that his recovering has gone well.

The pop star's dogs were returned two days later by a woman who claimed she had found them tied to a pole and asked about Lady Gaga's offer of a \$500,000 reward if the dogs were returned "no questions asked." The singer was in Rome at the time filming a movie.

The woman was charged with receiving stolen property and the father of another suspect is charged with helping him avoid arrest.

Jackson already had been charged in the attack and had pleaded not guilty when the county district attorney's office filed a superseding indictment that charged him with attempted murder, conspiracy to commit a robbery and assault with a semiautomatic firearm.

## Seven years of sex abuse: How Mormon officials let it happen

By MICHAEL REZENDES Associated Press

BISBEE, Ariz. (AP) — MJ was a tiny, black-haired girl, just 5 years old, when her father admitted to his bishop that he was sexually abusing her.

The father, a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and an admitted pornography addict, was in counseling with his bishop when he revealed the abuse. The bishop, who was also a family physician, followed church policy and called what church officials have dubbed the "help line" for guidance.

But the call offered little help for MJ. Lawyers for the church, widely known as the Mormon church, who staff the help line around the clock told Bishop John Herrod not to call police or child welfare officials. Instead he kept the abuse secret.

"They said, 'You absolutely can do nothing,'" Herrod said in a recorded interview with law enforcement.

Herrod continued to counsel MJ's father, Paul Douglas Adams, for another year, and brought in Adams' wife, Leizza Adams, in hopes she would do something to protect the children. She didn't. Herrod later told a second bishop, who also kept the matter secret after consulting with church officials who maintain that the bishops were excused from reporting the abuse to police under the state's so-called clergy-penitent privilege.

Adams continued raping MJ for as many as seven more years, into her adolescence, and also abused her infant sister, who was born during that time. He frequently recorded the abuse on video and posted the video on the internet.

Adams was finally arrested by Homeland Security agents in 2017 with no help from the church, after law enforcement officials in New Zealand discovered one of the videos. He died by suicide in custody before he could stand trial.

The Associated Press has obtained nearly 12,000 pages of sealed records from an unrelated child sex abuse lawsuit against the Mormon church in West Virginia. The documents offer the most detailed and comprehensive look yet at the so-called help line Herrod called. Families of survivors who filed the lawsuit said they show it's part of a system that can easily be misused by church leaders to divert abuse accusations away from law enforcement and instead to church attorneys who may bury the problem, leaving victims in harm's way.

The help line has been criticized by abuse victims and their attorneys for being inadequate to quickly stop abuse and protect victims. Yet the Utah-based faith has stuck by the system despite the criticism and increasing scrutiny from attorneys and prosecutors, including those in the Adams case.

"I just think that the Mormon church really sucks. Seriously sucks," said MJ, who is now 16, during an interview with the AP. "They are just the worst type of people, from what I've experienced and what other people have also experienced."

MJ and her adoptive mother asked the AP to use only her initials in part because videos of her abuse posted by her father are still circulating on the internet. The AP does not publish the names of sexual abuse survivors without their consent.

William Maledon, an Arizona attorney representing the bishops and the church in a lawsuit filed by three of the Adams' six children, told the AP last month that the bishops were not required to report the abuse.

"These bishops did nothing wrong. They didn't violate the law, and therefore they can't be held liable," he said. Maledon referred to the suit as "a money grab."

In his AP interview, Maledon also insisted Herrod did not know that Adams was continuing to sexually assault his daughter after learning of the abuse in a single counseling session.

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But in the recorded interview with the agent obtained by the AP, Herrod said he asked Leizza Adams in multiple sessions if the abuse was ongoing and asked her, "What are we going to do to stop it?"

"At least for a period of time I assumed they had stopped things, but — and then I never asked if they picked up again."

## 'THE PERFECT LIFESTYLE'

The Adams family lived on a lonely dirt road about 8 miles from the center of Bisbee, an old copper-mining town in southeastern Arizona known today for its antique shops and laid-back attitude. Far from prying eyes, the Adams home — a three-bedroom, open concept affair surrounded by desert — was often littered with piles of clothing and containers of lubricant Adams used to sexually abuse his children, according to legal documents reviewed by the AP.

Paul's wife, Leizza, assumed most of the child-rearing responsibilities, including getting their six children off to school and chauffeuring them to church and religious instruction on Sundays. Paul, who worked for the U.S. Border Patrol, spent much of his time online looking at porn, often with his children watching, or wandering the house naked or in nothing but his underwear.

He had a short fuse and would frequently throw things, yell at his wife and beat his kids. "He just had this explosive personality," said Shaunice Warr, a Border Patrol agent and a Mormon who worked with Paul and described herself as Leizza's best friend. "He had a horrible temper."

Paul was more relaxed while coaxing his older daughter to hold a smartphone camera and record him while he sexually abused her. He also seemed to revel in the abuse in online chat rooms, where he once bragged that he had "the perfect lifestyle" because he could have sex with his daughters whenever he pleased, while his wife knew and "doesn't care."

He would later tell investigators the abuse was a compulsion he couldn't stop. "I got into something too deep that I just couldn't pull myself out of," he said. "I'm not trying to say the devil made me do it."

The Adams family was deeply involved in the Mormon community, and on Sundays they attended services in Bisbee. So Adams turned to his church, and to Bishop Herrod, when he sought help and revealed his abuse of MJ.

Herrod later told Homeland Security agent Robert Edwards he knew from the start that Leizza Adams was unlikely to stop her husband, after he called her into the counseling sessions. The bishop, who was also Leizza's personal physician, said she seemed "pretty emotionally dead" when her husband recounted his abuse of their daughter. The bishop also recognized the harm being done to MJ. "I doubt (she) will ever do well," he said in his recorded interview with Homeland Security agents.

Herrod also told Edwards that when he called the help line, church officials told him the state's clergy-penitent privilege required him to keep Adams's abuse confidential.

But the law required no such thing.

Arizona's child sex abuse reporting law, and similar laws in more than 20 states that require clergy to report child sex abuse and neglect, says that clergy, physicians, nurses, or anyone caring for a child who "reasonably believes" a child has been abused or neglected has a legal obligation to report the information to police or the state Department of Child Safety. But it also says that clergy who receive information about child neglect or sexual abuse during spiritual confessions "may withhold" that information from authorities if the clergy determine it is "reasonable and necessary" under church doctrine.

In 2012, when Herrod rotated out of his position as bishop of the Bisbee ward — a Mormon jurisdiction similar to a Catholic parish — he told incoming Bishop Robert "Kim" Mauzy about the abuse in the Adams household. Instead of rescuing MJ by reporting the abuse to authorities, Mauzy also kept the information within the church.

In a separate recorded interview with federal agents obtained by the AP, Mauzy said church officials told him he should convene a confidential disciplinary hearing for Adams, after which Adams was excommunicated in 2013. Mauzy and other church leaders still didn't report Adams to the police.

Two years later, in 2015, Leizza Adams gave birth to a second daughter. It took her husband just six weeks to start sexually assaulting her, recording the abuse, and uploading the videos to the internet.

The revelation that Mormon officials may have directed an effort to conceal years of abuse in the Adams

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household sparked a criminal investigation of the church by Cochise County Attorney Brian McIntyre, and the civil lawsuit by three of the Adams children.

"Who's really responsible for Herrod not disclosing?" McIntyre asked in an AP interview. "Is it Herrod," who says he followed the church lawyers' instruction not to report the abuse to authorities? "Or is it the people who gave him that advice?"

'THE CALL COMES TO MY CELL PHONE'

When it comes to child sexual abuse, the Mormon church says "the first responsibility of the church in abuse cases is to help those who have been abused and protect those who may be vulnerable to future abuse," according to its 2010 handbook for church leaders. The handbook also says, "Abuse cannot be tolerated in any form."

But church officials, from the bishops in the Bisbee ward to officials in Salt Lake City, tolerated abuse in the Adams family for years.

"They just let it keep happening," said MJ, in her AP interview. "They just said, 'Hey, let's excommunicate her father.' It didn't stop. 'Let's have them do therapy.' It didn't stop. 'Hey, let's forgive and forget and all this will go away.' It didn't go away."

A similar dynamic played out in West Virginia, where church leaders were accused of covering up the crimes committed by a young abuser from a prominent Mormon family even after he'd been convicted on child sex abuse charges in Utah. The abuser, Michael Jensen, today is serving a 35- to 75-year prison sentence for abusing two children in West Virginia. Their family, along with others, sued the church and settled out of court for an undisclosed sum.

"Child abuse festers and grows in secrecy," said Lynne Cadigan, a lawyer for the Adams children who filed suit. "That is why the mandatory reporting came into effect. It's the most important thing in the world to immediately report to the police."

The lawsuit filed by the three Adams children accuses The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and several members, including Bishops Herrod and Mauzy, of negligence and conspiring to cover up child sex abuse to avoid "costly lawsuits" and protect the reputation of the church, which relies on proselytizing and tithing to attract new members and raise money. In 2020, the church claimed approximately 16 million members worldwide, most of them living outside the United States.

"The failure to prevent or report abuse was part of the policy of the defendants, which was to block public disclosure to avoid scandals, to avoid the disclosure of their tolerance of child sexual molestation and assault, to preserve a false appearance of propriety, and to avoid investigation and action by public authority, including law enforcement," the suit alleges. "Plaintiffs are informed and believe that such actions were motivated by a desire to protect the reputation of the defendants."

Very few of the scores of lawsuits against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints mention the help line, in part because details of its operations have been a closely guarded secret. The documents in the sealed court records show how it works.

"The help line is certainly there to help — to help the church keep its secrets and to cover up abuse," said Craig Vernon, an Idaho attorney who has filed several sex abuse lawsuits against the church.

Vernon, a former member, routinely demands that the church require bishops to report sex abuse to police or state authorities rather than the help line.

The sealed records say calls to the help line are answered by social workers or professional counselors who determine whether the information they receive is serious enough to be referred to an attorney with Kirton McConkie, a Salt Lake City firm that represents the church.

A document with the heading "Protocol for abuse help line calls," which was among the sealed records obtained by the AP, laid out the questions social workers were to ask before determining whether the calls should be referred to the lawyers.

Mormon officials in the West Virginia case said they did not recognize the Protocol and could not authenticate it. But a ranking church official in a separate sex abuse lawsuit in Oregon confirmed that those answering the help line used a "written protocol" to guide them.

"There would be a page containing various topics to discuss and handle," said Harold C. Brown, then



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director of the church's Welfare Services Department.

The Protocol instructs those staffing the help line to tell callers they are to use first names only. "No identifying information should be given." Under the heading "High Risk Cases," it also instructs staffers to ask a series of questions, including whether calls concerned possible abuse by a church leader, an employee, or abuse at "a church-sponsored activity."

The protocol advises those taking the calls to instruct a "priesthood leader," which includes bishops and stake presidents, to encourage the perpetrator, the victim, or others who know of the abuse to report it. But it also says, in capital letters, that those taking the calls "should never advise a priesthood leader to report abuse. Counsel of this nature should come only from legal counsel."

That counsel comes from attorneys from Kirton McConkie, which represents the church.

Joseph Osmond, one of the Kirton McConkie lawyers assigned to take help line calls, said in a sealed deposition that he's always ready to deal with sex abuse complaints.

"Wherever I am. The call comes to my cell phone," he said. He then acknowledged that he did not refer calls to a social worker and wouldn't know how to do so.

Osmond declined to comment through church officials. Peter Schofield, a Kirton McConkie lawyer long associated with the help line, also declined to answer questions from the AP.

Maledon, the attorney for the church in the Adams lawsuit, said church clergy or church attorneys have made "hundreds of reports" of child abuse to civil authorities in Arizona over an unspecified number of years. But he could not say how many calls to the help line were not referred to police or child welfare officials and could not provide a referral rate.

Two church practices, identified in the sealed records, work together to ensure that the contents of all help lines calls remain confidential. First, all records of calls to the help line are routinely destroyed. "Those notes are destroyed by the end of every day," said Roger Van Komen, the church's director of Family Services, in an affidavit included in the sealed records.

Second, church officials say that all calls referred to Kirton McConkie lawyers are covered by attorney-client privilege and remain out of the reach of prosecutors and victims' attorneys. "The church has always regarded those communications between its lawyers and local leaders as attorney-client privileged," said Paul Rytting, the director of Risk Management, in a sealed affidavit.

## AN OMINOUS TIME

Mormon leaders established the help line in 1995 and it operated not within its Department of Family Services, but instead in its Office of Risk Management, whose role is to protect the church and members from injury and liability in an array of circumstances, including fires, explosions, hazardous chemical spills and severe weather. The department ultimately reports to the First Presidency, the three officials at the very top of the church hierarchy, according to records in the sealed documents.

Risk management also tracks all sex abuse lawsuits against the church, according to a sealed affidavit by Dwayne Liddell, a past director of the department who helped establish the help line. He said members of the church's First Presidency knew the details of the help line.

"I have been in those type of meetings where ... the training of ecclesiastical leaders (and) the establishment of a help line have been discussed," Liddell said. When asked who attended the meetings, he answered, "Members of the First Presidency and the presiding bishopric," or the top leaders of the church.

Before establishing the help line in 1995, the Mormon church simply instructed bishops to comply with local child sex abuse reporting laws.

At the time, child sex abuse lawsuits were on the rise and juries were awarding victims millions of dollars. The Mormon church is largely self-insured, leaving it especially vulnerable to costly lawsuits.

"There is nothing inconsistent between identifying cases that may pose litigation risks to the church and complying with reporting obligations," church lawyers said in a sealed legal filing.

But one affidavit in the sealed records which repeatedly says the church condemns child sexual abuse, also suggests the church is more concerned about the spiritual well-being of perpetrators than the physical and emotional well-being of young victims, who also may be members of the faith.

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"Disciplinary proceedings are subject to the highest confidentiality possible," said Rytting. "If members had any concerns that their disciplinary files could be read by a secular judge or attorneys or be presented to a jury as evidence in a public trial, their willingness to confess and repent and for their souls to be saved would be seriously compromised."

## A GLOBAL INVESTIGATION

In 2016 police in New Zealand arrested a 47-year-old farm worker on child pornography charges and found a nine-minute video on his cell phone, downloaded from the internet, showing a man in his 30s raping a 10-year-old girl.

A global search for the rapist and his victim was on. It started with Interpol and led to the U.S. State Department, where investigators using facial recognition technology matched the rapist with a passport card photo of a U.S. Border Patrol employee living in Bisbee, Arizona, according to a Homeland Security synopsis obtained by the AP.

Agents rushed to the Naco, Arizona, Border Station and arrested Adams, then a lanky, bearded mission support specialist with the Border Patrol. After some coaxing, Adams admitted to raping MJ and to sexually assaulting her younger sister, and to posting video of the assaults on the internet. When agents raided his home, they seized phones and computers holding more than 4,000 photos and nearly 1,000 videos depicting child sex abuse, many featuring the Adams daughters.

But the nine-minute video stood out. "This video is one of the worst I've ever seen," Homeland Security agent Edwards later testified, adding that haunting dialogue between Adams and his older daughter helped make the video "stand out in my mind and continue to stand out in my mind."

That video represented nine minutes and 14 seconds in seven years of continual and unnecessary trauma for MJ — and a lifetime of abuse for her tiny sister — while Bishops Herrod and Mauzy and church representatives in Salt Lake City stood by.

After Paul Adams died by suicide, Leizza Adams pleaded no contest to child sex abuse charges and served two-and-a-half years in state prison. Three of the Adams children went to live with members of Leizza's extended family in California. The other three were taken in by local families.

## THE SURVIVORS

MJ's little sister was only 2 when she met her adoptive mother for the first time. The toddler wrapped her arms and legs around Miranda Whitworth's head, buried her face in her neck, and refused to look up to say good-bye to members of Leizza's family. "It was the craziest thing," said Whitworth who, with her husband, Matthew, welcomed the toddler into their family. "It was like when you see a baby monkey or baby gorilla cling to their mother, and they just won't let go."

Over the next few days and weeks, the Whitworths would see additional markers of the unfathomable abuse the toddler endured at the hands of her father — much of it recorded on video. She would howl in terror when any man attempted to touch her, whether it was Matthew or the family physician. "The nurse was fine but the minute the doctor walked in she climbed onto me and started screaming bloody murder," Miranda said.

The 2-year-old was also terrified of the water, which made bathing an ear-splitting ordeal. She wouldn't tolerate anything wrapped around her wrists. And at church, she would run and hide behind Miranda whenever anyone greeted her by an old family nickname.

When they took in the toddler, neither Miranda nor Matthew knew very much about what had happened to her. But while sitting in on Leizza Adams's sentencing hearing, they learned about the repeated rapes, the videos, and the fact that church bishops knew about the abuse of the older daughter and did nothing to stop it.

The Whitworths were converts to the Mormon faith and, like many new followers of a religion, they were especially enthusiastic about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In particular, they appreciated the efforts Mormons make to help fellow church members in times of need through church organizations established to give special attention to women, teens and children.

"It's all about family," Miranda said. "That's one of the things we absolutely loved."

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But after learning about what Adams did to their new daughter, and the failure of the church to stop him, the scales fell from their eyes. "We decided to remove our records from the church," said Matthew Whitworth. "I personally couldn't continue to provide tithing money to a church that would allow young children to be abused and not do anything to prevent it."

Unlike the Whitworths, Nancy Salminen has never been a member of the Mormon church. But as a special needs teacher and a rape victim herself, she has a special affinity for MJ and others like her. Over the last five years, she has opened her home to 17 girls and boys who needed a safe place to stay. Her house is a modest, ranch-style structure she bought out of foreclosure.

"Everything's a little broken here and that's perfect because so are we," she said.

Salminen said she met MJ after receiving an urgent call on a Friday evening to rescue a 12-year-old from another family. "She was pretty scared and pretty confused when I picked her up," Salminen recalled. "She spent a lot of time in her closet in her room when we got home, but we got to know each other and got to like each other."

Like the Whitworths, Salminen knew very little about what MJ had endured until Leizza Adams's sentencing hearing.

"What I heard made me want to throw up," she said. "And the more I learned the more I wanted to help her fight this fight that she didn't even know about."

Safely settled in Salminen's household — which today includes a foster girl Salminen also plans to adopt — MJ has been transformed from a victim of unimaginable abuse to a bubbly 16-year-old who plays in the high school band and proudly dons a crisp, new uniform for her job at a fast-food restaurant.

"She had every excuse to fail and to just fold into herself and run away," Salminen said. "But instead, she came back stronger than anyone I've ever known."

So strong that she appears eager to play an active role in the battle she and her two siblings are waging against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "I just want them to do what they're supposed to do and report to the police," MJ said.

The adoptive parents of the third Adams child who has filed suit declined to speak to the AP about the case. Like MJ, Miranda and Matthew Whitworth said they joined the lawsuit against the church on behalf of their young daughter not in hopes of a payday, but to change church policy so that any instance of child sexual abuse is immediately reported to civil authorities. "We just don't understand why they're paying all these lawyers to fight this," Matthew Whitworth said. "Just change the policy."

## THE PRIVILEGE

That policy is the key to the church's defense. In a recent filing asking a Superior Court judge to dismiss the case, Maledon and other lawyers for the church said the case "hinges entirely on whether Arizona's child abuse reporting statute required two church bishops ... to report to authorities confidential confessions made to them by plaintiffs' father."

Whatever moral or public policy arguments one could make that the church should have told authorities that Paul Adams was raping his daughters are irrelevant, the lawyers argued. "Arizona's reporting statute broadly exempts confidential communications with clergy, as determined by the clergyman himself," according to the church motion to dismiss the case. "Reasonable people can debate whether this is the best public policy choice. But that is not an issue for a jury or this court."

Bishop Herrod, in his recorded interview, said church officials told him he had to keep what Adams told him confidential or he could be sued if he went to authorities.

But McIntyre, the Cochise County attorney, said that's false, noting the Arizona reporting law says that anyone reporting a belief that child sex abuse occurred "is immune from any civil or criminal liability."

Aside from the legal arguments over whether Bishops Herrod and Mauzy were excused from their reporting obligations under the clergy-penitent privilege, critics of the inaction by the two bishops and the broader church have raised ethical issues.

Gerard Moretz, a seasoned child sex abuse investigator for the Pima County, Arizona, Sheriff's Department and an expert witness for the Adams children, is one of them.

"What aspect of your religious practice are you advancing if you don't report something like this?" he asked.

## Sex abuse and the Mormon church 'help line': 4 takeaways

By MICHAEL REZENDES Associated Press

When an Arizona bishop in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, widely known as the Mormon church, learned that a member of his ward was sexually assaulting his 5-year-old daughter, he followed church policy and called the Mormon Abuse Help Line. The bishop later told law enforcement that church attorneys in Salt Lake City who staff the help line around the clock said that because he learned of the abuse during a counseling session the church considers a spiritual confession, he was legally bound to keep the abuse secret.

Paul Douglas Adams, a U.S. Border Patrol employee living with his wife and six children in Bisbee, Arizona, continued abusing his daughter for as many as seven more years, and went on to abuse a second daughter. He finally stopped in 2017 with no help from the church only because he was arrested.

The Associated Press obtained thousands of pages of sealed court documents that show in detail exactly how the church's "help line" can divert abuse complaints away from law enforcement, leaving children in danger.

Takeaways from the AP's investigation:

### THE CLERGY-PENITENT PRIVILEGE

The seven years of secrecy in the Adams case began when church attorneys in Salt Lake City advised Bishop John Herrod and later Bishop Robert "Kim" Mauzy they were exempt from reporting requirements under the state's child abuse reporting law because of the law's so-called clergy-penitent privilege.

"You absolutely can do nothing," Herrod said he was told during an interview with federal investigators.

Arizona's child sex abuse reporting law, and similar laws in more than 20 states, says clergy, physicians, nurses, or anyone caring for a child who "reasonably believes" the child has been abused or neglected has a legal obligation to report the information to police or the state Department of Child Safety. But it also says that clergy who receive information about child neglect or sexual abuse during spiritual confessions "may withhold" that information from authorities if the clergy determine it is "reasonable and necessary" under church doctrine.

An Arizona attorney who is defending the bishops and the church in a lawsuit filed by three of the Adams children, told the AP that Herrod and Mauzy — and by extension the church — were acting within the law and in accordance with their "religious principles."

"These bishops did nothing wrong. They didn't violate the law, and therefore they can't be held liable," said William Maledon. He also called the Adams children's lawsuit "a money grab."

### THE HELP LINE

The Associated Press obtained nearly 12,000 pages of sealed records from an unrelated child sex abuse lawsuit against the Mormon church in West Virginia, which show that the help line is part of a system that can easily be misused by church leaders to divert abuse accusations against church members away from law enforcement and instead to church attorneys, who may bury the problem, leaving victims in harm's way.

It was established in 1995 when legal claims of sex abuse against churches were on the rise.

Officials of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints said in sworn statements included in the sealed records that the help line is staffed by social workers who destroy records of all calls at the close of each day.

When the social workers receive calls about abuse that may present a risk to the church — such as abuse committed by prominent church members, abuse perpetrated during church activities, or especially egregious instances of abuse — the calls are referred to attorneys with the Salt Lake City law firm Kirton McConkie. The church maintains that all calls referred to the attorneys are protected by attorney-client privilege, leaving no record of the accusations accessible to prosecutors or victims' attorneys.

The lawsuit filed by the Adams children alleges: "The Mormon Church implements the Helpline not for



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the protection and spiritual counseling of sexual abuse victims...but for (church) attorneys to snuff out complaints and protect the Mormon Church from potentially costly lawsuits.”

## THE SURVIVORS

Miranda and Matthew Whitworth adopted the Adams’ younger daughter when she was just 2 years old. Miranda said when they met, the toddler wrapped her arms and legs around her head, buried her face in her neck, and refused to look up to say good-bye to her mother’s family.

“It was the craziest thing,” Miranda Whitworth said. “It was like when you see a baby monkey or baby gorilla cling to their mother, and they just won’t let go.”

The couple said they joined the lawsuit to push the church to change its policy so that any instance of child sexual abuse is immediately reported to civil authorities. “We just don’t understand why they’re paying all these lawyers to fight this,” Matthew Whitworth said. “Just change the policy.”

Nancy Salminen, a special needs teacher in public schools, adopted the older Adams daughter, MJ, after providing her with foster care when she was 12 years old. Today, MJ is a bubbly 16-year-old who plays in her high school band and proudly dons a crisp new uniform for her job as a fast-food restaurant.

“She had every excuse to fail and to just fold into herself and run away,” Salminen said. “But instead, she came back stronger than anyone I’ve ever known.”

## THE UPSHOT

Paul Adams died by suicide in jail before he could stand trial on federal child pornography charges and state child sex abuse charges.

Leizza Adams pleaded no contest to two counts of child abuse and served two-and-a-half years in state prison.

Judge Wallace Hoggatt called the abuse endured by MJ and her younger sister “one of the most horrendous cases of child molestation” he had ever encountered.

Today, the lawsuit filed by the Adams children in Cochise County Superior Court, as well as a criminal investigation by the Cochise County attorney, continue to unfold.

“I just think that the Mormon church really sucks. Seriously sucks,” MJ told the AP. “They are just the worst type of people, from what I’ve experienced and what other people have experienced.”

## **GOP eyes Nashville seat for flip; Dems vie to face governor**

By JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Tennessee Republicans on Thursday will settle a nine-way primary in a re-configured congressional district in Nashville they are hoping to flip, while Democrats will choose their nominee for governor in what could be a history-making bid to topple the GOP incumbent.

Two of three Democratic candidates for governor would be the state’s first Black Democratic nominee for that office; the third is a physician running for political office for the first time, spurred by Republican Gov. Bill Lee’s hands-off response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Lee is running unopposed and would have a strong advantage in a general election in a state that has not elected a Democrat to statewide office since 2006.

Redrawn congressional districts helped put Tennessee among the states where Republicans hope to flip a seat in a push to reclaim control of the U.S. House, providing the main drama in Tennessee’s Thursday primaries. Tennessee holds the only statewide elections nationally that day.

Nashville’s 5th Congressional District drew heavy interest from Republicans after GOP state lawmakers carved Democratic-tilted Nashville into three districts, favoring their party in each seat. The longtime incumbent in the 5th District, Democratic U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper, decided to retire, saying there was “no way” he could win reelection under the new redistricting maps. The new district favored Republican Donald Trump over Democrat Joe Biden by 12 percentage points in 2020.

In the other two Nashville-area districts, the Republican incumbents don’t have primary opponents. The new maps weight their districts in their favor.

In the 5th, state Sen. Heidi Campbell has no opponent in her Democratic primary and will take on the

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Republican winner in November. Two Democrats face off in the new 6th District, which includes more of Nashville, where Republican U.S. Rep. John Rose has a huge fundraising edge.

There is also a full slate of state legislative primary races. Additionally, Thursday is general election night for many local contests. The highlight of those is in Shelby County — which encompasses Memphis — where Republican District Attorney Amy Weirich faces a challenge from Democratic civil rights lawyer Steven Mulroy.

At least in Nashville, anyone who turns on a TV is more likely to see ads for a Republican running for the 5th Congressional District than a candidate for anything else.

Competing TV attacks — mostly run by generically named outside groups with mega-wealthy donors — are trying to sow doubt about the conservative resumes of the three top fundraising Republican candidates: former Tennessee House Speaker Beth Harwell, retired Tennessee National Guard Brig. Gen. Kurt Winstead and Maury County Mayor Andy Ogles.

Fellow GOP candidate Jeff Beierlein, who flew Blackhawk helicopters in the Army, bought TV ad time to decry the mudslinging. Other candidates in the race are Geni Batchelor, a retired small-business owner; former state legislative staffer Tres Wittum; Natisha Brooks, who runs a home-school academy; Timothy Lee, a paramedic; and Stewart Parks, a real estate businessman.

The election marks the first time voters get a say over a seat that had been subject to months of Republican political brokering.

Political infighting over the carefully crafted district — it meanders through six counties — led the state Republican Party to boot three candidates off the ballot, including Trump's pick, former State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus. One of the booted candidates, video producer Robby Starbuck, is attempting a write-in campaign.

The governor, meanwhile, can relax on primary night. He avoided a Republican challenge. The last governor to enjoy an unopposed primary was Democratic Gov. Ned McWherter in 1990, said Tennessee legislative historian Eddie Weeks.

Democrats will be sorting out who will face Lee in November. Memphis City Councilmember JB Smiley Jr. or Memphis community advocate Carnita Atwater would be the first Black Democratic nominee for governor in the state's history. Critical-care physician Jason Martin, who lives in Nashville, joined the race as a prominent critic of Lee's pandemic response. Martin has decidedly outraised and outspent the next-highest fundraiser, Smiley.

Weeks said he could not find an African American nominee for governor, Democrat or Republican, in state history. Yet, he noted that in 1876, William Yardley, an African American Knoxville official later elected to the county court, ran as an independent when the Republican Party declined to nominate a candidate for governor. Democratic Gov. James Davis Porter won reelection that year.

Tennessee had a Black Democratic nominee for U.S. Senate as recently as 2020.

Lee, meanwhile, defeated a Democratic opponent by 21 percentage points in 2018. He goes into November with a huge fundraising edge and the power of incumbency.

## On NATO, McConnell nudges GOP away from Trump-era approach

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — At a dinner with the president of Finland shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell assured his host that the U.S. Senate would swiftly ratify NATO membership if the north European country chose to apply to the military alliance.

It was a bold assumption for the Republican leader to make in the aftermath of the Trump era, when Donald Trump roused a neo-isolationist streak in the GOP, railing against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and threatening at times to upend the decades-old alliance. But over several courses of fresh fish and schnapps, McConnell, long a proponent of NATO's expansion as a bulwark against Russian aggression, sought to leave the impression that the U.S. would most certainly welcome the new NATO members with open arms.

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Late Wednesday, the Senate did exactly that, as most Republicans joined Democrats in ratifying the accession of Finland and Sweden to the alliance, an overwhelming 95-1 vote. Other NATO countries also must approve the new members.

"What a big day," McConnell said during an interview with The Associated Press in his office ahead of the vote.

McConnell said he had just finished a phone call with the Finnish president, Sauli Niinisto, whom he now considers something of a friend. The two were "just talking about what we've sort of been through since we had dinner together," he said, noting "this new and strengthened NATO and the way it's pulled together sort of the, shall I say, the democratic world."

The Republican is not the leader of the Senate's majority, but its minority, yet he has played a pivotal role in joining forces with President Joe Biden and the Democrats to nudge GOP senators off the Trump-era foreign policy approach and ensure NATO ratification.

It's a milestone for McConnell, who has championed the NATO alliance almost since he joined the Senate more than 35 years ago. That position put him at odds with Trump during his tenure in the White House. At the time, McConnell and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi famously invited NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg to deliver a speech to Congress on its 70th anniversary in direct response to Trump's criticisms of NATO.

"That's the role Sen. McConnell is trying to play," said Eric Edelman, a former U.S. ambassador to Finland and Turkey.

"It's an ongoing struggle," Edelman said. "The whole fight over Ukraine has become a little bit of a microcosm, a microcosmic case, of the larger fight in the party over its future stand on foreign policy. And, you see, unfortunately, a lot of people who don't see this as an important stake for the United States."

Speedy action in the typically slow moving Senate was no guarantee, particularly as Republicans are still sorting out their policies and politics after Trump's presidency. The former president had awakened in the party, and many American voters, a newfound skepticism of the overseas alliance that lingers in the GOP at a time when Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine has drawn the U.S. and its European allies closer together.

Privately, McConnell counseled his GOP senators ahead of the vote with the same arguments he makes in public — including the idea that part of being a leader is explaining complex choices to constituents, even if Americans may say they don't like spending money or focusing attention abroad.

"The one thing I was concerned about, particularly at that point, was this sort of growing isolationist sentiment in the party, to some extent, given voice by President Trump," McConnell said in his office, steps off the Senate floor.

He had reason to be worried: Just a few months earlier McConnell believed as many as 25 GOP senators, half his caucus, would oppose \$40 billion in military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine as it battled Russia. In the end, 11 voted against the Ukraine aid package, which Trump criticized.

Ahead of the NATO vote, McConnell said he sought to convey to senators that the U.S. leadership role in the world "is not just important militarily, but commercially, as well, all of which is good for this country. This is not a charity we're involved in here. This is for the benefit of America."

He added: "The world is better served if somebody stands up to dictatorships like we have in Russia and China."

In the end, only one Republican, Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri, a potential 2024 presidential hopeful, voted against ratifying the NATO expansion, saying the U.S.'s attention would be better focused on China.

Even longtime non-interventionist Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., did not oppose the vote, choosing instead to abstain. Paul said in a floor speech that after Putin's invasion of Ukraine, "the world changed."

McConnell shrugged off Paul's vote, saying he and his fellow Kentuckian often have different foreign policy views. As for Hawley, the GOP leader said he "couldn't disagree more" but didn't try to change his colleague's vote.

In the months after that March dinner with the Finnish president, McConnell led a delegation to visit

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv. The senators then stopped in Sweden and Finland in a show of support for the alliance.

At a news conference in Stockholm, McConnell vowed that the Senate, which he did not control, would vote to ratify NATO membership by summer.

Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., another potential presidential hopeful who joined the March dinner, said of the GOP leader: "Sen. McConnell has been a strong proponent all summer long of not waiting around to get this done."

## "Stray" cat video game brings some benefits to real cats

By THALIA BEATY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The virtual cat hero from the new video game sensation "Stray" doesn't just wind along rusted pipes, leap over unidentified sludge and decode clues in a seemingly abandoned city. The daring orange tabby is helping real world cats as well.

Thanks to online fundraising platforms, gamers are playing "Stray" while streaming live for audiences to raise money for animal shelters and other cat-related charities. Annapurna Interactive, the game's publisher, also promoted "Stray" by offering two cat rescue and adoption agencies copies of the game to raffle off and renting out a New York cat cafe.

Livestreaming game play for charity isn't new, but the resonance "Stray" quickly found from cat lovers is unusual. It was the fourth most watched and broadcast game on the day it launched on Twitch, the streaming platform said.

Viewers watch as players navigate the adventurous feline through an aging industrial landscape doing normal cat stuff — balancing on railings, walking on keyboards and knocking things off shelves — to solve puzzles and evade enemies.

About 80% of the game's development team are "cat owners and cat lovers" and a real-life orange stray as well as their own cats helped inspire the game, one creator said.

"I certainly hope that maybe some people will be inspired to help actual strays in real life — knowing that having an animal and a companion is a responsibility," said producer Swann Martin-Raget, of the BlueTwelve gaming studio in Montpellier, in southern France.

When Annapurna Interactive reached out to the Nebraska Humane Society to partner before the game's launch on July 19, they jumped at the chance, marketing specialist Brendan Gepson said.

"The whole game and the whole culture around the game, it's all about a love of cats," Gepson said. "It meshed really well with the shelter and our mission."

The shelter got four copies of the game to give away and solicited donations for \$5 to be entered into a raffle to win one. In a week, they raised \$7,000, Gepson said, with the vast majority of the 550 donors being new to them, including people donating from Germany and Malta. The company also donated \$1,035 to the shelter.

"It was really mutually beneficial," Gepson said. "They got some really good PR out of it and we got a whole new donor base out of it."

Annapurna also bought out Meow Parlour, the New York cat cafe and adoption agency, for a weekend, as well as donating \$1,000. Visitors who made reservations could buy "Stray" themed merchandise and play the game for 20 minutes while surrounded by cats. (The game also captivates cats, videos on social media show.)

Jeff Legaspi, Annapurna Interactive's marketing director, said it made sense for the game's launch to do something "positively impactful and hopefully bring more awareness to adopting and not shopping for a new pet."

Annapurna declined to disclose sales or download figures for the game, which is available on PlayStation and the Steam platform. However, according to Steam monitor SteamDB, "Stray" has been the No. 1 purchased game for the past two weeks.

North Shore Animal League America, which rescues tens of thousands of animals each year, said it hadn't



seen any increase in traffic from the game but they did receive more than \$800 thanks to a gamer.

In a happy coincidence, the shelter had just set up a profile on the platform Tiltify, which allows nonprofits to receive donations from video streams, the week the game launched. The player channeled donations to the shelter, smashing her initial goal of \$200.

"We are seeing Tiltify and livestreaming as this whole new way for us to engage a whole different audience," said Carol Marchesano, the rescue's senior digital marketing director. Usually, though, organizations need to reach out to online personalities to coordinate livestreams, which can take a lot of work, she said.

About nine campaigns on Tiltify mention the game "Stray," the company's CEO Michael Wasserman said. JustGiving, which also facilitates charity livestreams, said it identified two campaigns with the game.

For his part, Gepson from Nebraska reached out to an Omaha resident who goes by the name Trey-Day1014 online to run a charity livestream. Trey, who asked that his last name not be used, has two cats, one of which he adopted from the shelter.

Last week, he narrated to viewers watching live on the platform Twitch as his cat character batted another cat's tail and danced along railings.

"If I found out my cat was outside doing this, I'd be upset," Trey said, as his character jumped across a perilous distance. Moments later, a rusty pipe broke, sending the tabby down a gut-wrenching plunge into the darkness.

"That is a poor baby," Trey said somberly, "but we are okay."

A \$25 donation followed the fall, pushing the amount raised by Trey for the Nebraska shelter to over \$100 in about 30 minutes. By the end of four and a half hours of play, donations totaled \$1,500. His goal had been to raise \$200.

"This has opened my eyes to being able to use this platform for a lot more good than just playing video games," Trey said.

## Inspectors OK 1st Ukraine grain ship but no sign yet of more

By ZEYNEP BILGINSOY Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — The first grain ship to leave Ukraine and cross the Black Sea under a wartime deal passed inspection Wednesday in Istanbul and headed on to Lebanon. Ukraine said 17 other vessels were "loaded and waiting permission to leave," but there was no word yet on when they could depart.

A joint civilian inspection team spent three hours checking the cargo and crew of the Sierra Leone-flagged ship Razoni, which left Odesa on Monday carrying Ukrainian corn, a U.N. statement said.

The Joint Coordination Center team included officials from Ukraine, Russia, Turkey and the United Nations, who signed deals last month to create safe Black Sea shipping corridors to export Ukraine's desperately needed agricultural products as Russia's war upon its neighbor grinds on.

Ukraine is a major global grain supplier but the war had blocked most exports, so the July 22 deal aimed to ease food security around the globe. World food prices have been soaring in a crisis blamed on the war, supply chain problems and COVID-19.

Although U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Razoni's journey a "significant step," no other ships have left from Ukraine in the past 48 hours and no explanations have been given for that delay.

A U.N. statement said inspectors "gained valuable information" from the Razoni's crew about its voyage through the Black Sea maritime humanitarian corridor and the coordination center was "fine-tuning procedures."

The Turkish Ministry of National Defense tweeted a picture of an inspector reaching into the Razoni's hold and touching some of its 26,527 tons of corn for chicken feed. The Razoni's horn rang out as the inspectors left the ship, and then it headed off to Lebanon.

The checks seek to ensure that outbound cargo ships carry only grain, fertilizer or food and not any other commodities, and that inbound ships are not carrying weapons.

An estimated 20 million tons of grain — most of it said to be destined for livestock — has been stuck in Ukraine since the start of the 6-month-old war. Ukraine's top diplomat said Wednesday that more ships

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are ready to carry much-needed grain and food out of the country's Black Sea ports.

"Further ships are already ready for departure. They will depart from the ports that are part of the grain initiative in accordance with the agreed schedule, and we hope that everything will work out and the Russian Federation will not take any steps that would destroy these agreements," Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said at a joint press conference in Kyiv with his Estonian counterpart.

Kuleba said the U.N.-backed deal "is beneficial to Ukrainian farmers, it is beneficial to the Ukrainian economy, and it is beneficial to the world."

"It is now Ukraine that is, literally, saving the world from further growth in food prices and from hunger in individual countries," he said.

Still, a Black Sea voyage entails significant risks because of the war. Two civilian ships hit explosive devices there last week near the Danube River's Bystre estuary, according to Bridget Diakun, a data reporter at Lloyd's List, a global shipping publication.

Analysts say authorities' first priority is bringing out vessels that have been stuck for months at the three Ukrainian ports covered by the deal. Sixteen ships loaded with grain have been stuck at the ports of Odesa and Chernomorsk since Russia's invasion, according to Lloyd's List.

The U.N. official who helped negotiate the Russian deal with the U.N. aimed at ensuring unrestricted access to world markets for the country's food and fertilizer says there are still obstacles to overcome.

U.N. trade chief Rebeca Grynspan told a U.N. news conference Wednesday by video from Geneva that some obstacles Russia faces in terms of finance, insurance, shipping and transport of its grain and fertilizer have been clarified by the United States and European Union.

But she said there is still a major bottleneck -- getting the private sector to accept that the U.N.-Russia agreement will enable their companies to be involved in getting Russian grain and fertilizer shipped to global markets without the threat of sanctions.

There are no U.S. or EU sanctions on food or fertilizer exports, but companies engaged in related fields have been reluctant to take part.

Russia's war with Ukraine has had "a chilling effect on the private sector," Grynspan said. "So, an important part of the private sector has stopped their dealings in food and fertilizer."

Grynspan, the secretary-general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, said some grain and fertilizer are being exported from Russia but at very high costs. She explained that half the increase in grain prices comes from increases in transport and logistics costs.

"That is the pressure that we want to ease," she said.

Grynspan said the U.S. and EU clarifications are being evaluated by the private sector "as we speak."

Grain stockpiles are expected to keep growing. Despite the war, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal estimated his country would harvest up to 67 million tons of grain this year, up from 60 million tons last year.

A senior official from a leading Ukrainian farm association reckoned Ukraine would have about 50 million tons of grain for export this year.

Before the war, Ukraine exported around 5-6 million tons of grain per month, according to Denys Marchuk, the deputy head of the All-Ukrainian Agrarian Council.

In other news Wednesday:

\_\_\_ U.S. officials believe Russia is working to fabricate evidence concerning a deadly strike on prison housing prisoners of war in a separatist region of eastern Ukraine. U.S. intelligence officials have determined that Russia is looking to plant false evidence to make it appear that Ukrainian forces were responsible for the July 29 attack on Olenivka Prison that left 53 dead and wounded dozens more, a U.S. official familiar with the intelligence finding told The Associated Press. Russia has said that Ukraine's military used U.S.-supplied rocket launchers to strike the prison in Olenivka, a settlement controlled by the Moscow-backed Donetsk People's Republic.

\_\_\_ Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy referred to Russia as "number one" among global sponsors of terror, and called for the creation of a bolstered global security architecture "that ensures that no state can ever again resort to terror against another state."

\_\_\_ Russian forces kept up their bombardment of the southern Ukrainian port city of Mykolaiv. Regional governor Vitaliy Kim said the shelling damaged a pier, an industrial enterprise, residential buildings, a garage cooperative, a supermarket and a pharmacy. The mayor of Mykolaiv, Oleksandr Sienkevych, told The Associated Press that 131 civilians have died so far in the city from Russian shelling and 590 others have been seriously injured.

\_\_\_ The Ukrainian military said Ukrainian forces pushed back over a dozen Russian assaults in the key eastern province of Donetsk and claimed that none of the Russian attempts to advance over the previous 24 hours were successful. Still, Russian shelling killed at least four civilians in Donetsk province, Ukraine's presidential office said. Zelenskyy has ordered all those in the embattled province to evacuate as soon as possible.

\_\_\_ The U.N. chief says he's appointing a fact-finding mission in response to requests from Russia and Ukraine to investigate an explosion at a POW prison in a separatist region of eastern Ukraine that reportedly killed 53 Ukrainian prisoners of war and wounded another 75. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told reporters that he doesn't have authority to conduct criminal investigations but does have authority to conduct fact-finding missions.

## **US says Russia aims to fabricate evidence in prison deaths**

By AAMER MADHANI and EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials believe Russia is working to fabricate evidence concerning last week's deadly strike on prison housing prisoners of war in a separatist region of eastern Ukraine.

U.S. intelligence officials have determined that Russia is looking to plant false evidence to make it appear that Ukrainian forces were responsible for the July 29 attack on Olenivka Prison that left 53 dead and wounded dozens more, a U.S. official familiar with the intelligence finding told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Russia has claimed that Ukraine's military used U.S.-supplied rocket launchers to strike the prison in Olenivka, a settlement controlled by the Moscow-backed Donetsk People's Republic.

The Ukrainian military denied making any rocket or artillery strikes in Olenivka. The intelligence arm of the Ukrainian defense ministry claimed in a statement Wednesday to have evidence that local Kremlin-backed separatists colluded with the Russian FSB, the KGB's main successor agency, and mercenary group Wagner to mine the barrack before "using a flammable substance, which led to the rapid spread of fire in the room."

The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the classified intelligence — which was recently downgraded — shows that Russian officials might even plant ammunition from medium-ranged High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, as evidence that the systems provided by the U.S. to Ukraine were used in the attack.

Russia is expected to take the action as it anticipates independent investigators and journalists eventually getting access to Olenivka, the official added.

Ukraine has effectively used HIMARS launchers, which fire medium-range rockets and can be quickly moved before Russia can target them with return fire, and have been seeking more launchers from the United States.

Earlier Wednesday, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he is appointing a fact-finding mission in response to requests from Russia and Ukraine to investigate the killings at the prison.

Guterres told reporters he doesn't have authority to conduct criminal investigations but does have authority to conduct fact-finding missions. He added that the terms of reference for a mission to Ukraine are currently being prepared and will be sent to the governments of Ukraine and Russia for approval.

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

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

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

## Alex Jones concedes Sandy Hook attack was '100% real'

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — For years, bombastic far-right conspiracy theorist Alex Jones ranted to his millions of followers that the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting was a hoax, that children weren't killed and that parents were crisis actors in an elaborate ruse to force gun control.

Under oath and facing a jury that could hit him with \$150 million or more in damages for his false claims, Jones said Wednesday he now realizes that was irresponsible and believes that what happened in the deadliest school shooting in American history was "100% real."

Jones' public contrition came on the final day of testimony in a two-week defamation lawsuit against him and his Austin-based media company, Free Speech Systems, brought by Neil Heslin and Scarlett Lewis, the parents of 6-year-old Jesse Lewis. Their son was a first grader who was among the 20 students and six teachers killed at the school in Newtown, Connecticut, on Dec. 14, 2012.

"I unintentionally took part in things that did hurt these people's feelings," said Jones, who also acknowledged raising conspiracy claims about other mass tragedies, from the Oklahoma City and Boston Marathon bombings to the mass shootings in Las Vegas and Parkland, Florida, "and I'm sorry for that."

But an apology isn't enough for Heslin and Lewis. They said Jones and the media empire he controls and used to spread his false assertions must be held accountable.

"Alex started this fight," Heslin said, "and I'll finish this fight."

The parents testified Tuesday about a decade of trauma, inflicted first by the murder of their son and what followed: gun shots fired at a home, online and telephone threats, and harassment on the street by strangers, all fueled by Jones and his conspiracy theory spread to his followers via his website Infowars.

A forensic psychiatrist testified the parents suffer from "complex post-traumatic stress disorder" inflicted by ongoing trauma, similar to what might be experienced by a soldier at war or a child abuse victim.

At one point in her testimony, Lewis looked directly at Jones, who was sitting barely 10 feet away.

"It seems so incredible to me that we have to do this — that we have to implore you, to punish you — to get you to stop lying," Lewis told Jones.

Courts in Texas and Connecticut have already found Jones liable for defamation for his portrayal of the Sandy Hook massacre as a hoax involving actors aimed at increasing gun control.

Now, Heslin and Lewis are asking the jury in Austin for \$150 million in compensation for defamation and intentional infliction of emotional distress. They will also ask the jury to assess additional punitive damages.

Jurors began considering damages Wednesday. Once they determine whether Jones should pay the parents compensation for defamation and emotional distress, it must then decide if he must also pay punitive damages. That portion will involve a separate mini-trial with Jones and economists testifying to his and his company's net worth.

Jones' attorney asked the jury to limit damages to \$8 — one dollar for each of the compensation charges they are considering — and Jones himself said any award over \$2 million "would sink us."

At the end of Jones' testimony, Mark Bankston, an attorney for the family, pulled a crumpled dollar bill out of his pocket, showed it to Jones, and put it down in front of the parents.

"The day Sandy Hook happened, Alex Jones planted a seed of misinformation that lasted a decade," parents' attorney Kyle Farrar told the jury in closing arguments. "And he just watered that seed over and over until it bore fruit: cruelty and money."

During his testimony, Jones said he's tried in the past to back off the hoax claims, but "they (the media) won't let me take it back."

Jones — who has been banned from major social media platforms for hate speech and abusive be-



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havior — has portrayed the lawsuit as an attack on his First Amendment rights and complained that he's been "typecast as someone that runs around talking about Sandy Hook, makes money off Sandy Hook, is obsessed by Sandy Hook."

Eight days of testimony included videos of Jones and Infowars employees talking about the Sandy Hook conspiracy and even mocking Heslin's description in a 2017 television interview that he'd held his dead son Jesse's body "with a bullet hole through his head." Heslin described that moment with his dead son to the jury.

Jones was the only witness to testify in his defense. And he came under withering attack from the plaintiffs attorneys under cross examination, as they reviewed Jones' own video claims about Sandy Hook over the years, and accused him of lying and trying to hide evidence, including text messages and emails about Sandy Hook. It also included internal emails sent by an Infowars employee that said "this Sandy Hook stuff is killing us."

At one point, Jones was told that his attorneys had mistakenly sent Bankston the last two years' worth of texts from Jones' cellphone.

And shortly after Jones declared "I don't use email," Jones was shown one that came from his address, and another one from an Infowars business officer telling Jones that the company had earned \$800,000 gross in selling its products in a single day, which would amount to nearly \$300 million in a year.

Jones has already tried to protect Free Speech Systems financially. The company filed for federal bankruptcy protection last week. Sandy Hook families have separately sued Jones over his financial claims, arguing that the company is trying to protect millions owned by Jones and his family through shell entities.

## US-China ties on a precipice after Pelosi visit to Taiwan

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S.-China relations are teetering on a precipice after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.

Pelosi received a rapturous welcome in Taipei and was applauded with strong bipartisan support in Washington, despite the Biden administration's misgivings. But her trip has enraged Beijing and Chinese nationalists and will complicate already strained ties even after her departure.

Already, China is preparing new shows of force in the Taiwan Strait to make clear that its claims are non-negotiable on the island it regards as a renegade province. And, as the U.S. presses ahead with demonstrations of support for Taiwan, arms sales and diplomatic lobbying, the escalating tensions have raised the risks of military confrontation, intentional or not.

And the trip could further muddle Washington's already complicated relationship with Beijing as the two sides wrest with differences over trade, the war in Ukraine, human rights and more.

Wary of the reaction from China, the Biden administration discouraged but did not prevent Pelosi from visiting Taiwan. It has taken pains to stress to Beijing that the House speaker is not a member of the executive branch and her visit represents no change in the U.S. "one-China" policy.

That was little comfort for Beijing. Pelosi, who is second in line to the U.S. presidency, was no ordinary visitor and was greeted almost like a head of state. Taiwan's skyline lit up with a message of welcome, and she met with the biggest names on the island, including its president, senior legislators and prominent rights activists.

Chinese officials were enraged.

"What Pelosi has done is definitely not a defense and maintenance of democracy, but a provocation and violation of China's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said after her departure.

"Pelosi's dangerous provocation is purely for personal political capital, which is an absolute ugly political farce," Hua said. "China-US relations and regional peace and stability is suffering."

The timing of the visit may have added to the tensions. It came ahead of this year's Chinese Communist Party's Congress at which President Xi Jinping will try to further cement his power, using a hard line on

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Taiwan to blunt domestic criticism on COVID-19, the economy and other issues.

Summoned to the Foreign Ministry to hear China's complaints, U.S. Ambassador Nicholas Burns insisted that the visit was nothing but routine. "The United States will not escalate and stands ready to work with China to prevent escalation altogether," Burns said, according to the State Department.

The White House also said that Pelosi's visit "doesn't change anything" about the U.S. posture toward China and Taiwan. Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the U.S. had expected the harsh reaction from China, even as she called it unwarranted.

"We are going to monitor, and we will manage what Beijing chooses to do," she added.

Alarmed by the possibility of a new geo-strategic conflict at the same time the West sides with Ukraine in its resistance to Russia's invasion, the U.S. has rallied allies to its side.

The foreign ministers of the Group of 7 industrialized democracies released a statement Wednesday essentially telling China — by the initials of its formal name, the People's Republic of China — to calm down.

"It is normal and routine for legislators from our countries to travel internationally," the G-7 ministers said. "The PRC's escalatory response risks increasing tensions and destabilizing the region. We call on the PRC not to unilaterally change the status quo by force in the region, and to resolve cross-Strait differences by peaceful means."

Still, that status quo — long identified as "strategic ambiguity" for the U.S. and quiet but determined Chinese opposition to any figment of Taiwanese independence — appears to be no longer tenable for either side.

"It's getting harder and harder to agree on Taiwan for both Beijing and Washington," said Jean-Pierre Cabestan, an emeritus professor at Hong Kong Baptist University.

In Taipei and the U.S. Congress, moves are afoot to clarify the ambiguity that has defined U.S. relations with Taiwan since the 1970s. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will soon consider a bill that would strengthen relations, require the executive branch to do more to bring Taiwan into the international system and take more determined steps to help the island defend itself.

Writing in The New York Times, committee Chairman Robert Menendez, D-N.J., lambasted China's response to Pelosi's visit.

"The result of Beijing's bluster should be to stiffen resolve in Taipei, in Washington and across the region," he said. "There are many strategies to continue standing up to Chinese aggression. There is clear bipartisan congressional agreement on the importance of acting now to provide the people of Taiwan with the type of support they desperately need."

But China appears to be pressing ahead with steps that could prove to be escalatory, including live-fire military exercises planned for this week and a steady uptick in flights of fighter jets in and near Taiwan's self-declared air defense zone.

"They are going to test the Taiwanese and the Americans," said Cabestan, the professor in Hong Kong. He said the actions of the U.S. military in the area, including a naval force led by the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, will be critical.

China had ratcheted up potential confrontation weeks ago by declaring that the Taiwan Strait that separates the island from the mainland is not international waters. The U.S. rejected this and responded to by sending more vessels through it. Cabestan said that showed that "something had to be done on the U.S. side to draw red lines to prevent the Chinese from going too far."

Meanwhile, Taiwan is on edge, air raid shelters have been prepared and the government is increasing training for recruits serving their four months of required military service — generally considered inadequate — along with annual two-week annual refresher courses for reservists.

"The Chinese feel that if they don't act, that the United States is going to continue to slice the salami to take incremental actions toward supporting Taiwan independence," said Bonnie Glaser, a China expert at the Asia Program at the German Marshall Fund.

She said that domestic U.S. support for Taiwan actually gives China added incentive to take a strong stance: "China does feel under pressure to do more to signal that this is an issue in which China cannot

compromise.”

Despite the immediate concerns about escalation and potential miscalculation, there are others who don't believe the damage to U.S.-China ties will be more long-lasting than that caused by other, non-Taiwan-related issues.

China is “going to raise a huge fuss and there will be military exercises and there will be embargoes on importing Taiwan goods. And after the shouting is over, you will see a gradual easing,” said June Teufel Dreyer, a Chinese politics specialist at the University of Miami.

“The situation never goes back to completely normal, whatever normal is, but it will definitely die down,” she said.

## **Abortion vote in Kansas sparks new hope for Dems in midterms**

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Democrats displayed a newfound sense of optimism about the election-year political climate Wednesday after voters in traditionally conservative Kansas overwhelmingly backed a measure protecting abortion rights.

At the White House, President Joe Biden hailed the vote in Kansas as the direct result of outrage at the Supreme Court's decision in June to repeal a woman's constitutional right to obtain an abortion.

Republicans and the high court “don't have a clue about the power of American women,” Biden said. “Last night in Kansas, they found out.”

On Capitol Hill, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., boasted of the political winds “blowing at Democrats.”

“Last night in the American heartland, the people of Kansas sent an unmistakable message to the Republican extremists,” he said. “If it's going to happen in Kansas, it's going to happen in a whole lot of states.”

With three months until the November election, the optimism may be premature. But it represents a much-needed break for a party that has spent the better part of the past year reeling from crisis to crisis, including the botched withdrawal from Afghanistan and rising prices for gasoline and other goods. Those developments have contributed to Biden's low approval ratings, leaving Democrats without a unifying leader in a position to rally voters before the election, with control of Congress at stake.

The Kansas vote, however, suggests that threats to abortion rights may energize Democrats in a way few political leaders can. And it comes at a moment when the party is gaining momentum on other fronts, including a legislative package to reduce prescription drug prices, combat climate change and raise taxes on corporations.

The challenge for Democrats will be to maintain the energy for several more months and defy trends that typically trip up the party in power.

In recent history, the party controlling the White House almost always suffers deep losses in the first midterm election of a new presidency. Also, an overwhelming majority of voters believe the country is headed in the wrong direction amid inflation and other economic concerns.

Even with abortion-related momentum, many Democratic strategists privately expect to lose the House majority and believe the Senate is essentially a coin flip.

The day after the Kansas vote, Democratic strategists on the front lines of key midterm contests described a complicated political reality on abortion.

Abortion rights supporters surged to the polls in Kansas, where abortion was quite literally on the ballot. By a roughly 20-percentage point margin, they rejected a measure that would have changed the state constitution to allow state lawmakers to impose restrictions on abortion — or even a ban. The early August primary turnout was on par with a governor's general election contest.

But few elections this fall will feature such clear stakes for abortion rights. Just four states — California, Michigan, Vermont and Kentucky — are expected to feature a Kansas-style abortion referendum on the November ballot, according to the pro-Democratic group EMILY's List.

In the majority of states, Democrats must convince voters they can protect abortion access only by de-

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feating anti-abortion Republican candidates at the state and federal level. While that is true in most cases, it's much more complicated to run against a candidate than a single-issue ballot measure, according to Democratic pollster Molly Murphy.

"The optimist would say, when voters know that abortion is on the ballot, they are motivated to turn out," Murphy said. "That's the messaging challenge that we are going to face. Will voters believe that a legal right to abortion is at stake here in this country in their vote for Congress, Senate, governor, state house — all of those things — and be as motivated to show up to vote?"

"Republicans are going to do everything they can to deflect and not engage on this," she added, noting the GOP's heavy focus on inflation, gas prices and immigration.

Indeed, as Democrats celebrated on Wednesday, the Republican reaction to the abortion vote was decidedly muted.

The Kansas vote was "a huge disappointment for pro-life Kansans and Americans nationwide," said Malory Carroll, of Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America.

Republican strategist Christine Matthews warned that the Kansas vote could have "an energizing effect for abortion rights supporters."

"Success breeds success," she said. "It will encourage the belief that turning out and activating can make a difference and that is particularly important with younger voters and those less inclined to participate. It's a momentum-shifter."

Democrats have long tried without much success to energize supporters by focusing on abortion. But the Supreme Court's decision clarified the stakes as never before. Absent a new federal law, abortion rights now fall to the states, and in 12 states led by Republicans, abortion has already been banned or heavily restricted. Many more are expected to follow.

Republican strategists acknowledge that swing state candidates will have to tread carefully on the issue.

In Georgia, GOP Senate nominee Herschel Walker, for example, worried some Washington Republicans by quickly declaring his opposition to abortion rights even in cases of rape, incest and the life of the mother. Such a position, thought to be extreme in past years, is somewhat common among Republican candidates in 2022.

Republicans in other states have largely sought to avoid clarifying their position.

The Senate Democrats campaign arm recently established a website, [GPOnAbortion.com](http://GPOnAbortion.com), to highlight Republican candidates' outspoken opposition to abortion rights. While Democratic candidates from New York to Washington state are already running ads on abortion, the issue is expected to play a bigger role in some races than others.

Michigan Sen. Gary Peters, who leads the group dedicated to protecting the Senate's Democratic majority, predicted that abortion would likely matter most as a political issue in Senate races in Nevada, New Hampshire and Arizona — all states in which polling suggests strong support for abortion rights. Suburban women and younger voters are most likely to be motivated by the issue.

"There's a great deal of anger," Peters said of the backlash against the Roe reversal. "There's an energy I haven't seen before."

The Kansas vote suggests that such energy could extend well beyond a handful of states.

Polling shows that relatively few Americans wanted to see Roe overturned.

More Americans disapprove than approve of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, 53% to 30%, according to an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll from July conducted about three weeks after the ruling. Just over half of those surveyed said they felt angry or sad about the ruling, the poll found.

In Wisconsin, the leading Democratic Senate candidate, Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, noted that the day the Supreme Court overturned *Roe* was the biggest fundraising day of his entire campaign.

"People are motivated and energetic in ways that I've never seen before," he said in an interview. "I can only assume that that intensity will increase all the way to November."



## Wind-whipped fire leaves Northern California hamlet in ashes

By HAVEN DALEY and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

KLAMATH RIVER, Calif. (AP) — A week ago, the scenic Northern California hamlet of Klamath River was home to about 200 people and had a community center, post office and a corner grocery store. Now, after a wildfire raged through the forested region near the Oregon state line, four people are dead and the store is among the few buildings not reduced to ashes.

At an evacuation center Wednesday, Bill Simms said that three of the four victims were his neighbors. Two were a married couple who lived up the road.

"I don't get emotional about stuff and material things," Simms said. "But when you hear my next-door neighbors died ... that gets a little emotional."

The 65-year-old retiree bought his property six years ago as a second home with access to hunting and fishing. He said Klamath River is a place people are attracted to because they can have privacy and enjoy nature.

He went back to check on his property Tuesday and found it was destroyed.

"The house, the guest house and the RV were gone. It's just wasteland, devastation," Simms said. He found the body of one of his two cats, which he buried. The other cat is still missing. He was able to take his two dogs with him to the shelter.

The McKinney Fire broke out Friday and was still out of control on Wednesday, despite progress by firefighters who took advantage of rain from thunderstorms and lower temperatures.

But even the welcome precipitation brought problems. On Tuesday, heavy rain swelled rivers and creeks and a private contractor in a pickup truck who was aiding the firefighting effort was hurt when a bridge gave out and washed away the vehicle, said Courtney Kreider, a spokesperson with the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office. The contractor was hospitalized with non-life-threatening injuries, she said.

More than 100 buildings ranging from homes to sheds have burned. Identifying the four people who were killed could take several days, Kreider said.

The fire has charred nearly 90 square miles (233 square kilometers) and is the largest in California so far this year. The cause is unknown.

With the rain and cooler temperatures, the blaze grew very little and fire officials said crews used bulldozers to carve firebreaks along a ridge to protect homes and buildings in and around Yreka, which has about 7,800 residents and is the largest city in Siskiyou County.

On Wednesday, evacuation orders for residents of Yreka and Hawkinsville were downgraded to warnings, allowing people to return home. But they were warned the fire remains a threat and were urged to be ready to flee again if necessary.

Skies were mostly clear on Wednesday and temperatures were in the mid- to high 90s, baking an already parched landscape.

California and much of the rest of the West is in drought and wildfire danger is high, with the historically worst of the fire season still to come. Fires are burning in Montana, Idaho and Nebraska and have destroyed homes and threaten communities.

Scientists say 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. California has seen its largest, most destructive and deadliest wildfires in the last five years. In 2018, a massive blaze in the Sierra Nevada foothills destroyed much of the city of Paradise and killed 85 people, the most deaths from a U.S. wildfire in a century.

When it began, the McKinney Fire burned just several hundred acres and firefighters thought they would quickly bring it under control. But thunderstorms came in with ferocious wind gusts that within hours had pushed it into an unstoppable conflagration.

Roger Derry, 80, and his son, Rodger, were among the few families from Klamath River whose homes were spared by the inferno. The elder Derry, who has lived in the unincorporated town for more than four decades, said the fire was terrifying.

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"When that fire came over that ridgeline, it had 100-foot flames for about 5 miles and the wind was blowing. It was coming down like a solid blowtorch," he said. "There was nothing to stop it."

Harlene Schwander, 82, lost the home she had just moved into a month ago to be closer to her son and daughter-in-law. Their home survived but her house was torched.

Schwander, an artist, said she only managed to grab a few family photos and some jewelry before evacuating. Everything else — including her art collection, went up in flames.

"I'm sad. Everybody says it was just stuff, but it was all I had," she said.

In northwestern Montana, a fire that has destroyed at least four homes and forced the evacuation of about 150 residences west of Flathead Lake continued to be pushed north by winds on Wednesday, fire officials said.

Crews had to be pulled off the lines on Wednesday afternoon due to increased fire activity, Sara Rouse, a public information officer, told NBC Montana.

There were concerns the fire could reach Lake Mary Ronan by Wednesday evening, officials said.

The fire, which started on July 29 in grass on the Flathead Indian Reservation, quickly moved into timber and had charred nearly 29 square miles (76 square km).

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. And a wildfire 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.

## Senate backs Finland, Sweden for NATO 95-1, rebuking Russia

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. Senators delivered overwhelming bipartisan approval to NATO membership for Finland and Sweden Wednesday, calling expansion of the Western defensive bloc a "slam-dunk" for U.S. national security and a day of reckoning for Russian President Vladimir Putin over his invasion of Ukraine.

Wednesday's 95-1 vote — for the candidacy of two Western European nations that, until Russia's war against Ukraine, had long avoided military alliances — took a crucial step toward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and its 73-year-old pact of mutual defense among the United States and democratic allies in Europe.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer invited ambassadors of the two nations to the chamber gallery to witness the vote.

President Joe Biden, who has been the principal player rallying global economic and material support for Ukraine, has sought quick entry for the two previously non-militarily aligned northern European nations.

"This historic vote sends an important signal of the sustained, bipartisan U.S. commitment to NATO, and to ensuring our Alliance is prepared to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow," Biden said in a statement Wednesday evening.

"I look forward to signing the accession protocols and welcoming Sweden and Finland, two strong democracies with highly capable militaries, into the greatest defensive alliance in history," the president added.

Approval from all member nations — currently, 30 — is required. The candidacies of the two prosperous Northern European nations have won ratification from more than half of the NATO member nations in the roughly three months since the two applied. It's a purposely rapid pace meant to send a message to Russia over its six-month-old war against Ukraine's West-looking government.

"It sends a warning shot to tyrants around the world who believe free democracies are just up for grabs," Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., said in the Senate debate ahead of the vote.

"Russia's unprovoked invasion has changed the way we think about world security," she added.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, who visited Kyiv earlier this year, urged unanimous approval. Speaking to the Senate, McConnell cited Finland's and Sweden's well-funded, modernizing militaries and their experience working with U.S. forces and weapons systems, calling it a "slam-dunk for national security" of the United States.

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"Their accession will make NATO stronger and America more secure. If any senator is looking for a defensible excuse to vote no, I wish them good luck," McConnell said.

Sen. Josh Hawley, a Missouri Republican who often aligns his positions with those of the most ardent supporters of former President Donald Trump, cast the only no vote. Hawley took the Senate floor to call European security alliances a distraction from what he called the United States' chief rival — China, not Russia.

"We can do more in Europe ... devote more resources, more firepower ... or do what we need to do to deter Asia and China. We cannot do both," Hawley said, calling his a "classic nationalist approach" to foreign policy.

Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas, like Hawley a potential 2024 presidential contender, rebutted his points without naming his potential Republican rival.

That included arguing against Hawley's contention a bigger NATO would mean more obligations for the U.S. military, the world's largest. Cotton was one of many citing the two nations' military strengths — including Finland's experience securing its hundreds of miles of border with Russia and its well-trained ground forces, and Sweden's well-equipped navy and air force.

They're "two of the strongest members of the alliance the minute they join," Cotton said.

U.S. State and Defense officials consider the two countries net "security providers," strengthening NATO's defense posture in the Baltics in particular. Finland is expected to exceed NATO's 2% GDP defense spending target in 2022, and Sweden has committed to meet the 2% goal.

That's in contrast to many of NATO's newcomers formerly from the orbit of the Soviet Union, many with smaller militaries and economies. North Macedonia, NATO's most recent newcomer nation, brought an active military of just 8,000 personnel when it joined in 2020.

Senators' votes approving NATO candidacies often are lopsided — the one for North Macedonia was 91-2. But Wednesday's approval from nearly all senators present carried added foreign policy weight in light of Russia's war.

Schumer, D-N.Y., said he and McConnell had committed to the country's leaders that the Senate would approve the ratification resolution "as fast as we could" to bolster the alliance "in light of recent Russian aggression."

Sweden and Finland applied in May, setting aside their longstanding stance of military nonalignment. It was a major shift of security arrangements for the two countries after neighboring Russia launched its war on Ukraine in late February. Biden encouraged their joining and welcomed the two countries' government heads to the White House in May, standing side by side with them in a display of U.S. backing.

The U.S. and its European allies have rallied with newfound partnership in the face of Putin's military invasion, as well as the Russian leader's sweeping statements this year condemning NATO, issuing veiled reminders of Russia's nuclear arsenal and asserting Russia's historical claims to territory of many of its neighbors.

"Enlarging NATO is exactly the opposite of what Putin envisioned when he ordered his tanks to invade Ukraine," Sen. Bob Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Wednesday, adding that the West could not allow Russia to "launch invasions of countries."

Wednesday's vote by Republicans and Democrats stood out for the normally slow-moving and divided chamber. Senators voted down a proposed amendment by Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., intended to ensure that NATO's guarantee to defend its members does not replace a formal role for Congress in authorizing the use of military force. Paul, a longtime advocate of keeping the U.S. out of most military action abroad, voted "present" on the ratification of Sweden and Finland's membership bid.

Senators approved another amendment from Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, declaring that all NATO members should spend a minimum of 2% of their gross domestic product on defense and 20% of their defense budgets on major equipment, including research and development.

Each member government in NATO must give its approval for any new member to join. The process ran into unexpected trouble when Turkey raised concerns over adding Sweden and Finland, accusing the two of being soft on banned Turkish Kurdish exile groups. Turkey's objections still threaten the two countries'

membership.

## Indiana Rep. Walorski, 2 staffers killed in head-on crash

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and TOM DAVIES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican U.S. Rep. Jackie Walorski was killed Wednesday in a car crash in her northern Indiana district along with two members of her congressional staff and another person, police said.

The crash happened about 12:30 p.m. when a car crossed the center line on a state highway and collided head-on with the SUV Walorski was riding in, the Elkhart County Sheriff's Office said. Three people in the SUV, including Walorski, 58, were killed, as was a woman driving the other car, authorities said.

Walorski, who served on the House Ways and Means Committee, was first elected to represent Indiana's 2nd Congressional District in 2012. She previously served six years in the state's Legislature.

"She has returned home to be with her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Please keep her family in your thoughts and prayers," Walorski's chief of staff Tim Cummings said in a statement.

Walorski and her husband, Dean Swihart, were previously Christian missionaries in Romania, where they established a foundation that provided food and medical supplies to impoverished children. She worked as a television news reporter in South Bend before turning to politics.

Also killed in the crash were Zachery Potts, 27, of Mishawaka, Indiana; Emma Thomson, 28, of Washington, D.C.; and Edith Schmucker, 56, of Nappanee, Indiana, according to the sheriff's office.

Cummings confirmed that Potts and Thomson were members of Walorski's congressional staff. Thomson was Walorski's communications director, while Potts was her district director and the Republican chairman for northern Indiana's St. Joseph County.

Schmucker was driving the other car, according to the sheriff's office. The crash, which occurred in a rural area near the town of Wakarusa, is still under investigation.

Walorski was seeking reelection this year to a sixth term in the solidly Republican district.

She was active on agriculture and food policy in Congress, often working across the aisle on those issues. A co-chair of the House Hunger Caucus, she introduced legislation with Democrats to bring back a Nixon-era White House event on food insecurity.

President Joe Biden pointed to that work in a statement crediting Walorski for years of public service.

"We may have represented different parties and disagreed on many issues, but she was respected by members of both parties for her work," Biden said. "My team and I appreciated her partnership as we plan for a historic White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health this fall that will be marked by her deep care for the needs of rural America."

Indiana Republican U.S. Sen. Todd Young said he was devastated by Walorski's death.

"Jackie loved Hoosiers and devoted her life to fighting for them," Young said in a statement. "I'll never forget her spirit, her positive attitude, and most importantly her friendship. All of Indiana mourns her passing, along with the tragic deaths of her staff Emma Thomson and Zach Potts."

Walorski was a reliable Republican vote in Congress, including against accepting the Arizona and Pennsylvania electoral votes for Biden following the Capitol insurrection.

As a member of the Indiana House, Walorski pushed anti-abortion legislation opposed gambling expansion proposals. She became a favorite of the conservative tea party movement.

Walorski lost a close 2010 congressional race to Democrat Joe Donnelly before narrowly winning the seat in 2012 as Donnelly made a successful run for the Senate. She had easily won her reelection campaigns since then.

House Republican Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy called Walorski a "no-nonsense, straight shooter."

Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Walorski "lived a life of service."

"She passionately brought the voices of her north Indiana constituents to the Congress, and she was admired by colleagues on both sides of the aisle for her personal kindness," Pelosi said in a statement.

Pelosi ordered the flags at the U.S. Capitol to be flown at half-staff in Walorski's honor. The White House said its flags would be lowered Wednesday and Thursday, and Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb issued a similar flag directive for the state.



"At every level of public service Jackie was known to be a positive force of nature, a patriot, and a relentless policymaker with an unwavering loyalty to her constituents," Holcomb, a Republican, said.

Democratic Rep. Annie Kuster of New Hampshire said she and Walorski bonded as newly elected members of Congress in late 2012 over their husbands' shared love of jazz music and became friends.

"I was proud to work with her on a variety of critical issues, including legislation to address the addiction crisis, end sexual violence, and help military sexual assault survivors access the care they need," Kuster said.

## Parkland jurors hear 3rd day of heartbreaking testimony

By TERRY SPENCER and FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A Girl Scout and avid reader. A trombone player who loved movies and basketball. A straight-A student who loved Irish dance and was looking forward to a trip to Ireland.

Jurors in the trial of Florida school shooter Nikolas Cruz heard tearful statements Wednesday from three families whose children were among the 17 he murdered at Parkland's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Feb. 14, 2018. It was the third straight day of such testimony — but it didn't make it any easier to hear as once again jurors, spectators and even Cruz's lawyers wiped away tears.

Fourteen families have now given statements, with the final three set for Thursday after the jury tours the three-story classroom building where the massacre took place.

Cruz, 23, pleaded guilty in October to the murders; the trial, in its third week, is only to decide if he will be sentenced to death or life without parole.

Tony and Jennifer Montalto told the seven-man, five-woman jury and 10 alternates how their daughter Gina had saved a toddler from drowning when she was 10, and described the turtle figurine the child's grateful mother gave her. It still decorates her now unused room.

Gina, who was 14 when she died, had an infectious personality, they said, and was an avid reader.

"She once told me she wanted to live in a library," her mother said. The children's wing at the Parkland library is now named for her.

Her father, wearing the same suit he wore to their last father-daughter dance, said her death has driven a wedge between him and his wife and left her younger brother angry.

"Gina was our best girl and Anthony our best boy," he said. "My son struggles to make sense of Gina's death at her school."

They used to play together "filling our house with laughter," he said. "Now there is deafening silence."

Max Schachter spoke of his son, Alex, who was a dedicated trombone player in the school band. The 14-year-old also loved movies and played guard on a basketball team.

"Our family is broken. There is a constant emptiness," his father said, adding that there is a part of him that will "always be sad and miserable."

He said the family is haunted by the fact that they will never know whether Alex would have gone to his dream school, the University of Connecticut, or stayed closer to home.

"It's an ache that is just constant," he said. "I wish every single day that this was a nightmare that I could wake up from."

He said that at 5 a.m. on the day of Alex's funeral, he and Alex's older brother, Ryan, were struggling to finish his eulogy when Ryan suggested looking in Alex's bedroom trash can. There they found a poem titled "Life is like a Roller-coaster," which Alex had written for his English class. Ryan read it for the jury.

Isabel Dalu, a friend who spoke on behalf of the family of shooting victim Cara Loughran, said Cara always reminded her of a "porcelain doll." She made straight A's, loved the beach and to surf. She also was looking forward to a vacation in Ireland the family had planned for the summer of 2018, Dalu said.

"Losing Cara has left a crushing absence in their lives," Dalu said.

Dalu's daughter was Cara's "first friend and the big sister she didn't have," she said. The two loved Irish dancing, and Cara was looking forward to performing at the St. Patrick's Day festival, she said.

Dalu said her own daughter still does Irish dance "to continue Cara's legacy."

## Los Angeles mourning death of Dodgers' Vin Scully

By BETH HARRIS AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Mitch Hammontree stood back and gazed at the flowers, candles and handwritten messages laid out beneath a sign welcoming fans to Dodger Stadium at the main entrance on Vin Scully Avenue.

"This is an altar," said the 68-year-old fan from Placentia.

The city of Los Angeles was mourning Wednesday for the Bronx-born Scully, whose 67-year career calling games in Brooklyn and Los Angeles made him the longest-tenured broadcaster with a single team in sports history. He died Tuesday night at age 94.

With the Dodgers out of town until Friday, fans of all ages gathered outside the stadium and at other spots to honor Scully. Some recalled his voice soothing them to sleep as kids.

"It was like listening to your favorite song on the radio all the time, he was always in the background," said George Esteves, a 58-year-old from Sierra Madre.

Hammontree added, "He painted such a picture, you didn't need a TV."

Others recalled Scully as a bridge from one generation to the next, including 29-year-old Kenneth Walls of South Los Angeles who tuned in alongside his 90-year-old grandfather.

"He's been a part of my life since I was born," Walls said. "Having this opportunity to share this moment with the fans is really important. It's more appropriate to be in a celebratory mood for such a long, beautifully lived life."

At one point, a tiny green-colored bird alighted on a Dodgers cap nestled among the flowers.

"Look, it's Vinny!" a woman exclaimed.

Diana Gutierrez of Downey brought her 8-year-old grandson to view the collection of mementos that included a blue-and-white Dodgers serape, baseball-shaped balloons and baseballs resting on top of the D and tucked in the V on the welcome sign at 1000 Vin Scully Ave.

"My grandson was saying this morning, 'He's such a nice person to everybody,'" Gutierrez said. "I said, 'Absolutely, that's definitely a good memory to leave behind and that's something to be proud of in Los Angeles.'"

Along Hollywood Boulevard, tourists and locals paused at Scully's flower-strewn star on the Walk of Fame located two doors down from another legend, Musso & Frank Grill. A delivery man hung an arrangement of roses and other flowers in Dodgers colors on a wooden easel.

Back downtown a few miles from the stadium, the weekday lunch crowd was already in line at Philippe the Original French Dipped Sandwiches.

"I was almost in tears," 75-year-old Daniel Mirgil of Pomona said of hearing Scully had died. "We used to use our transistor radio just to listen to him."

Los Angeles City Hall will be lit in blue starting Wednesday night. ESPN2 is re-airing Game 1 of the 1988 World Series featuring Scully's memorable call of Kirk Gibson's pinch-hit, walk-off home run that led the Dodgers to a win over the Oakland Athletics. The Dodgers will add a patch with 'VIN' above a microphone to their uniforms.

The self-effacing Scully would have appreciated the tributes but would have likely found them to be "a little bit embarrassing," which was how he described the hoopla surrounding his retirement in 2016.

"I've never wanted to get out in front of the game," he said then.

Moments of silence were held in Scully's honor around the majors Wednesday.

"It's the end of an era," Hammontree said. "You think he's going to live forever, and of course his legacy will."

## Election skeptics rise in GOP races to run state elections

By BOB CHRISTIE and CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — The Trump-endorsed state lawmaker who won the GOP nomination for Arizona secretary of state is the latest candidate to advance to the November ballot for a post overseeing state elections while denying the results of the last one.

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The early success of such candidates is raising concerns about what happens if those who lack faith in elections are put in charge of running them.

State Rep. Mark Finchem easily cleared a crowded field in Tuesday's Arizona primary. He has embraced former President Donald Trump's false claims that the 2020 election was stolen and has promised to upend election administration in the politically pivotal state if elected.

"The focus of the election is going to be on restoring the rule of law. It's that simple," Finchem said in an interview Wednesday. "Right now, we have lawlessness."

Finchem, who earned an early endorsement from Trump, was among those seeking to have the Legislature overturn Democrat Joe Biden's win in Arizona. He joins Republican nominees for secretary of state in Alabama, Indiana, Michigan, Nevada and New Mexico and the Republican nominee for governor in Pennsylvania in supporting Trump's false claims. In Pennsylvania, the governor appoints the secretary of state.

Election experts say candidates who dispute the results of a valid election in which there has been no evidence of widespread fraud or manipulation of voting systems pose a danger of interfering in future elections. They warn it could trigger chaos if they refuse to accept results they don't like.

"They only have faith in elections when their side wins. Their definition of a secure election is only when they or their party wins," said David Becker, a former U.S. Justice Department attorney who now leads the nonprofit Center for Election Innovation and Research. "That is not a democracy."

Not all such candidates this year have been successful. Most notably, Rep. Jody Hice lost his bid to oust Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in the state's primary. Raffensperger had drawn the ire of Trump after refusing the former president's demand in a phone call to "find" enough votes to overturn Biden's win in the state.

Most of the seven incumbent Republican secretaries facing primary challengers this year have advanced to the November election. That includes Kansas Secretary of State Scott Schwab, who on Tuesday defeated a challenger who promoted election conspiracy theories.

Only Indiana's Holli Sullivan and South Dakota's Steve Barnett have lost their bids to stay in office. A handful of primaries remain over the next several weeks.

Historically, races for secretary of state have been low-key contests overshadowed by campaigns for governor and state attorney general. But they have drawn enormous interest since the 2020 election, when voting systems and processes came under attack by Trump and his supporters.

Secretaries of state don't make laws, but they work closely with local election officials in their states. Responsibilities vary, but they typically issue guidance on voting procedures to ensure uniformity, dole out funding to local election officials and coordinate with federal officials on election security.

Experts say a secretary of state who believes the 2020 election was stolen could seek changes to how elections are run. For instance, those who think mail voting is vulnerable to fraud could add new requirements for mail ballot requests, reduce access to drop boxes or eliminate lists of permanent absentee voters.

In Arizona, the secretary of state writes a manual with the force of law that lays out election rules. The manual must be based on state law and approved by the attorney general and governor, but has been the subject of controversy this year after the Republican attorney general sought to block a new version written by the Democratic secretary of state.

The 2019 version with some changes was allowed to remain in force instead of the new one, and Finchem vows to completely scrap that version.

"If they have the keys to the castle, so to speak, will they properly set rules, count votes and defend the will of the people?" said David Levine, a former election official who is now a fellow with the Alliance for Securing Democracy.

In Nevada, the Republican nominee, Jim Marchant, wants all voting equipment tossed out in favor of hand-marked and hand-counted paper ballots. He argues voting machines can't be trusted and has told voters: "You haven't elected anybody. The people that are in office have been selected. You haven't had a choice."

In Arizona, Finchem is part of a lawsuit seeking to compel election officials in the state to hand-count ballots cast in the November election. A federal judge is considering whether to dismiss it.

There is no evidence that voting machines have been manipulated. A coalition of federal and state election and cybersecurity officials called the 2020 presidential election "the most secure in American history" and Trump's own attorney general has said there was no fraud that would have altered the results.

Experts say hand-counting of ballots is not only less accurate but extremely labor-intensive, potentially delaying results by weeks. They also say it's unnecessary because voting equipment is tested before and after elections to ensure ballots are read and tallied correctly.

Besides noting election administration, Levine said there are questions about what a secretary of state who embraces conspiracy theories might do if their party's candidate lost an election and claimed fraud.

"We need to make sure that we are putting people in these positions who put free and fair elections above partisan interest," he said.

Finchem confirmed Wednesday that he has received a subpoena from the Justice Department seeking documents related to his activities surrounding the 2020 election. He dismissed claims that he or other candidates like him might be a danger to democracy.

"That's hyperbolic at its best," Finchem said. "At its worst, it's just fear-mongering."

Although secretaries of state are important positions, they do not have unlimited power, said Sylvia Albert, director of voting and elections for Common Cause, a nonpartisan organization that advocates for expanded voter access.

"Even in states where the secretary of state has an enormous amount of power, a secretary of state cannot — by themselves — overturn a democratic election," Albert said. "Even where these individuals may want to take actions to undermine the ability for voters to vote and have a ballot count, they are still limited by the law and checks and balances in place."

## **NFL appeals 6-game suspension for Browns' Deshaun Watson**

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

The NFL is seeking an indefinite suspension of at least one year plus a fine in appealing a disciplinary officer's decision to suspend Cleveland Browns quarterback Deshaun Watson for six games for violating the league's personal conduct policy, a person familiar with the filing told The Associated Press.

The person, speaking on condition of anonymity because the matter isn't public knowledge, also said Watson would be required to undergo treatment before he could be reinstated. The league initially recommended an \$8 million fine and asked during settlement negotiations for at least a \$5 million fine plus a 12-game suspension that never materialized, another person involved in the talks told the AP.

The NFL's appeal gives Commissioner Roger Goodell or someone he designates authority to impose a stiffer penalty. League spokesman Brian McCarthy said it's still to be determined whether Goodell or someone else will hear the appeal.

Former federal judge Sue L. Robinson issued her ruling Monday after Watson was accused by two dozen women in Texas of sexual misconduct during massage treatments while he played for the Houston Texans.

In her 16-page report, Robinson described Watson's behavior as "more egregious than any before reviewed by the NFL."

But her punishment fell far short of the NFL's request. So, the league on Wednesday exercised its right to appeal, per the collective bargaining agreement.

The players' union has until the end of business Friday to respond in writing. The union could challenge the appeal ruling in federal court, setting the stage for a prolonged fight. Both sides could still reach a settlement to avoid a lengthy battle. The NFLPA didn't immediately comment on the appeal.

McCarthy said there's no timeline for Goodell or his designee to make a ruling.

According to the league's personal conduct policy, the appeal will be processed on an expedited basis. Also, it will be "limited to consideration of the terms of discipline imposed" and "based upon a review of the existing record without reference to evidence or testimony not previously considered."

The policy also states the "decision of the Commissioner or his designee, which may overturn, reduce, modify or increase the discipline previously issued, will be final and binding on all parties."



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This is the first time since the new CBA was signed in 2020 that the league and the NFLPA turned to a jointly appointed disciplinary officer to determine violations of the personal conduct policy. In the past, Goodell has served as judge and jury to impose penalties on players.

By appealing, the NFL is giving that power back to Goodell, who can choose another person to levy any punishment.

A league official told the AP before Watson's three-day disciplinary hearing concluded in June that the NFL wanted to avoid an appeal.

But the league proceeded with one amid a backlash from some fans and intense public pressure in the media. Beyond that, there were other factors.

A person familiar with the league's thinking cited Watson's lack of expressed remorse, which Robinson noted in her report, the fact he didn't report the first incident when it happened and he wasn't truthful with the league's investigators.

Robinson questioned Watson's testimony in her report, saying: "It is difficult to give weight to a complete denial when weighed against the credible testimony of the investigators who interviewed the therapists and other third parties."

Watson, who played four seasons with the Texans before sitting out last season and then being traded to Cleveland in March, recently settled 23 of 24 lawsuits filed by the women who alleged sexual harassment or assault during massage treatments in 2020 and 2021. Two grand juries in Texas declined to indict Watson on criminal complaints brought by 10 of the women.

Robinson concluded 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.

She declined to suspend Watson for a full year based on precedents and the league's current policy. But Robinson concluded a longer suspension could be justified if it was already outlined in the personal conduct policy.

"While it may be entirely appropriate to more severely discipline players for non-violent sexual conduct, I do not believe it is appropriate to do so without notice of the extraordinary change this position portends for the NFL and its players," Robinson wrote in her report.

Watson has continued to practice with the Browns while awaiting resolution to his case, which has raised questions about the league's handling of off-field player behavior, inconsistencies in its personal conduct policy and its overall support of women.

The Browns have been in a state of limbo as well, not knowing when or if Watson will be able to play this season.

Cleveland traded three first-round picks to Houston for the three-time Pro Bowl QB and signed him to a five-year, \$230 million contract.

Watson will lose only \$345,000 if the suspension is unchanged because his base salary this season is \$1.035 million.

Watson didn't comment to the AP when asked for a reaction to the league's decision to appeal. He was then escorted inside the Browns' facility by a member of the team's security staff.

The three-time Pro Bowler had just wrapped up Cleveland's seventh practice of training camp and was still on the field when the league's appeal announcement was posted.

Watson had a conversation with Peter Jean-Baptiste, the team's vice president of communications, before spending a few minutes signing autographs for military members and their families.

He was embraced by one woman who said she told Watson to "stay strong."

## Walker accepts debate invite, but not one that Warnock chose

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia Republican Herschel Walker has accepted an invitation in his U.S. Senate race to debate Democratic incumbent Raphael Warnock, but it's not one of the three debate invitations War-

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Warnock earlier accepted, leaving it unclear whether the two will actually clash in person before the November general election.

Walker's campaign said Wednesday that the candidate had accepted an invitation from Nexstar Media Group and other television stations to debate Warnock in Savannah on Oct. 14.

Early-in person voting begins in Georgia on Oct. 17.

"It is time that people see the difference. So on Oct. 14, I want Sen. Warnock to be ready, because I have accepted a debate, and now he can quit talking and show the people he's going to stand behind his words and show up for the debate," Walker told Fox News host Sean Hannity on Tuesday.

Walker has been proclaiming his readiness to debate Warnock for months, but his campaign in recent weeks has expressed concern over whether the formats and moderators would be fair to Walker. The GOP nominee skipped debates during his easy primary win, despite criticism from some Republicans.

Warnock and Democrats have been relentlessly attacking Walker as unqualified and untrustworthy after months of negative news stories, and polls show Warnock narrowly ahead, increasing pressure on Walker. Georgia is one of the most important states as Republicans attempt to recapture control of the Senate from Democrats, who took over the chamber only after Warnock and Sen. Jon Ossoff won twin runoffs in January 2021.

Warnock in June accepted invitations for three debates from WTOC-TV in Savannah, the Atlanta Press Club, and a group of news organizations in Macon.

Walker's preferred debate would be aired on Nexstar stations WSAV-TV in Savannah, WJBF-TV in Augusta and WRBL-TV in Columbus, as well as WAGA-TV in Atlanta, WGXA-TV in Macon and WFXL-TV in Albany. The debate would take place in front of a live audience somewhere in Savannah.

WSAV-TV reported Wednesday that Walker would only participate in its debate. Walker spokesperson Mallory Blount did not respond to a question from The Associated Press about whether Walker would decline other invitations.

As of Wednesday, Warnock's campaign said he was still committed to those invitations and had not accepted the Nexstar invitation.

"Two months ago, Rev. Warnock accepted invitations to three well-established Georgia debates in Atlanta, Savannah, and Macon to be broadcast statewide, after Herschel Walker said he would debate Rev. Warnock anywhere, anytime. Nothing has changed," said campaign manager Quentin Fulks.

A proposal provided by the Walker campaign indicated Nexstar would tell candidates in advance about the topics to be discussed, but not specific questions.

For now, the Atlanta and Macon debates are still on, organizers said Wednesday, with Warnock and Libertarian Chase Oliver having accepted. Laurie Strauss of the Atlanta Press Club said the club has been in talks with the Walker campaign.

"I'm still hopeful we'll be able to get them to confirm," Strauss said.

The Atlanta Press Club represents candidates who refuse its debate with an empty podium, letting other candidates bash the absent debater freely. Those sessions also allow candidates to question each other.

Debbie Blankenship, the executive director of the Mercer University for Collaborative Journalism, which is organizing the Macon debate, said her group has never heard back from the Walker campaign despite multiple attempts to contact the candidate.

Blankenship said the consortium of news organizations wanted to mount a debate to make sure candidates address the needs of middle Georgia and rural Georgia. She said debates are a chance to hear from candidates directly.

"I think it just gives the candidates an opportunity to answer questions directly," Blankenship said. "They're not filtered through political ads or news releases."

## Record amount of seaweed is choking shores in the Caribbean

By DANICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Near-record amounts of seaweed are smothering Caribbean coasts from

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Puerto Rico to Barbados, killing fish and other wildlife, choking tourism and releasing stinky, noxious gases.

More than 24 million tons of sargassum blanketed the Atlantic in June, shattering the all-time record, set in 2018, by 20%, according to the University of South Florida's Optical Oceanography Lab. And unusually large amounts of the brown algae have drifted into the Caribbean Sea.

A raggedy carpet of vegetation recently surrounded an uninhabited island near the French Caribbean territory of St. Martin that is popular with tourists, forcing officials to suspend ferry service and cancel kayaking, paddleboarding and snorkeling tours. The normally translucent turquoise waters around Pinel Island turned into a prickly yellowish-brown slush.

Oswen Corbel, owner of Caribbean Paddling, said he had to close his St. Martin business on July 22 and doesn't expect to reopen until late October. He estimated he has lost at least \$10,000.

"Maybe I should give up. ... Sometimes I think I should go into the mountains and herd sheep, but this is what I know to do," he said. "What's next? We had Hurricane Irma, we had COVID, we had the sargassum, and now I'm pretty scared of global warming."

Scientists say more research is needed to determine why sargassum levels in the region are so high, but the United Nations' Caribbean Environment Program said possible factors include a rise in water temperatures as a result of climate change, and nitrogen-laden fertilizer and sewage that nourish the algae.

"This year has been the worst year on record," said Lisa Krinsky, a university researcher with Florida Sea Grant, a program aimed at protecting the coast. "It is absolutely devastating for the region."

She said large masses of seaweed have a severe environmental impact, with the decaying algae altering water temperatures and the pH balance and leading to declines in seagrass, coral and sponges.

"They're essentially being smothered out," Krinsky said.

The "golden tide" also has hit humans hard.

The concentration of algae is so heavy in parts of the eastern Caribbean that the French island of Guadeloupe issued a health alert in late July. It warned some communities about high levels of hydrogen sulfide gas emanating from the huge rotting clumps of seaweed. The gas, which smells like rotten eggs, can affect people with breathing problems such as asthma.

The Biden administration declared a federal emergency after the U.S. Virgin Islands warned last month of unusually high amounts of sargassum clogging machinery at a desalination plant near St. Croix that is struggling to produce water and meet demand amid a drought.

In addition, the U.S. Virgin Islands' electricity generating station relies on ultra-pure water from the desalination plant to reduce emissions. The loss of such water would force the government to use a type of diesel fuel that is more expensive and in limited supply, officials said.

Chuanmin Hu, an oceanography professor at the University of South Florida who helps produce the seaweed reports, said sargassum levels for the eastern Caribbean were at a near-record high this year, second only to those reported in July 2018. Levels in the northern Caribbean are at their third-highest level, he said.

Experts first noted large amounts of sargassum in the Caribbean Sea in 2011, and the problem has occurred practically every year since then.

"We don't know if this is a new normal," Krinsky lamented.

Sargassum in moderation helps purify water and absorb carbon dioxide and is a key part of the habitat for fish, turtles, shrimp, crabs and other creatures. It is also used in fertilizer, food, biofuel, construction materials and medicinal products.

But it is bad for tourism and the environment when too much accumulates just offshore or on beaches.

"This is the worst we've ever seen it for sure," said Melody Rouveure, general manager for a tour company in the Dutch Caribbean territory of St. Maarten, which shares an island with St. Martin. "It did ruin my personal beach plans."

On Union Island, which is part of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the seaweed invasion has forced some resorts in recent years to close for up to five months.

Masses of sargassum also have strangled the Caribbean's fishing industry. It damages boat engines

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and fishing gear, prevents fishermen from reaching their vessels and fishing grounds and leads to a drop in the number of fish caught. Barbados, where the beaches are piled with reddish-brown seaweed, has been hit especially hard.

An overabundance of sargassum was blamed for the recent deaths of thousands of fish in the French Caribbean island of Martinique. It also has activists concerned about the plight of endangered turtles. Some are dying at sea, entangled in the seaweed or unable to lay their eggs because of the mat of algae over the sand.

In the Cayman Islands, officials launched a trial program in which crews pumped more than 2,880 square feet (268 square meters) of seaweed out of the water. But on Tuesday, the government announced it suspended the project, saying the seaweed had decomposed so much that it had rendered the pumping useless.

Some island nations use heavy machinery to remove seaweed from the beach, but scientists warn that causes erosion and can destroy the nests of endangered turtles.

Many Caribbean islands are struggling financially and do not have the means to clear the vast amounts of seaweed.

Gov. Albert Bryan of the U.S. Virgin Islands said he asked President Joe Biden to declare a federal emergency for the entire three-island territory, not just St. Croix, but that didn't happen. Bryan said he is now trying to find local funds to clean beaches, "but a lot of things need money right now."

## **EPA announces flights to look for methane in Permian Basin**

By MICHAEL BIESECKER and HELEN WIEFFERING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency says it will conduct helicopter overflights to look for methane "super emitters" in the nation's largest oil and gas producing region.

EPA's Region 6 headquarters in Dallas, Texas, issued a news release about a new enforcement effort in the Permian Basin on Monday, saying the flights would occur within the next two weeks.

The announcement came four days after The Associated Press published an investigation that showed 533 oil and gas facilities in the region are emitting excessive amounts of methane and named the companies most responsible. Colorless and odorless, methane is a potent greenhouse gas that traps 83 times more heat in the atmosphere over a 20 year period than an equivalent amount of carbon dioxide.

EPA spokesman Tim Carroll said the timing of the agency's announcement was not related to AP's story and that similar overflights had been conducted in years past. EPA officials made no mention of an upcoming enforcement sweep in the Permian when interviewed by AP last month.

EPA Region 6 Administrator Earthea Nance said the Permian Basin accounts for 40 percent of our nation's oil supply and for years has released dangerous quantities methane and volatile organic compounds, contributing to climate change and poor air quality.

"The flyovers are vital to identifying which facilities are responsible for the bulk of these emissions and therefore where reductions are most urgently needed," Nance said, according to the agency's media release.

AP used 2021 data from the group Carbon Mapper to document massive amounts of methane venting into the atmosphere from oil and gas operations across the Permian, a 250-mile-wide bone-dry expanse along the Texas-New Mexico border that a billion years ago was the bottom of a shallow sea.

A partnership of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and academic researchers, Carbon Mapper used an airplane carrying an infrared spectrometer to detect and quantify the unique chemical fingerprint of methane in the atmosphere. Hundreds of sites were shown persistently spewing the gas across multiple overflights.

Last October, AP journalists visited more than two dozen sites flagged as persistent methane super emitters by Carbon Mapper with a FLIR infrared camera and recorded video of large plumes of hydrocarbon gas containing methane escaping from pipeline compressors, tank batteries, flare stacks and other production infrastructure. The Carbon Mapper data and the AP's camera work show many of the worst emitters are steadily charging the Earth's atmosphere with this extra gas.

Carbon Mapper identified the spewing sites only by their GPS coordinates. The AP then took the coor-



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dinates of the 533 "super-emitting" sites and cross-referenced them with state drilling permits, air quality permits, pipeline maps, land records and other public documents to piece together the corporations most likely responsible.

Just 10 companies owned at least 164 of those sites, according to an AP analysis of Carbon Mapper's data.

AP also compared the estimated rates at which the super emitting sites were observed gushing methane with the annual reports the companies are required to submit to EPA detailing their greenhouse gas emissions. AP found the EPA's database often fails to account for the true rate of emissions observed in the Permian.

The methane released by these companies will be disrupting the climate for decades, contributing to more heat waves, hurricanes, wildfires and floods. There's now nearly three times as much methane in the air than there was before industrial times. The year 2021 saw the worst single increase ever.

EPA recently enacted restrictions on how much methane can be released from new oil and gas facilities. But proposed regulations on the hundreds of thousands of older sites responsible for the bulk of emissions are still under review. What are restricted under current federal regulations are toxic air pollutants such as hydrogen sulfide, sulfur dioxide and cancer-causing benzene that often accompany methane and are sometimes called "ridealong" gases.

EPA said this week it too would collect data from its airborne observations in the Permian and use the GPS locations to identify the facilities releasing excess emissions. The agency said it will initiate enforcement actions against the companies responsible that could include administrative enforcement actions and referrals to the Justice Department. EPA said companies found to be violating federal law could face significant financial penalties as well as future monitoring to verify corrective action was taken.

## **Pelosi tells Taiwan US commitment to democracy is 'ironclad'**

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — After a trip that drew China's wrath, a defiant Nancy Pelosi concluded her visit to Taiwan on Wednesday with a pledge that the American commitment to democracy on the self-governing island and elsewhere "remains ironclad."

Pelosi received a euphoric welcome as the first U.S. House speaker to visit in more than 25 years, and China swiftly responded by announcing multiple military exercises nearby.

The speaker's departure for South Korea came just a day before China was scheduled to launch its largest maneuvers aimed at Taiwan in more than a quarter of a century.

Before leaving, a calm but resolute Pelosi repeated previous remarks about the world facing "a choice between democracy and autocracy."

"America's determination to preserve democracy, here in Taiwan and around the world, remains ironclad," she said in a short speech during a meeting with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen.

The trip enraged China, which claims Taiwan as its territory and opposes any engagement by Taiwanese officials with foreign governments.

The Biden administration, and Pelosi, have said that the United States remains committed to the so-called one-China policy, which recognizes Beijing but allows informal relations and defense ties with Taipei. The administration discouraged but did not prevent Pelosi from visiting.

Nevertheless, China issued a series of harsh statements after the American delegation touched down in the Taiwanese capital, Taipei.

Taiwanese President Tsai pushed back firmly against Beijing's military exercises, parts of which will enter Taiwanese waters.

"Facing deliberately heightened military threats, Taiwan will not back down," Tsai said at her meeting with Pelosi. "We will firmly uphold our nation's sovereignty and continue to hold the line of defense for democracy."

The exercises, including those involving live fire, are to start Thursday and will be the biggest aimed at Taiwan since 1995, when China fired missiles in a large-scale exercise to show its displeasure over a visit

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by then-Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui to the U.S.

In other activities, Pelosi visited a human rights museum in Taipei that details the history of the island's martial-law era. She also met with some of Taiwan's most prominent rights activists, including an exiled former Hong Kong bookseller who was detained by Chinese authorities, Lam Wing-kee.

Thanking Pelosi for her decades of support for Taiwan, the president presented her with a civilian honor, the Order of the Propitious Clouds.

A day earlier, China's official Xinhua News Agency announced the military operations and showed a map outlining six different areas around Taiwan.

Arthur Zhin-Sheng Wang, a defense studies expert at Taiwan's Central Police University, said three of the areas infringe on Taiwanese waters, meaning they are within 12 nautical miles (22 kilometers) of shore.

Using live fire in a country's territorial airspace or waters is risky, Wang said, because under international rules of engagement, it can be seen as an act of war.

In Washington, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby sought to tamp down fears. He told ABC's "Good Morning America" on Wednesday that U.S. officials "don't believe we're at the brink now, and there's certainly no reason for anybody to be talking about being at the brink going forward."

Pelosi's trip heightened U.S.-China tensions more than visits by other members of Congress because of her position as leader of the House of Representatives. The last House speaker to visit Taiwan was Newt Gingrich in 1997.

China's response came on multiple fronts — military, diplomatic and economic.

Shortly after Pelosi landed Tuesday night, China announced live-fire drills that reportedly started that night, as well as the four-day exercises starting Thursday. The People's Liberation Army Air Force also flew a contingent of 21 warplanes toward Taiwan.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Xie Feng summoned the U.S. ambassador in Beijing to convey the country's protests the same night.

On Wednesday, China banned some imports from Taiwan, including citrus and fish. That night, China flew an additional 27 fighter jets toward Taiwan.

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said a Taiwanese citizen was detained on suspicion of inciting separatism. Yang Chih-yuan, originally from the city of Taichung, was shown surrounded by police in a CCTV video. Yang had been a candidate for a legislative position in New Taipei City, according to local media.

Addressing Beijing's threats, Pelosi said she hopes it's clear that while China has prevented Taiwan from attending certain international meetings, "that they understand they will not stand in the way of people coming to Taiwan as a show of friendship and of support."

Pelosi noted that congressional support for Taiwan is bipartisan, and she praised the island's democracy. She stopped short of saying that the U.S. would defend Taiwan militarily and emphasized that Congress is "committed to the security of Taiwan, in order to have Taiwan be able to most effectively defend themselves."

Her focus has always been the same, she said, going back to her 1991 visit to Beijing's Tiananmen Square, when she and other lawmakers unfurled a small banner supporting democracy two years after a bloody military crackdown on protesters at the square. That visit was also about human rights and what she called dangerous technology transfers to "rogue countries."

On this trip, Pelosi met with representatives from Taiwan's legislature.

The speaker's visit is "the strongest defense" of human rights, democratic values and freedom, Tsai Ching-chang, vice president of Taiwan's legislature, said in welcome.

Pelosi's five-member delegation included Rep. Gregory Meeks, chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi from the House Intelligence Committee, as well as Reps. Andy Kim and Mark Takano.

Also traveling with the speaker was Rep. Suzan DelBene, whom Pelosi said was instrumental in the passage of a \$280 billion bill aimed at boosting American manufacturing and research in semiconductor chips — an industry that Taiwan dominates and is vital for modern electronics.

Hours after leaving Taipei, Pelosi arrived Wednesday evening at a South Korea military base ahead of

meetings with political leaders in Seoul, after which she will visit Japan.

Both countries are U.S. alliance partners, together hosting about 80,000 American personnel as a bulwark against North Korea's nuclear ambitions and China's increased assertiveness in the South China and East China seas.

## Michigan GOP Rep. Meijer loses reelection after Trump vote

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Michigan Rep. Peter Meijer, who witnessed the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection days after taking office and then cast one of the 10 Republican votes to impeach Donald Trump over it, has lost his reelection bid.

Meijer was defeated in a primary Tuesday by Trump-endorsed John Gibbs, a businessman and missionary who served in the Trump administration under Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson.

Two Republicans in Washington state who incurred Trump's wrath by voting for impeachment also went before voters. Races involving Reps. Jaime Herrera Beutler and Dan Newhouse were too early to call by Wednesday morning.

Trump vowed revenge against the 10 who crossed party lines on the impeachment vote, and he endorsed party challengers to them in the midterm elections.

In other races, Rep. Haley Stevens ousted Rep. Andy Levin in their Democratic primary in Michigan. Democratic Reps. Cori Bush of Missouri and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, both members of the progressive "Squad" in Congress, sailed through. In Arizona, a leading figure in the QAnon conspiracy movement fell way short.

Some of the top elections:

### FACING VOTERS AFTER IMPEACHMENT VOTES

Gibbs defeated Meijer despite the first-term incumbent having a large fundraising advantage. Gibbs cast Meijer as not a true Republican because of the impeachment vote. He also 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, had criticized Biden over the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, as well as his handling of the economy.

"A Constitutional Republic like ours requires leaders who are willing to take on the big challenges, to find common ground when possible, and to put their love of country before partisan advantage," Meijer said in a statement. "Though this was not the outcome we hoped for, I will continue to do everything possible to move the Republican Party, West Michigan, and our country in a positive direction."

Gibbs will face Democrat Hillary Scholten in November in the Democratic-leaning 3rd Congressional District.

Herrera Beutler and Newhouse had an advantage over Meijer because their primaries are nonpartisan, and the top two vote-getters, regardless of party, will move on to the general election in November. Each incumbent faced multiple Republican candidates.

Herrera Beutler, who has been in Congress since 2011, was in second place in early returns in the 3rd Congressional District, trailing Democrat Marie Gluesenkamp Perez but slightly ahead of fellow Republican Joe Kent. Kent, a former Green Beret whose wife was killed by a suicide bomber in 2019 in Syria, was endorsed by Trump. He heavily promoted the former president's lies that the 2020 election was stolen.

In a Zoom call with reporters after early returns posted, Herrera Beutler said she was "cautiously optimistic" about the results that indicate she could advance.

"If I get through this, I'm not going to change, I'm not going to be a different person," she said. "No one will work harder for this district than I will."

Newhouse had a narrow lead over Democrat Doug White in the 4th Congressional District, which Newhouse has represented since 2015. Republican Loren Culp, a former small-town police chief endorsed by Trump, was in third place in early returns.

Of the 10 House Republicans who voted for impeachment, four opted not to run for reelection. Rep. Tom

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Rice of South Carolina lost to a Trump-endorsed challenger in June and Rep. David Valadao of California survived a primary challenge. Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming is bracing for defeat in her Aug. 16 primary against a Trump-backed rival.

## CANDIDATE LINKED TO QANON

Ron Watkins, one of the most prominent figures in the QAnon conspiracy movement, will not be heading to Congress this year.

Watkins was last in early returns in his Republican primary for 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 was running for Congress because he hopes to "fix the machine from the inside."

He was 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, were at the top of the field. The winner will take on Democratic Rep. Tom O'Halleran in November in a district that favors Republicans.

## FROM COLLEAGUES TO COMPETITORS

Stevens' victory over Levin came in a newly drawn 11th Congressional District in suburban Detroit that favors Democrats, which means Stevens will likely win the seat in November.

Stevens got a financial boost from the United Democracy Project, a super PAC launched by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, commonly called AIPAC. Levin, a progressive member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has been highly critical of Israel's record on human rights.

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

## CHALLENGING THE 'SQUAD'

Tlaib defeated three Democratic challengers in her quest for a third term. Because of redistricting, she is running in the newly drawn Detroit-area 12th Congressional District that favors Democrats and is expected to prevail in November. Tlaib's main competition came from longtime Detroit City Clerk Janice Winfrey, who had strong name recognition in the city.

Bush's win in the 1st Congressional District was against state Sen. Steve Roberts, who hedged his campaign on the idea that Bush, a vocal advocate for defunding the police and moving money to social services and mental health programs, was too liberal even for heavily Democratic St. Louis.

Bush promoted 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 intern credited with saving then-Rep. Gabrielle Giffords' life after an attempted assassination in 2011, lost in the Democrat primary for her former seat.

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.

## Ex-anchor Lake, lawyer Robson in tight Ariz. GOP gov's race

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press



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PHOENIX (AP) — Vote counting continued Wednesday in the close race to determine the Republican nominee for governor in Arizona, with former television news anchor Kari Lake narrowly leading lawyer Karrin Taylor Robson.

The contest is seen as a barometer of Donald Trump's enduring influence after establishment Republicans came out in force behind Robson. Lake is closely aligned with the former president, who could gain allies with influence over how elections are run as he considers a 2024 White House campaign.

The winner will advance to the November general election to take on Secretary of State Katie Hobbs, who defeated Marco Lopez, a former mayor of Nogales and border enforcement official during Obama's administration, in Tuesday's primary.

Trump endorsed and campaigned for a group of candidates who supported his falsehoods about the 2020 election, including Lake, who says she would have refused to certify President Joe Biden's narrow Arizona victory. Robson said the GOP should focus on the future despite the election from two years ago that she called "unfair."

Trump-backed state lawmaker Mark Finchem won the Republican primary to oversee elections as secretary of state — Hobbs' current job. Finchem was at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021 — the day of the riot — and claims Trump was cheated out of a second term. Trump-backed candidates for attorney general and legislative races also were leading.

Mail ballots favored Robson, but Lake overwhelmingly won polling place votes. Ballots left to count are mainly mail ballots turned in at the polls on Tuesday, including 125,000 from Maricopa County, which includes Phoenix.

Arizona, a longtime Republican stronghold, 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 in 2020 was a onetime event or the onset of a long-term shift away from the GOP in the state.

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

Federal and state election officials and Trump's own attorney general have said there is no credible evidence the 2020 election was tainted. Trump's allegations of fraud were also roundly rejected by courts, including by judges he appointed. A hand recount led by Trump supporters in Maricopa County, Arizona's largest, 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, also central to Trump's election lies, his handpicked candidate for governor was defeated by more than 50 percentage points, and the GOP secretary of state was also renominated over a Trump-backed primary rival.

Trump hoped for more success in Arizona, where Republican Gov. Doug Ducey could not run for reelection.

Lake is well known in much of the state after anchoring the evening news in Phoenix for more than two decades. She ran as a fierce critic of the mainstream media, which she says is unfair to Republicans, and of those who oppose Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement, including the family of the late Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.

Lake claimed her campaign was "already detecting some stealing going on" in her own race, but she repeatedly refused to provide any evidence for the claim. She said Tuesday night that changing election laws was her top priority.

"This is why we're in this race," Lake said. "This is why we have this movement right here."

Robson, whose housing developer husband is one of the state's richest men, mostly self-financed her campaign. The GOP establishment, growing increasingly comfortable creating distance from Trump, 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.

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"You have entrusted me with your most sacred possession in a constitutional republic — your vote," Robson told supporters Tuesday night as she awaited election results.

Robson ran a largely old-school Republican campaign focused on cutting taxes and regulations, securing the border and advancing school choice. She also emphasized Lake's prior support for Democrats, including a \$350 contribution to the last Democratic president.

"I can't vote for someone who supported Barack Obama," said Travis Fillmore, 36, a firearms instructor from Tempe who planned to vote for Robson. He said he remains a Trump backer and believes the 2020 election was stolen from him, but Lake's support for Obama was disqualifying.

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

In the Senate race, Trump-backed Blake Masters emerged as the Republican nominee. The 35-year-old first-time candidate has spent most of his career working for billionaire Peter Thiel, who is bankrolling his campaign. Masters emphasized 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 among Masters, businessman Jim Lamon and Attorney General Mark Brnovich, all of whom jockeyed for his support.

Masters will take on Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly in the fall.

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

## Kansas voters resoundingly protect their access to abortion

By JOHN HANNA and MARGARET STAFFORD Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Kansas voters on Tuesday sent a resounding message about their desire to protect abortion rights, rejecting a ballot measure in a conservative state with deep ties to the anti-abortion movement that would have allowed the Republican-controlled Legislature to tighten restrictions or ban the procedure outright.

It was the first test of voter sentiment after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in June that overturned the constitutional right to abortion, providing an unexpected result with potential implications for the coming midterm elections.

While it was just one state, the heavy turnout for an August primary that typically favors Republicans was a major victory for abortion rights advocates. With most of the vote counted, they were prevailing by roughly 20 percentage points, with the turnout approaching what's typical for a fall election for governor.

The vote also provided a dash of hope for Democrats nationwide grasping for a game-changer during an election year otherwise filled with dark omens for their prospects in November.

"This vote makes clear what we know: the majority of Americans agree that women should have access to abortion and should have the right to make their own health care decisions," President Joe Biden said in a statement.

After calling on Congress to "restore the protections of Roe" in federal law, Biden added, "And, the American people must continue to use their voices to protect the right to women's health care, including abortion."

The Kansas vote also provided a warning to Republicans who had celebrated the Supreme Court ruling and were moving swiftly with abortion bans or near-bans in nearly half the states.

"Kansans bluntly rejected anti-abortion politicians' attempts at creating a reproductive police state," said Kimberly Inez McGuire, executive director of Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity. "Today's vote was a powerful rebuke and a promise of the mounting resistance."

The proposed amendment to the Kansas Constitution would have added language stating that it does

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not grant the right to abortion. A 2019 state Supreme Court decision declared that access to abortion is a "fundamental" right under the state's Bill of Rights, preventing a ban and potentially thwarting legislative efforts to enact new restrictions.

The referendum was closely watched as a barometer of liberal and moderate voters' anger over the Supreme Court's ruling scrapping the nationwide right to abortion. In Kansas, abortion opponents wouldn't say what legislation they'd pursue if the amendment were passed and bristled when opponents predicted it would lead to a ban.

Mallory Carroll, a spokesperson for the national anti-abortion group Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, described the vote as "a huge disappointment" for the movement and called on anti-abortion candidates to "go on the offensive."

She added that after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling, "We must work exponentially harder to achieve and maintain protections for unborn children and their mothers."

The measure's failure also was significant because of Kansas' connections to anti-abortion activists. Anti-abortion "Summer of Mercy" protests in 1991 inspired abortion opponents to take over the Kansas Republican Party and make the Legislature more conservative. They were there because Dr. George Tiller's clinic was among the few in the U.S. known to do abortions late in pregnancy, and he was murdered in 2009 by an anti-abortion extremist.

Anti-abortion lawmakers wanted to have the vote coincide with the state's August primary, arguing they wanted to make sure it got the focus, though others saw it as an obvious attempt to boost their chances of winning. Twice as many Republicans as Democrats have voted in the state's August primaries in the decade leading up to Tuesday's election.

"This outcome is a temporary setback, and our dedicated fight to value women and babies is far from over," the coalition leading the vote yes campaign said.

The electorate in Tuesday's vote wasn't typical for a Kansas primary, particularly because tens of thousands of unaffiliated voters cast ballots.

Kristy Winter, 52, a Kansas City-area teacher and unaffiliated voter, voted against the measure and brought her 16-year-old daughter with her to her polling place.

"I want her to have the same right to do what she feels is necessary, mostly in the case of rape or incest," she said. "I want her to have the same rights my mother has had most of her life."

Opponents of the measure predicted that the anti-abortion groups and lawmakers behind the measure would push quickly for an abortion ban if voters approved it. Before the vote, the measure's supporters refused to say whether they would pursue a ban as they appealed to voters who supported both some restrictions and some access to abortion.

Stephanie Kostreva, a 40-year-old school nurse from the Kansas City area and a Democrat, said she voted in favor of the measure because she is a Christian and believes life begins at conception.

"I'm not full scale that there should never be an abortion," she said. "I know there are medical emergencies, and when the mother's life is in danger there is no reason for two people to die."

An anonymous group sent a misleading text Monday to Kansas voters telling them to "vote yes" to protect choice, but it was suspended late Monday from the Twilio messaging platform it was using, a spokesperson said. Twilio did not identify the sender.

The 2019 Kansas Supreme Court decision protecting abortion rights blocked a law that banned the most common second-trimester procedure, and another law imposing special health regulations on abortion providers also is on hold. Abortion opponents argued that all of the state's existing restrictions were in danger, though some legal scholars found that argument dubious. Kansas doesn't ban most abortions until the 22nd week of pregnancy.

The Kansas vote is the start of what could be a long-running series of legal battles playing out where lawmakers are more conservative on abortion than governors or state courts. Kentucky will vote in November on whether to add language similar to Kansas' proposed amendment to its state constitution.

Meanwhile, Vermont will decide in November whether to add an abortion rights provision to its constitu-

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tion. A similar question is likely headed to the November ballot in Michigan.

In Kansas, both sides together spent more than \$14 million on their campaigns. Abortion providers and abortion rights groups were key donors to the “no” side, while Catholic dioceses heavily funded the “yes” campaign.

The state has had strong anti-abortion majorities in its Legislature for 30 years, but voters have regularly elected Democratic governors, including Laura Kelly in 2018. She opposed the proposed amendment, saying changing the state constitution would “throw the state back into the Dark Ages.”

State Attorney General Derek Schmidt, a Republican hoping to unseat Kelly, supported the proposed constitutional amendment. He told the Catholic television network EWTN before the election that “there’s still room for progress” in decreasing abortions, without spelling out what he would sign as governor.

Although abortion opponents pushed almost annually for new restrictions until the 2019 state Supreme Court ruling, they felt constrained by past court rulings and Democratic governors like Kelly.

## **EXPLAINER: A look at the missile that killed al-Qaida leader**

By NOMAAN MERCHANT and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For a year, U.S. officials have been saying that taking out a terrorist threat in Afghanistan with no American troops on the ground would be difficult but not impossible. Last weekend, the U.S. did just that — killing al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri with a CIA drone strike.

Other high-profile airstrikes in the past had inadvertently killed innocent civilians. In this case, the U.S. carefully chose to use a type of Hellfire missile that greatly minimized the chance of other casualties. Although U.S. officials have not publicly confirmed which variant of the Hellfire was used, experts and others familiar with counterterrorism operations said a likely option was the highly secretive Hellfire R9X — know by various nicknames, including the “knife bomb” or the “flying Ginsu.”

That potential use of the R9X, said Klon Kitchen, senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a former intelligence analyst, suggests the U.S. wanted to kill al-Zawahri with “limited likelihood of collateral death and destruction and for other relevant political reasons.”

A look at the Hellfire, and how al-Zawahri likely was killed:

### WHAT IS A HELLFIRE MISSILE?

Originally designed as an anti-tank missile in the 1980s, the Hellfire has been used by military and intelligence agencies over the last two decades to strike targets in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere.

The precision-guided missiles can be mounted on helicopters and unmanned drones and are used widely in combat around the world. More than 100,000 Hellfire missiles have been sold to the U.S. and other countries, according to Ryan Brobst, an analyst at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a Washington think tank.

“It can do enough damage to destroy most targets such as vehicles and buildings while not doing enough damage to level city blocks and cause significant civilian casualties,” Brobst said.

The U.S. military has routinely used Hellfire missiles to kill high-value targets, including a senior al-Qaida leader in Syria last year, and al-Qaida propagandist Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen in 2011.

### WHAT KILLED AL-ZAWAHRI?

The U.S. had multiple options for the attack. It could have used a traditional Hellfire, a bomb dropped from a manned aircraft, or a far more risky assault by ground forces. U.S. Navy SEALs, for example, flew into Pakistan on helicopters and took out Osama bin Laden in a raid.

In this case, the CIA opted for a drone strike. And while the CIA generally doesn’t confirm its counterterrorism missions and closely guards information about strikes it conducts, U.S. government officials have said that two Hellfire missiles were fired at the balcony of the building where al-Zawahri was living in Kabul.

Online images of the building show damage to the balcony, where the U.S. says al-Zawahri was, but the rest of the house is standing and not badly damaged.

Unlike other models of the Hellfire, the R9X doesn’t carry an explosive payload. Instead, it has a series of six rotating blades that emerge on its final approach to a target, Kitchen said. “One of their utilities



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is in opening up vehicles and other obstructions to get to the target without having to use an explosive warhead," he said.

## AVOIDING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

U.S. officials and experts made clear this week that avoiding civilian casualties was a crucial element in the choice of weapon.

Less than a year ago, a U.S. drone strike — using a more conventional Hellfire missile — struck a white Toyota Corolla sedan in a Kabul neighborhood and killed 10 civilians around and near the car, including seven children. In the midst of the chaotic U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan, American forces believed there were explosives in the car and that it posed an imminent threat to troops on the ground. It was, military leaders said, a "tragic mistake"

One former U.S. official said the likely choice of an R9X is an example of the administration's effort to find ways to minimize collateral damage and prevent the loss of innocent life. That missile is a very accurate weapon that strikes in a very small area, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss counterterrorism operations.

An administration official said Monday that the U.S. investigated the construction of the house where al-Zawahri was staying in order to ensure that the operation could be done without threatening the structural integrity of the building and also minimizing the risks of killing civilians, including members of his family who were in other parts of the house.

The choice of missile is ultimately one part of reducing the possibility of killing civilians or causing other collateral damage.

"I would say this is by far a lower-risk option," said Tom Karako, an expert on missile defense at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies. Using the Hellfire, he said, "reflects a high degree of caution as opposed to a riskiness."

## IS THE US PROVIDING UKRAINE WITH DRONES THAT CAN FIRE HELLFIRE MISSILES?

No. While the U.S. has delivered billions of dollars in military assistance to help Ukraine fight the invading Russian troops, it is wary of providing weapons that could fire deep into Russia, potentially escalating the conflict or drawing the U.S. into the war.

As a result, the U.S. so far has not provided Hellfire missiles or drones that could fire them. Instead, the U.S. has delivered smaller, so-called kamikaze drones, such as the Switchblade and Phoenix Ghost, which instead of firing missiles, explode when they hit a target.

## Indian government approves new emissions targets

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Nine months after India announced its target of "net zero" emissions by 2070 at the United Nations climate conference in Glasgow, the country's federal cabinet finally approved a new climate plan on Wednesday.

The new goals will be submitted to the U.N.'s climate agency as part of an international agreement where nations publish how they intend to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, known as nationally determined contributions. The U.S. hopes to achieve "net zero" by 2050, and China by 2060.

The approval comes as India is preparing to celebrate 75 years of independence on Aug. 15 and with just three months left before the next climate conference.

When India's plans were originally announced in November last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also said that India would increase its current capacity for non-fossil fuel electricity, with energy from clean sources able meet half of the country's needs. India's greener power generation has already passed 41%.

The emissions goals that India's federal cabinet ultimately approved are largely in line with Modi's announcement.

India now stands committed to reducing the emissions caused by activities for the nation's economic growth by 45% by the year 2030 from 2005 levels, according to the new targets. The nation will also aim to achieve about 50% of its energy requirements from non-fossil fuel-based energy sources by the year

2030, and promote a federal government program that encourages people to make green lifestyle changes.

Vaibhav Chaturvedi, an economist at the New Delhi-based Council on Energy, Environment and Water, called the approval a "significant step" towards India's climate aims.

The U.N.'s climate agency had set a deadline of July 31, 2021, for various nations to update their targets that were initially announced after the climate conference in Paris in 2015. India was not the only laggard nation, as China and dozens of others had also failed to meet the target date.

Indian officials say that the delay was a reflection of the peculiar challenges facing the country: On the one hand what it does has an outsized impact on the world's climate goals as it's a nation with quickly-growing energy needs, on the other it feels that it's often unfairly asked to prioritize climate goals over its developmental needs.

"India's updated climate action plan comes in a context where Europe and most developed countries are going for more drilling of oil and gas," said Harjeet Singh, head of global political strategy at the Climate Action Network International.

"The delay in updating the targets could have been avoided though. If they had announced these targets a few months earlier, it might have inspired other countries to act faster and more decisively on climate change," he added.

## Takeaways: Abortion backlash in Kansas, Greitens' collapse

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In one of the biggest days of this year's primary campaign season, voters rejected a measure that would have made it easier to restrict abortion rights in red-state Kansas and repudiated a scandal-tarred former governor seeking a U.S. Senate seat in Missouri.

Meanwhile, a Republican congressman who voted to impeach then-President Donald Trump after the Jan. 6 insurrection lost to a Trump-backed opponent early Wednesday, while two other impeachment-supporting House Republicans awaited results in their primaries in Washington state.

In Michigan, a political newcomer emerged from the state's messy Republican gubernatorial primary, setting up a rare woman-vs.-woman general election matchup between conservative commentator Tudor Dixon and incumbent Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

Takeaways from election results Tuesday night:

### RED-STATE KANSAS REJECTS ANTI-ABORTION AMENDMENT

Kansas may seem like an unlikely place for abortion rights supporters to notch a major victory.

But on Tuesday, voters in the conservative state resoundingly rejected a constitutional amendment that would have allowed the Legislature to ban abortion. It was the first major test of voter sentiment since the Supreme Court ruling in June to rescind the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion nationwide.

The amendment would have allowed the Legislature to overturn a 2019 state Supreme Court decision declaring access to abortion a "fundamental" right under the state constitution.

Its failure at the ballot in a state Donald Trump won by nearly 15 points issues a stark warning to Republicans, who have downplayed the political impact of the high court's ruling. It also hands a considerable win to Democrats, who are feeling newly energized heading into what was expected to be a tough midterm election season for them.

Kansas currently allows abortion until the 22nd week of pregnancy. After that, abortion is allowed only to save a patient's life or to prevent "a substantial and irreversible physical impairment of a major bodily function."

Gov. Laura Kelly, a Democrat who supports abortion rights, has warned that the Republican-led Legislature's efforts to ban abortion would hurt the state. On Tuesday it became clear that many voters agree with her.

### TRUMP'S REVENGE

First-term Michigan Rep. Peter Meijer was one of 10 Republicans who joined Democrats to vote in favor

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of impeaching Trump after the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol attack. On Tuesday, he became the latest victim of the former president's revenge campaign.

Meijer, an heir to a Midwestern grocery store empire and a former Army reserve officer who served in Iraq, lost the GOP contest to former Trump administration official John Gibbs.

"I'm proud to have remained true to my principles, even when doing so came at a significant political cost," Meijer said in a statement.

Besides having Trump's endorsement, Gibbs also shared Trump's penchant for conspiracy theories: He parroted Trump's lies about a stolen 2020 election and once spread false claims that Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign chair participated in a satanic ritual that involved bodily fluids.

But Gibbs also drew support from an unusual source: House Democrats' campaign arm spent nearly \$500,000 in the final week of the race on ads that played up his ties to Trump and labeled him "too conservative." It was a ploy by the Democrats to boost a general election candidate who they believe will give Democrat Hillary Scholten a better chance of winning in the general election.

Meijer is the second of the 10 impeachment-supporting Republicans to lose his primary, joining South Carolina Rep. Tom Rice, who was defeated by a Trump-backed challenger in June. Four others opted to retire rather than face voters' wrath. And, so far, only California Rep. David Valadao has survived — just barely.

Also on the ballot Tuesday were Washington state Reps. Jaime Herrera Beutler and Dan Newhouse, who both faced Trump-backed challengers over their impeachment votes. But those contests were too early to call because Washington state conducts elections by mail, delaying the reporting of results.

Herrera Beutler's challengers include Joe Kent, a former Green Beret who has cultivated links to right-wing extremist groups and employs a campaign aide who was a member of the Proud Boys. Newhouse's opponents include Loren Culp, a former GOP gubernatorial nominee who falsely claimed that his 13-point loss to Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee in 2020 was the result of voter fraud.

## TRUMP'S SLATE

Trump's candidates in Arizona had a successful primary night.

Senate candidate Blake Masters, whose campaign was bankrolled by tech investor Peter Thiel, won his Republican primary after echoing Trump's lies of a stolen election and playing up cultural grievances that animate the right, including critical race theory and allegations of big tech censorship.

In the secretary of state race, Mark Finchem, an Arizona state lawmaker who worked to overturn Trump's 2020 loss in the state, defeated three challengers, including an establishment-backed rival.

In the state Legislature, Arizona House Speaker Rusty Bowers, who testified at a Jan. 6 committee hearing about Trump's pressure to overturn the 2020 election, lost his Republican primary for a state Senate seat to a Trump-backed former lawmaker, David Farnsworth.

The Republican gubernatorial contest between former TV news anchor Kari Lake, who was backed by Trump, and businesswoman Karrin Taylor Robson, who was endorsed by Trump's estranged vice president, Mike Pence, was too early to call on Wednesday, with Lake and Robson separated by a slim margin. Lake has aggressively promoted Trump's election lies.

Arizona has emerged as a key swing state. But it also carries significance to Trump after Joe Biden became the first Democratic presidential candidate in decades to carry what was once a reliably Republican state.

## GREITENS' COMEBACK COLLAPSES

Democratic hopes of picking up a U.S. Senate seat in deep-red Missouri faltered Tuesday after Republican voters selected Attorney General Eric Schmitt as their nominee over former Gov. Eric Greitens, who resigned in disgrace in 2018.

Greitens, they predicted, would be toxic in a general election. Democrats landed a strong recruit in beer heir Trudy Busch Valentine, who won her primary Tuesday. And the state's Republican establishment prepared to put millions of dollars behind an independent candidate in the general election, potentially fracturing the GOP vote.

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But Greitens came up short Tuesday, finishing a distant third behind Schmitt and U.S. Rep. Vicky Hartzler. His campaign's tailspin can likely be traced back to March, when his ex-wife submitted a bombshell legal filing in the former couple's child custody case.

Sheena Greitens said in a sworn statement that Eric Greitens had abused her and one of their young sons. She also said he displayed such "unstable and coercive behavior" in the lead-up to his 2018 resignation that others took steps to limit his access to firearms.

At the time, Greitens faced potential impeachment after his former hairdresser testified that he blindfolded and restrained her in his basement, assaulted her and appeared to take a compromising photo to pressure her to keep quiet about an affair.

He resigned from office — and avoided testifying under oath about the affair.

He launched his comeback campaign for Senate last year, marketing himself as an unabashedly pro-Trump conservative. And while many in Missouri wrote him off, one important political figure didn't: Donald Trump, who mused publicly about Greitens' attributes.

But in the end, Trump stopped short of issuing an endorsement, instead issuing a vague statement this week throwing his support behind "ERIC."

And on Tuesday, the other "ERIC" in the race — Schmitt — won.

## MESSY RACE IN MICHIGAN

At its essence, Michigan's raucous Republican gubernatorial primary was a contest of which candidate's personal baggage was the least disqualifying. On Tuesday, conservative media personality Tudor Dixon was the victor, setting up a November general election against Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in the battleground state.

Dixon's past as an actor in a series of vulgar and low-budget horror movies became a campaign issue. But her career moonlighting in titles such as "Buddy BeBop Vs. the Living Dead" and a vampire TV series called "Transitions" paled in comparison to her rivals' problems.

One rival, Ryan Kelley, faces federal misdemeanor charges after he was recorded on video in Washington during the Jan. 6 insurrection directing a mob of Trump supporters toward a set of stairs leading to the U.S. Capitol. Kelley has pleaded not guilty.

Another, Kevin Rinke, is a former car dealer who settled a series of lawsuits in the 1990s after he was alleged to have made racist and sexist comments, which included calling women "ignorant and stupid" and stating that they "should not be allowed to work in public."

A third, Garrett Soldano, is a chiropractor and self-help guru who has sold supplements he falsely claimed were a therapeutic treatment for the coronavirus.

Many in the state's Republican establishment, including billionaire former Trump education secretary Betsy DeVos, view Dixon as their best shot at defeating Whitmer. Trump endorsed Dixon in the race Friday, just a few days before the primary.

But her primary victory is an outcome few would have predicted months ago. In addition to the shortcomings of her rivals, her path was cleared when the two best-known candidates in the race were kicked off the ballot in May for submitting false petition signatures.

## Atlanta's image challenged by facts of 1906 race massacre

By MICHAEL WARREN Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Everyone who moves through downtown Atlanta today passes places where innocent Black men and women were pulled from trolleys, shot in their workplaces, chased through the streets and beaten to death by a mob of 10,000 white men and boys.

But few have been taught about the 1906 Atlanta Race Massacre, which shaped the city's geography, economy, society and power structure in lasting ways. Much like the Red Summer of 1919 in the South and Northeast and the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 in Oklahoma would years later, the white-on-Black violence in Atlanta shattered dreams of racial harmony and forced thousands from their homes.



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A grassroots coalition is working to restore Atlanta's killings and their legacy to public memory. Historic markers and tours are planned for this September's anniversary. A one-act play will be performed simultaneously at group dinners across the city. Organizers are seeking 500 hosts, with the ambitious goal of seating 5,000 people to discuss the lasting effects.

These activists say the massacre doesn't fit comfortably in Atlanta's "cradle of the civil rights movement" narrative, but they insist on truth-telling as some politicians push to ignore the nation's history of racial violence.

Mislabeled a riot, the killings of at least 25 Black people and the destruction of Black-owned businesses had a specific purpose: thwarting their economic success and voting power before African-Americans could claim equal status, said King Williams, a journalist who gives tours describing what happened.

"The mob began its work early in the evening, pulling negroes from street cars and beating them with clubs, bricks and stones," The Associated Press reported on Sept. 24, 1906, adding that "negroes were beaten, cut and stamped upon in an unreasoning, mad frenzy. If a negro ventured resistance or remonstrated, it meant practically sure death."

The violence began where Georgia State University's campus is now. Enraged by unsupported headlines about attacks on white women and the evils of "race-mixing," the mob set fire to saloons and pounced on Black men and women headed home from work, Williams explains on the tour.

Their next target was the "Crystal Palace," an opulent barbershop where Alonzo Herndon made his first fortune catering to white elites. Poorer white people couldn't stomach such success by a Black man and shattered the place, Williams says.

Bodies were stacked at the statue of newspaperman Henry Grady. Williams describes Grady as a post-Civil War "demagogue who championed Atlanta, but also championed a lot of the racial rhetoric that we still see echoing today." His statue is four blocks from CNN Center, and for most people "it's just a thing they walk by," Williams said.

Steps from there, some Black people either jumped or were thrown from the Forsyth Street bridge onto the railroad tracks below. Others reached shelter inside the gates of the Gammon Theological Seminary in Brownsville, a thriving African American neighborhood 3 miles (5 kilometers) to the south.

That's where the mob, now "deputized" as law enforcers, came searching for weapons on the third day, ransacking businesses and pulling women and children from their homes. One white officer was killed and some 250 Black people were arrested, including 60 who were convicted. Not one white person was held responsible for any of the deaths, community organizer Ann Hill Bond said.

The cause was not in doubt. Atlanta Constitution editor Clark Howell and former Atlanta Journal publisher Hoke Smith had outdone each other vowing to disenfranchise Black voters while campaigning for governor. As Election Day approached, the papers printed baseless stories about attempted attacks on white women.

A Fulton County grand jury cited "inflammatory headlines" for fomenting the violence, but when "Voice of the Negro" publisher J. Maxwell Barber tied those articles to the racist campaigns, he was run out of town.

Once governor, Smith signed laws that kept most Black people from voting for another half-century. Thousands abandoned Atlanta, which became two-thirds white by 1910, the Census showed. City officials cited the need to avoid violence as they imposed segregation on neighborhoods, including "Sweet Auburn" Avenue, which became a model of African American economic self-sufficiency. Herndon gave up barbering to become one of the nation's leading insurers for Black families.

The "riot" label still stuck when the massacre was finally added to Georgia's eighth-grade curriculum in 2007.

"It is important for us to use correct language when we're speaking of and remembering and honoring the lives that were lost. This was a massacre. People were killed," said Bond, who leads a #changethename campaign. "And this is just the proper way to truth-tell in order to get to healing. If you don't rip the Band-Aid off, you never get to healing."

The massacre remains "terrifying" to playwright Marlon Burnley, whose one-act play will be performed by the Out of Hand Theater company at September's Equitable Dinners.

"The biggest through-line for me is the presence of fake news and just made-up stories and fearmon-

gering. And I feel like that's just a constant in our history," Burnley said.

Williams gets a variety of reactions on his tours. For college students "it's like discovering fire," he says. Older Atlantans are surprised they never heard the details before. "People who have skin in the game in the city" — civic boosters and people who run non-profits or work in politics — often get squeamish, he says.

"When you talk about the history of what happened in 1906, a lot of that overlaps today," Williams says. "And a lot of people just don't like that. It really just doesn't shine on Atlanta when we try to present ourselves to be a respected city on a hill."

The violence doesn't match the image many Black people have of Atlanta as a kind of Wakanda, the highly advanced mythical African nation of "Black Panther" fame, said Allison Bantimba, who co-founded the Fulton County Remembrance Coalition.

"I do think that restoring this history to public knowledge will make a difference," Bantimba said. "The second we pull down the veil and acknowledge all of that, a lot of people will have to reorient themselves."

## Kenya's election rips open scars of inequality, corruption

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — In the shadow of a glossy, thousand-dollar campaign billboard, one of many across Kenya's capital, street vendors struggle to make even 200 shillings (\$1.68) a day and often pocket none.

Kenya's Aug. 9 election is ripping open the scars of inequality and corruption as East Africa's economic hub chooses a successor to President Uhuru Kenyatta. The vastly rich son of the country's founding leader, Kenyatta has deflected graft allegations by calling for transparency but done little in a decade in power to enable it.

The vendors on a barren patch along Nairobi's Outer Ring Road can hardly grasp the enormous amounts of money spent on next week's election. Few can. In Kenya, candidates aren't required to publicly account for campaign donations or spending. But voters have watched the helicopters and long convoys that have whisked top candidates around the country for months.

"They're spending millions of dollars, but I'm not sure if it's their own money or the public's money," said Martin Wambua, who sells secondhand clothes and rarely is able to save anything from his earnings.

"I know the (election spending) can fund more than 10 people a day," estimated Joseph Kaguthi, who walks everywhere selling baked goods and says he often eats just one daily meal. "But I'm a poor man, and maybe the way I talk is distant from the way it is."

Rising prices for food and fuel, exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and following the economic pain of the COVID-19 pandemic, add to the traditional ethnic tensions in a vote called so closely contested that Kenya might go to a runoff election for the first time.

How the country of 56 million people will cope with extended uncertainty is a major question given a recent history of turbulent elections. The vote "will be an opportunity for Kenya to showcase its democracy to the world," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday, arguing for "a peaceful and transparent democratic process."

Kenya's 2017 vote saw results overturned by the courts, a first in Africa. Longtime opposition contender Raila Odinga boycotted the ordered re-vote and declared himself the "people's president" in a mock swearing-in that led to allegations of treason. The standoff ended when Kenyatta and Odinga, the son of Kenya's first vice president, shared a public handshake.

Now, in the latest twist of Kenya's shifting alliances, Kenyatta is backing former rival Odinga to succeed him after falling out with his deputy president, 55-year-old William Ruto, the other main presidential candidate and a former Odinga ally.

Ruto was indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity for his role in violence following the 2007 election that killed more than 1,000 people after Odinga alleged he had been cheated out of victory. An ICC indictment is hardly a bar to the presidency; Kenyatta was indicted over the turmoil, too. Both men saw their cases terminated amid allegations of witness tampering.

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Said to be one of Kenya's richest men after a decade as deputy president, Ruto promotes himself to the young and poor as a "hustler" who rose from humble beginnings as a chicken seller in contrast to the elite backgrounds of Kenyatta and Odinga.

He says he seeks greater agricultural productivity and financial inclusion. Agriculture is a main driver of Kenya's economy and about 70% of the rural workforce is in farming, while informal street vendors make up the majority of non-farm work.

"Our economic system is rigged against small people," Ruto said in a campaign video. The video came out as a court ordered his wealthy running mate, Rigathi Gachagua, to repay to the state about \$1.6 million that was determined to be the proceeds of corruption.

Ruto has said he would accept the election's outcome "whichever way it goes."

The 77-year-old Odinga, making his fifth and likely final try to win the presidency, is campaigning closely with running mate Martha Karua, a former justice minister who could become Kenya's first female deputy president.

Karua has caught the attention of women in a country that fails to meet a gender quota for elective bodies like Parliament and where female candidates commonly face harassment.

Odinga, famous for being jailed while fighting for multi-party democracy decades ago, has promised cash handouts to Kenya's poorest while saying "the middle class, of course, know how to look after themselves." He has said he'll accept election results "as long as they're free and fair."

When asked how much they were spending on the election, an Odinga spokesman told The Associated Press they will conduct a financial audit to find out at the end of the campaign. A spokesman for Ruto didn't respond.

Ruto and Odinga say they'll fight corruption, but non-governmental organizations sigh over Kenya's failure to address the graft that eats away at everyday lives. The vendors on Nairobi's Outer Ring Road described having to bribe hospitals for timely treatment and the city's notorious inspection officers to avoid alleged petty offenses.

Corruption is said to be widespread among those running for office. Interior Minister Fred Matiangi has described Parliament candidates handing out as little as 100 shillings (84 cents) to win votes in villages.

The underfunded Independent and Electoral Boundaries Commission, which sought to cap presidential campaign spending at 4.4 billion shillings (\$36 million), has accused some politicians of buying people's identification cards to keep them from voting for rivals.

"Out of the 214 persons blacklisted by the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission as morally and ethically unfit to hold public office, the (electoral commission) barred only six individuals," Transparency International Kenya and other watchdogs said in June. For the rest, "the commission seems to have thrown their hands in the air."

Kenyans want a peaceful election with results accepted by all sides.

"If we fight, it will basically backfire more on us than on them," said Andrew Atonya, part of a production company that staged a play in Nairobi asking voters to avoid falling prey to election divisions. "They abuse each other," he said of candidates, "but behind the curtain, they're friends."

## Vin Scully, Dodgers broadcaster for 67 years, dies at 94

By BETH HARRIS AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Hall of Fame broadcaster Vin Scully, whose dulcet tones provided the soundtrack of summer while entertaining and informing Dodgers fans in Brooklyn and Los Angeles for 67 years, died Tuesday night. He was 94.

Scully died at his home in the Hidden Hills neighborhood of Los Angeles, the team announced after being informed by family members. No cause of death was provided.

"He was the best there ever was," pitcher Clayton Kershaw said after the Dodgers' game in San Francisco. "Just such a special man. I'm grateful and thankful I got to know him as well as I did."

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As the longest tenured broadcaster with a single team in pro sports history, Scully saw it all and called it all. He began in the 1950s era of Pee Wee Reese and Jackie Robinson, on to the 1960s with Don Drysdale and Sandy Koufax, into the 1970s with Steve Garvey and Don Sutton, and through the 1980s with Orel Hershiser and Fernando Valenzuela. In the 1990s, it was Mike Piazza and Hideo Nomo, followed by Kershaw, Manny Ramirez and Yasiel Puig in the 21st century.

"You gave me my Wild Horse name. You gave me love. You hugged me like a father," tweeted Puig, the talented Cuban-born outfielder who burned brightly upon his Dodgers debut in 2013. "I will never forget you, my heart is broken."

The Dodgers changed players, managers, executives, owners — and even coasts — but Scully and his soothing, insightful style remained a constant for the fans.

He opened broadcasts with the familiar greeting, "Hi, everybody, and a very pleasant good evening to you wherever you may be."

Ever gracious both in person and on the air, Scully considered himself merely a conduit between the game and the fans.

"His voice played a memorable role in some of the greatest moments in the history of our sport," Major League Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said. "I am proud that Vin was synonymous with baseball because he embodied the very best of our national pastime."

After the Dodgers' 9-5 win, the Giants posted a Scully tribute on the videoboard.

"There's not a better storyteller and I think everyone considers him family," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "He was in our living rooms for many generations. He lived a fantastic life, a legacy that will live on forever."

Although he was paid by the Dodgers, Scully was unafraid to criticize a bad play or a manager's decision, or praise an opponent while spinning stories against a backdrop of routine plays and noteworthy achievements. He always said he wanted to see things with his eyes, not his heart.

"We have lost an icon," team president and CEO Stan Kasten said. "His voice will always be heard and etched in all of our minds forever."

Vincent Edward Scully was born Nov. 29, 1927, in the Bronx. He was the son of a silk salesman who died of pneumonia when Scully was 7. His mother moved the family to Brooklyn, where the red-haired, blue-eyed Scully grew up playing stickball in the streets.

As a child, Scully would grab a pillow, put it under the family's four-legged radio and lay his head directly under the speaker to hear whatever college football game was on the air. With a snack of saltine crackers and a glass of milk nearby, the boy was transfixed by the crowd's roar that raised goosebumps. He thought he'd like to call the action himself.

Scully, who played outfield for two years on the Fordham University baseball team, began his career by working baseball, football and basketball games for the university's radio station.

At age 22, he was hired by a CBS radio affiliate in Washington, D.C.

He soon joined Hall of Famer Red Barber and Connie Desmond in the Brooklyn Dodgers' radio and television booths. In 1953, at age 25, Scully became the youngest person to broadcast a World Series game, a mark that still stands.

He moved west with the Dodgers in 1958. Scully called three perfect games — Don Larsen in the 1956 World Series, Sandy Koufax in 1965 and Dennis Martinez in 1991 — and 18 no-hitters.

He also was on the air when Don Drysdale set his scoreless innings streak of 58 2/3 innings in 1968 and again when Hershiser broke the record with 59 consecutive scoreless innings 20 years later.

When Hank Aaron hit his 715th home run to break Babe Ruth's record in 1974, it was against the Dodgers and, of course, Scully called it.

"A Black man is getting a standing ovation in the Deep South for breaking a record of an all-time baseball idol," Scully told listeners. "What a marvelous moment for baseball."

Scully credited the birth of the transistor radio as "the greatest single break" of his career. Fans had trouble recognizing the lesser players during the Dodgers' first four years in the vast Los Angeles Memo-



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rial Coliseum.

"They were 70 or so odd rows away from the action," he said in 2016. "They brought the radio to find out about all the other players and to see what they were trying to see down on the field."

That habit carried over when the team moved to Dodger Stadium in 1962. Fans held radios to their ears, and those not present listened from home or the car, allowing Scully to connect generations of families with his words.

He often said it was best to describe a big play quickly and then be quiet so fans could listen to the pandemonium. After Koufax's perfect game in 1965, Scully went silent for 38 seconds before talking again. He was similarly silent for a time after Kirk Gibson's pinch-hit home run to win Game 1 of the 1988 World Series.

He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1982, received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame that year and had the stadium's press box named for him in 2001. The street leading to Dodger Stadium's main gate was named in his honor in 2016.

That same year he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama.

"God has been so good to me to allow me to do what I'm doing," Scully, a devout Catholic who attended Mass on Sundays before heading to the ballpark, said before retiring. "A childhood dream that came to pass and then giving me 67 years to enjoy every minute of it. That's a pretty large thanksgiving day for me."

In addition to being the voice of the Dodgers, Scully called play-by-play for NFL games and PGA Tour events as well as calling 25 World Series and 12 All-Star Games. He was NBC's lead baseball announcer from 1983-89.

While being one of the most widely heard broadcasters in the nation, Scully was an intensely private man. Once the baseball season ended, he would disappear. He rarely did personal appearances or sports talk shows. He preferred spending time with his family.

In 1972, his first wife, Joan, died of an accidental overdose of medicine. He was left with three young children. Two years later, he met the woman who would become his second wife, Sandra, a secretary for the NFL's Los Angeles Rams. She had two young children from a previous marriage, and they combined their families into what Scully once called "my own Brady Bunch."

He said he realized time was the most precious thing in the world and that he wanted to use his time to spend with his loved ones. In the early 1960s, Scully quit smoking with the help of his family. In the shirt pocket where he kept a pack of cigarettes, Scully stuck a family photo. Whenever he felt like he needed a smoke, he pulled out the photo to remind him why he quit. Eight months later, Scully never smoked again.

After retiring in 2016, Scully made just a handful of appearances at Dodger Stadium and his sweet voice was heard narrating an occasional video played during games. Mostly, he was content to stay close to home.

"I just want to be remembered as a good man, an honest man, and one who lived up to his own beliefs," he said in 2016.

In 2020, Scully auctioned off years of his personal memorabilia, which raised over \$2 million. A portion of it was donated to UCLA for ALS research.

He was preceded in death by his second wife, Sandra. She died of complications of ALS at age 76 in 2021. The couple, who were married 47 years, had daughter Catherine together.

Scully's other children are Kelly, Erin, Todd and Kevin. A son, Michael, died in a helicopter crash in 1994.

## Today in History: Aug. 4, Anne Frank and family arrested

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Aug. 4, the 216th day of 2022. There are 149 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History

On Aug. 4, 1944, 15-year-old diarist Anne Frank was arrested with her sister, parents and four others by the Gestapo after hiding for two years inside a building in Amsterdam. (Anne and her sister, Margot, died

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at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.)

On this date:

In 1790, the U.S. Coast Guard had its beginnings as President George Washington signed a measure authorizing a group of revenue cutters to enforce tariff and trade laws and prevent smuggling.

In 1830, plans for the city of Chicago were laid out.

In 1916, the United States reached agreement with Denmark to purchase the Danish Virgin Islands for \$25 million.

In 1936, Jesse Owens of the United States won the second of his four gold medals at the Berlin Olympics as he prevailed in the long jump over German Luz Long, who was the first to congratulate him.

In 1964, the bodies of missing civil rights workers Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Chaney were found buried in an earthen dam in Mississippi.

In 1972, Arthur Bremer was convicted and sentenced in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, to 63 years in prison for his attempt on the life of Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace (the sentence was later reduced to 53 years; Bremer was released from prison in 2007).

In 1977, President Jimmy Carter signed a measure establishing the Department of Energy.

In 1987, the Federal Communications Commission voted 4-0 to abolish the Fairness Doctrine, which required radio and television stations to present balanced coverage of controversial issues.

In 1993, a federal judge sentenced Los Angeles police officers Stacey Koon and Laurence Powell to 2 1/2 years in prison for violating Rodney King's civil rights.

In 2009, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il pardoned American journalists Laura Ling and Euna Lee for entering the country illegally and ordered their release during a surprise visit by former U.S. President Bill Clinton.

In 2019, a masked gunman fired on revelers enjoying summer nightlife in a popular entertainment district of Dayton, Ohio, leaving nine people dead and 27 wounded; police said officers shot and killed the shooter within 30 seconds of the start of his rampage.

In 2020, nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrate that had been improperly stored for years in the port of Beirut, Lebanon, exploded, killing more than 200 people, injuring more than 6,000 and devastating nearby neighborhoods; it was one of the largest non-nuclear explosions ever recorded.

Ten years ago: Michael Phelps won the 18th Olympic gold medal of his career as the United States won the medley relay at the London Games. The United States set a world record to win the women's medley relay. Serena Williams beat Maria Sharapova 6-0, 6-1 to join Steffi Graf as the only women to complete the Golden Slam — winning the Olympics and the four majors. Three British athletes won gold medals in Olympic Stadium: Jessica Ennis in heptathlon; Greg Rutherford in men's long jump; and Mo Farah in the men's 10,000 meters.

Five years ago: Former pharmaceutical CEO Martin Shkreli, who became notorious for a price-gouging scandal, was convicted on federal charges that he deceived investors in a pair of failed hedge funds. (Shkreli was sentenced months later to seven years in prison.) The unemployment rate ticked down to 4.3 percent, matching the 16-year low that had been recorded in May, as employers added 209,000 jobs.

One year ago: Sydney McLaughlin smashed the world record and Dalilah Muhammad broke it as well in an American 1-2 finish in the women's 400 hurdles at the Tokyo Olympics. Andre De Grasse of Canada won the Olympic gold medal in the 200-meter race five years after finishing second to Usain Bolt in Rio; De Grasse won in a national record time of 19.62 seconds. Belarusian Olympic sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya, who feared for her safety at home after criticizing her coaches on social media, flew into Warsaw on a humanitarian visa after leaving the Tokyo Olympics.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-singer Tina Cole is 79. Actor-comedian Richard Belzer is 78. Football Hall of Famer John Riggins is 73. Former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales is 67. Actor-screenwriter Billy Bob Thornton is 67. Actor Kym Karath (Film: "The Sound of Music") is 64. Hall of Fame track star Mary Decker Slaney is 64. Actor Lauren Tom is 63. Former President Barack Obama is 61. Producer Michael Gelman (TV: "Live with Kelly & Ryan") is 61. Retired MLB All-Star pitcher Roger Clemens is 60. Actor Crystal Chappell is 57. Author Dennis Lehane is 57. Rock musician Rob Cieka (Boo Radleys) is 54. Actor Daniel Dae Kim is

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54. Actor Michael DeLuise is 53. Former race car driver Jeff Gordon is 51. Rapper-actor Yo-Yo is 51. R&B singer-actor Marques (MAR'-kus) Houston is 41. Britain's Duchess of Sussex, the former actor Meghan Markle, is 41. Actor Abigail Spencer is 41. Actor/director Greta Gerwig is 39. Country singer Crystal Bowersox (TV: "American Idol") is 37. Actors Dylan and Cole Sprouse are 30. Singer Jessica Sanchez (TV: "American Idol") is 27.