

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 1 of 58

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [1- Help Wanted ads](#)
- [2- South Dakota Average Gas Prices](#)
- [3- Drought Monitor](#)
- [4- Storms roll through the area last night](#)
- [5- Weather Pages](#)
- [9- Daily Devotional](#)
- [10- 2022 Community Events](#)
- [11- Subscription Form](#)
- [12- News from the Associated Press](#)



“ENGAGE YOURSELF IN
THE LIVING PRESENT.
THE FUTURE WILL TAKE
CARE OF ITSELF.”

RAMANA MAHARSHI

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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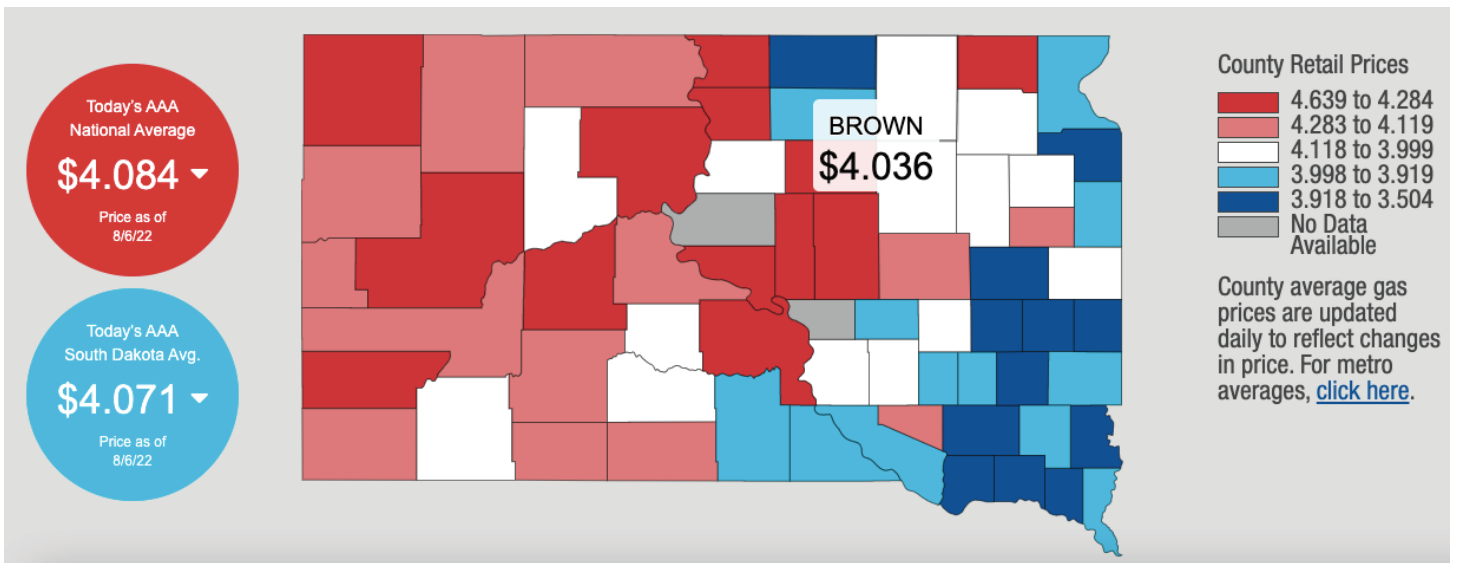
Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 2 of 58

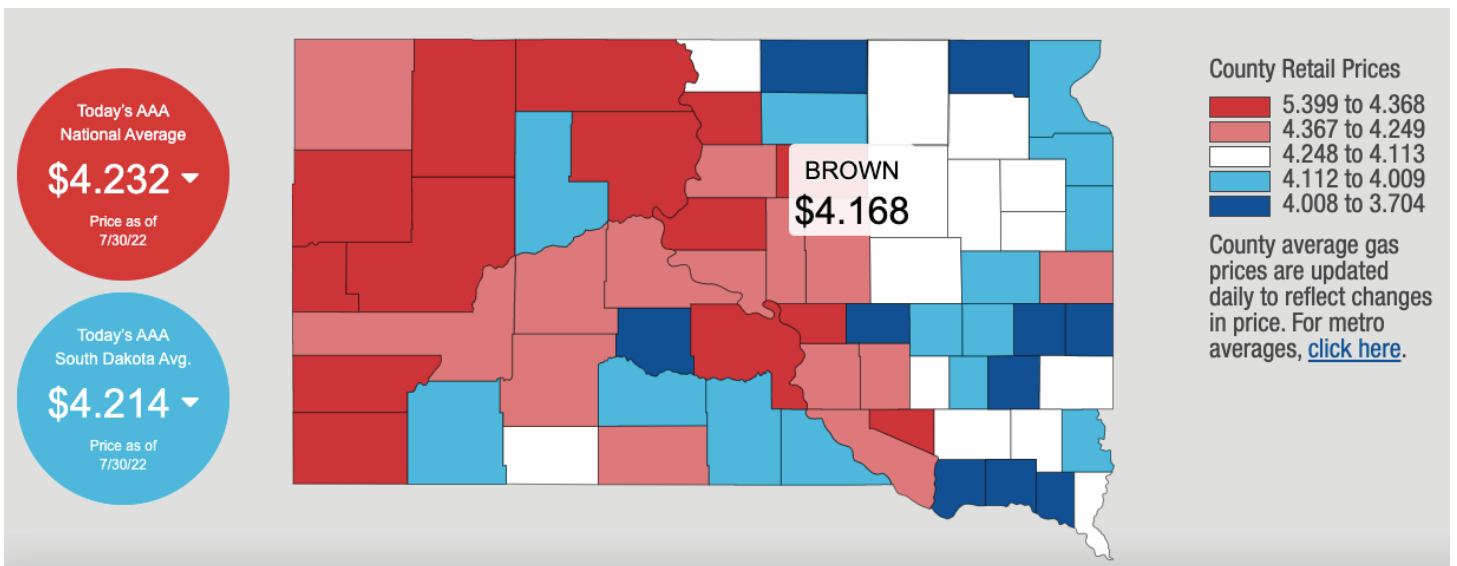
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$4.071	\$4.265	\$4.744	\$4.948
Yesterday Avg.	\$4.097	\$4.280	\$4.783	\$4.973
Week Ago Avg.	\$4.214	\$4.412	\$4.872	\$5.070
Month Ago Avg.	\$4.711	\$4.893	\$5.357	\$5.397
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.167	\$3.282	\$3.669	\$3.275

This Week



Last Week



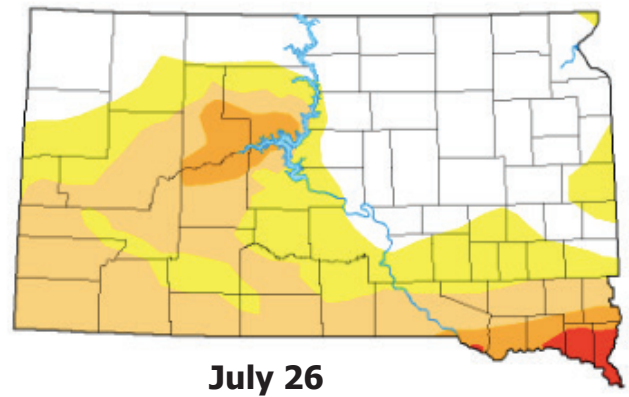
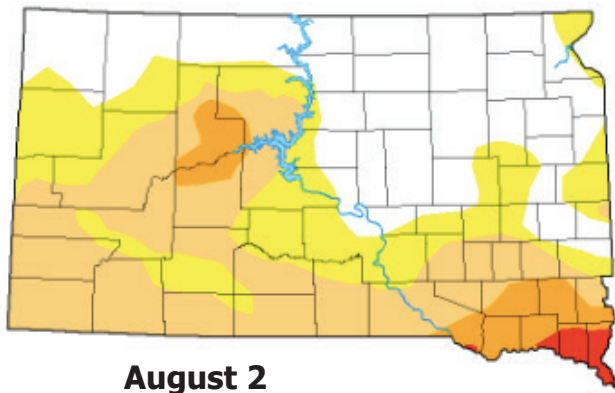
Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 3 of 58

Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



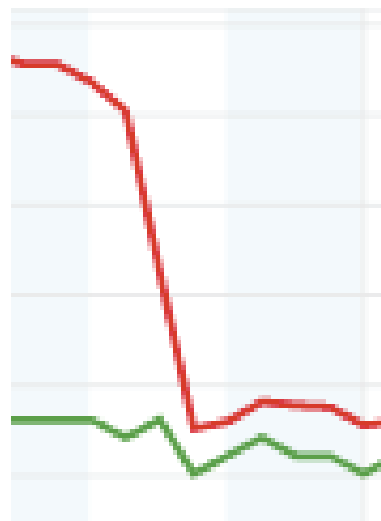
Moderate to heavy rains fell this week across portions of Colorado and western Kansas, related to an active North American Monsoon. Aside from other localized pockets of moderate to heavy rain, the High Plains region saw mostly dry weather this week. Temperatures from 2-4 degrees below normal were common across most of Kansas, southeast Colorado, central and eastern Nebraska, eastern South Dakota, and North Dakota this week. Near-normal temperatures mostly prevailed elsewhere, with parts of western Wyoming experiencing temperatures from 2-6 degrees above normal. The heavier rains in Colorado and western Kansas led to some improvements in ongoing drought, with localized removal of drought occurring, as precipitation deficits lessened. Conditions worsened in parts of southwestern, central, eastern, and northern Nebraska, and in adjacent southern South Dakota, where deficits in soil moisture and precipitation worsened. In Columbus, Nebraska, the Platte River ran dry, indicative of the moderate and severe drought conditions ongoing in and near the eastern Nebraska town. Two reservoirs in eastern Colorado are expected to run dry soon due to drought and water demand from irrigation.



Storms roll through the area last night



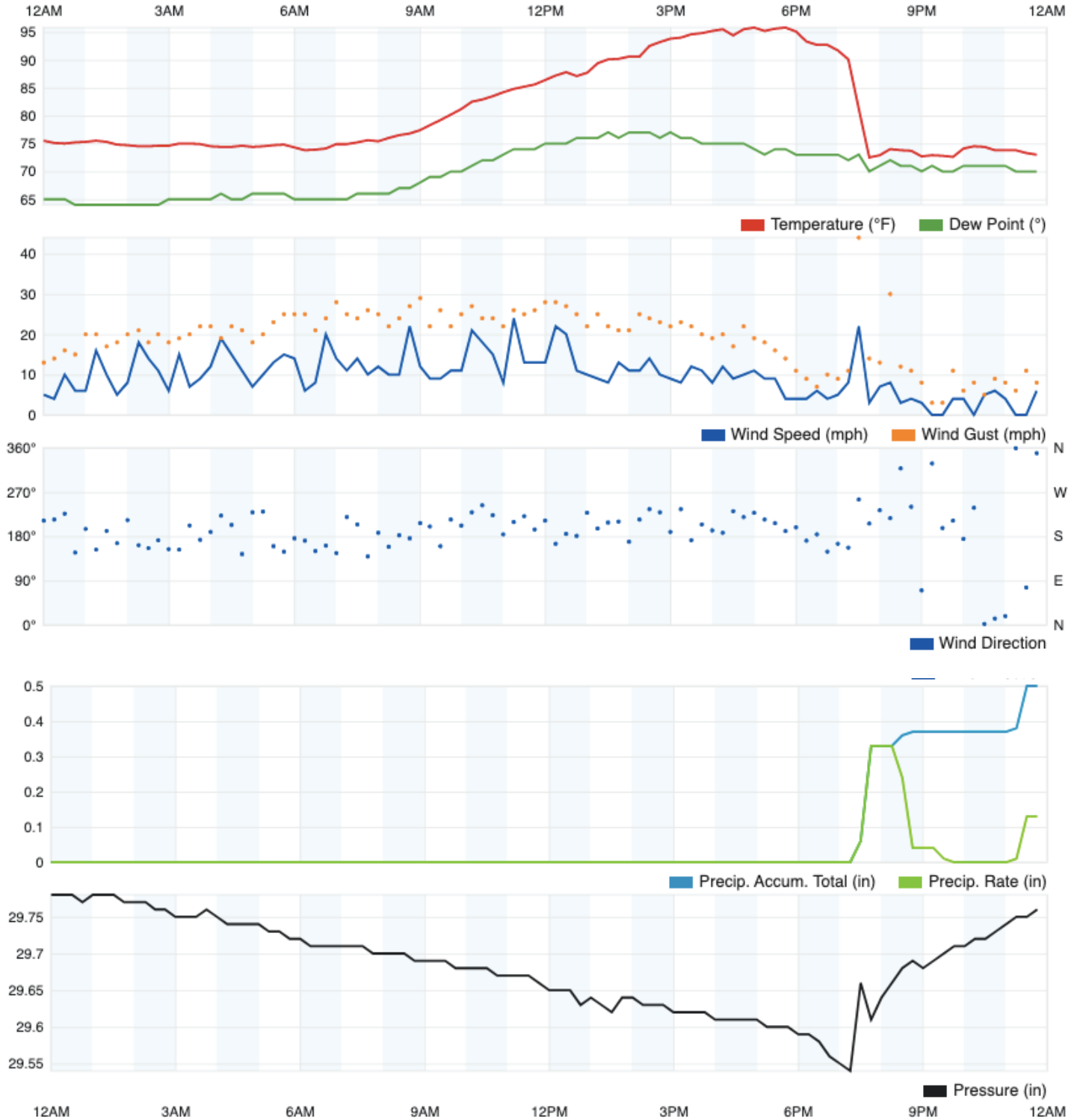
Several storms rolled through the area last night with the initial line of the cold front doing most of the damage. Marble size hail fell and a wind gust of 44 mph was recorded. The temperature dropped 20 degrees in 30 minutes (see graph below). The top left photo by Paul Kosel shows a tree broken near the base from the wind gust at the B.J. Clocksene home. The top right photo by Tina Kosel shows a branch lying on the street near the tennis court. The bottom left photo by Julianna Kosel shows a double rainbow.



Groton Daily Independent


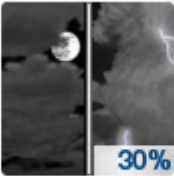



Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 5 of 58

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 6 of 58

Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
Chance T-storms then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Sunny
High: 69 °F	Low: 56 °F	High: 70 °F	Low: 53 °F	High: 78 °F



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

www.weather.gov/abr

Updated: 8/6/2022 5:12 AM Central

**Cloudy, Cool
& Damp Weekend**

Today



Highs: Mid 60s-Low 70s

Sunday



Highs: Upper 60s-Low 70s

Periods of showers and thunderstorms will remain in the forecast today and throughout the weekend. There will be breaks at times, so no all-day rains are expected for most of us. Cloudy skies will generally be the rule which will help to keep temperatures below normal for this time of year.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 7 of 58

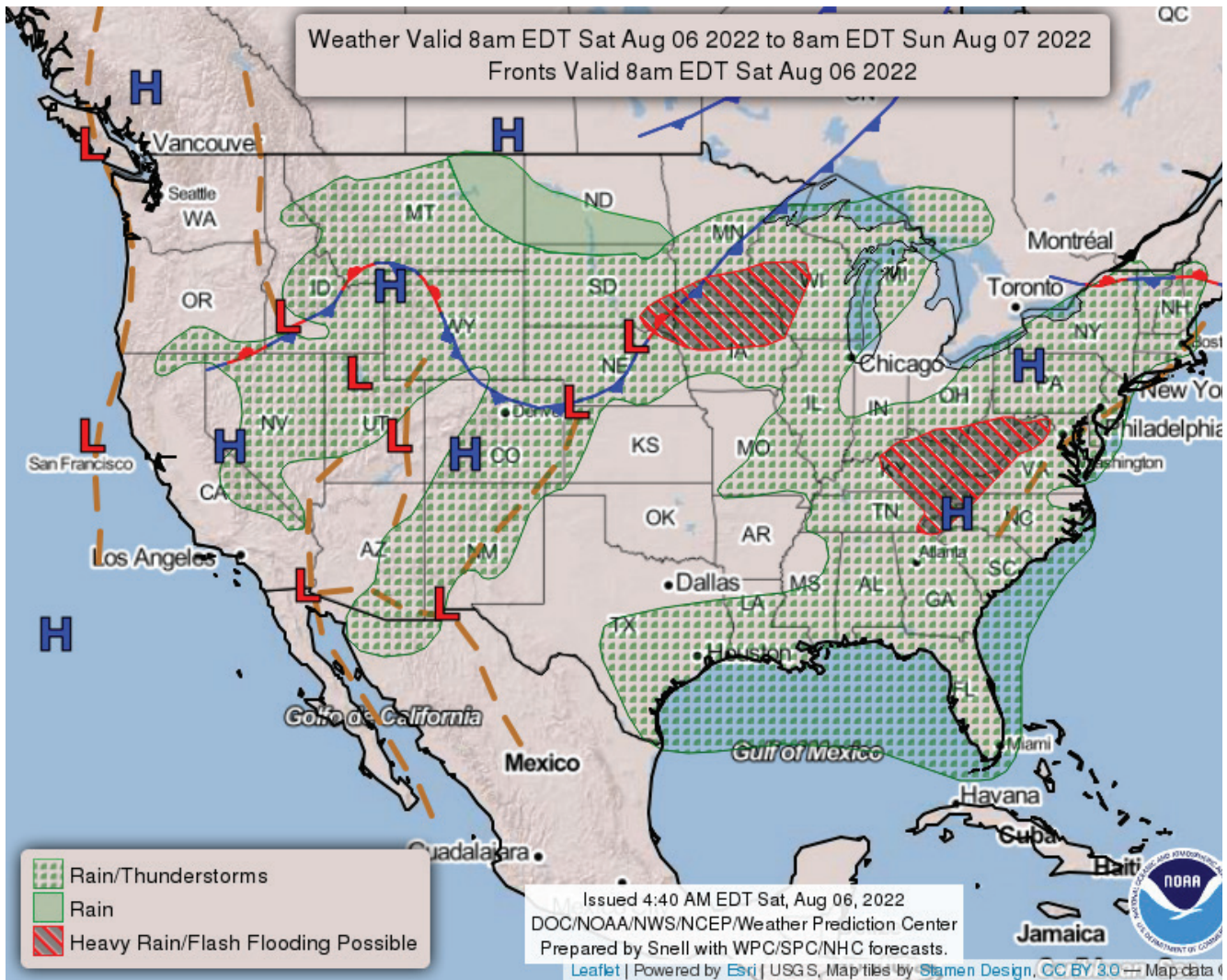
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 95.8 °F at 5:45 PM
Heat Index: 107.9
Low Temp: 72.5 °F at 7:45 PM
Wind: 44 mph at 7:30 PM
Precip: 0.50 + .12 this morning

Day length: 14 hours, 34 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 108 in 1941
Record Low: 44 in 1902
Average High: 84°F
Average Low: 59°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 0.44
Precip to date in Aug.: 0.50
Average Precip to date: 14.54
Precip Year to Date: 15.04
Sunset Tonight: 8:55:22 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:22:21 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 8 of 58

Today in Weather History

August 6, 1962: Wind damaged farm buildings and hail damaged crops over a large area. The area affected was northern Faulk, portions of Spink, Northern Clark, Codington, and Grant, along with Day County.

August 6, 1969: During the day and evening hours, two relatively large storms brought destructive weather to much of Minnesota. The northern storm area moved in from North Dakota between Fargo and Grand Forks. The southern storm rapidly developed north of Wadena. These two storms combined to cause twelve tornadoes, two vast areas of wind and hail damage, and one waterspout. The storms killed 15 people, injured 106, and caused 4.8 million dollars in property and public utility damage.

August 6, 1969: The first report of high winds was southeast of Piedmont with gusts of 65 to 70 mph estimated by a National Weather Service employee. Damage in that area included several downed trees and leveled gardens. As the storm moved east, large hail was reported. The first wind gust at Ellsworth AFB was 89 mph at 1918 MST on the northwest end of the runway. By 1925 MST, sustained winds were over 50 mph for nearly 10 minutes, and the peak gust was 114 mph. The sensor on the southeast end of the runway, 2.5 miles away, recorded a wind gust of 114 mph at 1929 MST. The damage on the base included several large trees blown over and snapped in half and roof damage to base housing units. A few tents set up on the taxiways for an air show were blown around, but not significantly damaged. A survey by base meteorologists indicated the main downburst winds hit over open prairie surrounding the runway, where there are no trees or structures. Also between 1920 and 1930 MST, a meteorology student estimated winds between 70 and 80 mph at Box Elder, where gardens were leveled, and wooden fences and roofs were damaged.

1890 - Thunderstorms left four inches of hail covering the ground in Adair County and Union County in Iowa. The hail drifted into six foot mounds, and in some places remained on the ground for twenty- six days. (The Weather Channel)

1918 - Unusually hot weather began to overspread the Atlantic Coast States, from the Carolinas to southern New England. The temperature soared to an all-time record high of 106 degrees at Washington D.C., and Cumberland and Keedysville hit 109 degrees to establish a state record for Maryland. Temperatures were above normal east of the Rockies that month, with readings much above normal in the Lower Missouri Valley. Omaha NE reached 110 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1959 - A bucket survey showed that thunderstorms dropped 16.70 inches of rain on parts of Decatur County IA. The total was accepted as Iowa's 24 hour rainfall record. (The Weather Channel)

1959: Hurricane Dot crossed Kauai in the Hawaiian Islands producing sustained winds of 105 mph with gusts to 125 mph. Over 6 inches of rain fell with over 9 inches on the big island of Hawaii. The sugar cane crop on Kauai sustained \$2.7 million in damages.

1986 - Evening thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 100 mph at Winner SD damaging two hundred homes. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1987 - Afternoon thunderstorms deluged Milwaukee, WI, with 6.84 inches of rain, including more than five inches in two hours, breaking all previous rainfall records for the city. Floodwaters were four feet deep at the Milwaukee County Stadium, and floodwaters filled the basement of the main terminal at the airport. Flooding caused 5.9 million dollars damage, and claimed the life of one person. Death Valley, CA, reported a morning low of 97 degrees. A midday thunderstorm deluged Birmingham AL with nearly six inches of rain in one hour. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in Pennsylvania and New York State. A cold front crossing the northwestern U.S. produced wind gusts to 66 mph at Livingston MT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1993: Virginia experienced its worst tornado outbreak ever as 18 tornadoes ripped through the state in 5 hours. The most devastating tornado caused severe damage in the historic part of Petersburg. The storm then moved on to Pocahontas Island and into Colonial Heights. There, the storm ripped apart a WalMart store, killing three people and injuring nearly 200. The F4 twister was the first known violent tornado in Virginia history. It killed a total of 4 people and injured 246 along its 12-mile path. Total damages were near \$50 million.



Our Daily Bread.

Love God. Love Others.

Relinquishing Control to God

Scripture: Ezekiel 17:19-24 (English Standard Version)

19 Therefore thus says the Lord God: As I live, surely it is my oath that he despised, and my covenant that he broke. I will return it upon his head. 20 I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with him there for the treachery he has committed against me. 21 And all the pick[a] of his troops shall fall by the sword, and the survivors shall be scattered to every wind, and you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken."

22 Thus says the Lord God: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it."

Insight By: K. T. Sim

The powerful Babylonians had been attacking Judah and besieging Jerusalem (605–597 bc). They'd already sent the royalty, aristocrats, and Jewish upper classes into exile (2 Kings 24:10–16; Daniel 1:1–5), including the prophet Ezekiel, who was a priest (Ezekiel 1:1–3). From Babylon (593 bc), Ezekiel ministered to the Jews already in exile (3:11) and to those still residing in Judah (12:10). He pleaded with his countrymen to repent and turn to God and warned them that if they continued in their sinfulness, Jerusalem would be destroyed and the nation exiled. The Jews remained unrepentant, however, and only pretended to be interested in following God (33:31–32). Within seven years (586 bc), Jerusalem was burned to the ground and the entire nation exiled (2 Kings 24:18–25:21) as prophesied by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 12:10–16).

Comment By: Karen Pimpo

Picture a mighty oak tree that's small enough to fit on a kitchen table. That's what a bonsai looks like—a beautiful ornamental tree that's a miniature version of what you find wild in nature. There's no genetic difference between a bonsai and its full-size counterpart. It's simply that a shallow pot, pruning, and root trimming restrict growth, so the plant remains small.

While bonsai trees make for wonderful decorative plants, they also illustrate the power of control. It's true that we can manipulate their growth as the trees respond to their environment, but God is ultimately the One who makes things grow.

God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel this way: "I the Lord bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall" (Ezekiel 17:24). God was foreshadowing future events when he would "uproot" the nation of Israel by allowing the Babylonians to invade. In the future, however, God would plant a new tree in Israel that would bear fruit, with "birds of every kind" finding shelter in the shade of its branches (v. 23). God said that no matter how much upcoming events seemed out of control, He was still in charge.

The world tells us to try to control our circumstances by manipulation and through our own hard work. But true peace and thriving are found by relinquishing control to the only One who can make the trees grow.

Reflect and Prayer: How are you tempted to try to control your life? How does trusting in God's control bring peace?

We praise You, loving God, as the all-powerful King. Help me acknowledge Your lordship in my life.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 10 of 58

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)

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 11 of 58

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

02-05-29-64-69, Mega Ball: 18, Megaplier: 3

(two, five, twenty-nine, sixty-four, sixty-nine; Mega Ball: eighteen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$52,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 20,000,000

North Dakota clinic ramps up move across river to Minnesota

By DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

MOORHEAD, Minn. (AP) — The owner of a North Dakota abortion clinic that faces closure this month was directing traffic and deliveries Friday at its planned new location a few miles away in Minnesota.

The Red River Women's Clinic, which has been operating on a busy downtown Fargo street since 1998, will close that location on Aug. 26 unless a judge blocks a North Dakota trigger law banning abortion. In the meantime, a move is already underway just over 2 miles (3 kilometers) away to a three-story brick office building in the middle of a commercial area.

Clinic owner Tammi Kromenaker declined to talk about details of the Moorhead facility, promising a statement later during what she said was a busy day of deliveries scheduled. As she spoke, a moving truck pulled up on the street and a junk removal truck drove through a parking lot.

Some abortion rights supporters in North Dakota still hope Kromenaker's clinic can prevail in a lawsuit alleging that abortion is protected by that state's constitution. No hearing is yet scheduled.

Though Kromenaker previously said she would move only if litigation fails, the statement she gave later Friday suggested she's fully committed to relocation.

"Red River Women's Clinic has found our new home," she said. "We could not be prouder to be able to continue to provide abortion care to our community and the region. This has not been an easy undertaking."

She added: "As the lights go out on legal abortion in North Dakota, we want to assure everyone that Red River Women's Clinic is here to stay. Abortion care will continue to be available in our region."

The clinic's relocation has been boosted by \$1 million in GoFundMe donations.

Kromenaker said she looked for a new location to rent or buy for more than a year and that she ultimately had to buy an office building larger than needed. She said it would be up to other tenants whether they stay. She said renting space to compatible tenants would give the clinic "long-term financial stability."

The building appeared mostly empty Friday.

Kromenaker has declined to say when the new clinic would be ready, but has said patients will see no interruption in services.

Minnesota Republican state Rep. Tim Miller, the director of an anti-abortion coalition that opposes the new clinic, told The Associated Press he plans to challenge the city on its zoning and planning rules.

"I just find it hard to believe that that an office building can suddenly become a clinic where they're doing abortions," Miller said. "That just seems too simplistic for me."

Destini Spaeth, the volunteer leader of the North Dakota Women In Need, which helps patients pay for travel costs, said the Moorhead facility will be the clinic that the community built.

"In the end, I think people needed somewhere to put their action and their rage into something good," Spaeth said. "And I know we all we all felt so helpless. And this felt like something tangible that we could see and make possible."

Israel and Gaza militants exchange fire after deadly strikes

By FARES AKRAM and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli jets pounded militant targets in Gaza on Saturday and rocket barrages into southern Israel persisted, raising fears of an escalation after a wave of Israeli airstrikes on the coastal enclave killed at least 12 people, including a senior militant and a 5-year-old girl.

The fighting began with Israel's killing of a senior commander of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in a strike Friday. Gaza's Hamas rulers so far appeared to stay on the sidelines of the conflict, keeping its intensity somewhat contained, for now. Israel and Hamas have fought four wars and several smaller battles over the last 15 years at a staggering cost to the territory's 2 million Palestinian residents.

Shortly before noon Saturday, Israeli warplanes stepped up airstrikes. After warning residents in phone calls, fighter jets dropped two bombs on the house of an Islamic Jihad member in a residential area of Gaza City, flattening the two-story structure and badly damaging surrounding homes. Women and children rushed out of the area, and there were no casualties.

"Warned us? They warned us with rockets and we fled without taking anything," said Huda Shamalakh, who lived next door. She said 15 people lived in the targeted home.

Another airstrike hit an Islamic Jihad site nearby. Gaza militants continued to launch rounds of rockets into southern Israel around every half hour, though there were no reports of casualties.

The lone power plant in Gaza ground to a halt at noon Saturday for lack of fuel as Israel has kept its crossing points into Gaza closed since Tuesday. The shutdown deepens the densely packed territory's chronic power crisis amid peak summer heat. With the new disruption, Gazans can get only 4 hours of electricity a day, increasing their reliance on private generators.

The latest round of Israel-Gaza violence was sparked by the arrest this week of a senior Islamic Jihad leader in the West Bank, part of a monthlong Israeli military operation in the territory. Citing a security threat, Israel then sealed roads around the Gaza Strip and on Friday killed Islamic Jihad's commander for northern Gaza, Taiseer al-Jabari, in a targeted strike.

An Israeli military spokesman said the strikes were in response to an "imminent threat" from two militant squads armed with anti-tank missiles.

"This government has a zero-tolerance policy for any attempted attacks — of any kind — from Gaza towards Israeli territory," Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid said in a televised speech Friday. "Israel will not sit idly by when there are those who are trying to harm its civilians."

"Israel isn't interested in a broader conflict in Gaza but will not shy away from one either," he added.

The violence poses an early test for Lapid, who assumed the role of caretaker prime minister ahead of elections in November, when he hopes to keep the position.

Lapid, a centrist former TV host and author, has experience in diplomacy having served as foreign minister in the outgoing government, but has thin security credentials. A conflict with Gaza could burnish his standing and give him a boost as he faces off against former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a security hawk who led the country during three of its four wars with Hamas.

Hamas also faces a dilemma in deciding whether to join a new battle barely a year after the last war caused widespread devastation. There has been almost no reconstruction since then, and the isolated coastal territory is mired in poverty, with unemployment hovering around 50%.

Egypt intensified efforts to prevent escalation, communicating with Israel, the Palestinians and the U.S. to keep Hamas from joining the fighting, an Egyptian intelligence official said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief media.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said a 5-year-old girl and a 23-year-old woman were among 12 killed in Gaza, along with more than 80 wounded. It did not differentiate between civilians and militants. The Israeli military said early estimates were that around 15 fighters were killed.

Hundreds marched in a funeral procession for the Jihad commander al-Jabari and others who were killed, with many mourners waving Palestinian and Islamic Jihad flags and calling for revenge. Al-Jabari had succeeded another militant killed in an airstrike in 2019, which at the time also set off a round of heavy fighting.

Overnight, Israeli media showed the skies above southern and central Israel lighting up with rockets and

interceptors from Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system. There were no immediate reports of casualties on the Israeli side. Israel said its overnight strikes in Gaza hit rocket launchers, rocket building sites and Islamic Jihad positions. It also arrested 19 Islamic Jihad militants in the West Bank, the military said.

The U.N. special envoy to the region, Tor Wennesland, said: "The launching of rockets must cease immediately, and I call on all sides to avoid further escalation."

Defense Minister Benny Gantz approved an order to call up 25,000 reserve soldiers if needed while the military announced a "special situation" on the home front, with schools closed and limits placed on activities in communities within 80 kilometers (50 miles) of the border.

Israel closed roads around Gaza earlier this week and sent reinforcements to the border as it braced for a revenge attack after Monday's arrest of Bassam al-Saadi, an Islamic Jihad leader, in a military raid in the occupied West Bank. A teenage member of the group was killed in a gunbattle between Israeli troops and Palestinian militants.

Hamas seized power in Gaza from rival Palestinian forces in 2007, two years after Israel withdrew from the coastal strip. Its most recent war with Israel was in May 2021. Tensions soared again earlier this year following a wave of attacks inside Israel, near-daily military operations in the West Bank and tensions at a flashpoint Jerusalem holy site.

Iran-backed Islamic Jihad is smaller than Hamas but largely shares its ideology. Both groups oppose Israel's existence and have carried out scores of deadly attacks over the years, including the firing of rockets into Israel. It's unclear how much control Hamas has over Islamic Jihad, and Israel holds Hamas responsible for all attacks emanating from Gaza.

Israel and Egypt have maintained a tight blockade over the territory since the Hamas takeover. Israel says the closure is needed to prevent Hamas from building up its military capabilities. Critics say the policy amounts to collective punishment.

Taiwan says China military drills appear to simulate attack

BEIJING (AP) — Taiwan said Saturday that China's military drills appear to simulate an attack on the self-ruled island, after multiple Chinese warships and aircraft crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait following U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taipei that infuriated Beijing.

Taiwan's armed forces issued an alert, dispatched air and naval patrols around the island, and activated land-based missile systems in response to the Chinese exercises, the Ministry of National Defense said.

China's Ministry of Defense said in a statement Saturday that it had carried out military exercises as planned in the sea and airspaces to the north, southwest, and east of Taiwan, with a focus on "testing the capabilities" of its land strike and sea assault systems.

China launched live-fire military drills following Pelosi's trip to Taiwan earlier this week, saying it violated the "one-China" policy. China sees the island as a breakaway province to be annexed by force if necessary, and considers visits to Taiwan by foreign officials as recognizing its sovereignty.

Taiwan's army also said it detected four unmanned aerial vehicles flying in the vicinity of the offshore county of Kinmen on Friday night and fired warning flares in response.

The four drones, which Taiwan believed were Chinese, were spotted over waters around the Kinmen island group and the nearby Lieyu Island and Beiding islet, according to Taiwan's Kinmen Defense Command.

Kinmen, also known as Quemoy, is a group of islands only 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) east of the Chinese coastal city of Xiamen in Fujian province in the Taiwan Strait, which divides the two sides that split amid civil war in 1949.

"Our government & military are closely monitoring China's military exercises & information warfare operations, ready to respond as necessary," Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen said in a tweet.

"I call on the international community to support democratic Taiwan & halt any escalation of the regional security situation," she added.

The Chinese military exercises began Thursday and are expected to last until Sunday. So far, the drills have included missile strikes on targets in the seas north and south of the island in an echo of the last

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 15 of 58

major Chinese military drills in 1995 and 1996 aimed at intimidating Taiwan's leaders and voters.

Taiwan has put its military on alert and staged civil defense drills, while the U.S. has deployed numerous naval assets in the area.

The Biden administration and Pelosi have said the U.S. remains committed to a "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.

China has also cut off defense and climate talks with the U.S. and imposed sanctions on Pelosi in retaliation for the visit.

Pelosi said Friday in Tokyo, the last stop of her Asia tour, that China will not be able to isolate Taiwan by preventing U.S. officials from traveling there.

Pelosi has been a long-time advocate of human rights in China. She, along with other lawmakers, visited Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1991 to support democracy two years after a bloody military crackdown on protesters at the square.

Meanwhile, cyberattacks aimed at bringing down the website of Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs had doubled between Thursday to Friday, compared to similar attacks ahead of Pelosi's visit, according to Taiwan's Central News Agency. The ministry did not specify the origin of the attack.

Other ministries and government agencies, such as the Ministry of Interior, also faced similar attacks on their websites, according to the report.

A distributed-denial-of-service attack is aimed at overloading a website with requests for information that eventually crashes it, making it inaccessible to other users.

Also Saturday, the Central News Agency reported that the deputy head of the Taiwan Defense Ministry's research and development unit, Ou Yang Li-hsing, was found dead in his hotel room after suffering a heart attack. He was 57, and had supervised several missile production projects.

The report said his hotel room in the southern county of Pingtung, where he was on a business trip, showed no signs of intrusion.

Taiwanese overwhelmingly favor maintaining the status quo of the island's de facto independence and reject China's demands that the island unify with the mainland under Communist control.

Globally, most countries subscribe to the "one-China" policy, which is a requirement to maintain diplomatic relations with Beijing.

Any company that fails to recognize Taiwan as part of China often faces swift backlash, often with Chinese consumers pledging to boycott its products.

On Friday, Mars Wrigley, the manufacturer of the Snickers candy bar, apologized after it released a video and materials featuring South Korean boy band BTS that had referred to Taiwan as a country, drawing swift criticism from Chinese users.

In a statement on its Weibo account, the company expressed "deep apologies."

"Mars Wrigley respects China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity and conducts business operations in strict compliance with local Chinese laws and regulations," the statement said.

In a separate post, the firm added that there is "only one China" and said that "Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory."

Blinken: China should not hold global concerns 'hostage'

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Saturday that China should not hold hostage talks on important global matters such as the climate crisis, after Beijing cut off contacts with Washington in retaliation for U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan earlier this week.

Blinken spoke in an online news conference with his Philippine counterpart in Manila after meeting newly elected President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and other top officials, as relations between Washington and Beijing plummeted to their worst level in years.

Pelosi's trip to the self-governed island outraged China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory to be

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 16 of 58

annexed by force if necessary. China on Thursday launched military exercises off Taiwan's coasts and on Friday cut off contacts with the U.S. on vital issues, including military matters and crucial climate cooperation, as punishments against Pelosi's visit.

"We should not hold hostage cooperation on matters of global concern because of differences between our two countries," Blinken said. "Others are rightly expecting us to continue to work on issues that matter to the lives and livelihood of their people as well as our own."

He cited cooperation on climate change as a key area where China shut down contact that "doesn't punish the United States — it punishes the world."

"The world's largest carbon emitter is now refusing to engage on combatting the climate crisis," Blinken said, adding that China's firing of ballistic missiles that landed in waters surrounding Taiwan was a dangerous and destabilizing action.

"What happens to the Taiwan Strait affects the entire region. In many ways it affects the entire world because the Strait, like the South China Sea, is a critical waterway," he said, noting that nearly half the global container fleet and nearly 90% of the world's largest ships transited through the waterway this year.

China shut "military-to-military channels, which are vital for avoiding miscommunication and avoiding crisis, but also cooperation on transnational crimes and counter-narcotics, which help keep people in the United States, China and beyond, safe," he said.

Despite China's actions, Blinken said he told his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on Friday in Cambodia, where they attended an annual meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, that the U.S. did not want to escalate the situation.

"We seek to deescalate those tensions and we think dialogues are a very important element of that," he said, adding the U.S. would "keep our channels of communication with China open with the intent of avoiding escalation to the misunderstanding or miscommunication."

Blinken is the highest ranking American official to visit the Philippines since Marcos Jr. took office on June 30 following a landslide election victory. In his brief meeting with Blinken, Marcos Jr. mentioned he was surprised by the turn of events related to Pelosi's visit to Taiwan this week.

"It just demonstrated it — how the intensity of that conflict has been," Marcos Jr. said based on a transcript released by the presidential palace.

"This just demonstrates how volatile the international diplomatic scene is not only in the region," he added.

Marcos Jr. praised the vital relationship between Manila and Washington, which are treaty allies, and U.S. assistance to the Philippines over the years.

Blinken reiterated Washington's commitment to the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty with the Philippines and "to working with you on shared challenges."

Blinken told journalists he also discussed with Marcos Jr. strengthening democracy and U.S. commitment to work with the Philippines to defend the rule of law, protect human rights, freedom of expression and safeguard civil society groups, "which are critical to our alliance."

Describing the Philippines as "an irreplaceable friend," he said he reiterated to the president that an armed attack on Filipino forces, public vessels or aircraft in the South China Sea "will invoke U.S. mutual defense commitments."

Blinken arrived Friday night in Manila after attending the ASEAN meetings in Cambodia, where he was joined by his Chinese and Russian counterparts.

ASEAN foreign ministers called for "maximum restraint" as China mounted war drills around Taiwan and moved against the U.S., fearing the situation "could destabilize the region and eventually could lead to miscalculation, serious confrontation, open conflicts and unpredictable consequences among major powers."

In Manila, Blinken visited a vaccination clinic, met with groups helping fight coronavirus outbreaks and went to a clean energy fair. He also met U.S. Embassy staff before flying out Saturday night.

Shortly before Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, as speculation rose that her aircraft might stop over briefly at the former U.S. Clark Air Force base north of Manila for refueling, Chinese Ambassador Huang Xilian said in a TV interview he hoped "the Philippine side will strictly abide by the one-China principle and handle all

Taiwan-related issues with prudence to ensure sound and steady development of China-Philippines relations.”

Huang’s remarks drew a sharp rebuke from opposition Sen. Risa Hontiveros, who said “the ambassador shouldn’t pontificate on such policies, especially considering that his country stubbornly and steadfastly refuses to recognize a decision rendered by an international arbitral court and ignores and flouts international law in the West Philippine Sea when it suits her interest.”

Hontiveros was referring to a 2016 arbitration ruling on a Philippine complaint that invalidated China’s vast territorial claims in the disputed South China Sea. She used the Philippine name for the disputed waters.

China has dismissed that ruling, which was welcomed by the U.S. and Western allies, as a sham and continues to defy it.

EXPLAINER: What is driving the current Israel-Gaza violence

By TIA GOLDENBERG and FARES AKRAM Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel and Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip were exchanging fire Saturday in the worst bout of cross-border violence since an 11-day war between Israel and Hamas last year.

Israeli airstrikes have killed 11 people, including a senior commander from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, an Iran-backed militant group, who was slain in a targeted attack.

That came following the arrest this week of another senior Islamic Jihad leader in the West Bank in what’s been a monthslong Israeli operation to round up Palestinians suspected of attacks.

Militants have fired dozens of rockets at Israeli cities and towns, disrupting life for tens of thousands of people.

Here’s a look at the latest round of violence:

IN HAMAS’ SHADOW

Islamic Jihad is the smaller of the two main Palestinian militant groups in the Gaza Strip, and is vastly outnumbered by the ruling Hamas group. But it enjoys direct financial and military backing from Iran, and has become the driving force in engaging in rocket attacks and other confrontations with Israel.

Hamas, which seized control of Gaza in 2007 from the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, is often limited in its ability to act because it bears responsibility for running day-to-day affairs of the impoverished territory. Islamic Jihad has no such duties and has emerged as the more militant faction, occasionally even undermining Hamas’ authority.

The group was founded in 1981 with the aim of establishing an Islamic Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza and all of what is now Israel. It is designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department, European Union and other governments. Like Hamas, Islamic Jihad is sworn to Israel’s destruction.

THE IRANIAN CONNECTION

Israel’s archenemy Iran supplies Islamic Jihad with training, expertise and money, but most of the group’s weapons are locally produced. In recent years, it has developed an arsenal equal to that of Hamas, with longer-range rockets capable of striking central Israel’s Tel Aviv metropolitan area. Air raid sirens went off in the suburbs just south of Tel Aviv on Friday, although no rockets appear to have hit the area.

Although its base is Gaza, Islamic Jihad also has leadership in Beirut and Damascus, where it maintains close ties with Iranian officials.

Ziad al-Nakhalah, the group’s top leader, was in Tehran meeting Iranian officials when Israel began its operation in Gaza on Friday.

TARGETING COMMANDERS

This isn’t the first time Israel has killed Islamic Jihad leaders in Gaza. The commander it killed Friday, Taiseer al-Jabari, replaced Bahaa Abu el-Atta who was slain by Israel in a 2019 strike. His death had been the first high-profile assassination of an Islamic Jihad figure by Israel since the 2014 war in the Gaza Strip.

Al-Jabari, 50, was a member of Islamic Jihad’s “military council,” the group’s decision-making body in Gaza. He was in charge of the Islamic Jihad militant activities in Gaza City and the northern Gaza Strip during the 2021 war. Israel said he was preparing to launch an anti-tank missile attack against Israel.

His death came on the heels of the arrest by Israel of a senior Islamic Jihad commander in the West

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 18 of 58

Bank earlier this week. Bassam al-Saadi, 62, is a senior Islamic Jihad official in the northern West Bank. According to Israeli media, al-Saadi was working to deepen the group's reach in the West Bank and expand its capabilities.

Al-Saadi spent a total of 15 years over several stints in Israeli jails for being an active Islamic Jihad member. Israel killed two of his sons who were also Islamic Jihad militants in separate incidents in 2002, and destroyed his home during a fierce battle in the West Bank city of Jenin the same year.

"Once you will hit the commanders it will affect immediately all the organization," said Zvika Haimovich, the former head of the Israeli military's air defense force.

"It immediately creates a big mess in the Jihad."

A DELICATE BALANCE

Since seizing power in 2007, Hamas has fought four wars with Israel, often with support from Islamic Jihad fighters. Aside from a flare-up earlier this year, the border has largely been quiet since last year's 11-day war and Hamas appears to be staying on the sidelines of this current conflagration, which might keep it from spilling over into all-out war.

Islamic Jihad militants have challenged Hamas by firing rockets, often without claiming responsibility, to raise its profile among Palestinians while Hamas maintains the cease-fire. Israel holds Hamas responsible for all rocket fire coming from Gaza.

Hamas must walk a tightrope between restraining Islamic Jihad's fire at Israel while avoiding the ire of Palestinians if it cracks down on the group. Like in past flare-ups, Hamas will have the final say in how long — and how violent — this round of fighting will last.

CARETAKER LEADER

The current fighting comes as Israel is mired in a protracted political crisis that is sending voters to the polls for the fifth time in less than four years in the fall.

Caretaker leader Yair Lapid took over earlier this summer after the ideologically diverse government he helped form collapsed, triggering the new elections.

Lapid, a centrist former TV host and author, lacks the security background many Israelis see as essential for their leadership. His political fortunes could rest on the current fighting, either gaining a boost if he can portray himself as a capable leader or take a hit from a lengthy operation as Israelis try to enjoy the last weeks of summer.

Lapid hopes to edge out former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a security hawk who is on trial for corruption charges, in the upcoming vote.

Ukraine grain shipments offer hope, not fix to food crisis

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB, AYA BATRAWY and CARA ANNA Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A ship bringing corn to Lebanon's northern port of Tripoli normally would not cause a stir. But it's getting attention because of where it came from: Ukraine's Black Sea port of Odesa.

The Razoni, loaded with more than 26,000 tons of corn for chicken feed, is emerging from the edges of a Russian war that has threatened food supplies in countries like Lebanon, which has the world's highest rate of food inflation — a staggering 122% — and depends on the Black Sea region for nearly all of its wheat.

The fighting has trapped 20 million tons of grains inside Ukraine, and the Razoni's departure Monday marked a first major step toward extracting those food supplies and getting them to farms and bakeries to feed millions of impoverished people who are going hungry in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia.

"Actually seeing the shipment move is a big deal," said Jonathan Haines, senior analyst at data and analytics firm Gro Intelligence. "This 26,000 tons in the scale of the 20 million tons that are locked up is nothing, absolutely nothing ... but if we start seeing this, every shipment that goes is going to increase confidence."

The small scale means the initial shipments leaving the world's breadbasket will not draw down food prices or ease a global food crisis anytime soon. Plus, most of the trapped grain is for animal feed, not for people to eat, experts say. That will extend the war's ripple effects for the world's most vulnerable

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 19 of 58

people thousands of miles away in countries like Somalia and Afghanistan, where hunger could soon turn to famine and where inflation has pushed the cost of food and energy out of reach for many.

To farmers in Lebanon, the shipment expected this weekend is a sign that grains might become more available again, even if at a higher price, said Ibrahim Tarchichi, head of the Bekaa Farmers Association.

But he said it won't make a dent in his country, where years of endemic corruption and political divides have upended life. Since 2019, the economy has contracted by at least 58%, with the currency depreciating so severely that nearly three-quarters of the population now lives in poverty.

"I think the crisis will continue as long as operating costs continue to soar and purchasing power falls," Tarchichi said.

The strife was on sharp display this week when a section of Beirut's massive port grain silos collapsed in a huge cloud of dust, two years after an explosion killed more than 200 people and wounded thousands more.

While symbolic, the shipments have done little to ease market concerns. Drought and high fertilizer costs have kept grain prices more than 50% higher than early 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic. And while Ukraine is a top supplier of wheat, barley, corn and sunflower oil to developing countries, it represents just 10% of the international wheat trade.

There's also little to suggest that the world's poorest who rely on Ukrainian wheat distributed through U.N. agencies like the World Food Program will be able to access them anytime soon. Before the war, half of the grain the WFP purchased for distribution came from Ukraine.

The Razoni's safe passage was guaranteed by a four-month-long deal that the U.N. and Turkey brokered with Ukraine and Russia two weeks ago. The grain corridor through the Black Sea is 111 nautical miles long and 3 nautical miles wide, with waters strewn with drifting explosive mines, slowing the work.

Three more ships departed Friday, heading to Turkey, Ireland and the United Kingdom. All the ships that have departed so far had been stuck there since the war began nearly six months ago.

Under the deal, some — not all — of the food exported will go to countries experiencing food insecurity. That means it could take weeks for people in Africa to see grain from the new shipments and even longer to see the effects on high food prices, said Shaun Ferris, a Kenya-based adviser on agriculture and markets for Catholic Relief Services, a partner in World Food Program distributions.

In East Africa, thousands of people have died as Somalia and neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya face the worst drought in four decades. Survivors have described burying their children as they fled to camps where little assistance could be found.

After Russia invaded Ukraine, Somalia and other African countries turned to non-traditional grain partners like India, Turkey and Brazil, but at higher prices. Prices of critical foods could start to go down in two or three months as markets for imported food adjust and local harvests progress, Ferris said.

Who is first in line for the grain from Ukraine could be affected by humanitarian needs but also comes down to existing business arrangements and commercial interests, including who is willing to pay the most, Ferris said.

"Ukraine is not a charity," he said. "It will be looking to get the best deals on the market" to maintain its own fragile economy.

The WFP said this week that it's planning to buy, load and ship 30,000 tons of wheat out of Ukraine on a U.N.-chartered vessel. It did not say where the vessel would go or when that voyage might happen.

In Lebanon, where humanitarian aid group Mercy Corps says the price of wheat flour has risen by more than 200% since the start of Russia's war, people stood in long, often tense lines outside bakeries for subsidized bread in recent days.

The government green-lit a \$150 million World Bank loan to import wheat, a temporary solution of six to nine months before it could be forced to lift subsidies on bread altogether.

While the situation is hard for millions of Lebanese, the country's roughly 1 million Syrian refugees who fled a civil war across the border face stigmatization and discrimination trying to buy bread.

A Syrian living in northern Lebanon said it often takes him three to four visits to bakeries before he finds someone willing to sell him bread, with priority given to Lebanese. He described lines of 100 people wait-

ing and only a handful being allowed in every half-hour to buy a small bundle of loaves.

"We get all sorts of rude comments because we're Syrian, which we usually just ignore, but sometimes it gets too much and we decide to go home empty-handed," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

Ukrainian unit digs in for Russian assault on eastern city

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

SLOVIANSK, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian military personnel are fortifying their positions around the eastern city of Sloviansk in expectation of a fresh Russian attempt to seize the strategic point in the fiercely fought-over Donetsk region.

As heavy ground fighting continues on the front line only miles to the east, southeast and north of Sloviansk, members of the Dnipro-1 Regiment are digging in after a week of relative calm. The last Russian strike on the city occurred on July 30.

While the lull provided Sloviansk's remaining residents a reprieve after regular shellings between April and July, some unit members say it could be a prelude to renewed attacks.

"I think it won't be calm for long. Eventually, there will be an assault," Col. Yuriy Bereza, the head of the volunteer national guard regiment, told The Associated Press on Friday, adding that he expected the area to get "hot" in the coming days.

Sloviansk is considered a strategic target in Moscow's ambitions to seize all of Donetsk province, a largely Russian-speaking area in eastern Ukraine where Russian forces and pro-Moscow separatists control about 60% of the territory.

Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk province, which Russia has almost entirely captured since Ukrainian forces withdrew in early July from the remaining cities under their control, together make up the industrial Donbas region. The separatists have claimed the region as two independent republics since 2014, and Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized their sovereignty before he sent troops into Ukraine.

Seizing Sloviansk would put more of the region under Russian control, but it also would be a symbolic victory for Moscow. The city was the first to be taken by the separatists during an outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine in 2014, though it was later brought back under Ukrainian control.

Furthermore, Russia's military would like to take control of nearby water treatment facilities to serve Russian-occupied cities like Donetsk to the southeast and Mariupol to the south, Sgt. Maj. Artur Shevtsov of the Dnipro-1 Regiment said.

The Institute for the Study of War, a think tank based in Washington, said in a Friday assessment that Russian forces had increasingly transferred personnel and equipment from the Donbas toward southern Ukraine to push back at a Ukrainian counteroffensive around the occupied port city of Kherson.

Those attempts to secure Kherson come "at the expense of (Russian) efforts to seize Sloviansk ... which they appear to have abandoned," the institute's analysts said.

But Col. Bereza said he thought muddy conditions after recent rainy weather in the region, not the abandonment of Sloviansk as a target, were responsible for the pause in Russian artillery strikes.

"In two or three days, when it dries out, they will proceed," he said.

Only around 20,000 residents remain in Sloviansk, down from over 100,000 before Russia's invasion. The city has been without gas or water for months, and residents are only able to manually pump drinking water from public wells.

From a position on the outskirts of the city, soldiers in the Dnipro-1 Regiment expanded a network of trenches and dug bunkers against mortar strikes and phosphorous bombs.

At the outpost, Sgt. Maj. Shevtsov said the provision of heavy weapons from Ukraine's Western allies, including U.S.-supplied multiple rocket launchers, had helped keep some Donbas cities like Sloviansk relatively safe since their delivery in June.

But such weapons have likely only bought time for Ukrainian forces, he said, adding that the lack of

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 21 of 58

strikes in the last week "worries me." In his experience, a lull means the Russians are preparing to go on the attack.

Another officer, Cmdr. Ihor Krylchatenko, said he suspected the silence could be broken within days.

"We were warned that there could be an assault on the 7th or 8th" of August, he said. "We'll see, but we are ready."

Dems change some tax provisions as they ready economic bill

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats pared part of their proposed minimum tax on huge corporations and made other changes in their giant economic bill, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Friday, as they drove toward delivering a campaign-season victory to President Joe Biden on his domestic agenda.

In an unusual peek at closed-door bargaining, Schumer, D-N.Y., said Democrats dropped a proposed tax boost on hedge fund executives after pivotal centrist Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., said she would otherwise vote "no." Schumer said that in its place, the measure now has a new tax — which others said will be 1% — on the shares companies buy back of their own stock, netting the government far more revenue.

"Sen. Sinema said she would not vote for the bill" or even vote to let debate begin unless private equity tax was removed from the legislation, Schumer told reporters. "So we had no choice."

He spoke a day after he and Sinema announced compromise revisions to the environment, health care and tax package. With final numbers still to be calculated, the overall measure raises over \$700 billion in revenue — including more robust IRS tax collections — using most of it for energy, climate and health initiatives and reducing federal deficits by \$300 billion.

The accord puts Democrats on the verge of a more modest yet striking resurrection of many of Biden domestic aspirations that appeal strongly to party voters. Those include taxing big business, restraining prescription drug prices, slowing climate change, helping families afford private insurance and trimming federal deficits.

In another change, Schumer said a proposed 15% minimum tax on mammoth corporations had been trimmed and would now raise \$258 billion over the coming decade, down from \$313 billion. That provision, which has been the legislation's biggest revenue raiser, will now let those companies depreciate their equipment costs more quickly, lowering the government's tax take and helping manufacturers who buy expensive machinery. The new tax is expected to apply to around 150 companies with income exceeding \$1 billion.

Democrats plan for the Senate to begin considering the bill Saturday, and the House will return next Friday for votes. The measure is sure to face unanimous Republican opposition in the 50-50 Senate, where the backing of Sinema and all other Democrats will be needed for passage, along with Vice President Kamala Harris' tie-breaking vote.

"This bill is a game changer for working families and our economy," Biden said at the White House.

Still other revisions are possible. But the package passed one hurdle when the Senate parliamentarian, Elizabeth MacDonough, said a provision could remain requiring union-scale wages be paid if energy efficiency projects are to qualify for tax credits.

She upheld another section limiting electric vehicle tax credits to those assembled in the U.S. and containing batteries with minerals from countries with whom the U.S. has free trade agreements.

"I'm especially pleased that our prevailing wage provisions were approved. These provisions guarantee wage rates for clean energy projects," Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said early Saturday.

Democrats were awaiting the parliamentarian's decision on other issues including requirements that pharmaceutical makers pay penalties if they raise prices above inflation for drugs patients get from private insurers.

Democrats are using special rules that let them overcome GOP opposition and pass the package without needing the 60 votes most bills require. Under those procedures, the parliamentarian can force provisions

to be dropped that break rules requiring them to be chiefly aimed at changing the federal budget, not making new policy.

Republicans say the measure will worsen inflation — a premier concern of voters — discourage companies from hiring workers and raise already high energy costs with its taxes.

"The pain at the pump is going to get worse, and it's not just on the cost of energy to drive your car," said Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, the Senate's No. 3 GOP leader. "It's also the energy to heat your home, energy that powers our country, energy for electricity."

Nonpartisan analysts have said the legislation will have a modest impact on inflation and the economy.

"We're feeling pretty good," Schumer said about the legislation. "It's what the country so desperately needs. And it's what Democrats will deliver on in the coming days."

The measure will also include \$4 billion sought by Western senators to help their states cope with ruinous drought conditions, according to Sens. Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev., and Michael Bennet, D-Colo. The group had sought \$5 billion.

The bill faces a long weekend, including a "vote-a-rama" of unlimited, non-stop votes on amendments, which will mostly come from Republicans. Most are destined to lose, though the GOP hopes some will box Democrats into votes that would create campaign-ad fodder.

Taxing executives of private equity firms, such as hedge funds, has long been a goal of progressives. Under current law, those executives can pay significantly less than the top 37% individual tax rate on their income, which is called "carried interest."

That measure was also a favorite of conservative Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., a long-time holdout against larger versions of Biden's domestic plans who helped write the compromise legislation with Schumer.

But progressives also support taxing publicly traded companies that buy back their own stocks, a move that critics say artificially drives up stock prices and diverts money from investing. The buyback tax will net \$74 billion over 10 years, much more than the \$13 billion the "carried interest" plan would have raised.

EXPLAINER: Why Kenya's presidential election is important

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Kenyans vote Tuesday to choose a successor to President Uhuru Kenyatta. The race is close and could go to a runoff for the first time.

One top candidate is Raila Odinga, an opposition leader in his fifth run for the presidency who is being supported by former rival Kenyatta. The other is William Ruto, Kenyatta's deputy who fell out with the president earlier in their decade in power.

Both tend to focus far more on domestic issues, raising the question of how either will follow up on Kenyatta's diplomatic efforts for calm in neighboring Ethiopia or in the tensions between Rwanda and Congo.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Kenya is East Africa's economic hub and home to about 56 million people. The country has a recent history of turbulent elections. Even then, it stands out for its relative stability in a region where some elections are deeply challenged and longtime leaders such as Rwandan President Paul Kagame and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni have been declared the winner with almost 99% of votes, or been widely accused of physically cracking down on contenders.

Kenya has no transparency in campaign donations or spending. Some candidates for Parliament and other posts are estimated to be spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to gain access to power and its benefits, both legal and illegal.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CANDIDATES' PLATFORMS?

The 55-year-old 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 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.

The 77-year-old Odinga, famous for being jailed while fighting for multi-party democracy decades ago, has promised cash handouts to Kenya's poorest and more accessible health care for all.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 23 of 58

WHAT DO VOTERS CARE ABOUT?

Odinga and Ruto have long circled among contenders for the presidency, and there is a measure of apathy among Kenyans, especially younger ones in a country where the median age is about 20. The electoral commission signed up less than half of the new voters it had hoped for, just 2.5 million.

Key issues in every election include widespread corruption and the economy. Kenyans have been hurt by rising prices for food and fuel in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and that comes after the financial pain of the COVID-19 pandemic. More than a third of the country's youth are unemployed.

WHEN WILL KENYA HAVE A WINNER?

Official results will be announced within a week of the vote. To win outright, a candidate needs more than half of all votes and at least 25% of the votes in more than half of Kenya's 47 counties. No outright winner means a runoff election within 30 days.

The previous presidential election in 2017 made history when a top court overturned the results and ordered a new vote, a first in Africa. If the courts again call for a new vote, such an election would take place within 60 days of the ruling. Candidates or others have a week after the results are declared to file a petition to the court, which has two weeks to rule on it.

Hiroshima vows nuke ban at 77th memorial amid Russia threat

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Hiroshima on Saturday remembered the atomic bombing 77 years ago as officials, including the head of the United Nations, warned against nuclear weapons buildup and as fears grow of another such attack amid Russia's war on Ukraine.

"Nuclear weapons are nonsense. They guarantee no safety — only death and destruction," said U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who joined the prayer at the Hiroshima Peace Park.

"Three quarters of a century later, we must ask what we've learned from the mushroom cloud that swelled above this city in 1945," he said.

The United States dropped the world's first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, destroying the city and killing 140,000 people. It dropped a second bomb three days later on Nagasaki, killing another 70,000. Japan surrendered on Aug. 15, ending World War II and Japan's nearly half-century of aggression in Asia.

Fears of a third atomic bombing have grown amid Russia's threats of nuclear attack since its war on Ukraine began in February.

"Crises with grave nuclear undertones are spreading fast" in the Middle East and the Korean Peninsula, Guterres said. "We are one mistake, one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from Armageddon."

Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui, in his peace declaration, accused Putin of "using his own people as instruments of war and stealing the lives and livelihoods of innocent civilians in another country."

Russia's war on Ukraine is helping build support for nuclear deterrence, Matsui said, urging the world not to repeat the mistakes that destroyed his city nearly eight decades ago.

On Saturday, attendees including government leaders and diplomats observed a moment of silence with the sound of a peace bell at 8:15 a.m., the time when the U.S. B-29 dropped the bomb on the city. About 400 doves, considered symbols of peace, were released.

Guterres met with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida after the ceremony and raised alarm over the global retreat in nuclear disarmament, stressing the importance for Japan, the world's only nation to have suffered nuclear attacks, to take leadership in the effort, Japan's Foreign Ministry said.

Kishida escorted Guterres in the peace museum, where they each folded an origami crane — a symbol of peace and nuclear weapons abolition.

Russia and its ally Belarus were not invited to this year's peace memorial. Russian Ambassador to Japan Mikhail Galuzin on Thursday offered flowers at a memorial epitaph in the park and told reporters his country would never use nuclear weapons.

The world continues to face threats from nuclear weapons, Kishida said at the memorial.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 24 of 58

"I must raise my voice to appeal to the people around the world that the tragedy of nuclear weapons use should never be repeated," he said. "Japan will walk its path toward a world without nuclear weapons, no matter how narrow, steep or difficult that may be."

Kishida, who will host a Group of Seven summit meeting next May in Hiroshima, said he hoped to share his pledge with other G7 leaders "before the peace monument" to unite them to protect peace and international order based on the universal values of freedom and democracy.

Matsui criticized nuclear weapon states, including Russia, for not taking steps despite their pledge to abide by obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"Rather than treating a world without nuclear weapons like a distant dream, they should be taking concrete steps toward its realization," he said.

Critics say Kishida's call for a nuclear-free world is hollow because Japan remains under the U.S. nuclear umbrella and continues to boycott the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Kishida said the treaty, which lacks the U.S. and other nuclear powers, is not realistic at the moment and that Japan needs to bridge the divide between non-nuclear and nuclear powers.

Many survivors of the bombings have lasting injuries and illnesses resulting from the explosions and radiation exposure and face discrimination in Japan.

The government began to provide medical support to certified survivors in 1968 after more than 20 years of effort by them.

As of March, 118,935 survivors, whose average age now exceeds 84, are certified as eligible for government medical support, according to the Health and Welfare Ministry. But many others, including those who say they were victims of the "black rain" that fell outside of the initially designated areas, are still without support.

Aging survivors, known in Japan as hibakusha, continue to push for a nuclear ban and hope to convince younger generations to join the movement.

Guterres had a message for younger people: "Finish the work that the hibakusha have begun. Carry their message forward. In their names, in their honor, in their memory — we must act."

Progressive and centrist Dems battle for Vermont House seat

By WILSON RING Associated Press

STOWE, Vt. (AP) — Lt. Gov. Molly Gray and Senate President Pro Tempore Becca Balint are the leading candidates in a Democratic U.S. House primary that could make either of them the first female member of Vermont's congressional delegation.

Gray has the backing of the centrist lane of the party, with endorsements from former Govs. Madeline Kunin and Howard Dean. Retiring U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy donated \$5,000 to her campaign and cast a ballot for her.

Balint has been endorsed by an all-star list of progressive leaders, including the state's other U.S. senator, Bernie Sanders; Rep. Pramila Jayapal, chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus; and Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, the founders of Vermont's famously progressive ice cream company, Ben & Jerry's.

The winner of Tuesday's primary is expected to cruise to victory in November in deep-blue Vermont. Despite the state's liberal credentials built up over the last half century, the lack of turnover in the congressional delegation has made Vermont the only state in the country that has never been represented in Washington by a woman.

Leahy's retirement after 48 years in office set the stage for the history-making moment. U.S. Rep. Peter Welch, who has been in Congress since 2007, decided to run for Leahy's Senate seat. That opened up his House seat for Gray or Balint, who would also be the first openly gay person to represent Vermont in Congress if elected.

It's the first open seat in the state's three-person congressional delegation since 2006. And given Vermont's penchant for reelecting incumbents, it's likely that the winner of the Democratic primary will be able to hold the seat as long as she wants.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 25 of 58

The ads on television and social media, and the flyers that are showing up in Vermonters' mailboxes every day, remain positive, focused on what the candidates see as their qualifications. But the high stakes of the contest — and the ongoing battle between the centrist and progressive wings of the Democratic Party — have laid bare the intensity of the campaign.

During a debate Thursday, Gray called Balint out for a critical comment she made while seeking the endorsement of Vermont's Progressive Party. Balint had denounced Gray as a "corporatist and a catastrophe for the left."

"How can Vermonters expect that you will act any differently in Congress than you have on this campaign where you've launched negative attacks?" Gray said. "Isn't that the problem that we see in Congress today?"

Balint apologized to Gray for the comment, "if you found it hurtful." But Balint used the opportunity to note the source of many of Gray's campaign contributions.

"I said at the time the reason why I was concerned was because of the funds that you're raising from Washington insiders," Balint said. "You have raised a tremendous amount of money from lobbyists in D.C. and not as much money from people back here in Vermont."

Despite this tension, the two candidates hold similar views on most issues. Both support abortion rights and want to boost affordable housing, increase access to inexpensive child care and expand broadband internet services in rural areas.

Gray, a 38-year-old attorney, grew up on a farm in the Connecticut River town of Newbury and now lives in Burlington. She has touted her experience working as a Welch staffer in Washington, in Europe for the International Committee of the Red Cross, her time as an assistant attorney general and, for the last two years, her job as lieutenant governor.

Balint, a 54-year-old former middle school teacher from Brattleboro, first came to Vermont in 1994 to teach rock climbing and settled in the state permanently in 1997. She was first elected to the state Senate in 2014. Two years ago, she became the first woman chosen as Senate president pro tempore, which means she oversees the chamber's legislative work and presides over the state Senate if the lieutenant governor is absent.

Disputes about the source of their donations — Vermonters versus out-of-state donors or spending by outside groups — have helped drive some of the acrimony in the race.

A number of outside groups are supporting Balint's candidacy, including the LGBTQ Victory Fund, which has spent nearly \$1 million supporting her. By law, those groups are prohibited from coordinating their efforts with the campaigns.

Before the ads started, Gray had asked Balint whether she would condemn outside spending. Balint agreed.

Now that the outside spending has started, Gray says those outside groups are interfering with the conversation she is trying to have with voters.

"All of a sudden, someone else is coming in and telling Vermonters who to hire. That's not the Vermont way," Gray said. "Outside groups are unelected. They're unaccountable. They're not representing us in Congress."

Balint said she doesn't think the outside spending will make a difference in the race. In any event, she said, she has no control over it.

"I feel really great about the fact that we've run a really excellent campaign," Balint said. "I wish they weren't involved because I want my team to get the full credit for everything that we have done here."

There are four Democrats on the ballot Tuesday for U.S. House; one has dropped out and the fourth is a South Burlington physician. Three candidates are vying for the Republican nomination.

Voter Christy Hudon of Stowe said she hadn't decided whether to vote for Balint or Gray, though she is leaning toward Gray. In one of her ads, Gray highlights the challenges she and her family have faced with her mother's chronic health problems. Hudon said her own family is dealing with issues related to aging relatives.

"I definitely feel like she understands where people's needs are at that time a little bit better," Hudon said.

Voter Annie Greenfelder of Middlesex noted that there doesn't appear to be much policy difference be-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 26 of 58

tween Gray and Balint. She said she voted for Balint because of the endorsements she has received from environmental activists but would like to see Gray run for another office if she loses.

"We need more politicians down the pipe," Greenfelder said.

EXPLAINER: On China, US and climate, action, not talk is key

By SETH BORENSTEIN and CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writers

The last two agreements the world made to battle climate change came only after the United States and China, by far the two biggest carbon polluters, made deals with each other. Now the successful dynamic is in jeopardy with China cutting off climate talks with the U.S. because of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's trip to Taiwan.

Just how much this will sidetrack momentum -- especially in the United States where there's congressional action to cut emissions of heat-trapping gas — depends on how long the rift extends, experts said. But they said there's hope that climate actions already set in motion in both countries will matter more than unspoken words.

"China's announcement that it's suspending talks on climate change is not surprising, but it definitely stings," said Joanna Lewis, an expert on China, energy and climate at Georgetown University. "I hope this is only a temporary pause."

The brief notice issued on Friday by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave few details and was largely focused on ceasing military and strategic meetings.

Halting climate talks between the U.S. and China imperils progress at a global climate summit in November, and specifically direct cooperation on thorny technical issues related to reducing methane emissions, said Lewis.

U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry said Friday, "Suspending cooperation doesn't punish the United States — it punishes the world, particularly the developing world. The human and financial cost will be catastrophic" if countries can't set aside differences to address climate change.

CLIMATE ACTION AT HOME

Just because the two nations aren't talking to each other about climate doesn't mean they are not acting, experts say.

"What the U.S. and China actually have to do to curb emissions is take strong actions domestically — and I don't believe the main impetus for either side right now is pressure from international negotiations," said Deborah Seligsohn, an expert on China's politics and energy at Villanova University and a former U.S. diplomat.

Longtime climate negotiations analyst Alden Meyer of the independent think tank E3G said there's a good possibility of the U.S. and, then in response, China taking big steps to try to limit emissions of heat-trapping gases — even if they aren't talking one-on-one.

The U.S. Congress is poised to pass the Inflation Reduction Act, the deal struck by West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin and Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

Calling it the U.S.'s "most significant climate bill ever," Nigel Purvis, CEO of Climate Advisers, said that passage will be more meaningful than a breakdown in bilateral talks. "China will need to respond to that new climate change bill coming out of Congress even if climate talks are suspended," he said.

In particular, pledges of public investment in developing and commercializing advanced clean technologies will get China's attention, experts say. That's because China hopes to dominate global clean energy markets.

"It's significant that arguably the two biggest domestic actions the U.S. and China have taken on climate change have happened at a time of continually increasing rivalry between the two countries — perhaps there's a lesson in that," said Scott Moore, Director of China Programs and Strategic Initiatives at the University of Pennsylvania.

While the U.S. is poised to pass its most significant climate legislation this year, China's leader Xi Jinping announced the country's target to become carbon neutral by 2060 at a United Nations meeting in Sep-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 27 of 58

tember 2020. And Xi pledged that China would stop building overseas coal-fired power plants at a U.N. meeting last year.

Given their different government systems, "what matters most in China is top-level targets, while what matters in the U.S. is actually passing legislation," said Villanova's Seligsohn.

GLOBAL CLIMATE TALKS

It's not clear whether China's announcement's cutting off talks applies only to top negotiators John Kerry and Xie Zhenhua, or to research and cooperation at all levels, which would be worse, said E3G's Meyer.

But he said it would be a good sign if multilateral negotiations, such as the G-20 where the U.S. and China often co-lead talks, continue.

Historically, climate deals often go through Beijing and Washington.

"When the U.S. and China have found common ground, it has tended to provide a model for the rest of the world," Purvis said.

A joint U.S.-China deal to fight climate change struck by Xi and then-President Barack Obama in 2014 "really helped improve the mood and laid groundwork" for the 2015 Paris agreement where nearly every nation pledged to curb emissions of heat-trapping gases, Meyer said. Then seven years later during U.N. climate talks in Glasgow, a U.S.-China deal helped smooth over bumps to another international climate deal.

Until recently, climate diplomacy had stayed a rare area of dialogue and even collegiality as Biden's and Xi's governments confronted one another on human rights, China's territorial claims, tariffs and other topics. Kerry and Xie, both senior leaders in government service, have spoken by telephone often and appeared side by side at global events.

Losing that avenue of cooperation is a "strong signal" from China, said University of Pennsylvania's Moore. "Climate has been the one issue that, on both sides, there was an attempt to insulate and run on separate tracks, insulated from broader tensions in the relationship," he said. "But that might not be possible anymore."

Indiana becomes 1st state to approve abortion ban post Roe

By ARLEIGH RODGERS Associated Press/Report for America

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Indiana on Friday became the first state in the nation to approve abortion restrictions since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, as the Republican governor quickly signed a near-total ban on the procedure shortly after lawmakers approved it.

The ban, which takes effect Sept. 15, includes some exceptions. Abortions would be permitted in cases of rape and incest, before 10-weeks post-fertilization; to protect the life and physical health of the mother; and if a fetus is diagnosed with a lethal anomaly. Victims of rape and incest would not be required to sign a notarized affidavit attesting to an attack, as had once been proposed.

Under the bill, abortions can be performed only in hospitals or outpatient centers owned by hospitals, meaning all abortion clinics would lose their licenses. A doctor who performs an illegal abortion or fails to file required reports must also lose their medical license — wording that tightens current Indiana law that says a doctor "may" lose their license.

"I am personally most proud of each Hoosier who came forward to courageously share their views in a debate that is unlikely to cease any time soon," Gov. Eric Holcomb said in the statement announcing that he had signed the measure. "For my part as your governor, I will continue to keep an open ear."

His approval came after the Senate approved the ban 28-19 and the House advanced it 62-38.

Indiana was among the earliest Republican-run state legislatures to debate tighter abortion laws after the Supreme Court ruling in June that removed constitutional protections for the procedure. But it is the first state to pass a ban through both chambers, after West Virginia lawmakers on July 29 passed up the chance to be that state.

"Happy to be completed with this, one of the more challenging things that we've ever done as a state General Assembly, at least certainly while I've been here," Senate President Pro-Tem Rodric Bray told reporters after the vote. "I think this is a huge opportunity, and we'll build on that as we go forward from here."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 28 of 58

Sen. Sue Glick of LaGrange, who sponsored the bill, said that she does not think "all states will come down at the same place" but that most Indiana residents support aspects of the bill.

Some senators in both parties lamented the bill's provisions and the impact it would have on the state, including low-income women and the health care system. Eight Republicans joined all 11 Democrats in voting against the bill, though their reasons to thwart the measure were mixed.

"We are backsliding on democracy," said Democratic Sen. Jean Breaux of Indianapolis, who wore a green ribbon Friday signifying support for abortion rights, on her lapel. "What other freedoms, what other liberties are on the chopping block, waiting to be stripped away?"

Republican Sen. Mike Bohacek of Michiana Shores spoke about his 21-year-old-daughter, who has Down syndrome. Bohacek voted against the bill, saying it does not have adequate protections for women with disabilities who are raped.

"If she lost her favorite stuffed animal, she'd be inconsolable. Imagine making her carry a child to term," he said before he started to choke up, then threw his notes on his seat and exited the chamber.

Republican Sen. Mike Young of Indianapolis, however, said the bill's enforcement provisions against doctors are not stringent enough.

Such debates demonstrated Indiana residents' own divisions on the issue, displayed in hours of testimony lawmakers heard over the past two weeks. Residents rarely, if ever, expressed support for the the legislation in their testimony, as abortion-rights supporters said the bill goes too far while anti-abortion activists expressed it doesn't go far enough.

The debates came amid an evolving landscape of abortion politics across the country as Republicans face some party divisions and Democrats see a possible election-year boost.

Republican Rep. Wendy McNamara of Evansville, who sponsored the House bill, told reporters after the House vote that the legislation "makes Indiana one of the most pro-life states in the nation."

Outside the chambers, abortion-rights activists often chanted over lawmakers' remarks, carrying signs like "Roe roe roe your vote" and "Build this wall" between church and state. Some House Democrats wore blazers over pink "Bans Off Our Bodies" T-shirts.

Indiana's ban followed the political firestorm over a 10-year-old rape victim who traveled to the state from neighboring Ohio to end her pregnancy. The case gained attention when an Indianapolis doctor said the child came to Indiana because of Ohio's "fetal heartbeat" ban.

Religion was a persistent theme during legislative debates, both in residents' testimony and lawmakers' comments.

In advocating against the House bill, Rep. Ann Vermilion condemned fellow Republicans who have called women "murderers" for getting an abortion.

"I think that the Lord's promise is for grace and kindness," she said. "He would not be jumping to condemn these women."

Record floods strand 1K people in Death Valley National Park

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, Calif. (AP) — Record rainfall Friday triggered flash floods at Death Valley National Park that swept away cars, closed all roads and stranded hundreds of visitors and workers.

There were no immediate reports of injuries but roughly 60 vehicles were buried in mud and debris and about 500 visitors and 500 park workers were stuck inside the park, officials said.

The park near the California-Nevada state line received 1.46 inches (3.71 centimeters) of rain at the Furnace Creek area. That's about 75% of what the area typically gets in a year and more than has ever been recorded for the entire month of August.

Since 1936, the only single day with more rain was April 15, 1988, when 1.47 inches (3.73 centimeters) fell, park officials said.

"Entire trees and boulders were washing down," said John Sirlin, a photographer for an Arizona-based adventure company who witnessed the flooding as he perched on a hillside boulder where he was trying to take pictures of lightning as the storm approached.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 29 of 58

"The noise from some of the rocks coming down the mountain was just incredible," he said in a phone interview Friday afternoon.

Park officials didn't immediately respond to requests for an update Friday night.

The storm followed another major flooding event earlier this week at the park 120 miles (193 kilometers) northeast of Las Vegas. Some roads were closed Monday after they were inundated with mud and debris from flash floods that also hit western Nevada and northern Arizona hard.

Friday's rain started around 2 a.m., according to Sirlin, who lives in Chandler, Arizona, and has been visiting the park since 2016.

"It was more extreme than anything I've seen there," said Sirlin, the lead guide for Incredible Weather Adventures who started chasing storms in Minnesota and the high plains in the 1990s.

"A lot of washes were flowing several feet deep. There are rocks probably 3 or 4 feet covering the road," he said.

Sirlin said it took him about 6 hours to drive about 35 miles (56 kilometers) out of the park from near the Inn at Death Valley.

"There were at least two dozen cars that got smashed and stuck in there," he said, adding that he didn't see anyone injured "or any high water rescues."

During Friday's rainstorms, the "flood waters pushed dumpster containers into parked cars, which caused cars to collide into one another. Additionally, many facilities are flooded including hotel rooms and business offices," the park statement said.

A water system that provides it for park residents and offices also failed after a line broke that was being repaired, the statement said.

A flash flood warning for the park and surrounding area expired at 12:45 p.m., Friday but a flood advisory remained in effect into the evening, the National Weather Service said.

Alex Jones ordered to pay \$45.2M more over Sandy Hook lies

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A Texas jury on Friday ordered conspiracy theorist Alex Jones to pay \$45.2 million in punitive damages to the parents of a child who was killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre, adding to the \$4.1 million he must pay for the suffering he put them through by claiming for years that the nation's deadliest school shooting was a hoax.

The total — \$49.3 million — is less than the \$150 million sought by Neil Heslin and Scarlett Lewis, whose 6-year-old son Jesse Lewis was among the 20 children and six educators killed in the 2012 attack in Newtown, Connecticut. But the trial marks the first time Jones has been held financially liable for peddling lies about the massacre, claiming it was faked by the government to tighten gun laws.

Afterward, Lewis said that Jones — who wasn't in the courtroom to hear the verdict — has been held accountable. She said when she took the stand and looked Jones in the eye, she thought of her son, who was credited with saving lives by yelling "run" when the killer paused in his rampage.

"He stood up to the bully Adam Lanza and saved nine of his classmates' lives," Lewis said. "I hope that I did that incredible courage justice when I was able to confront Alex Jones, who is also a bully. I hope that inspires other people to do the same."

It could be a while before the plaintiffs collect anything. Jones' lead attorney, Andino Reynal, told the judge he will appeal and ask the courts to drastically reduce the size of the verdict.

After the hearing, Reynal said he thinks the punitive amount will be reduced to as little as \$1.5 million.

"We think the verdict was too high. ... Alex Jones will be on the air today, he'll be on the air tomorrow, he'll be on the air next week. He's going to keep doing his job holding the power structure accountable."

Jones' companies and personal wealth could also get carved up by other lawsuits and bankruptcy. Another defamation lawsuit against Jones by a Sandy Hook family is set to start pretrial hearings in the same Austin court on Sept. 14. He faces yet another defamation lawsuit in Connecticut.

Plaintiffs' attorney Mark Bankston said he believes he can challenge any attempt to reduce the dam-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 30 of 58

ages. But he said even if the award is drastically cut, it's just as important to take the big verdict into the bankruptcy court for the family to claim against Jones' estate and company.

Jones testified this week that any award over \$2 million would "sink us." His company Free Speech Systems, which is Infowars' Austin-based parent company, filed for bankruptcy protection during the first week of the trial.

Punitive damages are meant to punish defendants for particularly egregious conduct, beyond monetary compensation awarded to the individuals they hurt. A high punitive award is also seen as a chance for jurors to send a wider societal message and a way to deter others from the same abhorrent conduct in the future.

Barry Covert, a Buffalo, New York, First Amendment lawyer with no connection to the Jones case, said the total damages awarded amount to "a stunning loss for Jones."

"With \$50 million in all, the jury has sent a huge, loud message that this behavior will not be tolerated," Covert said. "Everyone with a show like this who knowingly tells lies — juries will not tolerate it."

Future jurors in other pending Sandy Hook trials could see the damages amounts in this case as a benchmark, Covert said. If other juries do, Covert said, "it could very well put Jones out of business."

Attorneys for the family had urged jurors to hand down a financial punishment that would force Infowars to shut down.

"You have the ability to stop this man from ever doing it again," Wesley Ball, an attorney for the parents, told the jury Friday. "Send the message to those who desire to do the same: Speech is free. Lies, you pay for."

An economist testified that Jones and the company are worth up to \$270 million.

Bernard Pettingill, who was hired by the plaintiffs to study Jones' net worth, said records show that Jones withdrew \$62 million for himself in 2021, when default judgments were issued in lawsuits against him.

"That number represents, in my opinion, a value of a net worth," Pettingill said. "He's got money put in a bank account somewhere."

But Jones' lawyers said their client had already learned his lesson. They argued for a punitive amount of less than \$300,000.

"You've already sent a message. A message for the first time to a talk show host, to all talk show hosts, that their standard of care has to change," Reynal said.

Friday's damages drew praise from the American Federation of Teachers union, which represented the teachers at Sandy Hook.

"Nothing will ever fix the pain of losing a child, or of watching that tragedy denied for political reasons. But I'm glad the parents of Sandy Hook have gotten some justice," union President Randi Weingarten said in a tweet.

Lawyers for the Sandy Hook families suing Jones contend he has tried to hide evidence of his true wealth in various shell companies.

During his testimony, Jones was confronted with a memo from one of his business managers outlining a single day's gross revenue of \$800,000 from selling vitamin supplements and other products through his website, which would approach nearly \$300 million in a year. Jones called it a record sales day.

Jones, who has portrayed the lawsuit as an attack on his First Amendment rights, conceded during the trial that the attack was "100% real" and that he was wrong to have lied about it. But Heslin and Lewis told jurors that an apology wouldn't suffice and called on them to make Jones pay for the years of suffering he has put them and other Sandy Hook families through.

The parents told jurors they've endured a decade of trauma, inflicted first by the murder of their son and what followed: gunshots fired at a home, online and phone threats, and harassment on the street by strangers. They said the threats and harassment were all fueled by Jones and his conspiracy theory spread to his followers via Infowars.

A forensic psychiatrist testified that 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.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 31 of 58

Throughout the trial, Jones was his typically bombastic self, talking about conspiracies on the witness stand, during impromptu news conferences and on his show. His erratic behavior is unusual by courtroom standards, and the judge scolded him, telling him at one point: "This is not your show."

The trial drew attention from outside Austin as well.

Bankston told the court Thursday that the U.S. House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol has requested records from Jones' phone that Jones' attorneys had mistakenly turned over to the plaintiffs. Bankston later said he planned to comply with the committee's request.

By Friday, Bankston said, he had "a subpoena sitting on my desk" from the Jan. 6 committee. But he said he needed to "tamp down expectations" that it might reveal texts about the insurrection since it appears to have been scraped for data in mid-2020.

Bankston said he's also had "law enforcement" interest in the phone data, but he declined to elaborate.

Last month, the House committee showed graphic and violent text messages and played videos of right-wing figures, including Jones, and others vowing that Jan. 6 would be the day they would fight for Trump.

The committee first subpoenaed Jones in November, demanding a deposition and documents related to his efforts to spread misinformation about the 2020 election and a rally on the day of the attack.

GOP Rep who voted to impeach advances in Washington primary

By RACHEL LA CORTE Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — Republican Rep. Dan Newhouse, who voted to impeach Donald Trump, advanced Friday to the general election following days of vote counts in Washington state's primary, but fellow Republican Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler saw her advantage against an opponent endorsed by Trump rapidly shrink to within recount territory with thousands of votes left to count.

Both drew interparty challenges due to their vote to impeach Trump following the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Newhouse, the four-term incumbent in the 4th Congressional District in central Washington and Democrat Doug White were essentially tied, with each capturing about 25% of the vote on a crowded ballot. White also advanced to the fall ballot. Loren Culp, a Trump-endorsed former small town police chief who lost the 2020 governor's race to Democrat Jay Inslee, was at about 21%.

In the 3rd Congressional District in southwestern Washington, Democrat Marie Perez was the top vote getter, with 31% of the vote. Herrera Beutler, who had about 24% on Tuesday night, dropped to 22.6% Thursday night, 257 votes ahead of Joe Kent — a former Green Beret endorsed by Trump — who was at 22.5%.

A mandatory recount would occur if the margin of votes between the No. 2 and No. 3 candidates is less than half of 1% and closer than 2,000 votes.

Because Washington is a vote-by-mail state and ballots just need to be in by Election Day, it often takes days to learn final results in close races as ballots arrive at county election offices throughout the week.

An estimated 35,000 votes are left to count, and the three counties where votes remain to be counted — the majority of it in the 3rd District's largest county, Clark, — won't update their tallies again until late Monday afternoon. Counties have until Aug. 16 to finish their count and for canvassing boards to certify the results, followed by certification by the secretary of state by Aug. 19.

Under Washington's primary system, all candidates run on the same ballot, and the top two vote getters in each of Tuesday's races advance to the November election, regardless of party.

Of the 10 House Republicans who voted for Trump's impeachment, four opted not to run for reelection. Michigan Rep. Peter Meijer was defeated in a primary Tuesday by Trump-endorsed John Gibbs and Rep. Tom Rice of South Carolina lost to a Trump-endorsed challenger in June. Rep. David Valadao of California — which has an open primary like Washington — survived a primary challenge. Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming is bracing for defeat in her Aug. 16 primary against a Trump-backed rival.

In another key match in the 8th Congressional District, incumbent Democratic Rep. Kim Schrier advanced to the November ballot with more than 47% of the vote, and will face former state attorney general can-

didate Matt Larkin in November.

With about 17% of the vote, Larkin edged out King County Council Member Reagan Dunn, a former federal prosecutor whose mother once held the seat. Dunn conceded the race Thursday. The district is a key target of GOP efforts to retake control of the House.

Woman heading to prenatal checkup killed in California crash

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A pregnant woman who died along with her young son and three others in a fiery crash caused by a speeding car was heading to a prenatal doctor's appointment, her sister said Friday.

Thursday's crash killed Asherey Ryan, her 11-month-old son Alonzo Quintero and her boyfriend, Reynold Lester, Sha'seana Kerr said in a GoFundMe posting.

"Everybody's heartbroken," Kerr told KABC-TV. "She literally walked out the door, because we all live together, and she said, 'Ok, I love y'all. I'm going to my doctor's appointment to check up on the baby.' We asked, 'Oh, why don't you leave our nephew here?' She said, 'No, I want to take my son for a ride.' So, knowing that really, really broke our hearts."

Lester's family told KABC-TV that the 24-year-old security guard was the father of the unborn child, who was listed as "baby boy Ryan" in online coroner's records.

Two other women and a man were also killed but their names weren't made public Friday.

Shortly after 1:30 p.m. Thursday, a Mercedes-Benz sedan ran a red light at high speed and caused the crash involving as many as six cars near a gas station in the unincorporated Windsor Hills about 10 miles (16 kilometers) southwest of downtown LA, according to the California Highway Patrol.

The California Highway Patrol said Nicole Lorraine Linton, who sustained moderate injuries in the collision, was taken into custody on suspicion of vehicular manslaughter with gross negligence.

Prosecutors said they could receive the case as early as next Monday and will then decide whether to file criminal charges.

It was not immediately clear whether Linton, 37, had an attorney who could comment on her behalf.

The Mercedes-Benz sedan never appeared to brake as it flew through the intersection and Pepi said detectives are looking into whether Linton had a medical episode or was driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

"It was definitely one of the most horrific crashes that we've seen," CHP Officer Franco Pepi told The Associated Press on Friday.

Several people were flung from the cars and two vehicles caught fire. Television reports showed the blackened and mangled cars, as well as a child's car seat among the debris covering the street.

Video showed the Mercedes careening through an intersection, striking at least two cars that exploded in flames and were sent hurtling onto a sidewalk, winding up against the gas station's corner sign. A fiery streak led to one car. One vehicle was torn in half.

The car was going at least 50 mph (80 kph) as it raced through the crowded intersection, Pepi said Thursday. Eight people were taken to the hospital, including Linton.

The other victims had minor injuries and included a 33-year-old woman and six children ranging in age from 1 to 15 years old, Pepi said.

A memorial grew outside the intersection Friday, as mourners left flowers and candles in memory of the dead.

Henry Sanchez, who works at nearby Sinclair Gas, was at the indoor register when he heard "the loudest noise I've ever heard."

"The sound of it, it was gut-wrenching," he told the AP on Friday. "It was like two trains hitting each other, metal on metal."

He saw people rush to the cars to offer aid but they were kept back by the flames until firefighters arrived.

"I remember everybody trying to get the fire down and help people out as much as they could, but nobody could do anything," he said.

Veronica Esquival told KTLA-TV that she covered her head for protection as debris flew.

"All of the sudden, a baby literally flew from the middle of the intersection to the middle of the gas station and landed right on the floor in front of me," Esquival said. "One of the workers came and saw me with the baby and took the baby out of my hands. ... Somebody tried to resuscitate the baby but the baby was gone."

Debra Jackson, told KCBS-TV she was about to get out of her car to pump gas when she heard a big explosion.

"The flames just went over everybody," Jackson said. "The flames went over my whole car and they told me to jump out of my car ... because I was trying to get out of my car, to go to the gas pump. And I jumped out of my car and just left my car sitting right there."

FACT FOCUS: Why final election results take days, not hours

By ALI SWENSON and JOSH KELETY Associated Press

As election workers spend long hours tallying ballots in Arizona and elsewhere in the days after Tuesday's primary elections, some critics are arguing they should be finished counting by now.

Widely shared Twitter posts this week called the delayed results "corrupt" and "unacceptable," while Arizona gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake in a press conference on Wednesday said Arizona voters should know the winner "when they go to bed on election night."

She repeated that gripe during a radio interview Friday, the day after the AP declared her victory in the primary, saying "we had days of waiting to get the ballots counted. It's a mess."

These complaints ignore the realities of modern-day ballot processing, which requires extensive time and labor, according to election officials and experts. In fact, states have never reported official election results on election night, experts say.

Here's a closer look at the facts.

CLAIM: In the past, election results have been released on election night.

THE FACTS: That's misleading. While media outlets routinely project winners and The Associated Press calls races when it determines a clear victor, no state releases complete and final results on election night, nor have they ever done so in modern history, according to experts.

"In the entirety of American history, there were never official results on election night. That is not possible, it's never happened," said David Becker, a former U.S. Justice Department attorney and current executive director of the Center for Election Innovation and Research. "There is not a state in the union that doesn't wait days, if not weeks, until after Election Day to officially certify the final results."

He added that when margins are large enough in certain races, media outlets feel confident enough to call races for one candidate or another. For example, Katie Hobbs was the clear winner in Arizona's Democratic primary for governor by Tuesday night, while the state's GOP primary for governor was still too close to call until Thursday night.

But those projections aren't official election results, and counting is still taking place after those calls are issued.

There's a reasonable argument to be made that states could strive to release unofficial election results by election night, according to Charles Stewart, a political science professor at MIT. Some states, like Florida, have passed laws that make that easier, he said.

However, even states that do manage to report unofficial counts on election night spend the following days processing provisional ballots, reconciling unmatched signatures and correcting any tabulation errors, which leads to a delay in final results, Stewart said.

Those unofficial counts also aren't sufficient for the closest races, where candidates must wait for final results to identify the winner anyway, Stewart said.

CLAIM: If election officials take days to release a complete ballot count, that means they cheated or are incompetent.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 34 of 58

THE FACTS: That's false. Time and labor is necessary to process and correctly tabulate ballots, experts and election officials say. Certain local laws also require procedures that extend the process.

For instance, election workers in Arizona are legally barred from picking up ballots from polling places before the sites close at 7 p.m. on Election Day, said Megan Gilbertson, a spokesperson for the Maricopa County Elections Department. And as the AP has previously reported, many voters who receive mail-in ballots opt to return them on Election Day.

In this year's primary election in Maricopa County, which is Arizona's largest county by far, more than 120,000 voters dropped off their ballots on Election Day, creating a backlog of votes that needed to be processed after the polls closed, Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer explained on Twitter.

Those ballots accounted for most of the votes still being counted in the days after the primary election, Richer said.

The law also requires that mail-in ballots undergo signature verification, a time-intensive process in which the signatures on ballot envelopes are compared to voters' on-file signatures to verify authenticity, according to Gilbertson. After the signature is verified, bipartisan two-person teams then have to physically separate the ballots from their envelopes and prepare them for tabulation.

"We've had two-member teams that take your ballot out of your envelope, flatten it, they have to count every single ballot and every single envelope," Gilbertson said. "It is a very, very manual process, but that is required by statute to have those bipartisan boards do that separation."

"They are making sure that eligible voters are the only ones who vote and they only vote once. And that takes time," Becker said. "We should be thrilled that election officials all across the country take that seriously. It is much more important to get it accurate than to get it fast."

Arizona state law gives counties 10 days to tabulate and certify the primary election results, according to Sophia Solis, a spokesperson for the Arizona Secretary of State.

"We don't anticipate any delays as we expect everyone will meet their statutory deadlines," she wrote in an email to the AP.

Breonna Taylor supporters relieved by charges against police

By DYLAN LOVAN Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Louisville activists put in long hours on phones and in the streets, working tirelessly to call for arrests in the fatal police shooting of Breonna Taylor — but it was mostly two years filled with frustration.

This week they saw their fortunes suddenly change, when U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland announced federal charges against four officers involved in the March 13, 2020, raid that ended in Taylor's death.

After a series of disappointing setbacks, the charges brought a welcome sense of relief.

"It is such a weight lifted," said Sadiqa Reynolds, president of Louisville's Urban League, who has advocated for Taylor's family and led protest marches. "What this decision yesterday did is to begin lifting the cloud that had been hanging over us."

The indictments represent the first time Louisville police officers have been held accountable for Taylor's shooting death in her home. Most of the new charges center around the faulty warrant that led officers to Taylor's front door.

The 26-year-old Black woman was shot to death after officers used a battering ram to knock down her door during a search for drugs. None were found. Taylor's boyfriend fired a defensive shot that hit one of the officers as he came through the door. The boyfriend later said he thought the officer was an intruder. Several police officers returned fire, striking Taylor multiple times.

The spring and summer of 2020 became a time of reckoning over how police treat Black communities. Protesters shouted Taylor's name along with that of George Floyd, a Black man who died from suffocation three months after Taylor when a white Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck.

Last year, federal officials brought civil rights charges against four officers in Floyd's death and federal

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 35 of 58

hate crimes charges against three white men involved in the death of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black Georgia man killed in February 2020. All were convicted of the charges in February of this year.

When that happened, "we celebrated, but there was a part of us that felt like we never got anything like that in Louisville," Reynolds said Friday.

In Breonna Taylor's case, the officers who fired the fatal shots were not involved in the warrant's creation and didn't know it was faulty, Garland said. The two officers who shot Taylor were not charged this week.

The indictments unsealed Thursday name former Louisville officers Joshua Jaynes and Brett Hankison, along with current officers Kelly Goodlett and Sgt. Kyle Meany. Louisville police are moving to fire Goodlett and Meany.

Jaynes and Meany both knew the warrant used to search Taylor's home had information that was "false, misleading and out of date," the indictment says. Both are charged with conspiracy and deprivation of rights. They and Hankison are facing a maximum sentence of life in prison. Taylor family lawyer Ben Crump said Goodlett has pleaded guilty to a lesser charge.

The warrant used to search Taylor's apartment alleged that she was receiving packages for a suspected drug dealer who was a former boyfriend. Investigators later learned that Jaynes had not confirmed any package deliveries with the postal inspector.

Hankison was the only officer charged Thursday who was on the scene the night of the killing. He was indicted on state charges in 2020, but they were related to bullets he fired that nearly hit Taylor's neighbors. He was acquitted in March of wanton endangerment. The new federal indictment charges Hankison with excessive force for firing into Taylor's and a neighbor's apartments.

Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron, a Republican running for governor, has been the target of many protesters' ire since he announced in September 2020 that only Hankison would be charged.

During a 2020 news conference to announce a grand jury's findings, Cameron said jurors "agreed" that homicide charges were not warranted against the officers, because they were fired upon. That prompted three of the jurors to come forward and dispute Cameron's account, arguing that Cameron's staff limited their scope and wouldn't let them consider harsher charges.

"The federal government had the guts to do what Daniel Cameron did not," said Lonita Baker, one of the Taylor family's attorneys. "The malfeasance that the Kentucky Attorney General's office showed in this case shows that his political career needs to end now."

Cameron said this week that some "want to use this moment to divide Kentuckians, misrepresent the facts of the state investigation and broadly impugn the character of our law enforcement."

"I won't participate in that sort of rancor," he said in a news release. "It's not productive."

Another longtime activist, Tamika Mallory, moved to Louisville along with members of the social justice group Until Freedom more than two years ago when she heard about the Taylor case from Crump. Her goal was to bring attention to Taylor's death at a time when the growing coronavirus pandemic was dominating headlines.

"We needed a movement on the ground here," said Mallory, who relocated from New York.

On Thursday, minutes after the indictment was announced, she was speaking at a downtown park that was the launching pad for hundreds of days of protests after Taylor's death. Protesters had renamed it "Injustice Square."

"There were many people who tried to tell us that we were wasting our time," Mallory said. But we knew "we still had a fallen soldier that will never come back in Breonna Taylor."

Israeli strikes on Gaza kill 10, including senior militant

By FARES AKRAM and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel unleashed a wave of airstrikes Friday on Gaza, killing at least 10 people, including a senior militant, according to Palestinian officials. Israel said it targeted the Islamic Jihad militant group in response to an "imminent threat" following the recent arrest of another senior militant.

Hours later, Palestinian militants launched a barrage of rockets as air-raid sirens wailed in Israel and the two sides drew closer to another all-out war. Islamic Jihad claimed to have fired 100 rockets.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 36 of 58

Israel and Gaza's militant Hamas rulers have fought four wars and several smaller battles over the last 15 years at a staggering cost to the territory's 2 million Palestinian residents.

A blast was heard in Gaza City, where smoke poured out of the seventh floor of a tall building. Video released by Israel's military showed the strikes blowing up three guard towers with suspected militants in them.

In a nationally televised speech, Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid said his country launched the attacks based on "concrete threats."

"This government has a zero-tolerance policy for any attempted attacks — of any kind — from Gaza towards Israeli territory," Lapid said. "Israel will not sit idly by when there are those who are trying to harm its civilians."

He added that "Israel isn't interested in a broader conflict in Gaza but will not shy away from one either."

The violence poses an early test for Lapid, who assumed the role of caretaker prime minister ahead of elections in November, when he hopes to keep the position. He has experience in diplomacy, having served as foreign minister in the outgoing government, but his security credentials are thin.

Hamas also faces a dilemma in deciding whether to join a new battle barely a year after the last war caused widespread devastation. There has been almost no reconstruction since then, and the isolated coastal territory is mired in poverty, with unemployment hovering around 50%.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said a 5-year-old girl and a 23-year-old woman were among those killed in Gaza, without differentiating between civilian and militant casualties. The Israeli military said early estimates were that around 15 fighters were killed. Dozens of people were wounded.

Islamic Jihad said Taiseer al-Jabari, its commander for northern Gaza, was among the dead. He had succeeded another militant killed in an airstrike in 2019.

An Israeli military spokesman said the strikes were in response to an "imminent threat" from two militant squads armed with anti-tank missiles. The spokesman, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity, said al-Jabari was deliberately targeted and had been responsible for "multiple attacks" on Israel.

Hundreds marched in a funeral procession for him and others who were killed, with many mourners waving Palestinian and Islamic Jihad flags and calling for revenge.

Israeli media showed the skies above southern and central Israel lighting up with rockets and interceptors from Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system. An explosion was heard in Tel Aviv.

It wasn't immediately clear how many rockets were launched, and there was no immediate word on any casualties on the Israeli side.

Israel continued to strike other targets Friday, including weapon-production facilities and Islamic Jihad positions.

The U.N. special envoy to the region, Tor Wennesland, said he was "deeply concerned."

"The launching of rockets must cease immediately, and I call on all sides to avoid further escalation," he said.

Following the initial Israeli strikes, a few hundred people gathered outside the morgue at Gaza City's main Shifa hospital. Some went in to identify loved ones and emerged later in tears.

"May God take revenge against spies," shouted one, referring to Palestinian informants who cooperate with Israel.

Defense Minister Benny Gantz approved an order to call up 25,000 reserve soldiers if needed while the military announced a "special situation" on the home front, with schools closed and limits placed on activities in communities within 80 kilometers (50 miles) of the border.

Israel closed roads around Gaza earlier this week and sent reinforcements to the border as it braced for a revenge attack after Monday's arrest of Bassam al-Saadi, an Islamic Jihad leader, in a military raid in the occupied West Bank. A teenage member of the group was killed in a gunbattle between the Israeli troops and Palestinian militants.

Hamas seized power in the coastal strip from rival Palestinian forces in 2007. Its most recent war with Israel was in May 2021, and tensions soared again earlier this year following a wave of attacks inside Israel, near-daily military operations in the West Bank and tensions at a flashpoint Jerusalem holy site.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 37 of 58

Islamic Jihad leader Ziad al-Nakhalah, speaking to Al-Mayadeen TV network from Iran, said "fighters of the Palestinian resistance have to stand together to confront this aggression." He said there would be "no red lines" and blamed the violence on Israel.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said "the Israeli enemy, which started the escalation against Gaza and committed a new crime, must pay the price and bear full responsibility for it."

Islamic Jihad is smaller than Hamas but largely shares its ideology. Both groups are opposed to Israel's existence and have carried out scores of deadly attacks over the years, including the firing of rockets into Israel. It's unclear how much control Hamas has over Islamic Jihad, and Israel holds Hamas responsible for all attacks emanating from Gaza.

Israel and Egypt have maintained a tight blockade over the territory since the Hamas takeover. Israel says the closure is needed to prevent Hamas from building up its military capabilities, while critics say the policy amounts to collective punishment.

Mohammed Abu Selmia, director of the Shifa hospital, said hospitals faced shortages after Israel imposed a full closure on Gaza earlier this week. He said there were enough supplies and essential drugs to sustain hospitals for five days in normal times, but that with a new round of fighting underway, "they may run out at any moment."

Israel called off an expected fuel delivery for Gaza's sole power plant, which was expected to shut down early Saturday if the fuel did not enter the territory. Even when the plant is running at full capacity, Gazans still endure daily power outages that last several hours.

Earlier Friday, a couple of hundred Israelis protested near the Gaza Strip to demand the return of the remains of two Israeli soldiers held by Hamas.

The protesters were led by the family of Hadar Goldin, who along with Oron Shaul was killed in the 2014 Gaza war. Hamas is still holding their remains, as well as two Israeli civilians who strayed into Gaza and are believed to be mentally ill, hoping to exchange them for some of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Israel says there can be no major moves toward lifting the blockade until the soldiers' remains and captive civilians are released. Israel and Hamas have held numerous rounds of Egyptian-mediated talks on a possible swap.

China cuts off vital US contacts over Pelosi Taiwan visit

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER, ZEKE MILLER and DAVID RISING Associate Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — China cut off contacts with the United States on vital issues Friday — including military matters and crucial climate cooperation — as concerns rose that the Communist government's hostile reaction to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Taiwan visit could signal a lasting, more aggressive approach toward its U.S. rival and the self-ruled island.

China's move to freeze key lines of communication compounded the worsening of relations from Pelosi's visit and from the Chinese response with military exercises off Taiwan, including firing missiles that splashed down in surrounding waters.

After the White House summoned China's ambassador, Qin Gang, late Thursday to protest the military exercises, White House spokesman John Kirby on Friday condemned the decision to end important dialogue with the United States as "irresponsible."

The White House spokesman blasted China's "provocative" actions since Pelosi's trip to Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory. But Kirby noted that some channels of communication remain open between military officials in the two countries. He repeated daily assurances that the U.S. had not changed its policy toward the Communist mainland and the self-ruled island.

"Bottom line is we're going to continue our efforts to keep opening lines of communication that are protecting our interests and our values," Kirby said. He declined to speak about any damage to long-term relations between China and the United States, calling that a discussion for later.

Taiwan has put its military on alert and staged civil defense drills, but the overall mood remained calm

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 38 of 58

on Friday. Flights have been canceled or diverted and fishermen have remained in port to avoid the Chinese drills.

On the Chinese coast across from Taiwan, tourists gathered to try to catch a glimpse of military aircraft. A minister at the Chinese Embassy in Washington, Jing Quan, told reporters that Pelosi's mission of support for the democratic government of Taiwan has had "a severe impact on the political foundation of China-U.S. relations, seriously infringed upon China's sovereignty and (territorial) integrity and ... undermines peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits."

Long term, a significantly more confrontational relationship between China and the U.S. threatens an equilibrium under which Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping's governments have sparred on human rights, trade, competition and countless other issues but avoided direct conflict and maintained occasional top-level contacts toward other matters, including cutting climate-damaging emissions.

A joint U.S.-China deal to fight climate change struck by Xi and then-President Barack Obama in November of 2014 is credited as a turning point that led to the landmark 2015 Paris agreement in which nearly every nation in the world pledged to try to curb emissions of heat-trapping gases. Seven years later during climate talks in Glasgow, another U.S.-China deal helped smooth over bumps to another international climate deal.

China and the United States are the world's No. 1 and No. 2 climate polluters, together producing nearly 40% of all fossil-fuel emissions.

Ominously, experts in China-U.S. relations warned that China's diplomatic and military moves appeared to go beyond retaliatory measures for the visit and could open a new, more openly hostile era, and a more uncertain time for Taiwan's democratic government.

China-U.S. relations are "in a downward spiral," said Bonnie Glaser, head of the Asia program at the German Marshall Fund.

"And I think that China is likely to change the status quo in the Taiwan Strait in ways that are going to be harmful to Taiwan and are going to be disadvantageous to the United States," Glaser said.

In recent years, other rounds of tensions between China and its neighbors over the India border, regional islands and the South China Sea have ended with China asserting new territorial claims and enforcing them, noted John Culver, a former East Asia national intelligence officer, now a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council. The same could happen now over Taiwan, Culver said. "So I don't know how this ends. We've seen how it begins."

China's measures this week are the latest steps intended to punish the U.S. for allowing the visit to the island it claims as its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary. China on Thursday launched threatening military exercises just off Taiwan's coasts, running through Sunday.

Some missiles were sent flying over Taiwan itself, Chinese officials told state media — a significant increase in China's menacing of the island.

China routinely complains when Taiwan has direct contacts with foreign governments, but its response to the Pelosi visit — she was the highest-ranking American official in 25 years — has been unusually strong.

It appears to derail a rare encouraging note — high-level in-person meetings between top officials in recent months including the defense chiefs at an Asia security conference in Singapore and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Secretary of State Antony Blinken at a Group of 20 meeting in Indonesia.

Those talks were viewed as steps in a positive direction in an otherwise poisoned relationship. Now, talks have been suspended even on climate, where the two countries' envoys had met multiple times.

China stopped short of interrupting economic and trade talks, where it is looking to Biden to lift tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump on imports from China.

On Friday, China's Foreign Ministry said dialogue between U.S. and Chinese regional commanders and defense department heads would be canceled, along with talks on military maritime safety. Cooperation on returning illegal immigrants, criminal investigations, transnational crime, illegal drugs and climate change will be suspended, the ministry said.

China's actions come ahead of a key congress of the ruling Communist Party later this year at which President Xi is expected to obtain a third five-year term as party leader. With the economy stumbling, the

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 39 of 58

party has stoked nationalism and issued near-daily attacks on the government of Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, which refuses to recognize Taiwan as part of China.

China said Friday that more than 100 warplanes and 10 warships have taken part in live-fire military drills surrounding Taiwan over the past two days. Also, mainly symbolic sanctions against Pelosi and her family were announced.

On the China coast, fighter jets could be heard flying overhead, and tourists taking photos chanted, "Let's take Taiwan back," looking out into the blue waters of the Taiwan Strait from Pingtan island, a popular scenic spot in China's Fujian province.

Pelosi's visit has stirred emotions among the Chinese public, and the government's response "makes us feel our motherland is very powerful and gives us confidence that the return of Taiwan is the irresistible trend," said Wang Lu, a tourist from neighboring Zhejiang province.

China is a "powerful country and it will not allow anyone to offend its own territory," said Liu Bolin, a high school student visiting the island.

China's insistence that Taiwan is its territory and its threat to use force to reclaim control have featured in Communist Party statements, the education system and the state-controlled media for more than seven decades since the sides were divided amid civil war in 1949.

Taiwan residents overwhelmingly favor maintaining the status quo of de facto independence and reject China's demands that the island unify with the mainland under Communist control.

Beyond Taiwan, five of the missiles fired by China landed in Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone off Hatsumura, an island far south of Japan's main islands, Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said. He said Japan protested the missiles to China as "serious threats to Japan's national security and the safety of the Japanese people."

In Tokyo, where Pelosi is winding up her Asia trip, she said China cannot stop U.S. officials from visiting Taiwan.

'What recession?': US employers add 528,000 jobs in July

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. employers added an astonishing 528,000 jobs last month despite flashing warning signs of an economic downturn, easing fears of a recession and handing President Joe Biden some good news heading into the midterm elections.

Unemployment dropped another notch, from 3.6% to 3.5%, matching the more than 50-year low reached just before the pandemic took hold.

The economy has now recovered all 22 million jobs lost in March and April 2020 when COVID-19 slammed the U.S.

The red-hot numbers reported Friday by the Labor Department are certain to intensify the debate over whether the U.S. is in a recession.

"Recession — what recession?" wrote Brian Coultan, chief economist at Fitch Ratings. "The U.S. economy is creating new jobs at an annual rate of 6 million — that's three times faster than what we normally see historically in a good year."

Economists had expected only 250,000 new jobs last month, in a drop-off from June's revised 398,000. Instead, July proved to be the best month since February.

The strong figures are welcome news for the Biden administration and the Democrats at a time when many voters are worried about the economy.

Inflation is raging at its highest level in more than 40 years, and the economy has contracted for two quarters in a row, which is the common — but informal — definition of a recession and does not take into account a host of other factors economists consider, such as the job picture.

At the White House, Biden credited the job growth to his policies, even as he acknowledged the pain being inflicted by inflation. He emphasized the addition of 642,000 manufacturing jobs on his watch.

"Instead of workers begging employers for work, we're seeing employers have to compete for American

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 40 of 58

workers," the president said.

Biden has boosted job growth through his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package and \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure law last year. Republican lawmakers and some leading economists, however, say the administration's spending has contributed to high inflation.

The president has received some other encouraging economic news in recent weeks, as gasoline prices have steadily fallen after averaging slightly more than \$5 a gallon in June.

On Wall Street, stocks closed mostly lower Friday. The good news about job creation was mostly offset by worries that the Federal Reserve will have to keep aggressively raising interest rates to cool the economy and tamp down inflation.

"The strength of the labor market in the face of ... rate-tightening from the Fed already this year clearly shows that the Fed has more work to do," said Charlie Ripley, senior investment strategist at Allianz Investment Management. "Overall, today's report should put the notion of a near-term recession on the back burner for now."

The Labor Department also reported that hourly earnings posted a healthy 0.5% gain last month and are up 5.2% over the past year. But that is not enough to keep up with inflation, and many Americans are having to scrimp to pay for groceries, gasoline, even school supplies.

Job growth was especially strong last month in the health care industry and at hotels and restaurants.

The number of Americans saying they had jobs rose by 179,000, while the number saying they were unemployed fell by 242,000. But 61,000 Americans dropped out of the labor force in July, trimming the share of those working or looking for work to 62.1% from 62.2% in June.

New Yorker Karen Smalls, 46, started looking for work three weeks ago as a member of the support staff for social workers.

"I didn't realize how good the job market is right now," she said after finishing her fifth interview this week. "You look at the news and see all these bad reports ... but the job market is amazing right now."

A single mother, she is weighing several offers, looking for one that is close to home and pays enough to let her take care of her two children.

Two years ago, the pandemic brought economic life to a near standstill as companies shut down and millions of people stayed home or were thrown out of work. The U.S. plunged into a deep, two-month recession.

But massive government aid — and the Fed's decision to slash interest rates and pour money into financial markets — fueled a surprisingly quick recovery. Caught off guard by the strength of the rebound, factories, shops, ports and freight yards were overwhelmed with orders and scrambled to bring back the workers they furloughed when COVID-19 hit.

The result has been shortages of employees and supplies, delayed shipments and high inflation. In June, consumer prices were up 9.1% from a year earlier, the biggest increase since 1981.

The Fed has raised its benchmark short-term interest rate four times this year in a bid to tame inflation, with more increases ahead.

Labor Secretary Marty Walsh conceded that businesses and consumers are worried about inflation but added: "Companies are still growing, and they're looking for employees. And that's a good sign."

In a report filled with mostly good news, the Labor Department did note that 3.9 million people were working part time for economic reasons in July, up by 303,000 from June. Department economists said that reflected an increase in the number of people whose hours were cut because of slack business.

Some employers are also reporting signs of slack in the job market.

Aaron Sanandres, CEO and co-founder Untuckit, an online clothing company with nearly 90 stores, noticed that in the past few weeks that it has been a bit easier filling jobs at the corporate headquarters in New York and part-time roles at the stores.

"We have had a plethora of candidates," Sanandres said. He also said the labor market has been loosening up for engineers, probably as a result of some layoffs at technology companies.

Simona Mocuta, chief economist at State Street Global Advisors, was among those stunned by the strong

hiring numbers when other indicators show an economy losing momentum.

Mocuta said it is possible that hiring rose so sharply last month because job candidates, seeing signs of an impending slowdown, are now more willing to accept jobs they would have balked at earlier in the year. Conditions may now be "shifting in employers' favor," she said.

Whatever the reason for it, the employment data released Friday shows an astonishingly strong and resilient job market.

"Underestimate the U.S. labor market at your own peril," said Nick Bunker, head of economic research at the Indeed Hiring Lab. "Yes, output growth might be slowing and the economic outlook has some clouds on the horizon. But employers are still champing at the bit to hire more workers. That demand may fade, but it's still red-hot right now."

Sinema gives her nod, and influence, to Democrats' big bill

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Joe Manchin sealed the deal reviving President Joe Biden's big economic, health care and climate bill. But it was another Democratic senator, Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, who intently, quietly and deliberately shaped the final product.

Democrats pushed ahead Friday on an estimated \$730 billion package that in many ways reflects Sinema's priorities and handiwork more than the other political figures who have played a key role in delivering on Biden's signature domestic policy agenda.

It was Sinema early on who rejected Biden's plan to raise the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28%, as she broke with party's primary goal of reversing the Trump-era tax break Republicans gave to corporate America.

Sinema also scaled back her party's long-running plan to allow Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices with the pharmaceutical companies as a way to reduce overall costs to the government and consumers. She limited which drugs can be negotiated.

Her insistence on climate change provisions forced the coal-state Manchin to stay at the table to accept some \$369 billion in renewable energy investments and tax breaks. She also is tucking in more money to fight Western droughts.

And it was Sinema who in one final stroke gave her blessing to the deal by extracting an ultimate demand — she forced Democrats to drop plans to close a tax loophole that benefits wealthy hedge fund managers and high-income earners, long a party priority. Instead, the final bill will keep the tax rate at 20% instead of hiking it to the typical 37%.

"Kyrsten Sinema's proven herself to be a very effective legislator," said Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., who has negotiated extensively with his colleague over the past year, including on the tax loophole.

In a 50-50 Senate where every vote matters, the often inscrutable and politically undefinable Sinema puts hers to use in powerful ways. Her negotiating at the highest levels of power — she appears to have equal access to Biden, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and even Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell — has infuriated some, wowed others and left no doubt she is a powerful new political figure.

While other lawmakers bristle at the influence a single senator can wield in Congress, where each member represents thousands if not millions of voters, Sinema's nod of approval late Thursday was the last hurdle Democrats needed to push the Inflation Reduction Act forward. A final round of grueling votes on the package is expected to begin this weekend.

"We had no choice," Schumer told reporters Friday at the Capitol.

Getting what you want in Congress does not come without political costs, and Sinema is amassing a balance due.

Progressives are outraged at her behavior, which they view as beyond the norms of sausage-making during the legislative process and verging on an unsettling restacking of party priorities to a more centrist, if not conservative, lane.

Progressive Rep. Ruben Gallego is openly musing about challenging Sinema in the 2024 primary in

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 42 of 58

Arizona, and an independent expenditure group, Change for Arizona 2024, says it will support grassroots organizations committed to defeating her in a Democratic primary.

"The new reconciliation bill will lower the cost of prescription drugs," Gallego wrote on Twitter last weekend. "@SenatorSinema is holding it up to try to protect ultra rich hedge fund managers so they can pay a lower tax."

In fact, on the left and the right, commentators lambasted her final act — saving the tax breaks for the wealthy. Some pointed to past legislative luminaries — the late Sen. Robert Byrd, for example, used his clout to leave his name on roads, buildings and civic institutions across the West Virginia hillsides. They scoff at Sinema establishing her legacy in such a way.

"Astonishing," wrote conservative Hugh Hewitt on Twitter. "@SenatorSinema could have demanded anything she wanted — anything that spent money or changed taxes — and with that leverage for Arizona she choose ... to protect the carry interest exemption for investors. ... Not the border. Not the country. A tax break. Wow."

Democratic former Clinton-era Labor Secretary Robert Reich wrote, "The 'carried interest' loophole for billionaire hedge-fund and private-equity partners is now out of the Inflation Reduction Act, courtesy of Kyrsten Sinema.

"She's up in 2024. Primary her and get her out of the Senate."

But Sinema has never cared much about what others say about her, from the time she set foot in the Senate, breaking the rules with her whimsical fashion choices and her willingness to reach across the aisle to Republicans — literally joining them at times in the private Senate GOP cloakroom.

The Arizona senator seeks to emulate the maverick career of John McCain, drawing on his farewell address for her maiden Senate speech, and trying to adopt his renegade style alongside her own — a comparison that draws some eyerolls for its reach and scope.

Still, in her short time in the Senate, Sinema has proven herself to be a serious study who understands intricacies of legislation and a hard-driving dealmaker who does not flinch. She has been instrumental in landmark legislation, including the bipartisan infrastructure bill Biden signed into law last summer.

"There's not been a bipartisan group that she's not been a part of," Warner said.

In the end, the final package is slimmer than Biden first envisioned with his lofty Build Back Better initiative, but still a monumental undertaking and a bookend to a surprisingly productive if messy legislative session.

The bill would make health care gains for many Americans, capping pharmacy costs for seniors at \$2,000 out of pocket and providing subsidies to help millions people who buy health insurance on the private market. It includes what the Biden administration calls the largest investment in climate change ever, with money for renewable energy and consumer rebates for new and used electric cars. It would mostly be paid for by higher corporate taxes, with some \$300 billion going to deficit reductions.

On the climate provisions, a priority for Democrats, Sinema may have played a role in keeping the sweeping provisions in the bill, when Manchin was less inclined to do so.

Environmental leaders, who have been involved in talks on the bill since last year, said Sinema has helped shape the bill all along. She was especially helpful last year when she made it clear she supports the climate and energy provisions, and her commitment to climate issues has remained steadfast, environmentalists said.

She tacked on her own priority, money to help Western states dealing with droughts, in the final push.

Jamal Raad, executive director of Evergreen Action, an environmental group that has pushed for the climate bill, said: "Senator Sinema needed money for drought relief to help her constituents stave off the worst effects of climate change. If that's what was needed to gain her support, then good on her."

At home in Arizona, business allies that have been crucial to Sinema's efforts to build an independent image have cheered on her willingness to resist party pressure over the tax increases.

The Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the National Association of Manufacturers ran ads against the deal, though they didn't target Sinema by name, and bent her ear in a phone call this week.

Pentagon denies DC request for National Guard migrant help

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon rejected a request from the District of Columbia seeking National Guard assistance in what the mayor has called a “growing humanitarian crisis” prompted by thousands of migrants being bused to the city from two southern states.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin declined to provide Guard personnel and the use of the D.C. Armory to assist with the reception of migrants into the city, according to U.S. defense officials. Mayor Muriel Bowser said Friday that the district may send an amended, “more specific” request, adding that she believes this is the first time a D.C. request for National Guard has been denied.

One official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a decision not yet made public, said that the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s food and shelter program has provided funding for the problem, and has indicated those funds are sufficient at this point.

Bowser, the district’s Democratic mayor, formally asked the White House last month for an open-ended deployment of 150 National Guard members per day as well as a “suitable federal location” for a mass housing and processing center, mentioning the D.C. Armory as a logical candidate.

During the spring, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, both Republicans, announced plans to send busloads of migrants to Washington, D.C., in response to President Joe Biden’s decision to lift a pandemic-era emergency health order that restricted migrant entry numbers by denying them a chance to seek asylum. The rule remains in effect under court order.

On Friday, Abbott said the first group of migrants from his state had now been bused to New York as well.

As of mid-July, about 5,200 migrants had been bused from Texas to D.C. since April. As of Aug. 3, more than 1,300 had been sent from Arizona since May. The governors call the practice a voluntary free ride - paid for by state taxpayers — that gets migrants closer to family or support networks.

But Bowser last month dismissed that characterization, saying that the asylum-seekers are being “tricked,” as many don’t get close enough to their final destinations and some are ditched at Union Station near the U.S. Capitol and the White House. Often they arrive with no resources and no clue what to do next.

On Friday, Bowser told reporters that the Pentagon appears to be concerned “about the open-ended nature of our request.” and that a more specific one would help.

“We want to continue to work with the Department of Defense so that they understand our operational needs and to assure that political considerations are not a part of their decision,” Bowser said, adding that she believes the “crisis” will only worsen. “We need the National Guard. If we were a state, I would have already done it.”

A coalition of local charitable groups has been working to feed and shelter the migrants, aided by a \$1 million grant from FEMA. But organizers have been warning that both their resources and personnel were nearing exhaustion.

“This reliance on NGOs is not working and is unsustainable — they are overwhelmed and underfunded,” Bowser said in her letter. She has repeatedly stated that the influx is stressing her government’s ability to care for its own homeless residents and now requires a federal response.

Bowser sharply criticized Abbott and Ducey, accusing them of “cruel political gamesmanship” and saying the pair had “decided to use desperate people to score political points.”

Explaining his decision to add New York City as a destination, Abbott said that Biden’s “refusal to acknowledge the crisis caused by his open border policies” forced Texas to “take unprecedented action to keep our communities safe.”

He said the migrants are being dropped off at the Port Authority Bus Terminal.

“In addition to Washington, D.C., New York City is the ideal destination for these migrants, who can receive the abundance of city services and housing that Mayor Eric Adams has boasted about within the sanctuary city,” Abbott said.

In response, Fabien Levy, spokesman for Adams, tweeted that Abbott’s “continued use of human beings

as political pawns is disgusting. NYC will continue to welcome asylum seekers w/ open arms, as we have always done, but we still need support from DC.”

As mayor of D.C., Bowser does not have the authority to personally order a National Guard deployment, an issue that has become emotionally charged in recent years as a symbol of the district’s entrenched status as less than a state.

Her limited authority played a role in the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by supporters of former President Donald Trump. When it became clear that Capitol Police were overmatched by the crowds, Bowser couldn’t immediately deploy the district guard. Instead, crucial time was lost while the request was considered inside the Pentagon, and protesters rampaged through the building.

Amazon to buy vacuum maker iRobot for roughly \$1.7B

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Amazon on Friday announced it has agreed to acquire the vacuum cleaner maker iRobot for approximately \$1.7 billion, scooping up another company to add to its collection of smart home appliances amid broader concerns from anti-monopoly and privacy advocates about Amazon’s market power and ability to gain deeper insights into consumers’ lives.

iRobot sells its products worldwide and is most famous for the circular-shaped Roomba vacuum, which would join voice assistant Alexa, the Astro robot and Ring security cameras and others in the list of smart home features offered by the Seattle-based e-commerce and tech giant.

The move is part of Amazon’s bid to own part of the home space through services and accelerate its growth beyond retail, said Neil Saunders, managing director at GlobalData Retail. A slew of home-cleaning robots adds to the company’s tech arsenal, making it more involved in consumers’ lives beyond static things like voice control. The latest line of Roombas use sensors to map -- and remember -- a home’s floor plan, offering a trove of data that Amazon could potentially integrate with its other products.

Amazon’s Astro robot, which helps with tasks like setting an alarm, was unveiled last year at an introductory price of \$1,000. But its rollout has been limited and has received a lackluster response.

Amazon hasn’t had much success with household robots, but the iRobot acquisition and the company’s strong market reputation provide a “massive foothold in the consumer robot market” that could help Amazon replicate the success of its Echo line of smart speakers, said Lian Jye Su, a robotics industry analyst for ABI Research.

Su said it also illustrates the shortcomings of consumer robotics vendors like iRobot, which struggled to expand beyond a niche product and was in a “race-to-the-bottom” competition with Korean and Chinese manufacturers offering cheaper versions of a robotic vacuum.

On Friday, iRobot reported its quarterly results. Revenue plunged 30% primarily on order reductions and delays, and the company announced it was laying off 10% of its workforce.

Amazon said it will acquire iRobot for \$61 per share in an all-cash transaction that will include iRobot’s net debt. The company has total current debt of approximately \$332.1 million as of July 2. The deal is subject to approval by shareholders and regulators. Upon completion, iRobot’s CEO, Colin Angle, will remain in his position.

Noting that iRobot has been running its robotics platform on Amazon’s cloud service unit AWS for many years, Su said the acquisition could lead to more integration of Amazon speech recognition and other capabilities into vacuums.

In afternoon trading, iRobot shares rose 19%. Amazon’s were down 1.7%.

The deal comes as anti-monopoly advocates continue to raise concerns about Amazon’s increasing dominance. The purchase of iRobot is Amazon’s fourth-largest acquisition, led by its \$13.7 billion deal to buy Whole Foods in 2017. Last month, the company said it would buy the primary care provider One Medical in a deal valued roughly at \$3.9 billion, a move that expanded its reach further into health care.

On Friday, groups advocating for stricter antitrust regulations called on regulators to block the iRobot merger, arguing it gives Amazon more access into consumers’ lives and furthers its dominance in the smart

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 45 of 58

home market.

"The last thing American and the world needs is Amazon vacuuming up even more of our personal information," said Robert Weissman, president of the progressive consumer rights advocacy group Public Citizen.

"This is not just about Amazon selling another device in its marketplace," Weissman said. "It's about the company gaining still more intimate details of our lives to gain unfair market advantage and sell us more stuff."

Landmark antitrust legislation targeting Amazon and other Big Tech companies has languished for months in Congress as prospects for votes by the full Senate or House have dimmed.

Last month, Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., who heads the Senate Judiciary antitrust panel, urged the the Federal Trade Commission to investigate the One Medical acquisition, in the mold of other critics who've called on regulators to block the purchase over concerns about Amazon's past conduct and potential implications for consumers' health data. Regulators also have discretion to challenge Amazon's \$8.5 billion buyout of Hollywood studio MGM, which was completed earlier this year.

Founded in 1990 by a trio of Massachusetts Institute of Technology roboticists, including Angle, iRobot's early ventures led to rovers that could perform military and disaster-relief tasks in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks.

The profits from defense contracts allowed iRobot to experiment with a variety of other robots, producing some duds and one huge commercial success: the first Roomba, introduced in 2002, which pioneered the market for automated vacuum cleaners.

The company spun off its defense robotics division in 2016 to become almost exclusively a seller of vacuums and some other home robots, such as the Braava robotic mop. It planned to launch a robotic lawn mower in 2020 but backed off, citing problems tied to the pandemic.

NCAA hoops leagues grapple with unequal pay for women's refs

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

The NCAA earned praise last year when it agreed to pay referees at its men's and women's basketball tournaments equally. The gesture only cost about \$100,000, a tiny fraction of the roughly \$900 million networks pay annually to broadcast March Madness.

Now, as the NCAA examines various disparities across men's and women's sports, pressure is rising to also pay referees equally during the regular season. Two Division I conferences told The Associated Press they plan to equalize pay, and another is considering it. Others are resisting change, even though the impact on their budgets would be negligible.

"The ones that are (equalizing pay) are reading the writing on the wall," said Michael Lewis, a marketing professor at Emory University's Goizueta Business School.

The details of NCAA referee pay are closely guarded, but The Associated Press obtained data for the 2021-22 season that show 15 of the NCAA's largest — and most profitable -- conferences paid veteran referees for men's basketball an average of 22% more per game.

That level of disparity is wider than the gender pay gap across the U.S. economy, where women earn 82 cents for every dollar a man earns, according to the 2020 census. And it is an overwhelming disadvantage for women, who make up less than 1% of the referees officiating men's games.

Dawn Staley, the head coach for the University of South Carolina Gamecocks — the women's national champions — said referees on the men's side should be "stepping up" and advocating for equal pay for women's referees. "They don't do anything different," she said. "Why should our officials get paid less for taking the (expletive) we give them?"

The people who provided AP with data for nearly half of the NCAA's 32 Division I conferences have direct knowledge of pay scales, and they did so on condition of anonymity because the information is considered private.

The Northeast Conference had the widest per-game pay disparity among the NCAA leagues AP analyzed,

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 46 of 58

with the most experienced referees for men's games earning 48% more. The Atlantic-10 paid veteran men's refs 44% more, while the Colonial Athletic Association paid them 38% more. (Only the Ivy League paid veteran officials equally in the data AP reviewed.)

Of the conferences with unequal pay contacted by AP, two -- the Pac-12 and the Northeast Conference — said they plan to level the playing field starting next season. A third, the Patriot League, which had a 33% pay gap last year, said it is reviewing equity for officials in all sports. "Pay is part of that," commissioner Jennifer Heppel said.

The Pac-12 paid referees equally a decade ago, but allowed a disparity to build over time, according to associate commissioner Teresa Gould. She said returning to equal pay is "the right thing to do."

NEC commissioner Noreen Morris said the decision to equalize pay was an easy one to make once it realized that basketball was the only sport where it was not compensating referees equally.

Relative to the amounts of money these leagues generate, the cost of bridging the pay gap can seem small.

For example, the SEC paid referees for men's games 10%, or \$350, more than those officiating women's games. Over the course of a season, it would cost the SEC a couple hundred thousand dollars to pay them equally -- a sliver of the \$3 billion deal it signed with ESPN to broadcast all of its sports starting in 2024.

The most experienced Division I referees — for men's or women's games — are well paid. Some earn more than \$150,000 in a season, officiating dozens of games across multiple conferences. Newer referees earn far less, supplementing income from another job.

All NCAA referees are independent contractors, with no union representing their interests, and all have to cover their own travel expenses.

The busiest referees can work five or six games a week in different cities, running up and down the court for 40 minutes one night, getting a few hours of sleep, and then waking up at 4 a.m. to catch a flight to their next destination.

Dee Kantner, a veteran referee of women's games who works for multiple conferences, finds it frustrating to have to justify equal pay.

"If I buy an airline ticket and tell them I'm doing a women's basketball game they aren't going to charge me less," she said.

"Do you value women's basketball that much less?" Kantner said. "How are we rationalizing this still?"

Several conference commissioners said the men's and women's games do not generate equal amounts of revenue, and that the level of play is not equal, and so referee salaries are set accordingly.

"Historically we have treated each referee pool as a separate market," said Big East Commissioner Val Ackerman. "We paid rates that allow us to be competitive for services at our level. I think the leagues are entitled to look at different factors here. I don't see it as an equity issue — I see it as a market issue."

The Big East pays referees working its men's games 22% more, and Ackerman said there is no imminent plan to make a change.

Atlantic-10 Commissioner Bernadette McGlade said the market-based approach is what enables her to offer some of the highest per-game rates across the NCAA. "We get the most experienced, most qualified officials in the country," she said.

Veteran referees officiating in the Atlantic-10 are paid \$3,300 for men's games, compared with \$2,300 for women's games, according to data reviewed by AP. Seven other conferences had higher per-game rates — and narrower gender gaps — last year, the data show.

Of the roughly 800 referees officiating women's basketball this past season, 43% were female, a proportion that's been relatively consistent over the past decade. But just six women officiated men's games last year — a number that has slowly grown over the last few years.

Penny Davis, the NCAA's supervisor of officials, said conferences are trying to recruit more women to officiate men's games, which is another way to help bridge the gender pay gap.

But Davis says she would hate to see even fewer women refereeing women's basketball. "We don't want to lose our best and brightest," she said.

A decade ago, referees working the men's and women's NCAA Tournament were paid equally. But as the profitability of the men's tournament skyrocketed, its budget grew too -- and so did pay for referees.

Both McGlade and Ackerman praised the NCAA for restoring equal pay at the March tournaments. "We're mindful of the what the NCAA did for the tournament," Ackerman said. "NCAA Tournament games are closer but not entirely a common officiating experience."

Ivy League executive director Robin Harris disagrees. "We decided a while ago that it was the right thing to do to pay them the same amount. They are doing the same job."

Musk countersuit accuses Twitter of fraud over 'bot' count

Associated Press undefined

Elon Musk accused Twitter of fraud in a countersuit over his aborted \$44 billion deal for the social media company, which he claimed held back necessary information and misled his team about the true size of its user base.

The countersuit by the billionaire and Tesla CEO alleges that Twitter committed fraud, breach of contract and violation of a securities law in Texas, where Musk lives.

Musk's counterclaims were filed confidentially last week and unsealed in a filing late Thursday at the Delaware Chancery Court.

Musk offered to buy Twitter earlier this year, then tried to back out of the deal by claiming the social platform was infested with a larger numbers of "spam bots" and fake accounts than Twitter had disclosed.

Twitter sued to force him to complete the acquisition. Musk responded by filing his countersuit.

Musk's attorneys argue in the countersuit that Twitter "misrepresentations or omissions" distorted the company's value and caused Musk to agree in April to buy it at an inflated price. They said Twitter's own disclosures revealed that it has 65 million fewer "monetizable daily active users," who can be shown digital ads, than the 238 million that Twitter claims.

The filing also said most of Twitter's ads are shown only to a sliver of the company's user base.

Musk's team also accused Twitter of making too many major changes in recent months without consulting Musk, including personnel decisions and allegedly disobeying social media restrictions imposed by the government of India, which is Twitter's third largest market. Musk had pledged to make Twitter a haven for free speech but has also said it must comply with the local laws where it operates.

In an unexpected twist, Twitter filed its response denying Musk's accusations before Musk's own counterclaims surfaced.

Twitter called Musk's reasoning "a story, imagined in an effort to escape a merger agreement that Musk no longer found attractive." The company, in particular, took issue with Musk's estimate of fake accounts, saying the analysis relied on a "generic web tool" that designated Musk's own Twitter account as a likely bot.

"The result is a distortion that Musk is hoping will nonetheless make waves," Twitter's response said.

The case is scheduled to go to trial on October 17. The Delaware court handles many high-profile disputes between businesses, such as Twitter, that are incorporated there.

Kremlin says Griner swap must be discussed without publicity

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The Kremlin said Friday that it's open to talking about a possible prisoner exchange involving American basketball star Brittney Griner but strongly warned Washington against publicizing the issue.

Griner, a two-time U.S. Olympic champion and an eight-time all-star with the WNBA's Phoenix Mercury, has been detained in Russia since Feb. 17 after police at a Moscow airport said they found vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage.

A judge convicted the 31-year-old athlete Thursday of drug possession and smuggling, and sentenced her to nine years in prison. The politically charged case comes amid high tensions between Moscow and Washington over Russia's military action in Ukraine.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 48 of 58

Asked at the White House Friday about the prospects of securing Griner's release, President Joe Biden said: "I'm hopeful ... We're working hard."

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

Lavrov and Blinken were both in Cambodia on Friday for a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Blinken did not even glance at his Russian counterpart as they took their seats at an East Asia Summit.

Lavrov told reporters that Blinken didn't try to contact him while they were attending the ASEAN meeting. "We were separated by just one person at the discussion table, but I didn't feel his desire to catch me. My buttons are all in place," he said when asked about Washington's statement that Blinken would try to buttonhole Lavrov for a quick interaction in Phnom Penh.

Lavrov said Moscow was "ready to discuss" a prisoner swap but that the topic should only be discussed via a dedicated Russia-U.S. channel that Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to establish when they met in Geneva in June 2021.

"If the Americans again try to engage in public diplomacy and make loud statements about their intention to take certain steps, it's their business, I would even say their problem," Lavrov said. "The Americans often have trouble observing agreements on calm and professional work."

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov made the same point more harshly, saying "the U.S. already has made mistakes, trying to solve such problems via 'microphone diplomacy.' They are not solved that way."

He, too, emphasized that any discussions on a possible trade should be held via the previously established confidential channels that Putin and Biden agree to during last year's summit.

"Such mechanisms exist, but they will be thrown into doubt if the discussion continues in the public domain," Peskov said. He said: "If we discuss any nuances related to the issue of exchange via media, no exchange will ever take place."

People familiar with the U.S. proposal have said it envisions trading Griner and Whelan for a notorious Russian arms trader, Viktor Bout. He is serving a 25-year sentence in the U.S. after being convicted of conspiracy to kill U.S. citizens and providing aid to a terrorist organization.

The call between Blinken and Lavrov marked the highest-level known contact between Washington and Moscow since Russia sent troops into Ukraine more than five months ago, underlining the public pressure that the White House has faced to get Griner released.

Griner was arrested as she was returning to play for a team in Russia, where she has competed since 2014. Blinken said Friday that her conviction and sentence "compounds the injustice that has been done to her."

"It puts a spotlight on our very significant concern with Russia's legal system and the Russian government's use of wrongful detentions to advance its own agenda using individuals as political pawns," he said.

On Thursday, Biden denounced the Russian judge's verdict and sentence as "unacceptable" and said he would continue working to bring Griner and Whelan home.

Kentucky flood survivors turn to grim task: Burying the dead

By LEAH WILLINGHAM and BRYNN ANDERSON undefined

CHAVIES, Ky. (AP) — Angel Campbell should have been sitting in her usual chair in her grandmother's living room this week, looking through her old photo albums and eating her favorite soup beans.

Now the living room is gone, and so is her grandmother.

A week after 82-year-old Nellie Mae Howard died in the devastating floods that killed at least 37 people in eastern Kentucky, Campbell can't stop thinking about how she was swept away. She said losing her "Mammaw" will plague her for a very long time.

"The way she had to leave this earth just shatters me," she said. "It just feels so cruel."

Eastern Kentucky has been engaged for days now in the slow, grim task of recovering and burying the

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 49 of 58

dead. Local funeral homes have settled into a steady cadence of visitations and memorials, sometimes in quick succession. The somber rituals have continued as more rain falls, prompting yet another flood watch across the Appalachian mountain region. People here brace at the prospect of a new round of misery.

Funeral home workers have had to navigate the staggering losses, in communities where families have known each other for generations, some after losing their own houses. They've had to carry on without power or water at times, taking in so many bodies that a mobile refrigerator was brought in to add capacity.

Mobile federal emergency management centers opened across at least seven counties where people could request money for immediate needs. A relief fund set up by Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear has begun distributing money to pay the funeral expenses of flood victims.

No place in eastern Kentucky suffered more deaths than Knott County, where 17 people perished in the historic flooding. The local coroner, Corey Watson, knew nearly all of them.

"I was retrieving people from scenes that I had known since I was a child or I had seen that person grow up," Watson said. "It's hard."

The floodwaters tore families apart. Two sets of husbands and wives died. Whole families were "decimated," the coroner said. Most of those who died were retirees, he said.

Watson said his training taught him how to compose himself, but in such an extreme situation, he wondered: "How do you properly compose yourself when you see a multitude of people passing away and there being attempts to save their life or to keep them together? It's troubling, but we have to go through this. We have to overcome it. We can always hold their memory in our heart."

The floods in Pine Top surged through Randall and Rosa Lee Vick's front door, ripped a huge hole in their back wall and swept them into the dark water. Vick said he had just a split second to speak to her before they went under. "Whatever happens, I love you," he said.

Vick was able to cling to a tree for about seven hours before Kevin Patrick and another neighbor lashed themselves together with extension cords and waded out to rescue him. They found his wife's body miles away.

What's left of their home came to rest on the opposite side of their normally placid creek. A neighbor has lent him a pop-up camper to live in, once he's ready.

"I can't bring back what I had," Vick said. "I'm just going to have to get up and go on. I'll make it."

Denver Bates, 76, drove up to check on them Thursday. The Vicks had worked for him, cutting his grass.

"They had four and five cars in their driveway. Money. Yards kept clean. They were living good, and God let them know who's the boss," Bates said.

A family friend, Jade Dollarhide, gave Vick a hug while seeing what he needs.

"We may not have all the shopping centers, we may not have all these big jobs and factories and everything else, but what we lack with money, you know we're rich in friendship and family," Dollarhide said. "That's what's important."

For some families, the funerals have offered their first chance to pause and reflect on the losses after days of digging out.

Campbell's mother, Patricia Collins, was at home with her boyfriend next door to Howard's home in Chavies, Kentucky, when the storms hit. Collins went to check on her, and climbed with her grandmother onto the kitchen table, but it collapsed into the surging water.

Collins was in the water for two hours, pinned between a couch and a car. The only thing that saved her was a flashing tail light that caught the eye of her neighbors, who pulled her to safety. Battered and bruised, she never saw Howard alive again.

It took nearly five hours to find Howard's body. Campbell's brother pulled their grandmother from the water, checked for a pulse and wiped mud from her face. Then he asked the neighbors for a sheet to cover her, and sat with her body for hours.

Both homes are now in ruins, carried in pieces hundreds of feet from where Howard had lived for half a century.

Campbell said her grandmother was like her second mother. They either saw each other or spoke on

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 50 of 58

the phone every day. She can still hear her giggling on the other line, or telling her to remember to thank Jesus for all the good in her life. She was a deeply religious woman who tended to her rose garden and thanked the Lord each morning for letting her see another day.

She was the person Campbell most often went to for advice — she knew just what to say.

"I always thought one day when I had to say goodbye to her I would still get to go sit in my favorite chair and remember all the good times," she said. "But I can't even do that and that really hurts."

Almost everything her grandmother and mother owned was lost in the flood. Miraculously, a photo still hung on one wall — a portrait of her grandmother and her grandfather, who passed away 13 years ago.

That photo was displayed next to the white casket at her funeral this week, near a spray of roses put together by a family friend.

Just like the ones in her grandmother's garden.

The AP Interview: US aid chief counters food crisis, Russia

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Samantha Power won fame as a human rights advocate and was picked by President Joe Biden to lead the agency that distributes billions of dollars in U.S. aid abroad, including providing more food assistance than anyone else in the world. But since Russia invaded Ukraine, that job includes a new task with a Cold War feel — countering Russia's messaging abroad.

As administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Power is dealing now with a global food crisis, brought on by local conflicts, the pandemic's economic upheaval, and drought and the other extremes typical of climate change. As the Biden administration spells out often, the problems have all been compounded by Russia invading Ukraine, deepening food shortages and raising prices everywhere.

That set up an hearts-and-minds competition reminiscent of the days of the Soviet Union last month, when Power visited desperate families and struggling farmers in Horn of Africa nations. She watched relief workers give emergency food to children, always among the first to die in food crises, and announced new food aid.

But unexpectedly, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov trailed her to Africa days later, visiting other capitals with a different message meant to shore up his country's partnerships in Africa.

It was U.S. and international sanctions on Russia over its six-month invasion of Ukraine that were to blame for cutting off vital grain supplies from the world market, Lavrov claimed. He dismissed "the so-called food crisis" on the continent being hit hardest.

In fact, a Russian blockade has kept Ukraine's grain from reaching the world. The international sanctions on Russia exempt agricultural products and fertilizer.

"What we're not going to do, any of us in the administration, is just allow the Russian Federation, which is still saying it's not at war in Ukraine, to blame the latest spike in food and fertilizer prices on sanctions and on the United States," Power, back in her office in Washington, told The Associated Press.

"People, especially when they're facing a crisis of this enormity, they really do know the difference about ... whether you're providing emergency humanitarian assistance ... or whether you're at a podium trying to make it a new Cold War," Power said.

"For Mr. Lavrov to have traveled to Africa just after I did, there's almost nothing tangible in the wake of that visit that the countries he visited have obtained from him, other than the misinformation and lies," Power said.

Even African officials whose governments refused to join in formal U.N. condemnation earlier this year of Russia's invasion of Ukraine tell of calling Russian leaders privately to urge Russia to let Ukraine's grain out of the ports, she said.

A former journalist, Power won the Pulitzer in 2003 for "A Problem from Hell," a book on genocide that has fueled debates in government and among academics on the wisdom and morality of intervening in atrocities abroad ever since. She served as U.S. ambassador to the U.N. under President Barack Obama, before joining the Biden administration.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 51 of 58

Since Russia invaded Ukraine, creating new food and energy shortfalls at a time when record numbers of people around the world were already hungry, much of Power's focus has been on the food crisis. After an earlier decade of success slicing away at the numbers of people going without food, the estimated number of people around the world going hungry rose to 828 million this year, 150 million just since the pandemic, Power said, with many in acute need.

Even in countries outside areas where aid organizations warn of famine, high food prices are adding to political unrest, as in the overthrow of Sri Lanka's government this summer. "Most analysts would be very surprised if the Sri Lankan government were the last to fall," Power noted.

"The cascading political effects and the instability that stems from economic pain and people's need, the human need, to hold authorities accountable for what is a terrifying inability to look out for the needs of your loved ones — that is a motivator if there ever is one" to protest, Power said.

"This, I can't say it more starkly, is the worst food crisis of our lifetimes," Power said.

There have been some hopeful signs in recent weeks, she pointed out — Russia allowing Ukraine to send its first ship of grain in months out of a Russian-blockaded port, and food and fuel prices easing slightly. Three more ships carrying thousands of tons of badly needed corn left the Ukraine port Friday.

But in the East Africa states hardest hit — Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia — four rainy seasons in a row failed, withering grain in the field and killing hundreds of million of livestock that were the only support for the region's herders. "They don't have a Plan B," she said.

A woman farmer in Kenya told her of recoiling at the high price of fertilizer, and realizing she could only plant half as much food for the next season, a warning of even deeper hunger coming.

But donor assistance for Africa's current hunger crisis is running at less than half of that for the last major one, in 2016, Power said. With no sign of an end to the war in Ukraine or to the food crisis, wealthier countries tell Power they gave much of their relief money to Ukraine and are otherwise tapped out.

Tellingly, a GoFundMe-run account that Power announced in mid-July for ordinary people to help out in the global food crisis showed just \$2,367 in donations on Friday.

Power and other U.S. officials increasingly urge China, in particular, to give more relief. The Chinese Embassy in Washington, asked for comment, said China had given \$130 million to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization.

"That's not a talking point," Power said of the request to China. "That's a sincere hope."

Meta quieter on election misinformation as midterms loom

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facebook owner Meta is quietly curtailing some of the safeguards designed to thwart voting misinformation or foreign interference in U.S. elections as the November midterm vote approaches.

It's a sharp departure from the social media giant's multibillion-dollar efforts to enhance the accuracy of posts about U.S. elections and regain trust from lawmakers and the public after their outrage over learning the company had exploited people's data and allowed falsehoods to overrun its site during the 2016 campaign.

The pivot is raising alarm about Meta's priorities and about how some might exploit the world's most popular social media platforms to spread misleading claims, launch fake accounts and rile up partisan extremists.

"They're not talking about it," said former Facebook policy director Katie Harbath, now the CEO of the tech and policy firm Anchor Change. "Best case scenario: They're still doing a lot behind the scenes. Worst case scenario: They pull back, and we don't know how that's going to manifest itself for the midterms on the platforms."

Since last year, Meta has shut down an examination into how falsehoods are amplified in political ads on Facebook by indefinitely banishing the researchers from the site.

CrowdTangle, the online tool that the company offered to hundreds of newsrooms and researchers so

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 52 of 58

they could identify trending posts and misinformation across Facebook or Instagram, is now inoperable on some days.

Public communication about the company's response to election misinformation has gone decidedly quiet. Between 2018 and 2020, the company released more than 30 statements that laid out specifics about how it would stifle U.S. election misinformation, prevent foreign adversaries from running ads or posts around the vote and subdue divisive hate speech.

Top executives hosted question and answer sessions with reporters about new policies. CEO Mark Zuckerberg wrote Facebook posts promising to take down false voting information and authored opinion articles calling for more regulations to tackle foreign interference in U.S. elections via social media.

But this year Meta has only released a one-page document outlining plans for the fall elections, even as potential threats to the vote remain clear. Several Republican candidates are pushing false claims about the U.S. election across social media. In addition, Russia and China continue to wage aggressive social media propaganda campaigns aimed at further political divides among American audiences.

Meta says that elections remain a priority and that policies developed in recent years around election misinformation or foreign interference are now hard-wired into company operations.

"With every election, we incorporate what we've learned into new processes and have established channels to share information with the government and our industry partners," Meta spokesman Tom Reynolds said.

He declined to say how many employees would be on the project to protect U.S. elections full time this year.

During the 2018 election cycle, the company offered tours and photos and produced head counts for its election response war room. But The New York Times reported the number of Meta employees working on this year's election had been cut from 300 to 60, a figure Meta disputes.

Reynolds said Meta will pull hundreds of employees who work across 40 of the company's other teams to monitor the upcoming vote alongside the election team, with its unspecified number of workers.

The company is continuing many initiatives it developed to limit election misinformation, such as a fact-checking program started in 2016 that enlists the help of news outlets to investigate the veracity of popular falsehoods spreading on Facebook or Instagram. The Associated Press is part of Meta's fact-checking program.

This month, Meta also rolled out a new feature for political ads that allows the public to search for details about how advertisers target people based on their interests across Facebook and Instagram.

Yet, Meta has stifled other efforts to identify election misinformation on its sites.

It has stopped making improvements to CrowdTangle, a website it offered to newsrooms around the world that provides insights about trending social media posts. Journalists, fact-checkers and researchers used the website to analyze Facebook content, including tracing popular misinformation and who is responsible for it.

That tool is now "dying," former CrowdTangle CEO Brandon Silverman, who left Meta last year, told the Senate Judiciary Committee this spring.

Silverman told the AP that CrowdTangle had been working on upgrades that would make it easier to search the text of internet memes, which can often be used to spread half-truths and escape the oversight of fact-checkers, for example.

"There's no real shortage of ways you can organize this data to make it useful for a lot of different parts of the fact-checking community, newsrooms and broader civil society," Silverman said.

Not everyone at Meta agreed with that transparent approach, Silverman said. The company has not rolled out any new updates or features to CrowdTangle in more than a year, and it has experienced hourslong outages in recent months.

Meta also shut down efforts to investigate how misinformation travels through political ads.

The company indefinitely revoked access to Facebook for a pair of New York University researchers who they said collected unauthorized data from the platform. The move came hours after NYU professor Laura Edelson said she shared plans with the company to investigate the spread of disinformation on the platform

around the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, which is now the subject of a House investigation.

"What we found, when we looked closely, is that their systems were probably dangerous for a lot of their users," Edelson said.

Privately, former and current Meta employees say exposing those dangers around the American elections have created public and political backlash for the company.

Republicans routinely accuse Facebook of unfairly censoring conservatives, some of whom have been kicked off for breaking the company's rules. Democrats, meanwhile, regularly complain the tech company hasn't gone far enough to curb disinformation.

"It's something that's so politically fraught, they're more trying to shy away from it than jump in head first," said Harbath, the former Facebook policy director. "They just see it as a big old pile of headaches."

Meanwhile, the possibility of regulation in the U.S. no longer looms over the company, with lawmakers failing to reach any consensus over what oversight the multibillion-dollar company should be subjected to.

Free from that threat, Meta's leaders have devoted the company's time, money and resources to a new project in recent months.

Zuckerberg dived into this massive rebranding and reorganization of Facebook last October, when he changed the company's name to Meta Platforms Inc. He plans to spend years and billions of dollars evolving his social media platforms into a nascent virtual reality construct called the "metaverse" — sort of like the internet brought to life, rendered in 3D.

His public Facebook page posts now focus on product announcements, hailing artificial intelligence, and photos of him enjoying life. News about election preparedness is announced in company blog posts not written by him.

In one of Zuckerberg's posts last October, after an ex-Facebook employee leaked internal documents showing how the platform magnifies hate and misinformation, he defended the company. He also reminded his followers that he had pushed Congress to modernize regulations around elections for the digital age.

"I know it's frustrating to see the good work we do get mischaracterized, especially for those of you who are making important contributions across safety, integrity, research and product," he wrote on Oct. 5. "But I believe that over the long term if we keep trying to do what's right and delivering experiences that improve people's lives, it will be better for our community and our business."

It was the last time he discussed the Menlo Park, California-based company's election work in a public Facebook post.

'Golden Girls' LA pop-up restaurant has the golden touch

By TERRY TANG The Associated Press

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. (AP) — Picture it: A vacant Beverly Hills bistro has been transformed into the set of a 1980s sitcom about four women living in Miami — but it's also a working restaurant.

Reservations have been going fast at the newly opened The Golden Girls Kitchen. Some patrons have come from out of state to see the pop-up eatery.

Joe Saunders, of Cranston, Rhode Island, his two teenage children and their mother were visiting Northern California when they learned about the pop-up. So they made a special trip south just to see it.

"I was a little hesitant about coming but my kids' mom really wanted to come," said Saunders, who was wearing a T-shirt referencing the sitcom's fictitious Shady Pines retirement home. "It's been a good time... the lasagna, the strawberry daiquiri and I'm going to have a piece of cake with ice cream, too."

Thirty years after "The Golden Girls" ended on NBC, fans still can't let go of the sitcom about four housemates — Dorothy, Rose, Blanche and Sophia — bonding over aging, dating and cheesecake. The first month of reservations sold out before the pop-up opened July 30, which the internet deems National Golden Girls Day. It's just the latest example of the comedy rising to pop culture relevancy again. In just the past few months, the first ever Golden-Con fan convention was held in Chicago and a pilot for an animated, futuristic "Golden Girls" series is being shopped around.

Bucket Listers, an online events company, organized the pop-up. It had the blessing of Disney, which

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 54 of 58

owns the rights to "Golden Girls." So, organizers were free to put Easter Egg references in the decor and the menu. Upon walking in, fans are immediately greeted by a bartender at the Shady Pines bar. Further inside is a replica of the women's kitchen counter, complete with a yellow wall phone. Behind the dining room is a recreation of Blanche's bedroom, including the iconic banana leaf bedspread and wallpaper.

"It has been so heartwarming to see my mom light up. I know that she's watched the show at least 50 times each season," said A.J. Maloney, 23, who came from San Diego with her mother, Shellee, 45.

Derek Berry, Bucket Listers' director of experiences, has plenty of experience staging pop-ups. Since 2016, he has overseen half-a-dozen restaurant tributes starting with a "Saved By the Bell" diner in Chicago. "Breaking Bad," "Beverly Hills 90210" and "Good Burger" have also inspired fast-casual diners. Berry's criteria for the pop-up treatment is if a show has "staying power" and people are constantly quoting it. "Golden Girls" was inevitable.

"Every time we announce a pop-up, we look at the comments. People are like 'I love it, but you should have done this!' And it's always 'Golden Girls,'" said Berry, who worked with a 45-member team.

One of the most fun aspects was working with executive chef Royce Burke to devise menu items and to name them. The choices of course include lasagna — which the Sicilian-born Sophia often cooked — and various flavors of cheesecake. There are also references to Scandinavian delicacies mentioned by Rose in her stories about her hometown of St. Olaf, Minnesota.

"I like all the St. Olaf items where you never knew if they were real or not," Berry said. "We threw a couple on there. It's so fun to see my staff and myself try to pronounce them."

The pop-up only has reservations through late October. But its popularity has been beyond expectations. So much so that there are plans to take it on the road to New York, Chicago, San Francisco and, of course, Miami, Berry added.

"The Golden Girls" premiered in 1985. None of the four stars are alive. Bea Arthur, Rue McClanahan, and Estelle Getty all died in the late 2000s and Betty White died last December at age 99. Yet, because of cable reruns and streaming availability on Hulu, the show keeps finding new life and new, younger fans. The widely varying demographics of the restaurant's patrons are proof of that.

Moses Nicholas and his girlfriend, Johanna James, both 18 and from Los Angeles, had a date over vegan lasagna and vegan cheesecake. Their reservation was a surprise gift from James' mother, who knew both of them grew up watching "Golden Girls" in syndication and still catch it on Hulu.

"There's something so relatable to the show for me for some reason," Nicholas said. "I just find it really funny and it's very comforting to watch."

The couple's ages is just proof the show "never dies," James added.

Shirley Lyon and her three girlfriends, all of whom are senior citizens, came from Palos Verdes, California, with their own drinkware. The quartet, who call themselves "golden girls," brought "Golden Girls" mugs they made but with their faces superimposed over the characters. Just being in the restaurant brought back the joy they feel when watching the sitcom.

"People here I think all love them," Lyon said. "I don't think anybody comes who hasn't experienced how precious they are. I just love their friendship."

Spain leads Europe in monkeypox, struggles to check spread

By JOSEPH WILSON and RENATA BRITO Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — As a sex worker and adult film actor, Roc was relieved when he was among the first Spaniards to get a monkeypox vaccine. He knew of several cases among men who have sex with men, which is the leading demographic for the disease, and feared he could be next.

"I went home and thought, 'Phew, my God, I'm saved,'" the 29-year-old told The Associated Press.

But it was already too late. Roc, the name he uses for work, had been infected by a client a few days before. He joined Spain's steadily increasing count of monkeypox infections that has become the highest in Europe since the disease spread beyond Africa where it has been endemic for years.

He began showing symptoms: pustules, fever, conjunctivitis and tiredness. Roc was hospitalized for

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 55 of 58

treatment before getting well enough to be released.

Spanish health authorities and community groups are struggling to check an outbreak that has already claimed the lives of two young men. They reportedly died of encephalitis, or swelling of the brain, that can be caused by some viruses. Most monkeypox cases cause only mild symptoms.

Spain has had 4,942 confirmed cases in the three months since the start of the outbreak, which has been linked to two raves in Europe, where experts say the virus was likely spread through sex.

The only country with more infections than Spain is the much larger United States, which has reported 7,100 cases.

In all, the global monkeypox outbreak has seen more than 26,000 cases in nearly 90 countries since May. There have been 103 suspected deaths in Africa, mostly in Nigeria and Congo, where a more lethal form of monkeypox is spreading than in the West.

Health experts stress that this is not technically a sexually transmitted disease, even though it has been mainly spreading via sex among gay and bisexual men, who account for 98% of cases beyond Africa. The virus can be spread to anyone who has close, physical contact with an infected person, their clothing or bedsheets.

So part of the complexity of fighting monkeypox is striking a balance between not stigmatizing men who have sex with men, while also ensuring that both vaccines and pleas for greater caution reach those currently in the greatest danger.

Spain has distributed 5,000 shots of the two-shot vaccine to health clinics and expects to receive 7,000 more from the European Union in the coming days, its health ministry said. The EU has bought 160,000 doses and is donating them to member states based on need. The bloc is expecting another 70,000 shots to be available next week.

To ensure that those shots get administered wisely, community groups and sexual health associations targeting gay men, bisexuals and transgender women are taking the lead.

In Barcelona, BCN Checkpoint, which focuses on AIDS/HIV prevention in gay and trans communities, is now contacting at-risk people to offer them one of the precious vaccines.

Pep Coll, medical director of BCN Checkpoint, said the vaccine rollout is focused on people who are already at risk of contracting HIV and are on preemptive treatment, men with a high number of sexual partners and those who participate in "chemsex" (sex with the use of drugs), as well as people with suppressed immune responses.

But there are many more people who fit those categories than doses.

"If we just consider the number of people (on prophylactic HIV treatment) plus the number of people with HIV, we are talking about some 15,000 people (just in Barcelona)," Coll said.

The lack of vaccines, which is far more severe in Africa than in Europe and the U.S., makes social public health policies key, experts say.

As with the coronavirus pandemic, contact tracing to identify people who could have been infected is critical. But, while COVID-19 could spread to anyone simply through the air, the close bodily contact that serves as the leading vehicle for monkeypox makes some people hesitant to share information.

"We are having a steady stream of new cases, and it is possible that we will have more deaths. Why? Because contact tracing is very complicated because it can be a very sensitive issue for someone to identify their sexual partners," said Amós García, epidemiologist and president of the Spanish Association of Vaccinology.

Spain says that 80% of its cases are among men who have sex with men and only 1.5% are women. But García insisted that will even out unless the entire public, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, grasps that having various sexual partners creates greater risk.

"The same thing happened with AIDS/HIV, when at one moment the group of men who had sex with men was the most affected (before spreading to other groups), and that can become the path that this takes if we are not able to send a strong message to society," García said.

Given the dearth of vaccines and the trouble with contact tracing, more pressure is being put on encouraging prevention.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 56 of 58

From the start, government officials ceded the leading role in the get-out-the-word campaign to community groups.

Sebastian Meyer, president of the STOP SIDA association dedicated to AIDS/HIV care in Barcelona's LGBTQ community, said the logic was that his group and others like it would be trusted message-bearers with person-by-person knowledge of how to drive the health warning home.

Community associations that represent gay and bisexual men have bombarded social media, websites and blogs with information on monkeypox safety. Officials in Catalonia, the region including Barcelona which has over 1,500 cases, are pushing public service announcements on dating apps Tinder and Grindr warning about the disease.

But Meyer, who is on the monkeypox advisory boards for both Spain's national government and for Catalonia, says there is still a lot to be done.

Meyer believes fatigue from the COVID-19 pandemic has played a part. Doctors advise people with monkeypox lesions to isolate until they have fully healed, which can take up to three weeks.

"When people read that they must self-isolate, they close the webpage and forget what they have read," Meyer said. "We are just coming out of COVID, when you couldn't do this or that, and now, here we go again ... People just hate it and put their heads in the sand."

Meyer said that his group is currently brainstorming ways to revamp and relaunch their message.

"If you haven't been selected for a vaccine, the answer is not to desperately hope that you'll get one," he said. "The answer is to be more careful. That is much better than any vaccine."

Democrats say they've reached agreement on economic package

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democrats have agreed to eleventh-hour changes to their marquee economic legislation, they announced late Thursday, clearing the major impediment to pushing one of President Joe Biden's paramount election-year priorities through the chamber in coming days.

Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., a centrist seen as the pivotal vote in the 50-50 chamber, said in a statement that she had agreed to revamping some of the measure's tax and energy provisions and was ready to "move forward" on the bill.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said he believed his party's energy, environment, health and tax compromise "will receive the support of the entire" Democratic membership of the chamber. His party needs unanimity and Vice President Kamala Harris' tie-breaking vote to move the measure through the Senate over certain solid opposition from Republicans, who say the plan's tax boosts and spending would worsen inflation and damage the economy.

The announcement came as a surprise, with some expecting talks between Schumer and the mercurial Sinema to drag on for days longer without guarantee of success. Schumer has said he wants the Senate to begin voting on the legislation Saturday, after which it would begin its summer recess. Passage by the House, which Democrats control narrowly, could come when that chamber returns briefly to Washington next week.

Democrats revealed few details of their compromise, and other hurdles remained. Still, final congressional approval would complete an astounding resurrection of Biden's wide-ranging domestic goals, though in more modest form.

Democratic infighting had embarrassed Biden and forced him to pare down a far larger and more ambitious \$3.5 trillion, 10-year version, and then a \$2 trillion alternative, leaving the effort all but dead. Instead, Schumer and Sen. Joe Manchin, the conservative maverick Democrat from West Virginia who derailed Biden's earlier efforts, unexpectedly negotiated the slimmer package two weeks ago.

Its approval would let Democrats appeal to voters by boasting they are moving to reduce inflation — though analysts say that impact would be minor — address climate change and increase U.S. energy security.

"Tonight, we've taken another critical step toward reducing inflation and the cost of living for America's families," Biden said in a statement.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 57 of 58

Sinema said Democrats had agreed to remove a provision raising taxes on "carried interest," or profits that go to executives of private equity firms. That's been a proposal she has long opposed, though it is a favorite of Manchin and many progressives.

The carried interest provision was estimated to produce \$13 billion for the government over the coming decade, a small portion of the measure's \$739 billion in total revenue.

It will be replaced by a new excise tax on stock buybacks which will bring in more revenue than that, said one Democrat familiar with the agreement. The official, who was not authorized to discuss the deal publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, provided no other detail.

Sinema said she had also agreed to unspecified provisions to "protect advanced manufacturing and boost our clean energy economy."

She noted that Senate parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough is still reviewing the measure to make sure no provisions must be removed for violating the chamber's procedures. "Subject to the parliamentarian's review, I'll move forward," Sinema said.

The measure must adhere to those rules for Democrats to use procedures that will prevent Republicans from mounting filibusters, delays that require 60 votes to halt.

Schumer said the measure retained the bill's language on prescription drug pricing, climate change, "closing tax loopholes exploited by big corporations and the wealthy" and reducing federal deficits.

He said the bill "addressed a number of important issues" that Democratic senators raised during talks. He said the final measure "will reflect this work and put us one step closer to enacting this historic legislation into law."

Left unclear was whether changes had been made to the bill's 15% minimum corporate tax, a provision Sinema has been interested in revising. It would raise an estimated \$313 billion, making it the legislation's largest revenue raiser.

That levy, which would apply to around 150 corporations with income exceeding \$1 billion, has been strongly opposed by business, including by groups from Sinema's Arizona.

The final measure was expected to include assistance that Sinema and other Western senators have been trying to add to help their states cope with epic drought and wildfires that have become commonplace. Those lawmakers have been seeking around \$5 billion but it was unclear what the final language would do, said a Democrat following the bargaining who would describe the effort only on condition of anonymity.

The measure will also have to withstand a "vote-a-rama," a torrent of nonstop amendments expected to last well into the weekend, if not beyond. Republicans want to kill as much of the bill as possible, either with the parliamentarian's rulings or amendments.

Even if their amendments lose — as is certain for most — Republicans will consider it mission accomplished if they force Democrats to take risky campaign-season votes on touchy issues like taxes, inflation and immigration.

Democratic amendments are expected as well. Progressive Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., has said he wants to make its health care provisions stronger.

The overall bill would raise \$739 billion in revenue. That would come from tax boosts on high earners and some huge corporations, beefed-up IRS tax collections and curbs on drug prices, which would save money for the government and patients.

It would spend much of that on initiatives helping clean energy, fossil fuels and health care, including helping some people buy private health insurance. That would still leave over \$300 billion in the measure for deficit reduction.

Today in History: Aug. 6, U.S. drops atom bomb on Hiroshima

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Aug. 6, the 218th day of 2022. There are 147 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Aug. 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 030 ~ 58 of 58

On Aug. 6, 1945, during World War II, the U.S. B-29 Superfortress Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb code-named "Little Boy" on Hiroshima, Japan, resulting in an estimated 140,000 deaths. (Three days later, the United States exploded a nuclear device over Nagasaki; five days after that, Imperial Japan surrendered.)

On this date:

In 1806, the Holy Roman Empire went out of existence as Emperor Francis II abdicated.

In 1825, Upper Peru became the autonomous republic of Bolivia.

In 1942, Queen Wilhemina of the Netherlands became the first reigning queen to address a joint session of Congress, telling lawmakers that despite Nazi occupation, her people's motto remained, "No surrender."

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act.

In 1973, entertainer Stevie Wonder was seriously injured in a car accident in North Carolina.

In 1978, Pope Paul VI died at Castel Gandolfo at age 80.

In 1991, the World Wide Web made its public debut as a means of accessing webpages over the Internet. TV newsman Harry Reasoner died in Norwalk, Connecticut, at age 68.

In 1993, Louis Freeh won Senate confirmation to be FBI director.

In 2003, actor Arnold Schwarzenegger used an appearance on NBC's "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno" to announce his successful bid to replace California Gov. Gray Davis.

In 2009, Sonia Sotomayor was confirmed as the first Hispanic Supreme Court justice by a Senate vote of 68-31. John Hughes, 59, Hollywood's youth movie director of the 1980s and '90s, died in New York City.

In 2011 insurgents shot down a U.S. military helicopter during fighting in eastern Afghanistan, killing 30 Americans, most of them belonging to the same elite Navy commando unit that had slain Osama bin Laden; seven Afghan commandos also died.

In 2013, U.S. Army Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan went on trial at Fort Hood, Texas, charged with killing 13 people and wounding 32 others in a 2009 attack. (Hasan, who admitted carrying out the attack, was convicted and sentenced to death.)

Ten years ago: Syria's prime minister, Riad Hijab, defected two months after being forced into the position by President Bashar Assad. Marvin Hamlisch, 68, who composed or arranged the scores for dozens of movies including "The Sting" and the Broadway smash "A Chorus Line," died in Los Angeles.

Five years ago: Vice President Mike Pence, in a statement released by the White House, described as "disgraceful and offensive" a New York Times report suggesting that he was laying the groundwork for a possible presidential bid in 2020 if President Donald Trump were not to run.

One year ago: A New Jersey gym owner, Scott Fairlamb, and a Washington state man, Devlyn Thompson, became the first people charged in the Jan. 6 Capitol riot to plead guilty to assaulting a law enforcement officer. (Fairlamb was sentenced to 41 months in prison; Thompson received nearly four years.) American Allyson Felix won her record 10th Olympic track medal at the Tokyo Games with a bronze in the 400 meters, the most medals won by any woman in Olympic history. (She would win an 11th the following day.) The U.S. team of April Ross and Alix Klineman won gold in beach volleyball.

Today's Birthdays: Children's performer Ella Jenkins is 98. Actor-director Peter Bonerz is 84. Actor Louise Sorel is 82. Actor Michael Anderson Jr. is 79. Actor Ray Buktenica is 79. Actor Dorian Harewood is 72. Actor Catherine Hicks is 71. Rock singer Pat MacDonald (Timbuk 3) is 70. Country musician Mark DuFresne is 69. Actor Stephanie Kramer is 66. Actor Faith Prince is 65. R&B singer Randy DeBarge is 64. Actor Leland Orser is 62. Actor Michelle Yeoh (yoh) is 60. Country singers Patsy and Peggy Lynn are 58. Basketball Hall of Famer David Robinson is 57. Actor Jeremy Ratchford is 57. Actor Benito Martinez is 54. Country singer Lisa Stewart is 54. Movie writer-director M. Night Shyamalan (SHAH'-mah-lahn) is 52. Actor Merrin Dungey is 51. Singer Geri Halliwell Horner is 50. Actor Jason O'Mara is 50. Actor Vera Farmiga is 49. Actor Ever Carradine is 48. Actor Soleil (soh-LAY') Moon Frye is 46. Actor Melissa George is 46. Rock singer Travis McCoy is 41. Actor Leslie Odom Jr. is 41. Actor Romola Garai is 40. U.S. Olympic and WNBA basketball star A'ja Wilson is 26.