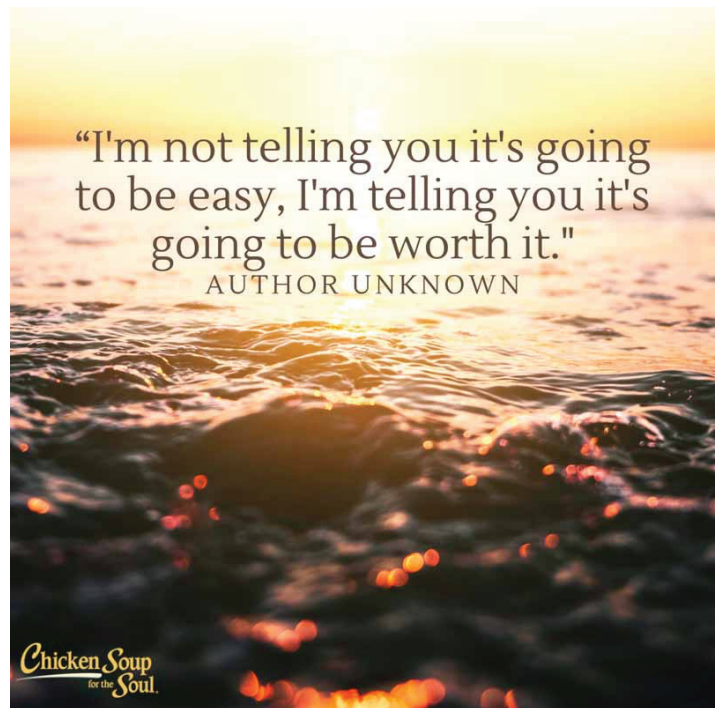


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Jr. Legion takes second at state

Groton's Junior Legion team lost to Lake Norden in the state championship game, 16-8. The game was played in Clark.

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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#547 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

It does appear we're leveling off a bit; we've come off the high-point which I have at July 14 when we had a seven-day reported new-case average of almost 133,000. At midday today, we were at 117,539. While this is an improvement, it is still true that you'd have to go back to mid-February to find the last point we were looking at numbers like these, so I would hesitate to call this a lull. The pandemic total stands at 91,929,347. Hospitalizations are slightly below the peak of just about a week ago; we're at 43,608 at midday. Deaths, on the other hand, continue to creep upward toward 500 per day. Considering we'd sort of settled in around 300 (which honestly still seems like too many to me), this isn't great. At midday, the seven-day average was 492 and the pandemic total was 1,029,797.

BA.5 is now accounting for up to 86.6 percent of cases in the US. BA.4, which was always a poor orphan cousin, is diminishing, as is BA.2.12.2. But we have a new entrant on the scene, one whose significance we haven't yet fully assessed; this is BA.4.6. It is a mutation of BA.4, which is pretty evident from its name. So far, although it appears to have been circulating for several weeks, it doesn't seem to be spreading quickly, which is a good sign as long as that doesn't change. It accounts for 4.1 percent of cases in the US, but is more prevalent in the four-state area of Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Missouri, where it is responsible for nearly 11 percent. There is also increased prevalence in the mid-Atlantic and the South. We're not sure yet whether it will be better at evading our immune responses than BA.4 and BA.5, but early examination of its mutation is not raising alarms yet. If it is not more transmissible or better at immune evasion than BA.5, it will quite likely not compete successfully and will not be of concern. How all this works out remains to be seen, so this is one to watch.

There is also some fair amount of concern among scientists about the rate at which new subvariants are emerging; this is, of course, a function of our heedless rush into wildly-unchecked transmission in a too-little-vaccinated population. The CDC says while nearly 80 percent of us have received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, only two-thirds of us have had a second dose. Less than half of us have had even one booster dose. That makes more than half of us sitting ducks, not just for infection, but for real trouble. I get how some folks are wary of vaccines, but if you've already had one dose, it seems reasonable to expect your objection is not fear of the vaccines—so I guess it's just active delusion. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said the new boosters are trying to hit a "moving target," and it appears the target is moving faster and faster. More vaccines in more arms is our best shot at slowing this whole thing down; yet our vaccination efforts have pretty much sputtered to a near stop. There are research efforts focused on a more universal vaccine that will cover a broad swath of coronaviruses, but absent a rare stroke of very good luck, this is a much longer-term project and we can't afford to wait.

I'm seeing all kinds of signs we're probably in for a difficult fall and winter. We don't have to wait to see what new subvariants might pop up; we're looking bad for the current ones. Less than half of us who are eligible for even a first booster dose of vaccine have received one, and we're pretty clear you don't have sufficient protection against severe disease or hospitalization without a booster. Less than a third of those eligible for a second booster have received one. Dr. Ashish Jha, White House Covid response coordinator, projected in the spring that we could see a surge of 100 million new cases and

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tens of thousands of deaths starting in a month or so.

The thing is, even if you're at low risk for severe disease, if you aren't up-to-date on vaccinations (two doses of mRNA vaccine plus one or two boosters), you're a vehicle for ramping up transmission; and increased transmission is how the virus finds enough hosts to enable it to mutate into an even scarier new version, maybe one that evades all of our protections. More vaccination means less transmission, and less transmission means lower likelihood of new variants emerging. I fully recognize it isn't currently fashionable to show a sense of civic responsibility—a feeling of obligation to our fellow citizens (and the rest of the folks on Earth too, for that matter)—but failure to act in the public interest threatens all of us, even you. You're showing your disregard for others and endangering yourself if you refuse to do what you can to limit spread.

On Tuesday, Fauci went on to say on Los Angeles radio station, KNX's In Depth show, "You don't want COVID to dominate the lives of people throughout this country or the world. . . . We're not talking about locking down; we're just talking about common sense, getting the appropriate interventions . . . and right now we have boosters that are very effective in diminishing any aspect of the infection." He added this really frightening assessment: "The durability of protection against infection is measured in a matter of several months, as opposed to measles, where the durability is measured in decades, if not a lifetime. [With] polio, the durability of protection against reinfection once you've been infected or vaccinated is measured in decades, not in several months. [This is] something we've never had to deal with."

I don't want to be the harbinger of doom, but we have another concern coming up. It's currently winter in the Southern Hemisphere, and we generally consider Australia's flu season, well underway right now, to be a pretty good indication of what may be in store for us in the upcoming winter. Well, Australia is having their worst flu season in five years. It started earlier than usual, which is generally a bad sign, and the highest rates have been among children. Authorities there are not yet sure whether their vaccine was a good match for the currently circulating strains, another important factor in how things go; we'll know soon. The vaccine being produced now for the US market includes two strains of influenza A and two strains of influenza B; we never know until the season hits whether we've guessed right on the strains to include in any given year. Because influenza rates have been exceptionally low for two years now, our immunity has waned, and children who have fewer years of prior exposure will be especially at risk. Because flu is a risk factor for severe damage from Covid-19 and Covid-19 is a risk factor for severe damage from influenza, it is particularly important to get that flu shot this year. The vaccines should become available in September, and it's probably smart to get them early this year. Like Covid-19, vaccines may not prevent infection, but they are proven to reduce the risk for severe disease, hospitalization, and death. Seems like a good bet this year.

And on another front—just in case you don't have enough to worry about—wastewater sampling in New York is turning up a polio outbreak in two counties, both of which have some of the lowest vaccination rates in the state—60 percent in Rockland County and 59 percent in Orange County. A neighboring county which has not (yet) had positive wastewater samples, Sullivan County, has a 62 percent vaccination rate. For a disease which was almost eradicated worldwide a few years back and has been eradicated in the US since 1979, polio has become a current risk. Why? You know, right?

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The poliovirus has been spreading for some time in this country: Two people have already become paralyzed. Although the risk of paralysis is small in any individual case, modelers are projecting more paralytic cases as we go along. Polio-caused paralysis is typically irreversible. The way out is—you guessed it—vaccination. Unfortunately, the political backlash against Covid-19 vaccines has damaged vaccination efforts across the country for all kinds of vaccinations.

For those who are wondering why, when I occasionally include information about diseases like influenza and polio, I haven't addressed the current monkeypox outbreaks across the world and in the US, I'll just say I have only so much time and bandwidth. I'm familiar from my past work with these older viruses, but I am not at all knowledgeable about monkeypox virus, and the very last thing I need in my life at this moment is to spend a whole bunch of time getting up to speed on the next world health emergency. I simply don't know enough, and I don't see myself investing the time and energy needed to learn enough. I just can't do it at this time. I think it's very important, but I can't. The best I'll be able to do—as time permits—is a summary of what is now known; I don't know how soon even that will happen. Sorry.

We have unsettling news in a paper about to be published in PLOS Biology from a group at the University of Queensland, Australia. The version of the paper I saw is peer-reviewed, but not yet edited. The research team collected nasal epithelial (lining) cells (NEC) from healthy adult and healthy pediatric donors, cultured in these in the lab, and then experimentally infected them with wild-type Wuhan, Delta, and Omicron SARS-CoV-2 virus particles. Findings were that pediatric NECs were less susceptible to viral replication post-infection with Wuhan or Delta virus because the pediatric cells mounted a strong antiviral response to the virus; however when infected with Omicron, "there was no difference in RNA levels in pediatric versus adult NECs." In other words, the Omicron variant is equally as successful in invading pediatric cells as adult cells, which means there's a good chance this variant is just as good at making kids sick as it is at making adults sick. This is not a great signal. This may mean our observation that children are less often infected and have less severe symptoms no longer holds with Omicron. If Omicron is equally as effective at invading children's NECs as those of adults, it is likely because the antiviral defenses in children's noses are less pronounced. Because NEC are the first site of infection, it appears Omicron may be more efficient at infecting children than previous variants. While this is a small study, this looks like pretty important information going forward and may account for the increased number of pediatric infections since Omicron came on the scene in November. There may be other mechanisms operating in determining the likelihood of infection, but this could be an ominous sign for children in the current circumstances.

I've read a couple of summaries of work done by researchers at the Pontificia Universidad Catolica Argentina and presented as preliminary findings last month at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference 2022. I'll note that this is not peer-reviewed work. It centered on exploring the relationship between anosmia (loss of the sense of smell) in Covid-19 and long-term cognitive impairment afterward. This comes up pretty naturally because anosmia has long been considered a warning sign for Alzheimer's disease; it appears anosmia signals inflammatory responses in the brain and is an early warning sign of structural changes in the brain regions that show damage in dementia. Something like five percent of Covid-19 patients report anosmia lasting more than six months, and some Covid-19 patients go on to develop cognitive impairment. So the question is whether these two phenomena are

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linked for Covid-19 as they are for Alzheimer's.

The work centered on adults 60 and older from the health registry in the province of Jujuy, Argentina, which includes all SARS-CoV-2 testing data for the region. It included 766 adults 55 to 95, 88.4 percent of whom were Covid-19 cases and 11.6 percent of whom were negative controls and tracked them for a year. Over the course of that year, participants were tested for neurocognitive function in the domains of memory, attention, language, and executive function and were also tested for olfactory function. Two-thirds of the Covid group had some sort of cognitive impairment, half of them severe. Around 40 percent of the Covid group and none of the controls had olfactory dysfunction. The team did not have hard data on the patients' cognitive function before their Covid-19 diagnosis, but they did interview families about the patients' functioning and excluded anyone who had clear prior signs of impairment.

The big finding is that every single person with severe cognitive impairment also had anosmia (loss of smell). Severity of anosmia "significantly predicted cognitive impairment," regardless of the clinical severity of the original Covid-19 infection. I'll emphasize that these are preliminary findings, but this certainly warrants some attention. This study has exceptionally long follow-up, but while we know both of these effects can be persistent, it's too soon to know whether they're permanent.

I read a paper in JAMA Network published just this week from Israel who started offering a second booster dose of vaccine to the elderly, health care workers, and the immunosuppressed in January 2022. Since Israel's been ahead of us all along in terms of vaccination, we can draw on their experience to inform our actions going forward. This recent work deals with the comparative benefits of that second booster against breakthrough infections with the Omicron variant. All of the health care workers at 11 general hospitals were included in the study; there were 29,611 participants. Findings were that, for people who'd received first boosters administered by the end of September 2021, infection rate was 20 percent, second boosters reduced the rate of breakthrough infections to 6.9 percent, a nearly 65 percent reduction. This is an excellent indication that vaccination, while not perfectly protective against infection, does provide substantial protection for that purpose. Now that we see a substantial reduction in risk with that fourth dose, it's clear we're better off if we take the trouble to receive it. While vaccines can't provide complete protection against new infection, it's clear they do provide substantial benefit.

We talked about long-Covid last time we were together, but I have another study on the condition today. You may recall that long-Covid or post-acute sequelae of Covid (PASC) is the persistence of symptoms after the initial infection resolves. This new work posted in preprint, so not yet peer-reviewed, comes from a group at King's College London and deals with 9323 people with PASC symptoms lasting more than 28 days, 1459 of whom had symptoms lasting more than 12 weeks, drawn from a sample of 336,652 subjects. They found that patients fitted into one of three groups: those with respiratory symptoms like chest pain and shortness of breath or palpitations; those with central neurologic symptoms like fatigue, brain fog, memory problems, and headaches (more common with Alpha or Delta variants); or those with severe multi-organ symptoms due to immunological responses. The Census Bureau shows more than seven percent of US adults have long-Covid symptoms, and this sorting into categories may lend insight into what's going on with those folks. At some point, we're going to have to personalize diagnosis and treatment for long-Covid patients or simply write off a fair proportion of our population; I hope we do the right thing here.

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And also on the long-Covid front, we have more information on the condition in children. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) estimates more than 14 million children have tested positive, 6.2 million of those this year, which indicates an accelerating rate of infection in children—we talked about that above. Additionally, the AAP reports children are disproportionately undercounted in case reports compared with adults. Attempts to quantify the proportion of infected children who develop long-Covid have varied widely—from five or 10 percent to as much as 26 percent. Wherever that falls, we're talking about a whole lot of kids.

Children generally have the same kinds of symptoms as adults do—respiratory and neurologic/psychiatric/cognitive issues. Now a new report published by the CDC on Thursday in its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report has found some serious kinds of organ involvement, things like acute pulmonary embolism (a potentially life-threatening obstruction of blood vessels in the lungs, usually by blood clots), myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle), cardiomyopathy (disease of the heart muscle that decreases the pumping efficiency of the heart and can lead to heart failure), kidney failure, type 1 diabetes, and blood clotting abnormalities.

The federal government is running out of Eli Lilly's monoclonal antibody bebtelovimab, the only monoclonal still effective against current subvariants. The current supply is projected to be exhausted by the 22nd of the month, and funding from Congress to purchase more has run out even after repurposing funds designated for other purposes to buy additional supplies of the drug. The company expects to make it available for purchase more widely—that is, by customers other than the federal government—by mid-month. At a list price of \$2100 per dose, no one thinks folks without solid medical insurance are going to be receiving it. Bebtlovimab is authorized to treat mild to moderate disease in people, 12 and over, who are not hospitalized and is intended for use only when Paxlovid or Veklury (remdesivir, a drug which appears to offer limited benefit) is unavailable or contraindicated. It's looking like Medicare will pick up the cost for seniors and the disabled and Medicaid will pay for it in people in that program. We'll see what happens in the vast gap between these folks and the uninsured population.

We've talked here at various times about infections in animals. These are of interest in terms of the welfare of the involved animals and also because a zoonotic virus is the sort of thing that may well be able to reproduce and mutate in another species, then cross back over into humans in a new, possibly more virulent or more transmissible or immune-escaping version. None of those outcomes would be a good thing. That means this next is good news.

Just recently, the first systematic effort to track data on animal infections has kicked off, a collaboration between the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna and the Wildlife Conservation Society. They have begun to pull information from data sources scattered around the world and have published a Covid data tracking dashboard for animal cases. No one thinks this database is or ever will be complete; testing resources are not evenly enough available all around the world to enable scientists in every country to routinely monitor the disease in animals. Still, getting an idea what we're looking at is an essential step to understanding the risks. It might also highlight places where more testing and reporting are needed so that resources can be directed to them.

This effort has so far gathered 704 cases in 27 species from 39 countries, most of them PCR-con-

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firmed. Most frequent were mink, cats, and dogs. The general line of thinking is that owners are the source for most or all of the cats and dogs, although that sort of transmission has not been confirmed in a study yet. Caretakers are presumed to be the source at least for an index case in farmed mink. We've also heard about cases in hamsters, deer, big cats, and various primates. Most reported animal cases have been with the Omicron variant and its subvariants.

Infected animals have mostly been asymptomatic; those with symptoms most often experience respiratory symptoms. The infection has been most likely to be fatal to mink. Several species appear to have relatively mild infections and low risk for death.

The big question is whether the animals can or routinely could transmit the virus back to humans. We had some cases in Denmark late in 2020 where caretakers were infected by mink, and last year there were cases transmitted from hamsters to humans. A case study published last month in *Emerging Infectious Diseases* reported on a Thai veterinarian who was testing a cat for Covid-19 when the cat sneezed in her face; she tested positive three days later. None of her close contacts tested positive. Genomic testing found the cat's two owners, the cat, and the veterinarian were infected with identical viruses, a genomic sequence not circulating in the same region; since the vet had no contact with the owners, it looks like the cat was the source of her infection. (I'll add a note that the vet was wearing an N95 mask, but no face shield or goggles, it seems likely this represents a case of ocular transmission and indicates what might be best practice for veterinarians going forward during this pandemic.) This sort of thing, however, does seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Infected cats in particular have a very short period of viral shedding. At this point, the general consensus is that the probability of becoming infected via contact with an infected animal is very low. We can hope it stays that way.

And with that, we'll close this out for the day. Please take care to stay safe. We'll talk again.

That's Life by Tony Bender **A little more americana, please**

There was a spot between the bullpen and the concession stand at the 17th Annual Ashley PRCA Rodeo last weekend where the wafting odors of manure and seared burgers competed, and somehow, strangely, to the olfactory of this child of the prairie, it was heaven.

We pause, here in Ashley, the first weekend in August to just be, unabashedly, American. Cowboys, rodeo queens, invocations of a higher power, flags and veterans. Taps on trumpet. The national anthem. Rodeo clowns, an announcer with the right amount of Oklahoma drawl and the cadence of a brisk trot. Spirited bucking stock, hokey clown entertainment. Close calls in the arena. Pick-up men and bullfighter saviors. Riderless horses and moments of silence paid tribute to fallen cowboys. We honor the departed. Celebrate life. And for a few hours, watch slices of self-induced cowboy heroism. That's gonna leave a mark.

It's easy to become cynical in these fractious times, but how can you spend but a moment among all of this, the good-natured camaraderie, neighbors suspending baling and a bountiful wheat harvest to commune, again, with one another, with the past, the Cowboy Way, and not have faith that somehow, as long as we have our friends, that someday, we'll get back on track. And maybe we are more than we know. This is reality, not cable TV talking heads who wouldn't know a steer from a heifer from a

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saddle bronc from a fox from a coyote from a hole in the ground.

That's okay. Perhaps there's no place more American than another. Bunker Hill. Broadway. Rushmore. Philadelphia freedom. Greasy Grass. Gettysburg. But, somehow, this cowboy coteau feels just a little more special. Maybe just a skosh. Maybe that's just partiality. Maybe it's pride, but that's okay, too, because for all the missteps we've made as a nation, we sure have tried, and we ain't done yet, and pride in this place—in that place, or the other—well, I get it. I'll cut you some slack.

Babies. Tanned beauties in short shorts, shades, and cowboy boots. Lipstick. A cool beer. Wide-eyed kids. Mutton busting, by God, in flip-flops, even. Cuz it ain't about the look, straw hats, pearl buttons, or none of that, it's about heart. One year, a kid went down hard, and everyone gasped. "Just remember," Tim Fuller, the announcer, said, "Chicks dig scars. Jest sayin'."

In the Ranch Rodeo event, one of the broncs slammed the rider into the gates, they both went down with the horse kicking furiously on its side, inches from the kid's head. In unison, we stopped breathing. Then, after that close view of Boot Hill, the kid took a re-ride. I'd have tried to slap some sense into him but he was so wobbly he mighta gone down. If there's no crying in baseball, there sure as heck isn't in rodeo. Rub some dirt on it.

It's possible we're not the most American of Americans, but who's tougher?

Jim Mosbrucker woulda loved it. The rodeo's longtime stock contractor died last year after the Ashley Rodeo. I met him 30 years ago, and stood beside him every year in Ashley while I photographed the action. I told his son Wally, "He taught me what little I know about rodeo." Wally smiled knowingly, shook my hand, and accepted the framed photo I shot of Jim one year. Black hat. Big white grin. Aviators. Black leather jacket. It don't get more cowboy than that.

I'm no cowboy. But I rode my grandfather's horses each summer, about the most romantic thing a guy can do alone. Grandpa Spilloway, a Russian cowboy, rode in a rodeo when I was young, and he was too old to do it, but he did, anyway.

"Did you ever ride the bulls," I asked him once. "There's easier ways to die," he smiled.

I own his 30-30 lever action saddle gun with the square bolt that held a cracked stock together for so many years, the edges of the bolt were worn smooth. Leather vs. Steel.

People. It takes so many people, so many hours, so much money, to make it all happen, and it wouldn't without the Ashley Community Rodeo Club. It's a year's work for two days of rodeo.

And it's worth it.

If you can't get sentimental about all of this and appreciate where you are, well, friend, we need to talk. Over a beer. Where the grass is stirrup-high. And if we've timed it right, close to that gangly newborn buckskin.

Chaps. Spurs. Chaw. A glorious sunset, a photographers delight, casting a glow upon the mayhem. Here, today, for a moment, we celebrate life.

Shake my hand, friend. I haven't seen you for a coon's age.

© Tony Bender, 2022

Weekly Vikings Recap

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

With one week remaining until the Vikings' preseason begins, there are still a couple remaining questions regarding the starting lineup that the Vikings will need to answer before the regular season starts on September 11 against the Green Bay Packers.

Will Garrett Bradbury be the starting center?

For most of the offseason, all indications have pointed to Garrett Bradbury maintaining his role as the starting center for the Vikings' offense. Many believed that the new Vikings' regime was attempting to provide little-to-no competition at the center position as a way of building Bradbury's confidence. However, everything changed this week when head coach, Kevin O'Connell, stated that he cannot confirm that Bradbury will be the starting center at the regular season opener.

Now entering his fourth season with the Vikings, Bradbury seems to have the same issue that he has always had in his career: pass-blocking. Reports out of training camp are that Bradbury has been struggling to maintain his blocks in pass protection against bigger defensive linemen such as Harrison Phillips and Dalvin Tomlinson. Although Bradbury has been a great run-blocker throughout his career, his mistakes in pass protection have seemed to outweigh any of his run-blocking success.

The Vikings appear to now be working in Chris Reed at center, despite playing mostly at the guard position throughout his career. In my opinion, I don't think the Vikings would make a drastic change at the center position when Week 1 of the regular season rolls around. However, there is a chance that if Bradbury's pass-blocking failures continue, the Vikings might be looking to one of the other offensive linemen to fill in. The two likely candidates to take Bradbury's spot will be either Chris Reed, who we mentioned above, or former Denver Broncos' backup center Austin Schlottmann.

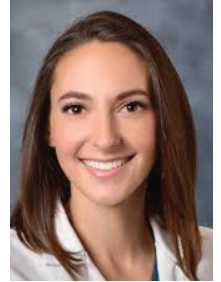
Which rookies will be in the starting lineup?

It appears that three Vikings rookies have asserted themselves into the competition to be in the starting lineup come week 1 of the regular season: Lewis Cine, Andrew Booth, and Ed Ingram. This should not come as a surprise as these three players were the Vikings' first three picks in the 2022 NFL draft. With the Vikings' previous draft class not having a single player take a snap in week 1 last season, it will be a great start to the new Vikings' regime if they can have at least 3 players from their first draft class contribute right away.

Reports are that Cine and Ingram have begun taking some of the first-team snaps in practice. And for Booth, it seems that he might force his way into the starting lineup purely by his confidence alone. Booth has talked trash to every single wide receiver on the Vikings that he has gone up against in practice, even stars like Justin Jefferson and Adam Thielen. For the past 3 seasons, the Vikings have seemed to be lacking that cocky, confident cornerback that can get in the heads of opposing wide receivers and quarterbacks. If Booth can live up to the hype, he may quickly become a fan favorite.

As for the other rookies on the Vikings, their best chance to enter the starting lineup will be by performing extremely well during the preseason. Since most of them are stuck with second and third-team snaps now, any great things they do in practice do not carry the same weight as they will if they are done during the pressure of preseason. Therefore, it will be fun to watch every rookie next week when the Vikings take on the Las Vegas Raiders to see who takes advantage of the opportunity.

Myths associated with urinary incontinence



Lauren Wood Thum, M.D.

As a practicing urologist who is double board certified in urology and female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery, I see a lot of patients with urinary incontinence. And while it is extremely common, many myths surround the topic. Sadly, even though more patients in the U.S. suffer from overactive bladder than diabetes, there is very little education surrounding incontinence and other pelvic floor disorders.

One common misconception I hear is “you have to drink eight glasses of water.” Says who? Was it your doctor? Maybe. There are a few medical conditions where you need to drink extra water, kidney stones being one of them. However, the more you drink, the more you urinate. So, if you are having urinary issues, the first step is likely to cut back on fluids and simply drink when you are thirsty.

It is also important to note that some bladder medications can be dangerous. Anticholinergics are the most prescribed group of medications for urinary leakage with urgency and overactive bladder. Recent studies have shown an association between these drugs and dementia. If you take these drugs, you may be up to 50 percent more likely to get dementia. The risk increases with age and with longer medication use. The good news is there are newer, safer medications available, which are often covered by your insurance. Be sure to review your medication list with your doctor and confirm if the medications you are taking are right for you.

Additionally, not all bladder leakage is the same. There are several types, and they are treated differently. If you leak with activity, like coughing, laughing, sneezing or exercise, a simple office procedure or same day surgery may be appropriate. On the other hand, if you are making constant trips to the bathroom or having leakage with a strong urge to urinate, a medication, Botox injection or implantable bladder pacemaker may be the answer. Keeping a bladder diary of how much you drink, when you urinate, and what you are doing at the time of leakage can be a tool to help determine which type of leakage you have. Bladder diaries are free and available online or may be provided by your doctor.

Lastly, I wish more people knew that incontinence is not normal. It is not a part of aging that must be accepted, or a consequence of childbirth that cannot be helped. If you or someone you know suffers from urinary incontinence or other pelvic floor disorders, please talk to your urologist. There are many treatments available to help you improve your quality of life.

Lauren Wood Thum, M.D. is a contributing Prairie Doc® columnist. She is double board certified in urology and female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery with a practice based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

SUPPORT



Groton Robotics



@ Groton's Family Fun Night

Thursday, August 11th



—5:30-7:30—



Robot demonstrations, meet the coaches,
sign up your 6th-12th grade child!

HOT DOGS, BRATS, HAMBURGER'S AND CHIPS

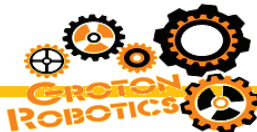
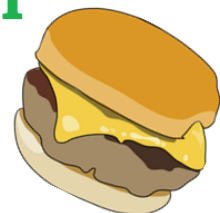


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ALL PROCEEDS BENEFIT

GROTON ROBOTICS



Groton Daily Independent

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How I Became a Pirate



When: Wednesday- August 10, 2022

Time: 2:00pm

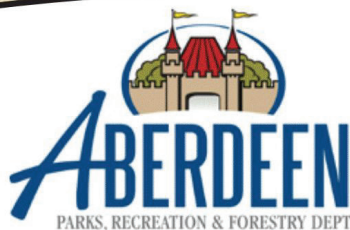
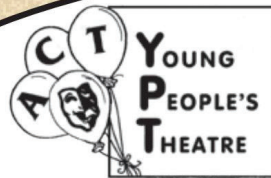
Where: Groton High School (Old Gym)

Entry Fee: \$0

Sponsored by: Wage Memorial Library, Groton Area Chamber of Commerce, Groton Lions Club and Bahr's Jungle Lanes & Lounge
Snacks Provided by: Dacotah Bank

Book, Music and Lyrics by Janet Yates Vogt and Mark Friedman

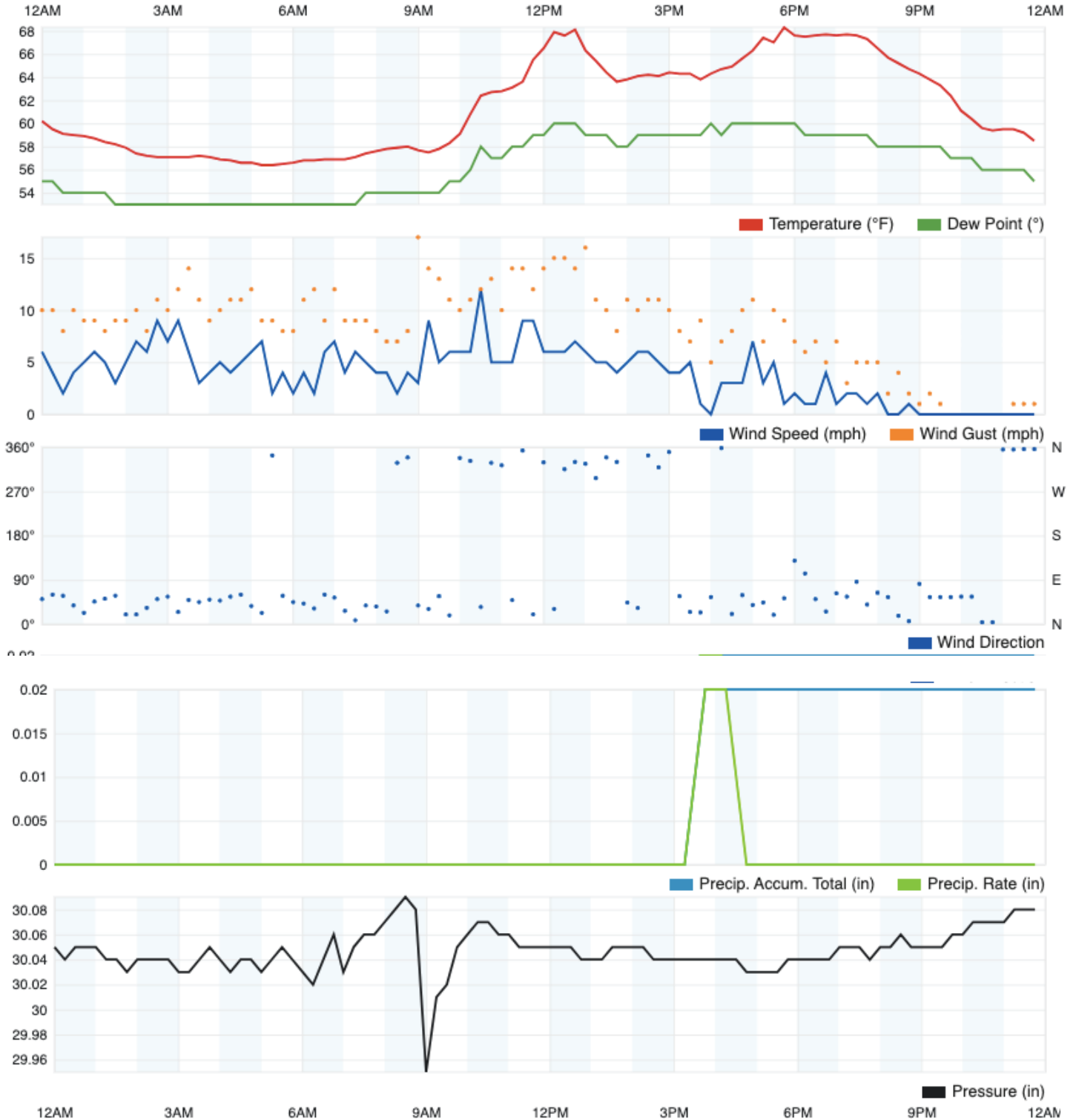
Based on the book "How I Became a Pirate" Written by Melinda Long, Illustrations by David Shannon



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Areas Fog
then Sunny

High: 81 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 58 °F

Tuesday



Sunny

High: 89 °F

Tuesday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 61 °F

Wednesday



Sunny

High: 81 °F

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Plenty of
Sunshine & Dry

www.weather.gov/abr
Updated: 8/8/2022 3:24 AM Central

Today



Early AM Fog

77-88°

Tuesday



86-98°

Wednesday



78-92°

Thursday



76-93°

After some early morning fog in spots, plenty of sunshine can be expected today. Temperatures will remain pleasant with daytime readings in the 70s and 80s. The quiet conditions look to persist for the better part of the work week. Warm to hot temperatures at times along with dry conditions are anticipated. Cooler readings will be confined mainly to eastern areas from the James Valley into western Minnesota. Warmer temperatures will set up across the Missouri Valley this week.

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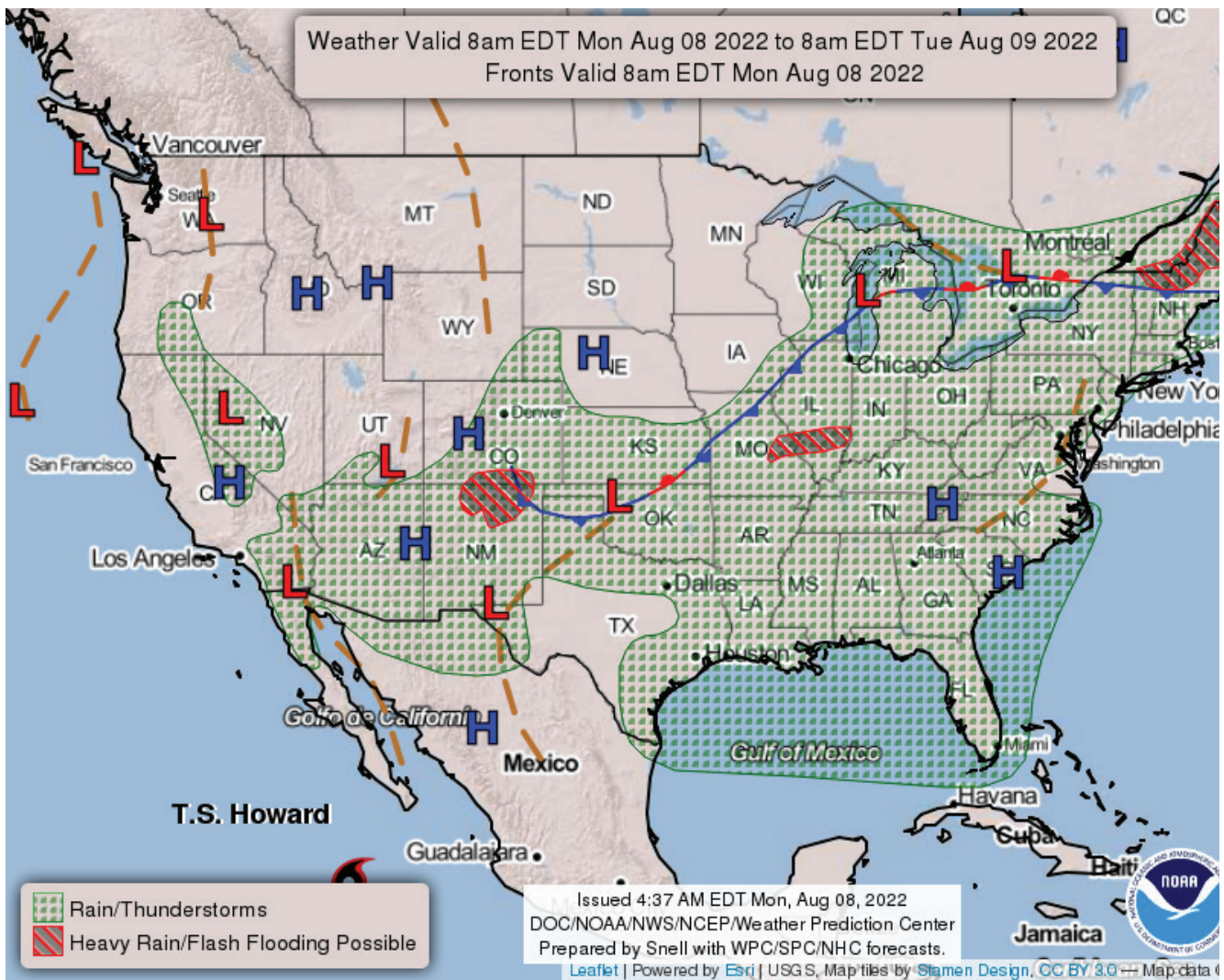
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 68 °F at 5:47 PM
Low Temp: 56 °F at 5:12 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 8:59 AM
Precip: : 0.02

Day length: 14 hours, 28 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 108 in 1936
Record Low: 42 in 1939
Average High: 84°F
Average Low: 58°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 0.58
Precip to date in Aug.: 0.64
Average Precip to date: 14.68
Precip Year to Date: 15.18
Sunset Tonight: 8:52:28 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:24:46 AM



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Today in Weather History

August 8, 2010: Thunderstorms produced damaging winds and flash flooding from heavy rain along and near the Missouri River in southeast South Dakota during the late afternoon. Bon Homme and Yankton Counties were among the hardest hit areas. Avon in Bon Homme County, thunderstorm winds caused widespread damage to trees and power lines. The tree damage included large trees uprooted or blown down, and falling trees destroyed at least two houses. The damage to power lines caused a power outage over the town which lasted about 5 hours. The winds also destroyed a large shed and damaged a camper parked in the shed. In Tyndall, thunderstorm winds of 70 mph caused tree damage, including large trees blown down. The winds also blew down power lines, damaged several small sheds, and tore shingles off roofs. Thunderstorm winds also ripped through Yankton County. Near Napa, winds overturned several campers and caused widespread tree damage, including large trees blown down at a Lewis and Clark Lake campground.

1878 - The temperature at Denver, CO, soars to an all-time record high of 105 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1881 - A cloudburst and flash flood occurred at Central Springs, CO, and Idaho Springs, CO. (David Ludlum)

1882 - An August snowstorm was reported by a ship on Lake Michigan. A thick cloud reportedly burst on the decks covering them with snow and slush six inches deep. Snow showers were observed at shore points that day. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1874: Swarms of Rocky Mountain locust invaded Denver, Colorado. Millions were seen cruising through the air. The insects were picked up by a thunderstorm gust front and carried into the city. The grasshoppers ravaged crops in surrounding counties for the last month.

1983 - The temperature at Big Horn Basin, WY, reached 115 degrees to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorm rains in eastern Nebraska sent the Wahoo River and Ithica River above flood stage. Thunderstorm rains in western Iowa sent the Nishnabotna River over flood stage. Up to seven inches of rain deluged the Council Bluffs area Friday evening and Saturday morning. Thunderstorms produced 4.4 inches of rain in three hours Friday evening, along with golf ball size hail. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a slow moving cold front produced severe weather from central Kansas to southern Wisconsin late in the day. Thunderstorms in Iowa produced hail three inches in diameter at Vinton, and produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Donohue and near Mount Pleasant. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A total of ninety-nine cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Alpena MI with a reading of 40 degrees. Mount Mitchell NC was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 35 degrees. Early evening thunderstorms around Las Vegas NV produced wind gusts to 116 mph. The high winds damaged or destroyed about eighty-two aircraft at Henderson Sky Harbor Airport and McCarran International Airport, causing fourteen million dollars damage. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2007: A tornado bounces across Staten Island and Brooklyn, New York, ripping off roofs and damaging dozens of buildings. The EF-2 twister hop-scotched through Brooklyn's Bay Ridge and Sunset Park neighborhoods around 6:30 am.



Discerning Right Paths

Scripture: Proverbs 22:6, 17-21 (English Standard Version)

⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. ¹⁷ Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge, ¹⁸ for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips. ¹⁹ That your trust may be in the Lord, I have made them known to you today, even to you. ²⁰ Have I not written for you thirty sayings of counsel and knowledge, ²¹ to make you know what is right and true, that you may give a true answer to those who sent you?

Insight By: Jed Ostoich

Proverbs 22 opens a window into the world of King Solomon. Beginning in verse 17, Solomon provides a collection of thirty “sayings of the wise,” which are modeled on the proverbs of an Egyptian sage named Amenemope. A “sage” was the ancient Near Eastern equivalent of a modern philosopher, and Solomon’s work in Proverbs shows he was well aware of his fellow sage’s approach to wisdom. The striking differences in Solomon’s take on Amenemope’s work, however, highlight the crucial role of Israel’s God in wise living. Wisdom on its own isn’t enough, but, as Solomon notes in verse 19, the goal of wisdom is confident trust in God Himself.

Believers in Jesus don’t have a monopoly on wisdom. Like Solomon did with the Egyptian sages, we can find wisdom at work across the globe. But we also know that wisdom ultimately must direct humanity back to the God who created us.

Comment By: Karen Pimpo

No one would have believed sixteen-year-old Brazilian skateboarder Felipe Gustavo would become “one of the most legendary skateboarders on the planet.” Gustavo’s dad believed his son needed to pursue his dream of skating professionally, but they didn’t have the money. So his dad sold their car and took his son to the renowned Tampa Am skating competition in Florida. No one had heard of Gustavo . . . until he won. And the victory catapulted him into an amazing career.

Gustavo’s dad had the capacity to see his son’s heart and passion. “When I become a father,” Gustavo said, “I just want to be like 5 percent of what my dad was for me.”

Proverbs describes the opportunity parents have to help their children discern the unique way God has crafted their heart, energy, and personality—and then to direct and encourage them toward the path that reflects who God made them to be. “Start children off on the way they should go,” the writer said, “and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (22:6).

We may not possess vast resources or profound knowledge. With God’s wisdom (vv. 17–21) and our attentive love, however, we can offer our kids and other children within our sphere of influence an immense gift. We can help them trust in God and discern the paths they can follow for a lifetime (3:5–6).

Reflect and Prayer: Where have you encountered a parent attentive to their child’s heart or energy? How has God revealed His attentive ways to you?

Heavenly Father, as I consider how good parents pay attention to their children, I know You’re the truest parent. Thank You for seeing and guiding me.

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2022-23 Community Events

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

Fragile cease-fire between Israel, Gaza militants holding

By FARES AKRAM and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — A fragile cease-fire deal to end nearly three days of fighting between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza held into Monday morning — a sign the latest round of violence may have abated.

The flare-up was the worst fighting between Israel and Gaza militant groups since Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers fought an 11-day war last year, adding to the destruction and misery that have plagued blockaded Gaza for years.

Since Friday, Israeli aircraft had pummeled targets in Gaza while the Iran-backed Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group fired hundreds of rockets at Israel.

Over three days of fighting, 44 Palestinians were killed, including 15 children and four women, and 311 were wounded, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. Islamic Jihad said 12 of those killed were militants and Israel said some of the dead were killed by misfired rockets.

Israel on Monday said it was partially reopening crossings into Gaza for humanitarian needs and would fully open them if calm is maintained. Gaza's lone power plant came back online Monday after fuel trucks entered a cargo crossing for the first time since the crossings with the strip were closed last week. The closure prompted a fuel shortage that ground the plant to a halt on Saturday. Gaza suffers from a chronic power crisis.

Life for hundreds of thousands of Israelis was disrupted during the violence. Security precautions imposed in recent days on residents of southern Israel were being gradually lifted Monday, the military said.

Both sides boasted of their successes. Speaking to reporters in Tehran on Sunday, Islamic Jihad leader Ziad al-Nakhalah said the militant group remained strong, despite losing two of its leaders. "This is a victory for Islamic Jihad," he said.

Despite that claim, the group undoubtedly sustained a blow during Israel's fierce offensive. Beyond losing the two leaders, it reduced its arsenal by firing hundreds of rockets without striking a single Israeli, thanks to Israel's missile defense system that shot most of them down. Its own rockets may have killed several Gazans, according to Israel.

The cease-fire deal contained a promise that Egypt would work for the release of two senior Islamic Jihad detainees held by Israel, but there were no guarantees this would happen. The weekend fighting was also bound to complicate Islamic Jihad's relations with Hamas.

A senior Israeli diplomatic official said the offensive had taken Islamic Jihad's capabilities back "decades." The flareup was "a successful counterterrorism operation" because Israel achieved its goals in a brief period of time, he said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the operation with the media.

The violence had threatened to spiral into another all-out war but ended up being contained because Gaza's ruling Hamas group stayed on the sidelines, possibly because it fears Israeli reprisals and undoing economic understandings with Israel, including Israeli work permits for thousands of Gaza residents, that bolster its control over the coastal strip.

Israel and Hamas have fought four wars since the group overran the territory in 2007.

Israel launched its operation with a strike Friday on a leader of the Islamic Jihad, saying there were "concrete threats" of an anti-tank missile attack against Israelis in response to the arrest last week of another senior Islamic Jihad member in the West Bank. That arrest came after months of Israeli raids in the West Bank to round up suspects following a spate of Palestinian attacks against Israel.

It killed another Islamic Jihad leader in a strike on Saturday.

Israel said some of the deaths during this round were caused by errant militant rocket fire, including one incident in the Jebaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza in which six Palestinians were killed Saturday.

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On Sunday, a projectile hit a home in the same area of Jebaliya, killing two men. Palestinians held Israel responsible, while Israel said it was investigating whether the area was struck by an errant rocket.

In the occupied West Bank on Monday, Israeli troops demolished the homes of two Palestinians suspected of carrying out a deadly attack against Israelis in the city of Elad in May. The soldiers faced a violent protest during the operation, the military said.

The outburst of violence in Gaza was a key test for Israel's caretaker Prime Minister Yair Lapid, who lacks experience leading military operations. Still, he unleashed the offensive less than three months before a general election in which he is campaigning to keep the job.

President Joe Biden said he welcomed the cease-fire between Israel and Gaza-based militants.

"Over these last 72-hours, the United States has worked with officials from Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Qatar, Jordan, and others throughout the region to encourage a swift resolution to the conflict," he said in a statement Sunday.

The U.N. Security Council was to hold an emergency meeting Monday on the violence. China, which holds the council presidency this month, scheduled the session in response to a request from the United Arab Emirates, which represents Arab nations on the council, as well as China, France, Ireland and Norway.

"We underscore our commitment to do all we can towards ending the ongoing escalation, ensuring the safety and security of the civilian population, and following-up on the Palestinian prisoners file," said U.N. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, in a statement.

The Israeli army said militants in Gaza fired about 1,100 rockets toward Israel, with about 200 of them landing inside the Palestinian enclave. The army said its air defenses had intercepted 380 of them, including two fired toward Jerusalem. The military did not specify what happened to the remainder, but they likely fell in open areas or broke up in the air.

Islamic Jihad has fewer fighters and supporters than Hamas, and little is known about its arsenal. Both groups call for Israel's destruction, but have different priorities, with Hamas constrained by the demands of governing.

Hamas had a strong incentive to avoid another war. Last year's Israel-Hamas war, one of four major conflicts, and several smaller battles over the last 15 years, have exacted a staggering toll on the impoverished territory's 2.3 million Palestinian residents.

Over the past year, Israel and Hamas have reached tacit understandings based on trading calm for work permits and a slight easing of the border blockade, imposed by Israel and Egypt when Hamas overran the territory 15 years ago. Israel has issued 12,000 work permits to Gaza laborers, and has held out the prospect of granting another 2,000 permits.

China extends threatening military exercises around Taiwan

BEIJING (AP) — China said Monday it was extending threatening military exercises surrounding Taiwan that have disrupted shipping and air traffic and substantially raised concerns about the potential for conflict in a region crucial to global trade.

The exercises would include anti-submarine drills, apparently targeting U.S. support for Taiwan in the event of a potential Chinese invasion, according to social media posts from the eastern leadership of China's ruling Communist Party's military arm, the People's Liberation Army.

The military has said the exercises involving missile strikes, warplanes and ship movements crossing the midline of the Taiwan Strait dividing the sides were a response to U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to the self-ruled island last week.

China has ignored calls to calm the tensions, and there was no immediate indication of when it would end what amounts to a blockade.

On Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China would "firmly safeguard China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, resolutely deter the U.S. from containing China with the Taiwan issue and resolutely shatter the Taiwan authorities' illusion of "relying on the U.S. for independence."

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Taiwan's defense ministry said Sunday it detected a total of 66 aircraft and 14 warships conducting the naval and air exercises. The island has responded by putting its military on alert and deploying ships, planes and other assets to monitor Chinese aircraft, ships and drones that are "simulating attacks on the island of Taiwan and our ships at sea."

Meanwhile, Taiwan's official Central News Agency reported that Taiwan's army will conduct live-fire artillery drills in southern Pingtung county on Tuesday and Thursday, in response to the Chinese exercises.

The drills will include snipers, combat vehicles, armored vehicles as well as attack helicopters, said the report, which cited an anonymous source.

China claims Taiwan as its own territory and has threatened to annex it by force if necessary. The two sides split in 1949 after a civil war, but Beijing considers visits to Taiwan by foreign officials as recognizing its sovereignty.

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has called on the international community to "support democratic Taiwan" and "halt any escalation of the regional security situation." The Group of Seven industrialized nations has also criticized China's actions, prompting Beijing to cancel a meeting between Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Japanese counterpart, Yoshimasa Hayashi.

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

The Biden administration and Pelosi say the U.S. remains committed to the "one-China" policy that extends formal diplomatic recognition to Beijing while allowing robust informal relations and defense ties with Taipei.

The U.S., however, criticized Beijing's actions in the Taiwan Strait, with White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre calling them "fundamentally irresponsible."

"There's no need and no reason for this escalation," Jean-Pierre said.

In Washington, Taiwanese de facto ambassador Bi-khim Hsiao said China had no reason to "be so furious" over Pelosi's visit, which follows a long tradition of American lawmakers visiting Taiwan.

"Well, you know, we have been living under the threat from China for decades," Hsiao told CBS News on Sunday. "If you have a kid being bullied at school, you don't say you don't go to school. You try to find a way to deal with the bully.

"The risks are posed by Beijing," Hsiao said.

On a visit to Myanmar, whose Chinese-backed military government has been accused of murdering its opponents, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Washington was "taking the opportunity to build up its military deployment in the region, which deserves high vigilance and resolute boycott from all sides."

"China's firm stance" is aimed at "earnestly safeguarding peace across the Taiwan Strait and regional stability," Wang was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua News Agency.

Meanwhile, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong called for a cooling of tensions. "Australia continues to urge restraint, Australia continues to urge deescalation, and this is not something that solely Australia is calling for, and the whole region is concerned about the current situation, the whole region is calling for stability to be restored," Wong told reporters in Canberra.

China's Hainan beach resort expands COVID-19 lockdowns

BEIJING (AP) — The capital of China's Hainan province has locked down its residents for 13 hours on Monday as a COVID-19 outbreak grows on the tropical island during the summer school holidays.

The temporary lockdown of Haikou city from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. follows an ongoing and indefinite lockdown of the beach resort of Sanya since Saturday that is confining vacationers to their hotels for a week. Four other cities and four counties in Hainan also started lockdowns of two days or more on Sunday and Monday.

More than 470 new cases were recorded in the province on Sunday, of which 245 did not show symptoms. Overall, China reported more than 760 new daily cases, the National Health Commission said Monday.

Some 80,000 tourists have reportedly been stranded by the lockdown in Sanya. Those wanting to depart have to test negative five times over seven days.

China has stuck steadfastly to a "zero-COVID" policy, despite the economic and social costs. It has credited that approach with keeping hospitalization and death rates lower than in other countries that have opened up amid high vaccination rates and more effective treatments.

Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous Chinese city, announced Monday that it would reduce a mandatory hotel quarantine for overseas arrivals to three days from the current one week. The new policy takes effect Friday.

Analysis: Israeli PM's Gaza gamble seems to have paid off

By TIA GOLDENBERG and EMILY ROSE Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel's caretaker prime minister took a gamble with his preemptive strike against Islamic Jihad militants in Gaza, less than three months before he is to compete in general elections to retain his job.

Yair Lapid had counted on Gaza's militant Hamas rulers to stay out of the fight, thus enabling Israel to weaken Hamas' smaller sister group while avoiding a full-blown escalation. At the same time, he may also have gained political ground ahead of the polls.

With a cease-fire between the sides holding on Monday, after three days of violence, the calculation appears to have been accurate.

Hamas remained on the sidelines as Israeli jets pounded targets in Gaza, killing two Islamic Jihad leaders in targeted attacks, and Israel's missile shield intercepted many of the hundreds of rockets fired by Islamic Jihad.

Long-suffering Gaza civilians once again bore the brunt of the violence, with 44 Palestinians killed, among them 15 children and four women. Israel said some were victims of rockets falling short.

The Egyptian-brokered cease-fire, which took effect late Sunday, capped one of the shortest rounds of fighting since Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007. Israel and Hamas fought four wars over the past 15 years, as more than 2 million Gazans endured a suffocating Israeli-Egyptian border blockade.

Since the last war in May 2021, Lapid and his governing partner Naftali Bennett have tried to create more incentives for Hamas to maintain quiet along the Gaza border, with the implied acknowledgement that this would cement the militants' rule.

As part of this strategy, Israel issued permits for 12,000 Gaza workers to enter Israel, with the promise of handing out more if the situation remains calm. Qatar and Egypt have also been engaged in rebuilding Gaza, with Israel's support.

On Monday morning, Israel partially reopened Gaza crossings that had been closed during the fighting, signaling a quick return to the understandings that were in place before the fighting.

Some said Lapid scored political points at home with the short military campaign.

"Lapid is in a much stronger position than he was before because the main claim against him is he is not experienced enough," said Gayil Talshir, a political analyst from Jerusalem's Hebrew University. "He might also be able to claim that he's trying to achieve a change of paradigm" underpinning Israel's Gaza policy.

Going into the Gaza offensive, the centrist Lapid, a former TV host and author, lacked the security credentials that Israelis often seek in their leaders. It was seen as a glaring weakness as he faces off against former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who portrays himself as a security hawk, in November elections.

By Monday morning, Lapid appeared to have burnished his security prowess for beating back what he said was an imminent threat from the Palestinian militant group.

"It's crucial to his campaign," said Tal Schneider, a veteran Israeli political correspondent. "It's helpful when you have more of a military activity experience when you go into election."

The events of the past few days also underscored Hamas' shifting priorities, as it focuses on governing and staying in power.

"Hamas doesn't want a war every other day. If it joined publicly, this means destruction of buildings, infrastructure, and the Egyptians played an influential role in preventing Hamas from joining the battle," said Mkhaimar Abusada, a political science professor at Gaza's al-Azhar University.

The Israeli work permits are a lifeline for Gaza's economy, battered by widespread destruction from

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Israeli strikes over the years and crippling movement restrictions.

The permits are “definitely very important to Hamas as it governs Gaza and has governing responsibilities,” said Hossam al-Dajani, political scientist at the Islamic University of Gaza.

Lapid, meanwhile, has signaled other policy shifts.

Throughout the fighting, Lapid has refrained from mentioning Hamas, diverging from Netanyahu, who held Hamas responsible for any fire emanating from Gaza.

At the same time, the outgoing Lapid-Bennett government struck back at any and all fire from Gaza, including incendiary balloons. And Lapid appears to have gone further than self-styled security buff Netanyahu whose strategy largely involved striking Gaza in response to rocket attacks. Lapid chose a preemptive strike in the most recent round, citing concrete threats by Islamic Jihad.

“This government has a zero tolerance policy for any attempted attacks - of any kind - from Gaza towards Israeli territory,” Lapid said at the onset of the operation Friday.

Lapid was the architect of the outgoing coalition government — an alliance of eight diverse parties spanning the Israeli political spectrum that was bonded largely by their shared antipathy toward Netanyahu.

The coalition, which for the first time in Israeli history also included an Arab party, ended the 12-year reign of Netanyahu, who was Israel’s longest-serving prime minister. His Yesh Atid party is expected to be the second-largest in parliament in the November elections and he could get a chance at forming a government.

Unlike Netanyahu, who served in an elite unit in Israel’s compulsory military in the late 1960s, Lapid was a soldier-journalist at a weekly magazine published by Israel’s military. As prime minister, Netanyahu guided Israel through three wars with Gaza, stepped up a campaign to strike enemy targets in Syria and rattled sabers with Iran over its nuclear program.

Lapid came to prominence promising to address standard of living issues and became a hero for the mainstream, secular middle class, wooed by his telegenic mien and his pledges to stretch their shekels. They cared little about his less-than-heroic military service.

But Lapid has been unable to break through into other constituencies in part because he has little of a security background. In his stints in government, he has served as finance and foreign minister, gaining valuable skills in politics, governance and diplomacy but failing to gain security experience.

In the weeks following the offensive, Netanyahu will likely seek to tear down what is seen in Israel as a military achievement. But after having dragged Israel into three, far costlier wars in Gaza, and being unable to stamp out rocket fire from Gaza throughout his decade-plus in power, Netanyahu might not succeed.

“Lapid will be able to claim that the policy he led together with Bennett was more effective than that of the man who is trying to replace him in the prime minister’s office,” Anshel Pfeffer, a columnist, wrote in the Haaretz daily.

As summer wanes, water crisis looms for east Ukrainian city

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

SLOVIANSK, Ukraine (AP) — The echo of artillery shells thundering in the distance mingles with the din of people gathered around Sloviansk’s public water pumps, piercing the uneasy quiet that smothers the nearly deserted streets of this eastern Ukrainian city.

The members of Sloviansk’s dwindling population only emerge — a few minutes at a time — to fill up at the pumps that have been the city’s only water source for more than two months. Fighting between Ukrainian and Russian forces near the key city in the Donetsk region has damaged vital infrastructure that has cut residents off from gas and water for months.

The water flows for now, but fears grow that come winter the city only seven miles (12 kilometers) from Russian-occupied territory could face a humanitarian crisis once the pipes begin to freeze over.

“The water infrastructure was destroyed by the constant battles,” said Lyubov Mahlii, a 76-year-old widow who gathers 20 liters (around five gallons) of water twice a day from a public tank near her apartment, dragging the plastic bottles up four flights of stairs on her own.

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"When there are bombings and sirens, we keep carrying it," she said on Sunday. "It's a great risk for us, but what can we do?"

Only a fifth of the city's pre-invasion population of 100,000 remains. With heavy fighting raging only miles away as Russian forces continue their push on Donetsk — part of the industrial Donbas region where Moscow-backed separatists have been battling Ukrainian troops since 2014 — residents defy the shelling to make do with the only water source left. And local officials believe things will only get worse once the cold sets in.

Locals fill their bottles with hand pumps or from plastic tanks at one of five public wells before hauling them home in bicycle baskets, wheeled carts and even children's strollers.

Speaking from her tidy kitchen after one such trip, Mahlii said she boils some water for at least 15 minutes to make sure it's safe for consumption. The remainder is used for bathing, washing clothes and dishes, watering plants and taking care of a stray dog named Chapa.

Following the death of her husband, Nikolai, from diabetes four years ago, Mahlii shares her Soviet government-provided apartment with two bright yellow canaries and an assortment of houseplants.

Water she had gathered filled the plastic tubs and buckets stacked on every flat surface in her small bathroom, while empty plastic bottles lined the walls in her hallway. A meat and vegetable soup was cooking on an electric burner for lunch.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy issued a mandatory evacuation order to all residents of the Donetsk region at the end of July, saying remaining would cost lives. But despite that and the terror that accompanies the shriek of falling rockets near the city, with no money to relocate and nowhere to go, Mahlii plans to stay in Sloviansk — no matter what.

"I don't want to leave my apartment because someone else might occupy it," she said. "I don't want to leave. I will die here."

Another Sloviansk resident, Ninel Kyslovska, 75, gathered water from a tank at a park on Sunday for marinating cucumbers in the sun that afternoon. She said the scarcity had upended all aspects of her life.

"Without water, you won't get anywhere. I have to carry 60, 80, 100 liters of water a day and it's still not enough," she said. "Bread and water are sacred and they just took it from people. Such actions must be punished, maybe not by us, but hopefully by God's judgment."

Filling her bottles, Kyslovska said she sometimes avoids bathing to save herself a trip to the park, and often washes her clothing in a nearby lake.

She blamed the local government for the lack of running water, complaining that nearby Kramatorsk — just six miles (10 kilometers) to the south — still had water flowing from its taps.

But Oleksandr Goncharenko, the head of Kramatorsk's military administration, said even that comparative luxury was threatened by winter, when the temperature drops to -20 C (-4 F).

"All these wells and pumps will freeze," Goncharenko said, adding that places like Sloviansk and Kramatorsk — which also has no gas — had become "hostages of destroyed infrastructure."

Goncharenko said Kramatorsk would drain municipal pipes that run into unheated structures to prevent them from freezing and bursting, and that he was "99% certain" that gas wouldn't be restored before winter. Electricity cuts and the lack of heating could also see the fire risk soar as people try to heat and light their homes by other means, he added.

Ukrainian officials are still trying to convince the Donetsk region's remaining residents to evacuate as the war's front line threatens to move westward and the inhospitable winter looms.

Officials in Kramatorsk plan to build more public wells to supply the remaining population, but Goncharenko warned the water quality couldn't be guaranteed. Such water would likely be sourced from deep underground, he said, which would be too high in calcium and unfit for drinking.

Mahlii hasn't made plans for what she'll do once cold weather arrives, but after 47 years in her Sloviansk apartment, she will face whatever comes from her home.

"We are surviving!" she said. "We are surviving by any means."

Men face sentencing for hate crimes in Ahmaud Arbery's death

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — Months after they were sentenced to life in prison for murder, the three white men who chased and killed Ahmaud Arbery in a Georgia neighborhood faced a second round of criminal penalties Monday for federal hate crimes committed in the deadly pursuit of the 25-year-old Black man.

U.S. District Court Judge Lisa Godbey Wood scheduled back-to-back hearings to individually sentence each of the defendants, starting with Travis McMichael, who blasted Arbery with a shotgun after the street chase initiated by his father and joined by a neighbor.

Arbery's killing on Feb. 23, 2020, became part of a larger national reckoning over racial injustice and killings of unarmed Black people including George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Kentucky. Those two cases also resulted in the Justice Department bringing federal charges.

When they return to court Monday in Georgia, McMichael, his father Greg McMichael and neighbor William "Roddie" Bryan face possible life sentences after a jury convicted them in February of federal hate crimes, concluding that they violated Arbery's civil rights and targeted him because of his race. All three men were also found guilty of attempted kidnapping, and the McMichaels face additional penalties for using firearms to commit a violent crime.

Whatever punishments they receive in federal court could ultimately prove more symbolic than anything. A state Superior Court judge imposed life sentences for all three men in January for Arbery's murder, with both McMichaels denied any chance of parole.

All three defendants have remained jailed in coastal Glynn County, in the custody of U.S. marshals, while awaiting sentencing after their federal convictions in January.

Because they were first charged and convicted of murder in a state court, protocol would have them turned over to the Georgia Department of Corrections to serve their life terms in a state prison.

In a court filings last week, both Travis and Greg McMichael asked the judge to instead divert them to a federal prison, saying they won't be safe in a Georgia prison system that's the subject of a U.S. Justice Department investigation focused on violence between inmates.

Arbery's family has insisted the McMichaels and Bryan should serve their sentences in a state prison, arguing a federal penitentiary wouldn't be as tough. His parents objected forcefully before the federal trial when both McMichaels sought a plea deal that would have included a request to transfer them to federal prison. The judge ended up rejecting the plea agreement.

A federal judge doesn't have the authority to order the state to relinquish its lawful custody of inmates to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, said Ed Tarver, an Augusta lawyer and former U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Georgia. He said the judge could request that the state corrections agency turn the defendants over to a federal prison.

The McMichaels armed themselves with guns and jumped in a truck to chase Arbery after spotting him running past their home outside the port city of Brunswick on Feb. 23, 2020. Bryan joined the pursuit in his own truck, helping cut off Arbery's escape. He also recorded cellphone video of Travis McMichael shooting Arbery at close range as Arbery threw punches and grabbed at the shotgun.

The McMichaels told police they suspected Arbery had been stealing from a nearby house under construction. But authorities later concluded he was unarmed and had committed no crimes. Arbery's family has long insisted he was merely out jogging.

Still, more than two months passed before any charges were filed in Arbery's death. The McMichaels and Bryan were arrested only after the graphic video of the shooting leaked online and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation took over the case from local police.

During the February hate crimes trial, prosecutors fortified their case that Arbery's killing was motivated by racism by showing the jury roughly two dozen text messages and social media posts in which Travis McMichael and Bryan used racist slurs and made disparaging comments about Black people. A woman testified to hearing an angry rant from Greg McMichael in 2015 in which he said: "All those Blacks are nothing but trouble."

Defense attorneys for the three men argued the McMichaels and Bryan didn't pursue Arbery because of his race but acted on an earnest — though erroneous — suspicion that Arbery had committed crimes in their neighborhood.

Former coal town comes together in face of Kentucky floods

By ALLEN G. BREED AP National Writer

FLEMING-NEON, Ky. (AP) — Barely a week after floodwaters swept downtown and left a foot of mud and twisted, gutted buildings along Main Street, an incongruous sight appeared: A flashing sign declaring JR's Barber Shop "OPEN."

As National Guard troops patrolled outside and volunteers on backhoes mounded up debris, J.R. Collins stood behind his barber chair, giving a touchup to one of his regulars. Like most in Fleming-Neon, Collins comes from a family built on mining — both his grandfathers worked in coal — and he has stayed in the close-knit town even as the industry shrank and others fled. Those who remain are determined to prove their community is about more than coal.

And they've come together to make sure Collins' barber shop and other businesses reopen amid the devastating floods that have killed more than three dozen in eastern Kentucky.

"They were there with shovels and squeegees and water, and people packing, and kids helping," Collins said above the din of air conditioning and a dehumidifier in his shop. "It's good, hard-working people that like to help people out and got each other's back."

Fleming-Neon was once two towns: Fleming, a company town founded in the early 1900s by the Elkhorn Coal Corp. for the sole purpose of mining, and Neon, a former logging camp.

Fleming was run by Elkhorn and named for one of its executives. The company issued its own money, and workers used it for rent on company-owned homes and goods at the company store or local businesses. Neon was independent, a free town where U.S. government greenbacks, not company scrip, was legal tender — but it thrived off the glow of coal nearby.

Fleming and Neon prospered along with the company and industry. Dates still seen today on brick storefronts chronicle the boom years.

"We had department stores, we had grocery stores, we had restaurants, we had dry cleaners. We had a theater," said Susan Polis, Fleming-Neon's 73-year-old mayor. "You did not have to leave here to have, to get anything."

But as the mines mechanized, the population shrank in Fleming as well as Neon. In the late 1970s, the former rival towns merged under one government in an effort to pool resources, but the bleeding continued.

Today, only about 500 people remain. And on July 28, the waters of Wright Fork rose, threatening further devastation for this valley of people who long extracted riches from the earth. But there's a spark in Fleming-Neon that, so far, has refused to be extinguished.

A multipurpose center was set to open in a former car dealership about two weeks after the storm hit. Jeff Hawkins, a longtime educator who's lived here since he was a teenager, said the project, dubbed Neon Lights, would include a performing arts studio, an internet cafe, event space, and an innovation incubator.

"We wanted a space for kids to be able to do physical activity, to dance, to sing, whatever it may be," he said. "Upstairs, we would put a robotics lab and a computer coding lab."

That dream is not dead, just deferred. For now, the cleaned-up space serves as an emergency supply distribution center.

The rains came again this past weekend, prompting a brief evacuation Friday evening. But while some dreaded it, Emory Lee Mullins chose to see it as a blessing.

"It's washing it off pretty good," Mullins said, using a push broom to sweep the last of the creek silt into the gutter outside his flower shop. "Every little sweep gets it, don't it?"

Five feet of water had all but gutted the Letcher Flower Shop, which Mullins bought 25 years ago. But as the rain fell, he ripped out sodden walls, confident he will reopen in a couple of weeks.

"Because flowers makes people feel good," he said. "They're going to need flowers."

It's been hard to break coal's grip on these mountains, said Hawkins, describing a corporate strategy to "make as much money as you can and move on."

"For decades, money left here and was not reinvested here," he said. "And that's what we've been left with."

But Fleming-Neon has also been left with a toughness. And for every story of tragedy, Hawkins said, there are six more of goodness and grace.

"The folks here, they persevere. They are resilient. They have grit," he said.

The volunteers who've come from other states see that spirit, too. Ken Cagle, of North Carolina, said it makes him consider retiring here: "It's just unbelievable, the people here, how they just want to help other people."

And Hawkins intends to stay among them in these hills. He sees the flooding disaster as an opportunity to reinvent Fleming-Neon and eastern Kentucky.

"How do we reimagine what we can be?" he said. "And in a way that we're not just surviving, but we're moving to a point of thriving."

'We're triaging': Cops combat violent crime as ranks dwindle

By GILLIAN FLACCUS, CLAUDIA LAUER and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Five years after Brian Spaulding's parents found him fatally shot in the home he shared with roommates, his slaying remains a mystery that seems increasingly unlikely to be solved as Portland, Oregon, police confront a spike in killings and more than 100 officer vacancies.

The detective assigned to investigate the death of Spaulding — a chiropractic assistant who didn't do drugs, wasn't in a gang and lived close to the house where he was born — left in 2020 in a wave of retirements and the detective assigned to it now is swamped with fresh cases after Portland's homicide rate surged 207% since 2019.

"To us, it's not a cold case," said George Spaulding, who has his son's signature tattooed on his arm. "We're not dissatisfied with the Police Bureau because I think they're doing the best they can," he said. "They are just overwhelmed. It's insane."

From Philadelphia to Portland to Los Angeles, killings and gun violence are rising at the same time officers worn out by the pandemic and disillusioned over the calls to divest from policing that followed George Floyd's murder are quitting or retiring faster than they can be replaced.

Departments are scrambling to recruit in a tight labor market and also rethinking what services they can provide and what role police should play in their communities. Many have shifted veteran officers to patrol, breaking up specialized teams built over decades in order to keep up with 911 calls.

"We're getting more calls for service and there are fewer people to answer them," said Philadelphia Police spokesperson Eric Gripp, whose department has been rotating employees from specialty units for short assignments to increase patrols. "This isn't just an issue in Philadelphia. Departments all over are down and recruitment has been difficult."

Los Angeles, which is down more than 650 officers from its pre-pandemic staffing level, shuttered its animal cruelty unit and downsized its human trafficking, narcotics and gun details and reduced its homeless outreach teams by 80%. Seattle recently announced \$2 million in hiring bonuses and benefits to lure recruits amid a critical officer shortage that has hampered the investigation of serious crimes.

The pinch has led some cities to experiment to reduce strain on patrol officers.

Portland recently added unarmed "public support specialists" to take reports on things like vehicle break-ins and bike thefts, and in San Diego, licensed psychiatric clinicians go to mental health calls with officers.

"For me, I wonder, what the profession is going to be 20 years from now if we're having these challenges on a nationwide scale. Are we going to be able to recruit enough people to serve our cities?" asked Portland Police Chief Chuck Lovell, whose force has lost 237 sworn officers through retirements or resignations since 2020.

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Portland logged a record 89 homicides last year — roughly three times its historical average — and is on pace to top that this year after already tallying more than 50. A report completed for the city last month by the California Partnership for Safe Communities found it had the largest homicide rate increase among similarly sized cities and 75% of homicides in 2020 were by gun. The city has seen nearly 800 shootings this year.

That follows a national trend. While non-violent crime decreased during the pandemic, the murder rate increased nearly 30% in 2020 and the rate of assaults went up 10%, according to the Brennan Center for Justice.

It's unclear what's driving the surge, but COVID-19 created huge social disruption and upended government and community support systems. Gun sales also spiked during the pandemic.

Experts say widely cited theories that violent crime is worse in places that changed policing tactics in the wake of protests over Floyd's murder don't bear out. Violent crime has increased in red and blue communities alike, regardless of their approach.

"The problem is you see cities where they didn't do any of those things where crime also went up and you'll see rural areas where crime also went up as well," said Ben Struhl, executive director of the Crime and Justice Policy Lab at the University of Pennsylvania.

"There's a lot of evidence that something bigger is going on than the social justice protests that happened, and it's probably more than one thing," said Struhl, whose center has worked with Baltimore, Philadelphia and Oakland to reduce gun violence.

In Portland, gun violence once largely limited to historically marginalized neighborhoods has spread to the downtown core and more affluent areas. Last month, an Uber driver was seriously wounded and his passenger killed in an unsolved shooting.

Jeremiah King, who is transitioning out of homelessness, was shot while trying to protect a friend who was being attacked just a short walk from the city's business district.

"He turned around and pulled a pistol out and I didn't see it. I didn't feel anything at first but 10 seconds later I could hardly breathe," King said as he sat on street after three nights in the hospital. "I thought I was going to pass away."

After King's shooting, three more people were injured and two killed by gunfire in the same area over a four-day span.

To address the violence, Portland's police chief broke up specialized units to bolster patrol numbers and moved detectives from assault, cold case and gun violence units to create a third eight-person homicide squad. That effectively stopped investigations into about 300 unsolved slayings going back decades, although Lovell says those investigations will resume when staffing levels return.

Still, Brian Spaulding's parents now must consider the possibility that one day no one will be assigned to his case. Their son, who would be 41 now, was a free spirit whose interests ranged from jiu jitsu to home-brewed beer to heavy metal — although he also was a sustaining member of the local classical radio station.

Brian's mother sees a twisted silver lining in the violence on Portland's streets.

"I keep thinking that with all of the gun violence that's going on, they might be able to get a gun that matches the gun that killed Brian," said Carolyn Spaulding, as she clutched a teddy bear made of scraps from his high school graduation quilt.

That gun violence has also spread outside Portland, to the suburban city of Gresham, Oregon.

Gresham Police Chief Travis Gullberg has seen 16 officers leave in his 10 months on the job and all of his detectives are handling homicide investigations as gun violence soars.

Conversations around police reform are "important work and it's an opportunity for us to better serve our community ... but that said, as you transition to any of those new programs — which takes a while sometimes — you still have to be providing the basic services," Gullberg said.

For now, eight officers patrol a city of 115,000 people on a typical evening shift and must constantly make decisions about how to deploy limited resources.

On a recent night, police Sgt. Travis Garrison spotted a car with no plates driving erratically. The driver

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appeared high, probably on methamphetamine, and the passenger was almost comatose, with bloody track marks on his arm.

The driver had a suspended license, but the vehicle wasn't stolen and no one had an outstanding warrant. Garrison warned the driver to leave the car and find a ride home, and then headed to his next call. It would have taken hours to complete the testing necessary to prove the driver's meth use, Garrison said, and with officers depleted, the traffic stop wasn't a priority.

"Right now, because of the the spike in violent crime, we're only able to investigate murders," child abuse and sex crimes, he said. "We're triaging."

But what law enforcement says is a staffing crisis could actually be a case of misdirected resources, said Christy Lopez, co-director of Georgetown Law School's Center for Innovations in Community Safety.

And in some departments, police have sworn in new recruits this year, although the numbers aren't keeping up with attrition, they say.

"You really can't take it at face value when a department says you need more police officers. You need to look at a staffing audit: 'What are your police officers doing? What are they unable to do?' It might mean that you actually need another Boys and Girls Club, not more officers," she said.

Understaffed departments sometimes shift detectives to patrol because of political pressure, but research shows solving violent crime depresses crime rates more effectively than putting rank-and-file officers on the street, Lopez said.

"There may be some places where we need more police, but I'm fairly convinced from the evidence that I've seen over the decades that that can't be the answer everywhere."

Some have celebrated the downsizing, including homeless advocates in Los Angeles, where four out of five homeless outreach teams were disbanded.

"Police should be nowhere around outreach. You can't be the provider of services as well as the jailer," said Pete White, the founder and executive director of the Los Angeles Community Action Network. "My hope ... is that those resources that go to the police department are actually pointed towards real solutions."

Still many others are fed up with perceived lack of action by police.

In Philadelphia, where the department is down 550 officers from pre-pandemic staffing and another 860 are on medical leave or restricted duty, City Councilwoman Maria Quiñones-Sánchez said there are more than 30,000 complaints about abandoned cars awaiting police action. One of the worst areas is in her district where the cars block sidewalks and make the narrower streets impassable.

Officers normally assigned to a unit dealing with neighborhood issues have been shifted to the city center and violent hot spots around Philadelphia, where the homicide rate reached a record high last year.

The abandoned cars bring "trash in the areas, then you know other crimes, quality of life issues, drug dealing, shootings, killings," said Kimberly Washington, executive director of the Frankford Community Development Corporation. "This starts to look like the place where this can all go down because no one cares."

Royal Harris knows what that's like.

Growing up in Portland's gang territory in the 1990s, his brother, two first cousins, two second cousins and numerous friends were shot to death — and many of those cases remain unsolved.

Harris supports the temporary shut-down of the city's cold case unit if it means police can close fresh cases, even though it takes resources from solving his own loved ones' slayings.

"Under the current climate, somebody's going to feel cheated and we have to be honest with that. The question is, who do we cheat?" he said. "These hard decisions (have) to be made to stop this."

Not so fast: California's last nuke plant might run longer

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — An aggressive push toward renewable energy has run headlong into anxiety over keeping the lights on in California, where the largest utility is considering whether to try to extend the lifespan of the state's last operating nuclear power plant.

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California is the birthplace of the modern environmental movement that for decades has had a fraught relationship with nuclear power, which doesn't produce carbon pollution like fossil fuels but leaves behind waste that can remain dangerously radioactive for centuries.

Now environmentalists find themselves at odds with someone they usually see as an ally: Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, a green energy advocate who supported the 2016 agreement calling for the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant to close by 2025 but now is a leading voice to consider a longer operating run.

Newsom often is mentioned as a possible presidential candidate and an attorney for a consumer advocacy group that routinely challenges plant operator Pacific Gas & Electric in rate cases believes "national political ambitions" are at play.

The push to keep Diablo Canyon running "is clearly coming from the governor's office," said Matthew Freedman of The Utility Reform Network. Newsom "is mindful that problems with electric system reliability can become a political liability and he is determined to take all possible actions to avoid any possibility that the lights go out in California."

Newsom certainly wants to avoid a repeat of August 2020, when a record heat wave caused a surge in power use for air conditioning that overtaxed the electrical grid. There were two consecutive nights of rolling blackouts affecting hundreds of thousands of residential and business customers.

In a statement, Newsom communications director Erin Mellon didn't address the question of politics but said the governor is focused on maintaining reliable energy for households and businesses while accelerating state efforts to meet his aggressive goals for reducing carbon pollution. He continues to support shuttering Diablo Canyon "in the long term."

The debate over the plant comes as the long-struggling nuclear industry sees climate change as a reason for optimism. President Joe Biden has embraced nuclear power generation as part of his strategy to halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared to 2005 levels.

Nuclear power provides roughly one-fifth of the electricity in the country, though generation produced by the industry has dropped since 2010. Saving a plant in green energy-friendly California would carry symbolic weight but the window to make an abrupt turnaround appears narrow.

PG&E CEO Patricia "Patti" Poppe told investors in a call last month that state legislation would have to be enacted by September to open the way for PG&E to reverse course. She said the utility faced "a real sense of urgency" because other steps would be required to keep the plant running, including ordering more reactor fuel and storage casks for housing spent fuel that remains highly radioactive.

Extending the plant's operating life "is not an easy option," Poppe said. "The permitting and relicensing of the facility is complex and so there's a lot of hurdles to be overcome."

The plant on the coast midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco produces 9% of the electricity for California's nearly 40 million residents. The state earlier set aside up to \$75 million to extend operation of older power plants scheduled to close, but it's not yet clear whether taxpayers might be covering part of the bill — and, if so, how much — to keep Diablo running.

The Newsom administration has been pushing to expand clean energy, as the state aims to cut emissions by 40% below 1990 levels by 2030. California installed more clean energy capacity in 2021 than in any other year in state history, administration officials say, but they warn reliability remains in question as temperatures rise amid climate change.

For Diablo Canyon, the issue is whether the Newsom administration, in concert with investor-owned PG&E, can find a way to unspool the 2016 closure agreement agreed to by environmentalists, plant worker unions and the utility. The decision to close the plant also was endorsed by California utility regulators, the Legislature and then-Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown.

Plant workers now support keeping the reactors open for an extended run while anti-nuclear activists and environmentalists have rejoined a battle they thought was settled six years ago.

"It only makes sense keeping Diablo open," said Marc D. Joseph, an attorney for the Coalition of California Utility Employees, which represents plant workers. "There is no one involved who wants to see carbon emissions in California go up."

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Critics question if it's feasible — or even legal — for the utility to break the agreement.

"I don't know how to unwind it, and I don't think it should be unwound," said Ralph Cavanagh of the Natural Resources Defense Council, one of the groups that negotiated and signed the pact.

Friends of the Earth, another signatory of the deal, would oppose any effort to extend the reactors' operating span. "None of the conditions have changed to pull back on that agreement," said the group's president, Erich Pica.

There's also concern about the aging plant's safety. Construction at Diablo Canyon began in the 1960s and critics say potential shaking from nearby earthquake faults not recognized when the design was first approved — one nearby fault was not discovered until 2008 — could damage equipment and release radiation.

Lifting the agreement would place "huge numbers of people at great, great risk. That's what's at stake here," said Daniel Hirsch, retired director of the program on environmental and nuclear policy at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and a longtime critic of nuclear plant safety.

PG&E, which has long said the plant is seismically safe, hasn't said much about whether it will push to extend operations beyond 2025. It is assessing that possibility while continuing to plan for closing and dismantling the plant "unless those actions are superseded by new state policies," PG&E spokesperson Suzanne Hosn said in a statement.

PG&E is considering applying for a share of \$6 billion in federal funding the Biden administration established to rescue nuclear plants at risk of closing. The utility announced the move after Newsom suggested a longer operating run would help the state deal with potential future electricity shortages.

The Energy Department recently recast rules at the request of the Newsom administration that could open the way for an application from Diablo Canyon. But some environmentalists question if those changes conflict with the federal law that provided the funds.

As part of the closure deal, the state granted PG&E a short-term lease for submerged ocean water intake and discharge structures through 2025, which also would have to be extended to keep the plant operating.

Factors cited in the lease agreement echo language in the closing pact, including that the utility would not seek an extended operating license and PG&E was expected to use that period through 2025 to develop a portfolio of greenhouse gas-free renewables and efficiencies to replace Diablo Canyon's power.

PG&E said in a statement it has met its replacement power requirements to date.

PG&E's decision to close Diablo Canyon came at a time of rapid change in the energy landscape.

With heavily Democratic California prioritizing renewables to meet future power demand, the utility predicted there would be reduced need for power from large plants like Diablo Canyon after 2025. There was even the risk of too much power generation.

Rather than too much power, state officials have warned of possible electricity shortages this summer as a warming climate creates more demand for power, wildfires sometimes incinerate power lines and a long-running drought has reduced hydropower. An emerging tariff dispute — involving products assembled in Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia using parts and components from China — has delayed solar and storage projects, administration officials say.

But environmentalists argue that a nuclear plant — generating large amounts of power continuously — is not a solution to fill occasional gaps, such as when solar dips after the sun sets.

Reliable electricity "is not a 24/7 problem," said Cavanagh, of the NRDC. "The last thing you want to solve a problem like that is a giant machine that has to operate 24/7 in order to be economic."

Cease-fire between Palestinians, Israel takes effect in Gaza

By FARES AKRAM and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — A cease-fire between Israel and Palestinian militants took effect late Sunday in a bid to end nearly three days of violence that killed dozens of Palestinians and disrupted the lives of hundreds of thousands of Israelis.

The flare-up was the worst fighting between Israel and Gaza militant groups since Israel and Hamas

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fought an 11-day war last year, and adds to the destruction and misery that have plagued blockaded Gaza for years.

The Egyptian-brokered cease-fire took effect at 11:30 p.m. (2030 GMT; 4:30 p.m. EDT). Israeli strikes and militant rockets continued in the minutes leading up to the beginning of the truce, and Israel said it would "respond strongly" if the cease-fire was violated.

Israeli aircraft had pummeled targets in Gaza since Friday, while the Iran-backed Palestinian Jihad militant group fired hundreds of rockets at Israel in response.

Forty-three Palestinians were killed over three days, including 15 children and four women, and 311 were injured, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. Israel said some of the dead were killed by misfired rockets.

Gaza's ruling Hamas group remained on the sidelines, possibly because it fears Israeli reprisals and undoing economic understandings with Israel, including Israeli work permits for thousands of Gaza residents, that bolster its control.

Israel launched its operation with a strike Friday on a leader of the Islamic Jihad, and followed up on Saturday with another targeted strike on a second prominent leader.

The second Islamic Jihad commander, Khaled Mansour, was killed in an airstrike on an apartment building in the Rafah refugee camp in southern Gaza late Saturday, which also killed two other militants and five civilians.

Mansour, the Islamic Jihad commander for southern Gaza, was in the apartment of a member of the group when the missile struck, flattening the three-story building and badly damaging nearby houses.

"Suddenly, without warning, the house next to us was bombed and everything became black and dusty with smoke in the blink of an eye," said Wissam Jouda, who lives next to the targeted building.

Ahmed al-Qaissi, another neighbor, said his wife and son were among the wounded, suffering shrapnel injuries. To make way for rescue workers, al-Qaissi agreed to have part of his house demolished.

During the funeral for Mansour, Israeli air strikes hit what the military said were suspected rocket launch posts. Smoke could be seen from the strikes as thumps from their explosions rattled Gaza. Israeli airstrikes and rocket fire followed for hours as sirens wailed in central Israel. As the sunset call to prayer sounded in Gaza, sirens wailed as far north as Tel Aviv.

Israel said some of the deaths during this round were caused by errant rocket fire, including one incident in the Jebaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza in which six Palestinians were killed Saturday. On Sunday, a projectile hit a home in the same area of Jebaliya, killing two men. Palestinians held Israel responsible, while Israel said it was investigating whether the area was struck by an errant rocket.

Israel's Defense Ministry said mortars fired from Gaza hit the Erez border crossing into Israel, used by thousands of Gazans daily. The mortars damaged the roof and shrapnel hit the hall's entrance, the ministry said. The crossing has been closed amid the fighting.

The Rafah strike was the deadliest so far in the current round of fighting, which was initiated by Israel on Friday with the targeted killing of Islamic Jihad's commander for northern Gaza.

Israel said it took action against the militant group because of concrete threats of an imminent attack, but has not provided details. Caretaker Prime Minister Yair Lapid, who is an experienced diplomat but untested in overseeing a war, unleashed the offensive less than three months before a general election in which he is campaigning to keep the job.

In a statement Sunday, Lapid said the military would continue to strike targets in Gaza "in a pinpoint and responsible way in order to reduce to a minimum the harm to noncombatants." Lapid said the strike that killed Mansour was "an extraordinary achievement."

"The operation will continue as long as necessary," Lapid said.

U.S. President Joe Biden said he welcomed the cease-fire between Israel and Gaza-based militants.

"Over these last 72-hours, the United States has worked with officials from Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Qatar, Jordan, and others throughout the region to encourage a swift resolution to the conflict," he said in a statement.

The U.N. Security Council scheduled an emergency meeting for Monday on the violence. China, which holds the council presidency this month, scheduled the session in response to a request from the United

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Arab Emirates, which represents Arab nations on the council, as well as China, France, Ireland and Norway.

"We underscore our commitment to do all we can towards ending the ongoing escalation, ensuring the safety and security of the civilian population, and following-up on the Palestinian prisoners file," said U.N. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, in a statement.

The Israeli army said militants in Gaza fired about 580 rockets toward Israel. The army said its air defenses had intercepted many of them, with two of those shot down being fired toward Jerusalem. Islamic Jihad has fewer fighters and supporters than Hamas.

Israel estimates its airstrikes killed about 15 militants.

Islamic Jihad has fewer fighters and supporters than Hamas, and little is known about its arsenal. Both groups call for Israel's destruction, but have different priorities, with Hamas constrained by the demands of governing.

Hamas had a strong incentive to avoid another war. Last year's Israel-Hamas war, one of four major conflicts and several smaller battles over the last 15 years, exacted a staggering toll on the impoverished territory's 2.3 million Palestinian residents.

Over the past year, Israel and Hamas have reached tacit understandings based on trading calm for work permits and a slight easing of the border blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt when Hamas overran the territory 15 years ago. Israel has issued 12,000 work permits to Gaza laborers, and has held out the prospect of granting another 2,000 permits.

In a sign of the broad immediate impact on the Gaza population, the territory's lone power plant ground to a halt at noon Saturday due to lack of fuel. Israel has kept its crossing points into Gaza closed since Tuesday. With the new disruption, Gazans could use only four hours of electricity a day, increasing their reliance on private generators and deepening the territory's chronic power crisis amid peak summer heat.

Jerusalem is typically a flashpoint during periods of cross-border fighting between Israel and Gaza. On Sunday, hundreds of Jews, including firebrand ultra-nationalist lawmaker Itamar Ben Gvir, visited a sensitive holy site in Jerusalem, known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary. The visit, under heavy police protection, ended without incident, police said.

Such demonstrative visits by Israeli hard-liners seeking to underscore Israeli claims of sovereignty over contested Jerusalem have sparked violence in the past. The holy site sits on the fault line of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and is central to rival narratives of Palestinians and Israeli Jews.

In Palestinian cities and towns in the West Bank, Israeli security forces said they detained 19 people on suspicion of belonging to the Islamic Jihad during overnight raids.

What to watch in Wis., 3 other states in Tuesday's primaries

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

The Republican matchup in the Wisconsin governor's race on Tuesday features competing candidates endorsed by former President Donald Trump and his estranged vice president, Mike Pence. Democrats are picking a candidate to face two-term GOP Sen. Ron Johnson for control of the closely divided chamber.

Meanwhile, voters in Vermont are choosing a replacement for U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy as the chamber's longest-serving member retires. In Minnesota, U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar faces a Democratic primary challenger who helped defeat a voter referendum to replace the Minneapolis Police Department with a new Department of Public Safety.

What to watch in Tuesday's primary elections in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Vermont and Connecticut:

WISCONSIN

Construction company co-owner Tim Michels has Trump's endorsement in the governor's race and has been spending millions of his own money, touting both the former president's backing and his years working to build his family's business into Wisconsin's largest construction company. Michels casts himself as an outsider, although he previously lost a campaign to oust then-U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold in 2004 and has long been a prominent GOP donor.

Establishment Republicans including Pence and former Gov. Scott Walker have endorsed former Lt. Gov.

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Rebecca Kleefisch, who along with Walker, survived a 2012 recall effort. She argues she has the experience and knowledge to pursue conservative priorities, including dismantling the bipartisan commission that runs elections.

With Senate control at stake, Democrats will also make their pick to take on Johnson. Democratic support coalesced around Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes late in the race, when his three top rivals dropped out and threw their support to him. He would become the state's first Black senator if elected.

Several lesser-known candidates remain in the primary, but Johnson and Republicans have treated Barnes as the nominee, casting him as too liberal for Wisconsin, a state Trump won in 2016 but lost in 2020.

Four Democrats are also running in Wisconsin's 3rd Congressional District, a seat that opened up with the retirement of veteran Democratic U.S. Rep. Ron Kind. The district has been trending Republican, and Derrick Van Orden — who narrowly lost to Kind in 2020 and has Trump's endorsement — is running unopposed.

MINNESOTA

Democratic Gov. Tim Walz faces a little-known opponent as he seeks a second term. His likely challenger is Republican Scott Jensen, a physician and former state lawmaker who has made vaccine skepticism a centerpiece of his campaign and faces token opposition.

Both men have been waging a virtual campaign for months, with Jensen attacking Walz for his management of the pandemic and hammering the governor for rising crime around Minneapolis. Walz has highlighted his own support of abortion rights and suggested that Jensen would be a threat to chip away at the procedure's legality in Minnesota.

Crime has emerged as the biggest issue in Rep. Omar's Democratic primary. She faces a challenge from former Minneapolis City Council member Don Samuels, who opposes the movement to defund the police and last year helped defeat efforts to replace the city's police department. Omar, who supported the referendum, has a substantial money advantage and is expected to benefit from a strong grassroots operation.

The most confusing part of Tuesday's ballot was for the 1st Congressional District seat that was held by U.S. Rep. Jim Hagedorn, who died earlier this year from cancer. Republican former state Rep. Brad Finstad and Democrat Jeff Ettinger, a former Hormel CEO, are simultaneously competing in primaries to determine the November matchup for the next two-year term representing the southern Minnesota district, as well as a special election to finish the last few months of Hagedorn's term.

CONNECTICUT

It's been roughly three decades since Connecticut had a Republican in the U.S. Senate, but the party isn't giving up.

In the GOP primary to take on Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal, the party has endorsed former state House Minority Leader Themis Klarides. She's a social moderate who supports abortion rights and certain gun control measures and says she did not vote for Trump in 2020. Klarides contends her experience and positions can persuade voters to oppose Blumenthal, a two-term senator who in May registered a 45% job approval rating, his lowest in a Quinnipiac poll since taking office.

Klarides is being challenged by conservative attorney Peter Lumaj and Republican National Committee member Leora Levy, whom Trump endorsed last week. Both candidates oppose abortion rights and further gun restrictions, and they back Trump's policies.

VERMONT

Leahy's upcoming retirement has opened up two seats in Vermont's tiny three-person congressional delegation — and the opportunity for the state to send a woman to represent it in Washington for the first time.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Peter Welch, the state's at-large congressman, quickly launched his Senate bid after Leahy revealed he was stepping down. Leahy, who is president pro tempore of the Senate, has been hospitalized a couple of times over the last two years, including after breaking his hip this summer.

Welch has been endorsed by Sanders and is the odds-on favorite to win the seat in November. He faces two other Democrats in the primary: Isaac Evans-Frantz, an activist, and Dr. Niki Thran, an emergency physician.

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On the Republican side, former U.S. Attorney Christina Nolan, retired U.S. Army officer Gerald Malloy and investment banker Myers Mermel are competing for the nomination.

The race to replace Welch has yielded Vermont's first wide-open U.S. House campaign since 2006.

Two women, including Lt. Gov. Molly Gray and state Senate President Pro Tempore Becca Balint, are the top Democratic candidates in the race. Gray, elected in 2020 in her first political bid, is a lawyer and a former assistant state attorney general.

The winner of the Democratic primary will be the heavy favorite to win the general election in the liberal state. In 2018, Vermont became the last state without female representation in Congress when Mississippi Republican Cindy Hyde-Smith was appointed to the Senate.

Biden to join governor to survey flood damage in Kentucky

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and the first lady are expected to join Gov. Andy Beshear and his wife, Brittainy, as they meet with families and view damage from storms that have created the worst flooding in Kentucky's history.

At least 37 people have died since last month's deluge, which dropped 8 to 10 1/2 inches of rain in only 48 hours. The National Weather Service said Sunday that flooding remains a threat, warning of more thunderstorms through Thursday.

Monday's visit will be Biden's second to the state. He previously visited in December after tornadoes whipped through Kentucky, killing 77 people and leaving a trail of destruction.

"I wish I could tell you why we keep getting hit here in Kentucky," Beshear said recently. "I wish I could tell you why areas where people may not have much continue to get hit and lose everything. I can't give you the why, but I know what we do in response to it. And the answer is everything we can. These are our people. Let's make sure we help them out."

Biden has expanded federal disaster assistance to Kentucky, ensuring the federal government will cover the full cost of debris removal and other emergency measures.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the Federal Emergency Management Agency has provided more than \$3.1 million in relief funds, and hundreds of rescue personnel have been deployed to help.

The flooding came just one month after Beshear visited Mayfield to celebrate the completion of the first houses to be fully constructed since a tornado nearly wiped out the town. Three families were handed keys to their new homes that day, and the governor in his remarks hearkened back to a visit he had made in the immediate aftermath.

"I pledged on that day that while we had been knocked down, we were not knocked out," Beshear said. "That we would get back up again and we would move forward. And six months to the day, we're not just up, we're not just standing on our feet, we are moving forward."

Now more disasters are testing the state. Beshear has been to eastern Kentucky as many times as weather permitted since the flooding began. He's had daily news conferences stretching an hour to provide details including a full range of assistance for victims. Much like after the tornadoes, Beshear opened relief funds going directly to people in the beleaguered regions.

A Democrat, Beshear narrowly defeated a Republican incumbent in 2019, and he's seeking a second term in 2023.

Polling has consistently shown him with strong approval ratings from Kentuckians. But several prominent Republicans have entered the governor's race, taking turns pounding the governor for his aggressive pandemic response and trying to tie him to Biden and rising inflation.

Beshear comments frequently about the toll surging inflation is taking in eating at Kentuckians' budgets. He avoids blaming Biden, instead pointing to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and supply chain bottlenecks as contributors to rising consumer costs.

One year after Afghanistan, spy agencies pivot toward China

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a recent closed-door meeting with leaders of the agency's counterterrorism center, the CIA's No. 2 official made clear that fighting al-Qaida and other extremist groups would remain a priority — but that the agency's money and resources would be increasingly shifted to focusing on China.

The CIA drone attack that killed al-Qaida's leader showed that fighting terrorism is hardly an afterthought. But it didn't change the message the agency's deputy director, David Cohen, delivered at that meeting weeks earlier: While the U.S. will continue to go after terrorists, the top priority is trying to better understand and counter Beijing.

One year after ending the war in Afghanistan, President Joe Biden and top national security officials speak less about counterterrorism and more about the political, economic and military threats posed by China as well as Russia. There's been a quiet pivot within intelligence agencies, which are moving hundreds of officers to China-focused positions, including some who were previously working on terrorism.

The last week makes clear that the U.S. has to deal with both at the same time. Days after Ayman al-Zawahri was killed in Kabul, China staged large-scale military exercises and threatened to cut off contacts with the U.S. over House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.

The U.S. has long been alarmed by China's growing political and economic ambitions. China has tried to influence foreign elections, mounted campaigns of cyber and corporate espionage, and detained millions of minority Uyghurs in camps. Some experts also think Beijing will in coming years try to seize the self-ruled democratic island of Taiwan by force.

Intelligence officials have said they need more insights on China, including after being unable to definitively pinpoint the cause of the COVID-19 pandemic. Beijing has been accused of withholding information about the origins of the virus.

And the war in Ukraine has underscored Russia's importance as a target. The U.S. used declassified information to expose Russian President Vladimir Putin's war plans before the invasion and rally diplomatic support for Kyiv.

Supporters of the Biden administration approach note that the U.S. was able to track and kill al-Zawahri is evidence of its capabilities to target threats in Afghanistan from abroad. Critics say the fact that al-Zawahri was living in Kabul, under the apparent protection of the Taliban, suggests there's a resurgence of extremist groups that America is ill-equipped to counter.

The shift in priorities is supported by many former intelligence officers and lawmakers from both parties who say it's overdue. That includes people who served in Afghanistan and other missions against al-Qaida and other terrorist groups.

Rep. Jason Crow, a former Army Ranger who served in Afghanistan and Iraq, said he believed the U.S. had been overly focused on counterterrorism over the last several years.

"A far greater existential threat is Russia and China," said Crow, a Colorado Democrat who serves on the House Intelligence and Armed Services committees. Terrorist groups, he said, "will not destroy the American way of life ... the way China can."

CIA spokesperson Tammy Thorp noted that terrorism "remains a very real challenge."

"Even as crises such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and strategic challenges such as that posed by the People's Republic of China demand our attention, CIA will continue to aggressively track terrorist threats globally and work with partners to counter them," Thorp said.

Congress has pushed the CIA and other intelligence agencies to make China a top priority, according to several people familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence matters. Pushing resources toward China has required cuts elsewhere, including in counterterrorism. Specific figures were unavailable because intelligence budgets are classified.

In particular, lawmakers want more information about China's development in advanced technologies. Under President Xi Jinping, China has committed trillions of dollars in investment on quantum science, artificial intelligence and other technologies that are likely to disrupt how future wars are fought and

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economies are structured.

As part of the shift, congressional committees are trying to better track how intelligence agencies spend their funding on China, seeking more detail about how specific programs contribute to that mission, one person familiar with the matter said.

"We are late, but it's good that we're finally changing our focus into that region," said Rep. Chris Stewart, a Utah Republican who serves on the House Intelligence Committee. "That means in people, in resources, in military assets, and in diplomacy."

The CIA last year announced it would create two new "mission centers" — one on China, one on emerging technologies — to centralize and improve intelligence collection on those issues. The CIA is also trying to recruit more Chinese speakers and reduce wait times on security clearances to hire new people faster.

Inside the agency, many officers are learning Chinese and moving into new roles focused on China, though not all of those jobs require language training, people familiar with the matter said.

Officials note that intelligence officers are trained to adapt to new challenges and that many were moved more quickly into counterterrorism roles after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Advances from counterterrorism work — including better use of data and different sources of intelligence to build networks and identify targets — are also useful in countering Russia and China, former officers said.

"It's the analytics and targeting machine that has become extraordinary," said Douglas Wise, a former CIA senior officer who was deputy chief of operations at the counterterrorism center.

The CIA's Counterterrorism Center, renamed the Counterterrorism Mission Center in a 2015 reorganization, remains a point of pride for many people who credit its work for keeping Americans safe from terrorism after Sept. 11. CIA officers landed in Afghanistan on Sept. 26, 2001, and were part of operations to displace the Taliban and find and kill leaders of al-Qaida including Osama bin Laden.

And 13 years after a double agent tricked officers pursuing al-Zawahri and blew himself up, killing seven agency employees, the CIA killed him in a strike with no reported civilian casualties.

The CIA was also involved in some of the darkest moments of the fight against terrorism. It operated secret "black site" jails to hold terrorism suspects, some wrongly, and was found by a Senate investigation to have used interrogation methods that amounted to torture. Elite Afghan special operations units trained by the CIA were also accused of killing civilians and violating international law.

There's long been a debate over whether counterterrorism pulled intelligence agencies too far away from traditional spying and whether some of the CIA's work in targeting terrorists should instead be done by special forces under the military.

Marc Polymeropoulos is a retired CIA operations officer and former base chief in Afghanistan. He said he supports a greater focus on China and Russia but added, "There's no reason to diminish what we had to do."

"This notion that somehow all the CT work we did, somehow that was wrong, that we took our eye of the ball — just remember on Sept. 12 what everyone was feeling," he said.

Re-orienting the agencies toward more of a focus on China and Russia will ultimately take years and require both patience and recognition that the agency's culture will take time to change, Wise said.

"For decades, we have been doing counterterrorism," Wise said. "We've got to have a rational plan to make this adaptation, which doesn't take so long that our enemies can exploit a glacial process."

Dems look ahead to Barnes in fall race against Ron Johnson

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes grew up in Milwaukee with a mom who was a public school teacher and a father who worked in a factory — both union members, an important credential in a state where the labor movement is still a force.

At 35, Barnes is nearly half the age of the average U.S. senator, and would join a tiny group of Black senators — and be the first from Wisconsin — if he wins election to the chamber.

That biography stands to turn Barnes into one of the most prominent Democrats in the U.S. this year as

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the party aims to defeat one of its top targets: Republican Sen. Ron Johnson. His ouster is such a priority that Barnes' top Democratic rivals dropped out of the primary in recent weeks to rally around him, leaving Tuesday's primary as mostly a formality ahead of what's certain to be a brutal and expensive general election campaign.

"I wanted to make sure we can win this fall," his closest rival, Milwaukee Bucks executive Alex Lasry, said when he dropped out and supported Barnes. "That is the No. 1 goal."

Ousting Johnson has never been a bigger priority for Democrats with majority control of the Senate on the line. He's the only incumbent Senate Republican seeking reelection this year in a state that President Joe Biden carried. But Johnson has proven tough to beat as he's grown from a tea party outsider into one of Donald Trump's most vocal supporters and Wisconsin's senior senator.

This election is Johnson's first against someone other than Russ Feingold, whom he defeated in 2010 and then in a 2016 rematch, losses that still sting liberals in the swing state. Johnson is running for a third term after previously saying he wouldn't.

"Democrats will walk through fire and across broken glass to beat Ron Johnson," Democratic strategist Joe Zepecki said.

With his focus increasingly on the fall, Barnes is emphasizing an everyman image in campaign ads, including one in a grocery store in which he says most senators don't know what a gallon of milk costs.

"But I'm not like most senators," Barnes says, walking down the store aisle. "Or any of the other millionaires running for Senate. My mom was a teacher and my dad worked third shift."

Barnes served four years in the state Assembly representing Milwaukee before he won the statewide primary for lieutenant governor in 2018 to be paired with Gov. Tony Evers. Evers then defeated Gov. Scott Walker, who enraged Democrats over eight years in office, most famously for his Act 10 law that effectively ended collective bargaining for most public workers.

Barnes, who must still get past a handful of little-known opponents Tuesday, has already turned his sights to Johnson. He frequently compares beating Walker to what it will take to deny Johnson a third term.

"It's going to be difficult, an uphill battle," Barnes said after Lasry dropped out of the race. "But I know it'll be that much easier because we're in this together. And I'll remind you that four years ago, the race to get rid of Scott Walker was a difficult one, one that a lot of people in the audience today said was impossible. But we got it done because we came together."

Johnson raised about \$7 million in donations between April and June, more than the entire Democratic field. Barnes raised about \$2.1 million. But in the week after Lasry and the others dropped out, Barnes reported raising \$1.1 million.

Barnes built the most well-rounded campaign in the primary, with key endorsements from the likes of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, raising money and delivering a message focused on that middle-class upbringing. When it was reported during the 2018 campaign that Barnes had earned so little that he paid no income tax and was on the state's Medicaid program, he embraced it as evidence that he understood how critical the program is for working people.

Barnes previewed his attack strategy in his first TV spot after his top rivals dropped out, accusing Johnson of being "out of touch with Wisconsin," citing Johnson's decision not to attempt to save 1,000 jobs moving out of state. Johnson said at the time that Wisconsin has enough jobs.

Johnson and Republicans are already at work portraying Barnes as too liberal for Wisconsin. In a state that Trump won in 2016 and lost in 2020 by a nearly equal number of votes, the election will once again likely come down to who can win over independents, a small but key group.

"The power brokers of the Democrat party have now cleared the field for their most radical left candidate," Johnson tweeted before the primary. "Socialist policies have produced this mess, & a radical left Senator from Wisconsin is not the solution."

The Senate Leadership Fund, a political action committee that works to get Republicans elected, targeted Barnes for holding an "Abolish ICE" T-shirt; his supportive comments about the Green New Deal

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and Medicaid for all; and a 2020 tweet in which he said, "Defunding the police only dreams of being as radical as a Donald Trump pardon."

Republicans have also attacked Barnes for supporting ending cash bail and comments he made at a candidate town hall last fall about the founding of the country that referenced slavery and colonization. "The United States is the most wealthy, the most powerful nation on earth, and it's because of forced labor on stolen land," Barnes said.

Winning the primary without facing the attacks that are to come may come back to haunt Democrats, said Republican strategist and former Johnson campaign staff member Brian Reisinger.

"The question for Democrats now is have they had a thorough vetting process to have a candidate who can do what they haven't done before," Reisinger said. "It's not clear if they've really figured out who can beat Ron Johnson. These candidates have not really tested one another."

Barnes deflected a question about whether he would be a stronger candidate if the Democratic primary had been more contentious.

"What's most important is that we are experiencing a unity that has not been seen before," Barnes said. "In this state, we set out out of the gate to build a broad coalition. We are doing just that. This is about uniting the party. And I would say that we are more united than we've ever been before."

Johnson was first elected as a fiscal conservative, known for attacking spending and intent on lowering the national debt. In recent years, as the coronavirus rose and Trump fell, he became a lightning rod for anti-science positions and conspiracy theories on the 2020 election.

He joined the many Republicans who have played down the riot at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, saying he wasn't scared by the insurrectionists but would have been concerned if they had been Black Lives Matter protesters. It also emerged during a recent Jan. 6 House committee hearing that Johnson had wanted to hand-deliver ballots cast by fake GOP electors to Vice President Mike Pence.

Johnson's favorability rating in a June 22 Marquette University Law School poll was just 37%, lower than President Joe Biden's 40% approval rating. But Johnson was about even in matchups with Barnes. However, enthusiasm among Republicans was higher than Democrats for voting in the upcoming primary.

Democratic voter Leah Siordia, who attended a Barnes rally with Warren, said she was making her pick based on who she thought could beat Johnson. Before Lasry dropped out, the 57-year-old retired computer analyst was considering him, but she was leaning toward Barnes.

"He's a real person to me, not just a billionaire," Siordia said of Barnes. And she added: "Anybody's better than Johnson."

2 men face new trial over scheme to kidnap Michigan governor

By ED WHITE Associated Press

Two men accused of crafting a plan to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in 2020 and ignite a national rebellion are facing a second trial this week, months after a jury couldn't reach a verdict on the pair while acquitting two others.

The result in April was a blow to federal prosecutors, who had set out to show that extremists were committed to snatching Whitmer and causing chaos close to the election between Joe Biden and then-President Donald Trump.

The trial of Adam Fox and Barry Croft Jr. means another public airing of secretly recorded conversations, text messages and chilling social media posts. It also comes at a time of intense news coverage of the U.S. House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, riot by Trump supporters at the Capitol.

Jurors will see how undercover FBI agents and informants had infiltrated the Michigan group. In response, defense attorneys again will argue that Fox and Croft were shielded by the First Amendment when they expressed malicious opinions about government and were entrapped every step of the way.

"The stakes are higher because the government has doubled down," Matthew Schneider, a former U.S. attorney in Detroit, said of the second trial. "They're going to try this all over again, and the government's view is, 'We're going to prevail.'"

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Also in the background: Whitmer's reelection campaign for a second term is heating up. Jury selection starts Tuesday in federal court in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

"This is like deja vu all over again," U.S. District Judge Robert Jonker said.

The government alleges that Fox, who was living under a Grand Rapids-area vacuum shop, and Croft, a trucker from Bear, Delaware, wanted to target Whitmer as well as other public officials over their tough restrictions during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A handmade "shoot house" was erected for weekend gun drills. There's evidence that Croft, Fox and undercover operatives took a night ride to northern Michigan to check Whitmer's second home and discuss putting an explosive under a bridge. Two men who pleaded guilty will testify again for prosecutors.

"I'm gonna hit soon," Croft was heard saying during a June 2020 meeting of antigovernment activists in Ohio. "I'm going to terrorize people. The right people. The people who have been terrorizing my people."

Fox and Croft are charged with conspiracy. The first trial ended in a mistrial when the jury couldn't reach a unanimous verdict against them. The jury, however, acquitted Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta.

Caserta's attorney, Michael Hills, said the second trial will be "shorter and more focused" with two people instead of four.

"Defending a second time is always difficult for the defense," Hills said. "They've got everything against them, the power of the government."

The judge said he won't mention the result of the first trial during jury selection. But if prospective jurors say they're aware of it, Jonker will ask if it would affect their ability to be fair and impartial.

The "jury really needs to understand its decision needs to be based on the evidence in this case, not what happened in some other case," Jonker told the lawyers.

Whitmer, a Democrat, said little publicly after the first trial but opened up to The Washington Post during a recent interview.

"Does anyone think these kidnapers wanted to keep me or ransom me?" Whitmer said. "No. They were going to put me on trial and then execute me. It was an assassination plot, but no one talks about it that way. Even the way people talk about it has muted the seriousness of it."

Senate Democrats pass budget package, a victory for Biden

By ALAN FRAM and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats pushed their election-year economic package to Senate passage Sunday, a hard-fought compromise less ambitious than President Joe Biden's original domestic vision but one that still meets deep-rooted party goals of slowing global warming, moderating pharmaceutical costs and taxing immense corporations.

The estimated \$740 billion package heads next to the House, where lawmakers are poised to deliver on Biden's priorities, a stunning turnaround of what had seemed a lost and doomed effort that suddenly roared back to political life. Cheers broke out as Senate Democrats held united, 51-50, with Vice President Kamala Harris casting the tie-breaking vote after an all-night session.

"Today, Senate Democrats sided with American families over special interests," President Joe Biden said in a statement from Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. "I ran for President promising to make government work for working families again, and that is what this bill does — period."

Biden, who had his share of long nights during his three decades as a senator, called into the Senate cloakroom during the vote on speakerphone to personally thank the staff for their hard work.

The president urged the House to pass the bill as soon as possible. Speaker Nancy Pelosi said her chamber would "move swiftly to send this bill to the president's desk." House votes are expected Friday.

"It's been a long, tough and winding road, but at last, at last we have arrived," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., ahead of final votes.

"The Senate is making history. I am confident the Inflation Reduction Act will endure as one of the defining legislative feats of the 21st century," he said.

Senators engaged in a round-the-clock marathon of voting that began Saturday and stretched late into

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Sunday afternoon. Democrats swatted down some three dozen Republican amendments designed to torpedo the legislation. Confronting unanimous GOP opposition, Democratic unity in the 50-50 chamber held, keeping the party on track for a morale-boosting victory three months from elections when congressional control is at stake.

The bill ran into trouble midday over objections to the new 15% corporate minimum tax that private equity firms and other industries disliked, forcing last-minute changes.

Despite the momentary setback, the "Inflation Reduction Act" gives Democrats a campaign-season showcase for action on coveted goals. It includes the largest-ever federal effort on climate change — close to \$400 billion — caps out-of-pocket drug costs for seniors on Medicare to \$2,000 a year and extends expiring subsidies that help 13 million people afford health insurance. By raising corporate taxes and reaping savings from the long-sought goal of allowing the government to negotiate drug prices for Medicare, the whole package is paid for, with some \$300 billion extra revenue for deficit reduction.

Barely more than one-tenth the size of Biden's initial 10-year, \$3.5 trillion Build Back Better initiative, the new package abandons earlier proposals for universal preschool, paid family leave and expanded child care aid. That plan collapsed after conservative Sen. Joe. Manchin, D-W.Va., opposed it, saying it was too costly and would fuel inflation.

Nonpartisan analysts have said the 755-page "Inflation Reduction Act" would have a minor effect on surging consumer prices.

Republicans said the new measure would undermine an economy that policymakers are struggling to keep from plummeting into recession. They said the bill's business taxes would hurt job creation and force prices skyward, making it harder for people to cope with the nation's worst inflation since the 1980s.

"Democrats have already robbed American families once through inflation, and now their solution is to rob American families a second time," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., argued.

In an ordeal imposed on most budget bills like this one, the Senate had to endure an overnight "vote-a-rama" of rapid-fire amendments. Each tested Democrats' ability to hold together the compromise bill negotiated by Schumer, progressives, Manchin and the inscrutable centrist Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz.

Progressive Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., criticized the bill's shortcomings and offered amendments to further expand the legislation's health benefits, but those efforts were defeated. Republicans forced their own votes designed to make Democrats look soft on U.S.-Mexico border security and gasoline and energy costs, and like bullies for wanting to strengthen IRS tax law enforcement.

Before debate began, the bill's prescription drug price curbs were diluted by the Senate's nonpartisan parliamentarian who said a provision should fall that would impose costly penalties on drug makers whose price increases for private insurers exceed inflation.

It was the bill's chief protection for the 180 million people with private health coverage they get through work or purchase themselves. Under special procedures that will let Democrats pass their bill by simple majority without the usual 60-vote margin, its provisions must be focused more on dollar-and-cents budget numbers than policy changes.

But the thrust of Democrats' pharmaceutical price language remained. That included letting Medicare negotiate what it pays for drugs for its 64 million elderly recipients, penalizing manufacturers for exceeding inflation for pharmaceuticals sold to Medicare and limiting beneficiaries out-of-pocket drug costs to \$2,000 annually.

The bill also caps Medicare patients' costs for insulin, the expensive diabetes medication, at \$35 monthly. Democrats wanted to extend the \$35 cap to private insurers but it ran afoul of Senate rules. Most Republicans voted to strip it from the package, though in a sign of the political potency of health costs seven GOP senators joined Democrats trying to preserve it.

The measure's final costs were being recalculated to reflect late changes, but overall it would raise more than \$700 billion over a decade. The money would come from a 15% minimum tax on a handful of corporations with yearly profits above \$1 billion, a 1% tax on companies that repurchase their own stock, bolstered IRS tax collections and government savings from lower drug costs.

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Sinema forced Democrats to drop a plan to prevent wealthy hedge fund managers from paying less than individual income tax rates for their earnings. She also joined with other Western senators to win \$4 billion to combat the region's drought.

Several Democratic senators joined the GOP-led effort to exclude some firms from the new corporate minimum tax.

The package keeps to Biden's pledge not to raise taxes on those earning less than \$400,000 a year.

It was on the energy and environment side that compromise was most evident between progressives and Manchin, a champion of fossil fuels and his state's coal industry.

Clean energy would be fostered with tax credits for buying electric vehicles and manufacturing solar panels and wind turbines. There would be home energy rebates, funds for constructing factories building clean energy technology and money to promote climate-friendly farm practices and reduce pollution in minority communities.

Manchin won billions to help power plants lower carbon emissions plus language requiring more government auctions for oil drilling on federal land and waters. Party leaders also promised to push separate legislation this fall to accelerate permits for energy projects, which Manchin wants to include a nearly completed natural gas pipeline in his state.

Still, environmental groups hailed the passage as a milestone. "Tremendous progress," said Manish Bapna, president and CEO of the Natural Resources Defense Council, in a statement.

Biden steps out of the room and finds legacy-defining wins

By SEUNG MIN KIM and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Over five decades in Washington, Joe Biden knew that the way to influence was to be in the room where it happens. But in the second year of his presidency, some of Biden's most striking, legacy-defining legislative victories came about by staying out of it.

A summer lawmaking blitz has sent bipartisan bills addressing gun violence and boosting the nation's high-tech manufacturing sector to Biden's desk, and the president is now on the cusp of securing what he called the "final piece" of his economic agenda with Senate passage of a Democrats-only climate and prescription drug deal once thought dead. And in a counterintuitive turn for the president who has long promoted his decades of Capitol Hill experience, Biden's aides chalk up his victories to the fact that he's been publicly playing the role of cheerleader rather than legislative quarterback.

"In a 50-50 Senate, it's just true that when the White House takes ownership over a topic, it scares off a lot of Republicans," said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn. "I think all of this is purposeful. When you step back and let Congress lead, and then apply pressure and help at the right times, it can be a much more effective strategy to get things done."

Democrats and the White House hope the run of legislative victories, both bipartisan and not, just four months before the November elections will help resuscitate their political fortunes by showing voters what they can accomplish with even the slimmest of majorities.

Biden opened 2022 with his legislative agenda at a standstill, poll numbers on the decline and a candid admission that he had made a "mistake" in how he carried himself in the role.

"The public doesn't want me to be the 'President-Senator,'" he said. "They want me to be the president and let senators be senators."

Letting the senators be senators was no easy task for Biden, whose political and personal identities are rooted in his formative years spent in that chamber. He spent 36 years as a senator from Delaware, and eight more as the Senate's president when he was valued for his Capitol Hill relationships and insights as Barack Obama's vice president.

As Biden took a step back, he left it to aides to do much of the direct negotiating. His legislative strategy, instead, focused more on using his role as president to provide strategic jolts of urgency for his agenda both with lawmakers and voters.

In the estimation of many of his aides and advisers, leaving the Senate behind was key to his subsequent success. The heightened expectations for Democrats, who hold precarious majorities in Congress

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but nonetheless have unified control of Washington, were dragging Biden down among his supporters who wanted more ambitious action.

The sometimes unsavory horse-trading required to win consensus often put the president deep in the weeds and short on inspiration. And the dramatic negotiating breakdowns on the way to an ultimate deal proved to be all the more tantalizing because Biden himself was a party to the talks.

In the spring of 2021, Biden made a big show of negotiating directly with Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., on an infrastructure bill, only to have the talks collapse over the scope of the package and how to finance it. At the same time, a separate bipartisan group had been quietly meeting on its own, discussing how to overhaul the nation's transportation, water and broadband systems. After the White House gave initial approval and then settled the final details with senators, that became the version that was shepherded into law.

The president next tried to strike a deal on a sweeping social spending and climate package with Sen. Joe Manchin, going as far as inviting the West Virginia lawmaker to his home in Wilmington, Delaware, until the conservative Democrat abruptly pulled the plug on the talks in a Fox News interview. Manchin would later pick up the negotiations again, this time with just Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and the two would eventually reach an agreement that the Senate approved Sunday after more than a year of legislative wrangling.

In late 2021, White House aides persuaded the president to clam up about his conversations with the Hill, as part of a deliberate shift to move negotiations on his legislative agenda out of the public eye. The West Wing, once swift with the news that Biden had called this lawmaker or invited that caucus to the White House for a meeting, kept silent.

The new approach drew criticism from the press, but the White House wagered that the public was not invested in the details and would reward the outcomes.

Biden and his team "have been using the bully pulpit and closely working with Congress to fight for policies that lower costs for families and fight inflation, strengthen our competitiveness versus China, act against gun violence" and help veterans, said White House spokesman Andrew Bates. "He also directed his Cabinet, senior staff and legislative team to engage constantly with key lawmakers as we work together to achieve what could soon be the most productive legislative record of any president" since Lyndon Johnson.

Some of the shift, White House aides said, also reflected the changing dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic, which kept Biden in Washington for most of 2021; his meetings with lawmakers amounted to one of the few ways to show he was working. As the pandemic eased and Biden was able to return to holding more in-person events with voters and interest groups, he was able to use those settings to drive his message directly to people.

The subtle transformation did not immediately pay dividends: Biden's approval rating only continued to slide amid legislative inertia and soaring inflation.

Yet in time, Biden's decision to embrace a facilitating role rather than being negotiator in chief — which had achieved mixed success — began to pay off: the first substantive gun restrictions in nearly three decades, a measure to boost domestic production of semiconductor computer chips, and care for veterans exposed to toxic burn pits.

White House officials credit Biden's emotional speech after the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, with helping to galvanize lawmakers to act on gun violence — and even his push for more extensive measures than made it into the bill with giving the GOP space to reach a compromise. And they point to a steady cadence of speeches over months emphasizing the need to lower prescription drug costs or to act on climate with keeping those issues in the national conversation amid the legislative fits and starts.

In turn, both Democratic and GOP lawmakers say that Biden removing himself directly from the negotiations empowered senators to reach consensus among themselves, without the distraction of a White House that may have repeatedly pushed for something that would be unattainable with Republicans or could be viewed as compromising by some Democrats.

"The president kind of had said that we're staying out," Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, said, referring to the gun talks earlier this year. "I think that was helpful."

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Being hands off, however, by no means meant the administration was absent.

Rather than be in the room as a gun deal was coming together, White House aides stayed by the phone, explaining how the administration would likely interpret and regulate the law that senators were drafting. Murphy spoke with White House officials every day, and when the Connecticut senator met personally with Biden in early June to offer an update, the president never gave him an ultimatum on what he was or was not willing to sign — continuing to defer to lawmakers.

At another point during the gun negotiations, rumors flew that the administration was considering barring the Pentagon from selling certain types of surplus ammunition to gun dealers, who then sell the ammunition commercially, according to two people familiar with the deliberations. But Republicans, chiefly Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, urged the White House to scrap those plans because it would run counter to the parameters of what the gun negotiators had discussed, said the people, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details of private negotiations.

The White House eventually did so, issuing a statement to a conservative publication that no such executive order on ammunition was under consideration.

On the semiconductor package that Biden plans to sign into law Tuesday, the administration organized classified briefings for lawmakers that emphasized how China is gaining influence in the computer chip sector and the national security implications. Republicans were regularly in touch with Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, one Biden Cabinet official who has developed warm relationships across the aisle.

And on the Democrats' party-line climate and health care package, Manchin has emphasized that it is impossible to craft legislation of this magnitude without White House input, although he did not deal with Biden directly until near the end, when the president called to let Manchin know the White House would support his agreement with Schumer, according to an official with knowledge of the call.

Biden also stayed out of the last-minute deliberations involving Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., and she and the president did not speak even as Democrats finalized an agreement that accommodated her demands.

"In his heart, Joe is a U.S. senator," said Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., the chief Democratic author of the burn pits legislation who also helped hash out the infrastructure law last year. "So he understands allowing this to work is how you get it done."

Ashleigh Buhai wins Women's British Open after playoff

MUIRFIELD, Scotland (AP) — After seeing a five-shot lead slip away in the final round, Ashleigh Buhai still managed to secure a first major title at the Women's British Open.

Buhai kept her composure to beat In Gee Chun — and the setting sun — in a playoff at Muirfield on Sunday for her first career victory in an LPGA Tour event.

With the light fading, the South African golfer made a superb bunker shot on the fourth playoff hole to leave herself with a short par putt, while Chun settled for a bogey.

The 33-year-old Buhai calmly rolled in from less than three feet and then clutched her face in relief, before being drenched in water and other beverages by her entourage.

"I was surprisingly calm," Buhai said about the clutch bunker shot that secured the victory. "My caddie said to me on the last one, I don't want to brag, but she said 'Show them why you're No. 1 in bunkers this year.' So, you know, she gave me the confidence. Maybe it's got something to do with Muirfield and South Africans and bunker shots."

Ernie Els also won the men's British Open in a playoff at Muirfield in 2002 after a memorable bunker shot during the final round. This was the first time the Women's British Open was played at Muirfield, a club that didn't even allow female members until 2019 following a vote two years earlier.

Buhai made things a lot more difficult than they had to be, though.

She entered the final round with a commanding five-shot lead and was still three strokes ahead before a triple bogey on the par-4 15th that put her level with Chun.

Both players missed long birdie putts on the 18th as they settled for a playoff after finishing on 10-under 274.

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"I know there are a lot of people in South Africa with lots of gray hairs right now after that 15th hole," Buhai said. "But I'm very proud of myself, the way I dug deep and kept myself in it to get into that playoff."

Buhai shot a 4-over 75 in the final round, while Chun carded a 70.

Hinako Shibuno of Japan, the 2019 champion, finished one shot back in third after missing a chip from just off the green that would have made it a three-way playoff.

Chun was in trouble on the first two playoff holes, but her short game bailed her out both times.

On the first, Chun sent her second shot into a bunker while Buhai found the heart of the green. But the South Korean hit a near-perfect bunker shot to within a few feet of the hole to salvage the par.

On the second, she needed to make an 8-foot bogey putt to stay in it after sending her second shot wide and then barely making it onto the green with a chip from the tall grass.

Buhai nearly won it on the third playoff hole, but her long putt for the win pulled up a few inches away from the hole.

For Buhai, the win more than made up for a near-miss at that 2019 Women's British Open, when she led the event at the halfway stage at Woburn but finished fifth.

"Forgive me, there will be a few tears," Buhai said during the trophy presentation. "Obviously there's a lot of hard work and many years of dedication going into this."

GOP seeking power over elections in Wisconsin, Minnesota

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Wisconsin's secretary of state has no role in elections, but that could change if Republicans are able to flip the seat this year and pass a law that would empower the office with far more responsibilities.

All three GOP candidates competing for the nomination in Tuesday's primary support the shift and echo former President Donald Trump's false claims that fraud cost him the 2020 election.

If successful, the move would be a bold attempt to shift power to an office Republicans hope to control going into the 2024 presidential election and would represent a reversal from just six years ago when Republicans established the Wisconsin Elections Commission with bipartisan support. In 2020, Democrat Joe Biden won Wisconsin by about 21,000 votes in the presidential race.

"This is not about policy," said David Becker, a former U.S. Justice Department attorney who heads the nonpartisan Center for Election Innovation and Research. "It's about election outcomes and only election outcomes."

Once an under-the-radar contest overshadowed by campaigns for governor and state attorney general, races for secretary of state are drawing tremendous interest and money this year, driven largely by the 2020 election, when voting systems and processes came under attack by Trump and his supporters. There is no evidence of widespread fraud or manipulation of voting systems occurring in the 2020 election.

There are also primaries Tuesday in secretary of state races in Minnesota, Connecticut and Vermont. In Minnesota, the leading Republican candidate has called the 2020 election "rigged" and has faced criticism for a video attacking three prominent Jewish Democrats, including the current secretary of state, Democrat Steve Simon, who is seeking reelection.

Although the stakes are high, the Wisconsin primary for secretary of state has been mostly quiet. The incumbent, Democrat Doug La Follette, has barely been campaigning. In June, the 81-year-old, who was first elected to the position in 1974, opted to take a two-week trip to Africa.

La Follette has raised about \$21,000, according to the most recent campaign finance reports. That's not unusual because the office's only duties are to sit on a state timber board and to verify certain travel documents.

La Follette has said he decided to run again to stop Republicans from meddling with elections, citing Trump's call to Georgia's secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, after the 2020 election asking him to "find" enough votes to overturn Biden's win in the state. La Follette's primary opponent, Dane County Democratic Party Executive Board Chair Alexia Sabor, has raised about \$24,000.

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The Republican candidates argue that dismantling the elections commission and empowering the secretary of state to oversee elections would allow voters to hold someone accountable for important election-related decisions. They have all sharply criticized decisions made by the commission heading into the 2020 election, when the COVID-19 pandemic brought major challenges to running elections.

To accomplish their goal, Republicans also would need to defeat Democratic Gov. Tony Evers, who would block such a move, in November.

The leading fundraiser among the GOP secretary of state candidates is state Rep. Amy Loudenbeck, who has reported about \$94,000 in contributions. The other two Republicans are businessman Jay Schroeder and Justin Schmidtka, who hosts a political podcast. Also on the ballot is Libertarian candidate Neil Harmon.

In Minnesota, the leading Republican candidate for secretary of state, Kim Crockett, has called the 2020 election a "train wreck" and accused state election officials of using the pandemic as "cover to change how we vote, but also how the vote is counted."

While Crockett does not typically claim in public that the election was stolen from Trump, she has associated with those who do and has campaigned at events with them.

At the state party convention in May, in which Crockett was endorsed by convention delegates, she showed a video depicting billionaire investor and philanthropist George Soros as a puppet master, pulling the strings of Simon, the current secretary of state, and prominent election lawyer Marc Elias, with a caption that said, "Let's wreck elections forever and ever and ever."

All three men are Jewish. The GOP state chairman soon apologized, claiming Crockett did not intend for it to be anti-Semitic. Crockett did not apologize, and a day after the chairman's apology, sent a fundraising letter with the title "Media smears and communist tears" and claiming she was the victim of "contrived and bogus political attacks."

In their respective primaries, Crockett and Simon face lesser-known opponents — Republican Erik van Mechelen and Democrat Steve Carlson.

Races in Connecticut and Vermont have drawn a lot of interest after two longtime Democratic secretaries of state said they would not seek reelection.

Much of the debate in both the Democratic and Republican primaries in Connecticut has centered on voter ID requirements. A voter in Connecticut can sign an affidavit instead of presenting an ID, and there are multiple forms of ID that are accepted, including a bank statement or current utility bill.

Republican candidate Dominic Rapini, who is a former board chairman of a group called Fight Voter Fraud Inc., has called for tightening ID requirements and cleaning the state's voter rolls. While Rapini says he is suspicious about voter fraud in Connecticut and believes reforms are necessary, he hasn't echoed Trump's claim that the 2020 election was stolen.

Rapini faces state Rep. Terrie Wood, R-Darien, who has also called for tighter voter ID rules and cleaning voter lists.

On the Democratic side, both candidates oppose the GOP proposals on voter ID. State Rep. Stephanie Thomas of Norwalk, who won the party's endorsement at the state convention this spring, faces Maritza Bond, health director for the city of New Haven.

In Vermont, the Democratic primary has drawn the most attention. For the first time since 2010, Secretary of State Jim Condos, a Democrat, will not be on the ballot after announcing plans to retire.

All three Democratic candidates in Tuesday's primary promise to continue efforts to make elections in the state as accessible and secure as possible. Last year, the Legislature passed a law that requires general election ballots be mailed to all registered voters, although people can still opt to vote in person on Election Day.

The candidates are Deputy Secretary of State Chris Winters, who has worked in the office for 25 years; state Rep. Sarah Copeland Hanzas, who co-sponsored last year's voting law; and Montpelier City Clerk John Odum, who has overseen elections in Vermont's capital city for the past decade.

A perennial candidate for office, H. Brooke Paige, is the lone person running in the GOP primary. He also appears on the ballot for three other statewide offices.

Firefighters battle big blaze at Cuba tank farm for 2nd day

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Cuban firefighters were joined by special teams sent by Mexico and Venezuela on Sunday as they battled for a second day to control a fire blazing at a big oil tank farm in the western province of Matanzas.

The blaze began Friday night when lightning struck a storage tank during a thunder storm, and the fire spread to a second tank early Saturday, triggering a series of explosions, officials have said.

"The mission of the day is to keep the third tank cold," in hopes of preventing the flames from spreading into more of the site, provincial Gov. Mario Sabines said.

Most of the fuel held in the tank where the fire initially started was believed to have been consumed, officials said.

Authorities said a body found at the site Saturday had been identified as firefighter Juan Carlos Santana, 60. Officials previously said a group of 17 firefighters had gone missing while trying to quell flames, but there was no word if he was one of those.

Conditions were still too dangerous to mount a search for the missing firefighters, officials said.

A total of 122 people were treated for injuries, including five that officials said were in critical condition.

The governor said 4,946 people had been evacuated, mostly from the Dubrocq neighborhood, which is next to the Matanzas Supertanker Base in Matanzas city. The facility's eight huge storage tanks hold oil used to fuel electricity generation.

Dense black smoke billowed up from the tank farm and spread westward more than 100 kilometers (62 miles) to Havana. The Ministry of Science and Technology said Sunday that the cloud contained sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide and other toxic substances.

The disaster comes as Cuba struggles with a severe economic and energy crisis, with frequent power blackouts hitting during a torrid summer. It was unknown how much fuel had been lost to the flames.

Cuba's government had appealed for help Saturday from oil nations, and specialized firefighting teams began arriving with their equipment from Mexico and Venezuela late Saturday. They brought helicopters and specialized chemicals for fighting oil fire.

"The support (is) in the prevention of risks and also help to quell the fire by means of cooling based on water and foam," Mexican Brig. Gen. Juan Bravo said upon arrival. "We hope that more support will arrive soon, such as chemical material."

President Miguel Díaz-Canel met with the heads of the teams from Mexico and Venezuela to coordinate efforts for controlling the blaze. He later told Cuban media he appreciated the help, since Cuba doesn't have experience or resources for dealing with fires of such magnitude.

Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío said Saturday evening that the U.S. government had offered technical help. On his Twitter account, he said the "proposal is in the hands of specialists for the due coordination."

Minutes later, the president thanked Mexico, Venezuela, Russia, Nicaragua, Argentina and Chile for their offers of help.

Shift in war's front seen as grain leaves Ukraine; plant hit

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Six more ships carrying agricultural cargo held up by the war in Ukraine received authorization Sunday to leave the country's Black Sea coast as analysts warned that Russia was moving troops and equipment in the direction of the southern port cities to stave off a Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Ukraine and Russia also accused each other of shelling Europe's largest nuclear power plant.

The loaded vessels were cleared to depart from Chornomorsk and Odesa, according to the Joint Coordination Center, which oversees an international deal intended to get some 20 million tons of grain out of Ukraine to feed millions going hungry in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia.

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Ukraine, Russia, Turkey and the United Nations signed the agreements last month to create a 111-nautical-mile sea corridor that would allow cargo ships to travel safely out of ports that Russia's military had blockaded and through waters that Ukraine's military had mined. Implementation of the deal, which is in effect for four months, has proceeded slowly since the first ship embarked on Aug. 1.

Four of the carriers cleared Sunday to leave Ukraine were transporting more than 219,000 tons of corn. The fifth was carrying more than 6,600 tons of sunflower oil and the sixth 11,000 tons of soya, the Joint Coordination Center said.

Three other cargo ships that left Friday passed their inspections and received clearance Sunday to pass through Turkey's Bosphorus Strait on the way to their final destinations, the Center said.

However, the vessel that left Ukraine last Monday with great fanfare as the first under the grain exports deal had its scheduled arrival in Lebanon delayed Sunday, according to a Lebanese Cabinet minister and the Ukraine Embassy. The cause of the delay was not immediately clear.

Ukrainian officials were initially skeptical of a grain export deal, citing suspicions that Moscow would try to exploit shipping activity to mass troops offshore or send long-range missiles from the Black Sea, as it has done multiple times during the war.

The agreements call for ships to leave Ukraine under military escort and to undergo inspections to make sure they carry only grain, fertilizer or food and not any other commodities. Inbound cargo vessels are checked to ensure they are not carrying weapons.

In a weekend analysis, Britain's Defense Ministry said the Russian invasion that started Feb. 24 "is about to enter a new phase" in which the fighting would shift to a roughly 350-kilometer (217-mile) front line extending from near the city of Zaporizhzhia to Russian-occupied Kherson.

That area includes the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station which came under fire late Saturday. Each side accused the other of the attack.

Ukraine's nuclear power plant operator, Energoatom, said Russian shelling damaged three radiation monitors around the storage facility for spent nuclear fuels and that one worker was injured. Russian news agencies, citing the separatist-run administration of the plant, said Ukrainian forces fired those shells.

Russian forces have occupied the power station for months. Russian soldiers there took shelter in bunkers before Saturday's attack, according to Energoatom.

Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, recently warned that the way the plant was being run and the fighting going on around it posed grave health and environmental threats.

For the last four months of the war, Russia has concentrated on capturing the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, where pro-Moscow separatists have controlled some territory as self-proclaimed republics for eight years. Russian forces have made gradual headway in the region while launching missile and rocket attacks to curtail the movements of Ukrainian fighters elsewhere.

The Russians "are continuing to accumulate large quantities of military equipment" in a town across the Dnieper River from Russian-held Kherson, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank. Citing local Ukrainian officials, it said the preparations appeared designed to defend logistics routes to the city and establish defensive positions on the river's left bank.

Kherson came under Russian control early in the war and Ukrainian officials have vowed to retake it. It is just 227 kilometers (141 miles) from Odesa, home to Ukraine's biggest port, so the conflict escalating there could have repercussions for the international grain deal.

The city of Mykolaiv, a shipbuilding center that Russian forces bombard daily, is even closer to Odesa. The Mykolaiv region's governor, Vitaliy Kim, said an industrial facility on the regional capital's outskirts came under fire early Sunday.

Over the past day, five civilians were killed by Russian and separatist firing on cities in the Donetsk region, the part of Donbas still under Ukrainian control, the regional governor, Serhiy Haidai, reported.

He and Ukrainian government officials have repeatedly urged civilians to evacuate.

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Brad Pitt's 'Bullet Train' pulls into station with \$30.1M

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The stylized action romp "Bullet Train," starring Brad Pitt, arrived with a \$30.1 million opening weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday, as the last big movie of Hollywood's summer recovery landed in theaters.

The "Bullet Train" debut for Sony Pictures was solid but unspectacular for a movie that cost \$90 million to make and was propelled by Pitt's substantial star power. Even if it holds well in coming weeks, movie theaters have no major studio releases on the horizon for the rest of August, and few sure things to look forward to in early fall.

While late summer is always a quiet period in theaters, it will be especially so this year — and likely to sap some of the momentum stirred by "Top Gun: Maverick," "Jurassic World: Dominion," "Minions: The Rise of Gru" and others. After a comeback season that pushed the box office close to pre-pandemic levels, it's about to get pretty quiet in cinemas.

"It's definitely going to be quieter, like the calm after the storm," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for data firm Comscore. "But that doesn't mean there's not going to be great movies out there and perhaps the good will generated by some of those films might be enough to buoy the box office until we get into the blockbuster corridor with 'Black Panther: Wakanda Forever' and 'Avatar 2' down the road. We have to expect that we're not going to be able to keep up the pace we had this summer."

As the last big summer movie to leave the station, "Bullet Train" hopes to keep riding for the coming weeks. That would be in line with the playbook of some other original, August-released summer movies like "Free Guy" and "Crazy Rich Asians." Directed by David Leitch ("Atomic Blonde," "Deadpool 2"), "Bullet Train" gathers a number of assassins (co-stars include Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Brian Tyree Henry) together on a speeding train running from Tokyo to Kyoto.

As one of the few original would-be summer blockbusters without big-name intellectual property behind it, the R-rated "Bullet Train" might have come into the weekend with more momentum if reviews had been stronger. With a low 54% fresh rating from critics on Rotten Tomatoes, "Bullet Train" was only slightly better received by audiences, who gave the film a B+ CinemaScore. The film added \$32.4 million in overseas box office.

The weekend's other new wide release, "Easter Sunday," struggled to catch on. The Universal Pictures comedy, starring comic Jo Koy as an actor attending his family's Easter Sunday celebration, won praise for its Filipino representation but drew even worse reviews than "Bullet Train." It opened with \$5.3 million in ticket sales.

Instead, "Bullet Train" was trailed by a number of holdovers, including Warner Bros.' "DC League of Pets." The animated release grossed \$11.2 million in its second week of release.

Jordan Peele's "Nope," the Universal sci-fi horror release, continued to perform well, earning \$8.5 million in its third weekend. With \$98 million in tickets sold, "Nope" will soon surpass \$100 million at the domestic box office.

Taika Waititi's "Thor: Love and Thunder," for the Walt Disney Co., came in fourth with \$7.6 million in its fifth weekend. It's now up to \$316.1 million, making it the highest grossing Thor movie domestically. With \$699 million globally, "Love and Thunder" is less likely to catch the \$854 million worldwide haul of 2017's "Thor: Ragnarok."

In limited release, A24's "Bodies Bodies Bodies" launched on six screens in New York and Los Angeles with \$226,525 in ticket sales, good for a per-screen average of \$37,754. The horror comedy about rich 20-somethings at a remote house party, with a cast including Amandla Sternberg, Maria Bakalova and Pete Davidson, expands nationwide on Friday.

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

1. "Bullet Train," \$30.1 million.
2. "DC League of Super Pets," \$11.2 million.

3. "Nope," \$8.5 million.
4. "Thor: Love and Thunder," \$7.6 million.
5. "Minions: The Rise of Gru," \$7.1 million.
6. "Top Gun: Maverick," \$7 million.
7. "Where the Crawdads Sing," \$5.7 million.
8. "Easter Sunday," \$5.3 million.
9. "Elvis," \$4 million.
10. "The Black Phone," \$1.5 million.

Dems rally around abortion. Are they reaching Black voters?

By HARM VENHUIZEN Associated Press/Report for America

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Facing critical races for governor and U.S. Senate, Democratic hopefuls in Wisconsin are hoping that their support for abortion rights in the face of a Supreme Court ruling that overturned Roe v. Wade can overcome the headwinds of a midterm election long expected to favor Republicans. But there's one key group their strategies might fail to mobilize: Black voters.

An issue with strong support from white Democrats is more complicated in the Black community, especially among churchgoers who hold more conservative views on abortion. The topic is so fraught that most community organizers avoid bringing it up.

"Among the Black Baptist church alone, that would split us in half," said David Liners, executive director of WISDOM, a faith-based organizing group with a statewide presence, when asked why his group isn't organizing around abortion. Karen Royster, spokeswoman for Milwaukee-based Souls to the Polls, called abortion "taboo" in church circles, making it difficult for faith leaders to do any sort of work around it.

Other groups, like Black Leaders Organizing Communities, "won't proactively bring up the issue" while doing voter outreach, but will discuss it if it comes up, said Angela Lang, BLOC's executive director.

It's an issue bound to get even more focus after a decisive statewide vote in heavily Republican Kansas last week in favor of protecting abortion access, buoying Democratic hopes the issue could galvanize voters elsewhere.

AP VoteCast shows that overall, Black voters in the 2020 presidential election were more likely than white or Hispanic voters to say abortion should usually be legal. But among those identifying with or leaning toward the Democratic Party, things looked different: White Democrats were more likely than either Black or Hispanic Democrats to say abortion should be legal in most or all cases, 88% to 77% to 76%.

Valerie Langston, a 64-year-old Milwaukee woman who is Black, backs Democrats and supports abortion rights. She said she's afraid to bring up the issue with friends because she has occasionally been surprised to learn that some of them are anti-abortion.

"They're still going to vote Democrat even if they don't agree with abortion," she said.

Democratic Gov. Tony Evers, who won election four years ago by just over 1 percentage point, said he isn't worried about voter enthusiasm. He has noted that he has vetoed nine bills from the Republican-controlled Legislature that would have restricted abortion access. At a news conference, he projected confidence that the issue will carry him to reelection.

"I don't think there's going to be any trouble," Evers said when asked if he thought voters with varied views on abortion might not be motivated to support him.

Doctors in Wisconsin have stopped providing abortions after the Supreme Court's ruling due to an 1849 ban that Republican lawmakers have said they want to update. Anti-abortion groups have said they'll work to clarify the law to defend against challenges.

State Sen. La Tonya Johnson, a Black Democrat who represents a majority-Black district in Milwaukee, noted many voters are focused on economic concerns. She said she hasn't seen groups going door-to-door to talk about abortion rights, even though Black women are more likely than any other group to obtain an abortion, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Wisconsin Democratic Party's engagement teams that work directly with voters of color year-round

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prefer to take conversations where voters lead them, spokeswoman Iris Riis said. When it comes to abortion, "It's not the only thing we're talking to voters about, but we are talking about it," she said.

Shakya Cherry-Donaldson, executive director of 1000 Women Strong, a national political organizing group focused on issues that matter to Black women, favors a more direct approach. The key is to focus on the idea that "we have to have autonomy from the state," she said — a message that resonates enough with a historically marginalized community to overcome personal and religious views on the morality of abortion.

"The framing of our messaging is that we cannot go back, only forward. Civil rights were won for all of us," Cherry-Donaldson said.

But her group is not in Wisconsin this year, focusing its efforts in seven other states where they were able to staff and fund their work.

Paru Shah, a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee whose work focuses on race, ethnicity and politics, said Democrats would do well to make sure they are messaging on issues like crime and voting rights rather than focus on one particular issue like abortion.

"There isn't a lot of single-issue voting happening among Democrats in general, but especially among Black women who have kind of been the backbone of Democratic turnout for at least the last 10 years," said Shah.

The GOP's strategy and messaging to reach Black voters on abortion will be the same in the midterm as it's been for decades.

"What we will do is explain the inordinate — I would say even lopsided — access to abortion that's being pushed on African American women," said Gerard Randall, chair of the Wisconsin Republican Party's African American Council.

"They will hear certainly from the pulpits in many of their churches a similar message of restraint when it comes to accessing abortions," he said.

Still, Wisconsin Democrats see the issue as key to winning both the governor's race and the U.S. Senate race this fall.

Polling by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research has found most people in the United States want Congress to pass legislation guaranteeing access to legal abortion nationwide and that overwhelming majorities also think states should allow abortion in specific cases, including for a woman's health and for rape.

The Democratic front-runner in Wisconsin's Senate race, Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, who is Black, emphasizes abortion access as a civil right. In his latest television ad, Barnes, who grew up in Milwaukee, and his mother talk about her decision to end a complicated pregnancy. LaJuan Barnes highlights that she was able to choose: "It was my decision, not some politicians'."

Demand for grocery delivery cools as food costs rise

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Karen Raschke, a retired attorney in New York, started getting her groceries delivered early in the pandemic. Each delivery cost \$30 in fees and tips, but it was worth it to avoid the store.

Then earlier this spring, Raschke learned her rent was increasing by \$617 per month. Delivery was one of the first things she cut from her budget. Now, the 75-year-old walks four blocks to the grocery several times a week. She only uses delivery on rare occasions, like a recent heat wave.

"To do it every week is not sustainable," she said.

Raschke isn't alone. U.S. demand for grocery delivery is cooling as prices for food and other necessities rise. Some are shifting to pickup — a less expensive alternative where shoppers pull up curbside or go into the store to collect their already-bagged groceries — while others say they're comfortable doing the shopping themselves.

Grocery delivery saw tremendous growth during the first year of the pandemic. In August 2019 — a typical pre-pandemic month — Americans spent \$500 million on grocery delivery. By June 2020, it had ballooned to a \$3.4 billion business, according to Brick Meets Click, a market research company.

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Companies rushed to fill that demand. DoorDash and Uber Eats began offering grocery delivery. Kroger — the nation's largest grocer — opened automated warehouses to fulfill delivery orders. Amazon opened a handful of Amazon Fresh groceries, which provide free delivery to Prime members. Hyper-fast grocery delivery companies like Jokr and Buyk expanded into U.S. cities.

But as the pandemic eased, demand softened. In June 2022, Americans spent \$2.5 billion on grocery delivery — down 26% from 2020. For comparison, they spent \$3.4 billion on grocery pickup, which saw demand drop 10.5% from its pandemic highs.

That's causing some turmoil in the industry. Buyk filed for bankruptcy in March; Jokr pulled out of the U.S. in June. Instacart — the U.S. market leader in grocery delivery — slashed its own valuation by 40% to \$24 billion in March ahead of a potential IPO. Kroger said its digital sales — which include pickup and delivery — dropped 6% in the first quarter of this year.

Some think delivery demand could drop further. Chase Design, a consulting firm, says its surveys show the number of U.S. shoppers who plan to use grocery delivery "all the time" has fallen by half since 2021.

Cost is the biggest reason. Peter Cloutier, the growth and commercial strategy lead at Chase Design, said it's difficult to get groceries to a customer's door for less than a \$10 premium, which covers labor and transportation. Often, that cost is higher.

Consider a basket of eight staples from Target, including a gallon of milk, a dozen eggs and a pound of ground beef. In store, the order would ring up at \$35.12. Target offers curbside pickup for free. Delivery costs \$9.99, not including a tip.

DoorDash also offers delivery from Target, but it charges more for each item on its website. The cart rings up at \$39.90 from DoorDash, which then adds \$12.18 in taxes and delivery fees. If the consumer adds a \$10 tip, that totals \$62.08.

Both DoorDash and Target offer free delivery through subscriptions, but those come with a monthly or yearly fee.

The premiums are tough to swallow on top of skyrocketing food prices. In June, U.S. grocery food prices were up 12.2% over the last 12 months, the largest increase since April 1979, according to government data.

Cynthia Carrasco White, an attorney for a nonprofit in Los Angeles, got accustomed to grocery delivery during the pandemic. She still prefers it, since her youngest child isn't fully vaccinated and it saves time.

But earlier this summer, as gas prices approached \$7 and a box of strawberries neared \$9, she got serious about cutting costs.

White now toggles between Instacart, Uber Eats, Walmart and others, using whichever has the best offers and coupons. She will sometimes spend two hours filling a delivery cart and then wait to see if more promotions are posted before she finishes her order. And she has cut back on the amount she tips drivers.

"The economy has definitely taken the wind out of our sails," she said. "It's just this endless pressure."

Retailers are responding by varying delivery prices by time of day. On a recent morning, Walmart offered to deliver a \$35 order within two hours for \$17.95; that dropped to \$7.95 if the order could be delivered between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m.

But cost isn't the only reason some consumers are moving away from delivery. Cloutier says many customers are wary of the quality of items selected by workers.

"There's a trust gap between what the shopper wants to get and what the retailer fulfills," Cloutier said.

Delivery companies are trying to improve that. Last month, Uber Eats announced upgrades to its online grocery offering, including the ability for consumers to see the products as workers scan them.

But even that may not entice some shoppers.

Diane Kovacs, a college lecturer in Brunswick, Ohio, has been using curbside pickup for nearly a decade. It saves her money, she says, because she doesn't get sucked into impulse buys inside the grocery.

She got her groceries delivered briefly during the pandemic and she didn't mind paying \$10 or \$15 a week for the service. But she still prefers pickup. She likes driving her dogs to the store and chatting with the employees.

"I think that people are not using delivery because they want to get the heck out of the house," she said.

True demand for grocery delivery is tough to calculate. Usage can swing wildly when COVID cases rise

or companies offer discounts, said David Bishop, a partner at Brick Meets Click.

But he sees some patterns emerging. Households with young children and people with mobility issues are sticking with delivery. People over 60 have generally gone back to shopping in person.

Bishop says delivery saw five years of growth in the first three months of the pandemic, and demand is probably still elevated. Eventually, he expects delivery sales to settle into more regular growth of about 10% per year. But delivery won't go away, he said.

"I don't see it moving all the way back to pre-COVID levels. That can has been opened up," he said.

Parkland shooter's prosecutor had bloody facts on his side

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — The prosecutor seeking to sentence Florida school shooter Nikolas Cruz to death let the facts speak for themselves as he presented his case: terrifying witness accounts; heartrending statements from parents and spouses; chilling surveillance videos; gruesome autopsy and crime scene photos; and, as a capstone, Thursday's jury walk-through of the three-story building where it happened, bloodstains and Valentine's Day cards still clinging to the floors.

Lead prosecutor Mike Satz, the 80-year-old former Broward County state attorney, then rested his case against the defendant who murdered 14 students and three staff members at Parkland's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Feb. 14, 2018.

Cruz's attorneys repeatedly objected that Satz's case went beyond what was legally allowable or necessary and was aimed primarily at inflaming the jurors' emotions — objections that were denied by Circuit Judge Elizabeth Scherer.

There was never any doubt Satz would be able to prove the killings were "cold, calculated and premeditated," that Cruz's actions were "heinous, atrocious or cruel" and "created a great risk to many persons" and four other aggravating circumstances listed in Florida law that make him eligible for a possible death sentence. But Satz also had to give them heft as they must, in the jurors' unanimous opinion, "outweigh" the mitigating factors the defense will soon present.

"I didn't think there were any surprises, but what surprises could there have been?" said Bob Jarvis, a law professor at Nova Southeastern University in suburban Fort Lauderdale. "The jurors knew walking in what Cruz had done. ... The question that kept running through my mind was, 'Was it too much?'"

"He did a fantastic job," said David S. Weinstein, a Miami criminal defense attorney and former prosecutor. "He has built a case that I think has given the jury more than enough to find these aggravating factors and was not over-the-top at all."

After a one-week break, the sides will spend a week without the jury arguing before Judge Scherer over what evidence Cruz's defense can present about how his birth mother's drinking and drug abuse during pregnancy affected his brain and whether defects can be seen on scans.

Jennifer Zedalis, a University of Florida law professor, said such arguments over fetal alcohol syndrome scans go back 20 years.

"Brain scans, MRIs, we can learn from them — the argument will be over whether the evidence reaches a the standard of relevance and reliability to be permitted," Zedalis said. She said if the evidence's admissibility is borderline, she would expect the judge to side with Cruz's lawyers as appellate courts have said "a defendant on trial for his life deserves wide latitude."

Cruz, 23, pleaded guilty in October to 17 counts of first-degree murder; the trial is only to decide whether the former Stoneman Douglas student is sentenced to death or life without parole. Once they begin deliberating, likely several weeks from now, the jury will take separate votes for each victim. For each death sentence, the jury must be unanimous or the sentence for that victim is life.

After Scherer rules, lead defense attorney Melisa McNeill is expected to give her opening statement Aug. 22 and then she and her team will present their case.

"That's when the trial really begins," Jarvis said.

Instead, they are expected to focus on his life, starting with his birth mother's addictions; his severe

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emotional and behavioral problems that began in preschool and the holes in his treatment; his adoptive father's death when he was 5; his adoptive mother's death three months before the shootings; his alleged sexual abuse at the hands of a "trusted peer"; that he was an immature 19-year-old; and the bullying he endured from his brother and his brother's friends.

McNeill and her team are unlikely to downplay the severity of Cruz's actions — they have conceded in court several times that the murders were horrible and wiped away tears during some parents' statements about their dead child.

The defense will argue, "If you send him to death, you are ignoring all of that and that is just wrong," Jarvis said.

Weinstein said the defense has a tough task. The jurors all swore they could vote for either death or life, based on the evidence. Even if the defense can prove some mitigating factors, he said, it will be difficult for those to outweigh 17 people murdered in cold blood.

"I don't think you can paint a picture of Cruz as sympathetic, that he's not as bad as what the prosecution has said," Jarvis said. "Instead, they have to show that he is a victim, that he fell through the cracks, that society failed him from the outset. ...Society created this monster and failed to stop this monster."

Weinstein said the prosecution will argue if the death penalty "is not appropriate in this circumstance, why do we have it? What could happen that's possibly any more egregious than this?"

Today in History: August 8, Nixon announces his resignation

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Aug. 8, the 220th day of 2022. There are 145 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 8, 1974, President Richard Nixon, facing damaging new revelations in the Watergate scandal, announced he would resign the following day.

On this date:

In 1814, during the War of 1812, peace talks between the United States and Britain began in Ghent, Belgium.

In 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte set sail for St. Helena to spend the remainder of his days in exile.

In 1861, biologist William Bateson, founder of the science of genetics, was born in Whitby, Yorkshire, England.

In 1911, President William Howard Taft signed a measure raising the number of U.S. representatives from 391 to 433, effective with the next Congress, with a proviso to add two more when New Mexico and Arizona became states.

In 1942, during World War II, six Nazi saboteurs who were captured after landing in the U.S. were executed in Washington, D.C.; two others who cooperated with authorities were spared.

In 1945, President Harry S. Truman signed the U.S. instrument of ratification for the United Nations Charter. The Soviet Union declared war against Japan during World War II.

In 1953, the United States and South Korea initialed a mutual security pact.

In 1963, Britain's "Great Train Robbery" took place as thieves made off with 2.6 million pounds in banknotes.

In 1973, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew branded as "damned lies" reports he had taken kickbacks from government contracts in Maryland, and vowed not to resign — which he ended up doing.

In 1994, Israel and Jordan opened the first road link between the two once-warring countries.

In 2000, the wreckage of the Confederate submarine H.L. Hunley, which sank in 1864 after attacking the Union ship Housatonic, was recovered off the South Carolina coast and returned to port.

In 2009, Sonia Sotomayor was sworn in as the U.S. Supreme Court's first Hispanic and third female justice.

Ten years ago: Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi fired his intelligence chief for failing to act on an Israeli warning of an imminent attack days before militants stormed a border post in the Sinai Peninsula

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and killed 16 soldiers. Misty May-Treanor and Kerri Walsh Jennings of the United States became the first three-time gold medalists in Olympic beach volleyball history, beating Jennifer Kessy and April Ross in the all-American final.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump said continued North Korean threats aimed at the United States would cause the U.S. to respond with "fire and fury like the world has never seen." Venezuela's new constitutional assembly, created by embattled President Nicolas Maduro, took over the halls of the opposition-controlled congress and decreed itself to be superior to all other branches of government. Singer Glen Campbell died in Nashville, Tennessee, at the age of 81; he had announced in 2011 that he'd been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

One year ago: Taliban fighters seized most of Kunduz city, the capital of a key northern Afghan province, the latest in a series of blows to government forces. The pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics officially came to an end; the closing ceremony was held in an empty stadium, though athletes were still able to gather on the field. Hall of Fame football coach Bobby Bowden, who built one of the most prolific college football programs in history at Florida State, died at his home in Tallahassee, Florida, at 91.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Nita Talbot is 92. Actor Dustin Hoffman is 85. Actor Connie Stevens is 84. Country singer Phil Balsley (The Statler Brothers) is 83. Actor Larry Wilcox is 75. Actor Keith Carradine is 73. Movie director Martin Brest is 71. Radio-TV personality Robin Quivers is 70. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is 69. Percussionist Anton Fig is 69. Actor Donny Most is 69. Rock musician Dennis Drew (10,000 Maniacs) is 65. TV personality Deborah Norville is 64. Rock musician The Edge (U2) is 61. Rock musician Rikki Rockett (Poison) is 61. Rapper Kool Moe Dee is 60. Middle distance runner Suzy Favor Hamilton is 54. Rock singer Scott Stapp is 49. Country singer Mark Wills is 49. Actor Kohl Sudduth is 48. Rock musician Tom Linton (Jimmy Eat World) is 47. Singer JC Chasez ('N Sync) is 46. Actor Tawny Cypress is 46. R&B singer Drew Lachey (lah-SHAY') (98 Degrees) is 46. R&B singer Marsha Ambrosius is 45. Actor Lindsay Sloane is 45. Actor Countess Vaughn is 44. Actor Michael Urie is 42. Tennis player Roger Federer is 41. Actor Meagan Good is 41. Rock musician Eric Howk (Portugal. The Man) is 41. Actor Jackie Cruz (TV: "Orange is the New Black") is 38. Britain's Princess Beatrice of York is 34. Actor Ken Baumann is 33. New York Yankees first baseman Anthony Rizzo is 33. Pop singer Shawn Mendes is 24. Actor Bebe Wood (TV: "The Real O'Neals") is 21.