

Groton Daily Independent

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SABER SHRED HELP WANTED

Now hiring full or part-time positions. Tire handler, responsible for assisting in unloading tires from semi trailers, feeding the tire shredder and general cleanup tasks. Must be able to lift 50 lbs. Starting pay \$16/hr. Contact Robert Wegner at 605-397-7579. Saber Shred Solutions (formerly New Deal Tire Groton, SD)

CARD OF THANKS

I WOULD LIKE to say a big thank you to everyone who called, sent cards, gave gifts or visited me for my 80th birthday. I would also like to thank my daughter, Deb, for putting on a wonderful supper for me. It was a very special time. Blessings to all of you!

Thursday, Aug. 11
First allowable day of volleyball and cross country practice

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



Help Wanted

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

CLEANER WANTED

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

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

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

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New goal posts installed at Groton Doney Field

New goal posts were installed at Doney Field at Groton Sports Complex. Top left features Joe Foertsch (right) making sure it's level as he is assisted by Bill Ogden. The bottom photo features Foertsch in the skid-steer as Superintendent Joe Schwan lends a hand to Bill Ogden. (Photos by Tigh Fliehs)



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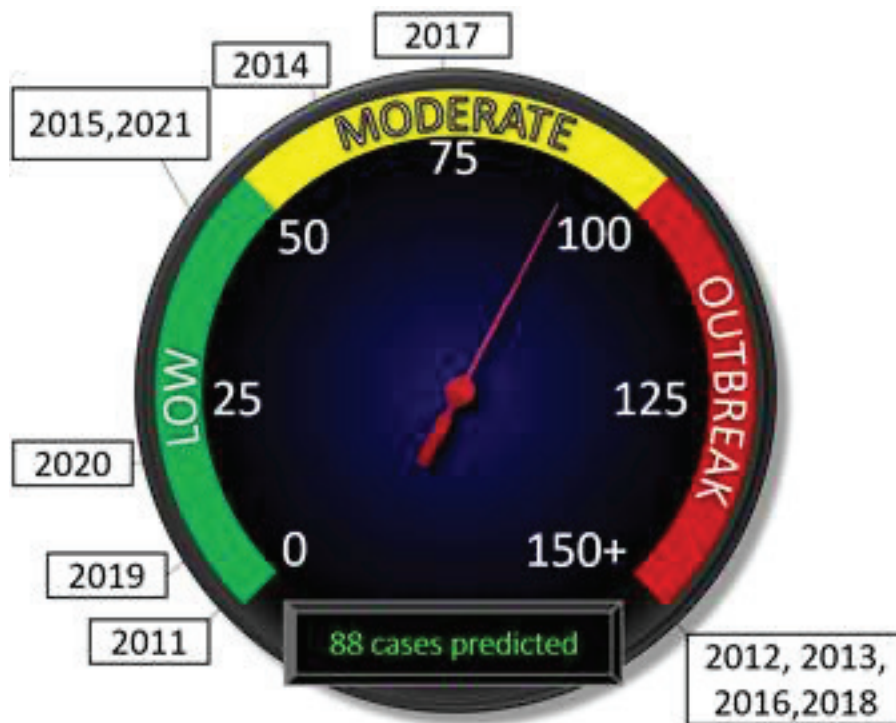
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SD WNV (as of August 10):

- 1 human case reported (Brown)
- 3 human viremic blood donors (Minnehaha, Potter, Spink)
- 7 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of July 27): 30 cases (AL, AZ, CA, IN, LA, MN, MS, ND, PA, TX) and 2 deaths

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2022, South Dakota (as of August 10)



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Highway Patrol Sturgis Rally Daily Information

Compiled from 6 a.m. Saturday August 6, 2022, to 6 a.m. Wednesday August 10, 2022

Item	Sturgis	Rapid City District	District Total	Last Year to Date
DUI Arrests	58	19	77	74
Misd Drug Arrests	52	28	80	93
Felony Drug Arrests	43	7	50	61
Total Citations	421	300	721	865
Total Warnings	1582	1020	2602	2340
Cash Seized	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1862.00
Vehicles Seized	0	0	0	0
For Drug Poss.	0	0	0	0
For Serial No.	0	0	0	0
Non-Injury Crashes	8	14	22	25
Injury Crashes	17	13	30	36
Fatal Crashes	1	2	3	1
# of Fatalities	1	2	3	1

Fatal Crashes:

At 10:30 a.m., South Dakota Highway 44, mile marker 88, within the city limits of Scenic: Three motorcycles were eastbound on South Dakota Highway 34. A 2019 Harley-Davidson Trike stopped on the shoulder of the road and then attempted a U-turn. A 2012 Harley-Davidson motorcycle collided with the trike and a 2018 Harley-Davidson Trike then struck the motorcycle. The 66-year-old female passenger on the 2018 trike was pronounced dead at the scene. The 71-year-old male driver suffered serious non-life threatening injuries and was transported to a Rapid City hospital. Neither was wearing a helmet. The 62-year-old male driver of the motorcycle sustained serious non-life threatening injuries and was transported to a Rapid City hospital. He was not wearing a helmet. The 64-year-old male driver of the 2019 trike received minor injuries and was taken to a Rapid City hospital. He was not wearing a helmet. The 58-year-old female passenger was not injured. She was wearing a helmet.

Injury Crashes:

At 11:23 a.m., Tuesday, intersection of South Dakota Highway 89 and South Dakota Highway 87, five miles north of Custer: A 2009 Harley-Davidson FLHRC motorcycle was southbound on South Dakota Highway 83 when the 51-year-old female driver failed to negotiate a turn. She suffered serious non-life threatening injuries and was taken to the Custer hospital. She was not wearing a helmet.

At 12:25 p.m., Tuesday, U.S. Highway 18, mile marker 19, eight miles east of Sturgis: A 2006 Nissan Titan vehicle pulling a trailer eastbound on U.S. Highway 18 when the driver lost control. The vehicle and trailer tipped over in the eastbound lane. The 52-year-old female driver sustained minor injuries and the 57-year-old male passenger was partially ejected and sustained serious non-life threatening injuries. Both were taken to the Hot Springs hospital. Neither occupant wore a seatbelt.

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At 1:20 p.m., Tuesday, Vanocker Road, mile marker 11, six miles south of Sturgis: A 2009 Harley-Davidson FLF motorcycle was northbound on Vanocker Road when the driver failed to negotiate a left-hand curve. The motorcycle went off the road to the right and hit rocks. The 60-year-old male driver sustained serious non-life threatening injuries and was transferred to the Sturgis hospital. He was not wearing a helmet.

At 5:15 p.m., Tuesday, South Dakota Highway 79, mile marker 112, two miles north of Sturgis: A 2019 Harley-Davidson FLHXS motorcycle was southbound on South Dakota Highway 79 when it rear-ended a 2019 Indian Chieftain motorcycle. The 61-year-old male driver of the Harley-Davidson suffered serious non-life threatening injuries and was transported to the Sturgis hospital. The 62-year-old male driver of the Indian Chieftain motorcycle was not injured. Neither was wearing a helmet.

At 6:50 p.m., Tuesday, Pleasant Valley Road, five miles south of Sturgis: A 2017 Harley-Davidson FLTRXS motorcycle was eastbound on Pleasant Valley Road when the driver lost control. The 56-year-old female driver sustained minor injuries and was taken to the Sturgis hospital. She was not wearing a helmet.

At 7:42 p.m., Tuesday, at the intersection of Lazelle Street and 14th Street, within the city limits of Sturgis: A 2005 Harley-Davidson XL883C motorcycle was westbound on Lazelle Street when it lost control. The 48-year-old driver sustained minor injuries, but was not transported. He was wearing a helmet.

2022 Sturgis Rally Vehicle Count - Through Day Five

STURGIS, S.D. – Vehicle traffic counts from the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) for vehicles entering Sturgis for the 82nd Annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally Aug. 5-14, 2022, are available and will be updated daily.

Traffic counts at nine locations entering Sturgis for the 2022 Rally are as follows:

Friday, Aug. 5: 56,855 entering: Up 11.4% from the previous five-year average
Saturday, Aug. 6: 62,199 entering: Up 5% from the previous five-year average
Sunday, Aug. 7: 60,672 entering: Up 6.8% from the previous five-year average
Monday, Aug. 8: 62,050 entering: Up 3.3% from the previous five-year average
Tuesday, Aug. 9: 58,610 entering: Up 1.6% from the previous five-year average

2022 – 5 Day Total: 300,386 Vehicles
Previous 5-Year Average: 284,819 Vehicles

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SENIOR MEALS PROGRAM

SEPTEMBER 2022

month/year

SITE: Groton

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
			1 DRI-1 Ham Sweet Potatoes Peas Acini Depepi Fruit Salad Whole Wheat Bread	2 DRI-32 Chili Cornbread Coleslaw Lime Pear Jello
5 HOLIDAY LABOR DAY	6 DRI-47 Ham and Bean Soup Egg Salad Sandwich Tomato Spoon Salad Fruit	7 DRI-55 Roast Pork Mashed Potatoes/Gravy Parsley Buttered Carrots Applesauce Whole Wheat Bread	8 DRI-40 Ranch Chicken Breast Boiled Potato Squash Fruit Whole Wheat Bread	9 DRI-50 Hamburger/Cabbage dish Mixed Vegetables Pears Muffin
12 DRI-63 Chicken Rice Casserole Green Beans Lettuce Salad Chocolate Pudding with Bananas Whole Wheat Bread	13 DRI-44 Swiss Steak w/Gravy Mashed Potatoes Mixed Vegetables Fruit Whole wheat bread	14 DRI-52 Baked Pork Chop Augratin Potatoes Carrots Applesauce Whole Wheat Bread	15 Breaded Codfish Parsely Buttered Potatoes Seasoned Cabbage Fruit Whole Wheat Bread	16 DRI-17 Spaghetti/Meat Sauce Mixed Vegetables Garlic Toast Pears Sherbert
19 DRI-37 Beef Stew Biscuit Waldort Salad Sherbert	20 Chicken Fried Steak Mashed Potatoes/Gravy Corn Chocolate Cake Fruit Whole wheat bread	21 DRI-35 Hearty Vegetable Soup Chicken Salad Sandwich Mandarin Oranges Peanut Butter Cookie	22 DRI-28 Scalloped Potato/Ham Green Peas Sunset Salad Oatmeal Raisin Cookie Whole Wheat Bread	23 DRI-39 Tuna Noodle Casserole Peas and Carrots Swedish Apple Pie Square Whole Wheat Bread
26 DRI-63 Sloppy Joe on Wheat Bun Oven Roasted Potatoes Mixed Vegetables Fruit Sauce	27 DRI-13 Hot Turkey Combos Mashed Potatoes/Gravy 7 Layer Salad Fruit	28 Swedish Meatballs Mashed Potatoes Peas and Carrots Fruit Cocktail Whole Wheat Bread	29 DRI-9 Meatloaf Baked Potato/S. Cream Creamed Peas Fruited Jello Whole Wheat Bread	30 DRI-58 Chicken Tetraccine Mixed Vegetables Honey Fruit Salad Whole Wheat Bread

MEALS APPROVED BY: REGISTERED DIETITIAN

All meals include milk

Water/wastewater assistance available in South Dakota

PIERRE – Assistance for South Dakota families whose water/wastewater service has been disconnected or who are at risk of losing access to water service may be available through the Department of Social Services (DSS).

“Water/wastewater service is key to maintaining a habitable and healthy home,” said DSS Cabinet Secretary Laurie Gill. “If your service has been disconnected, you have been notified of pending service disconnection, or you have overdue water service bills, there may be help available.”

Water/wastewater assistance is available for low-income individuals and families. Eligibility is based on the number of people and income of everyone in the home.

Applications are being accepted now.

To apply, contact the Community Action Agency serving your county:

Inter-Lakes Community Action – Ph: 605.256.6518 (www.interlakescap.com) serves Brookings, Clark, Codington, Deuel, Grant, Hamlin, Kingsbury, Lake, McCook, Miner, Minnehaha, and Moody counties.

Grow South Dakota - Ph: 605.698.7654 (<https://www.growsd.org/>) serves Beadle, Brown, Campbell, Day, Edmunds, Faulk, Hand, Hughes, Hyde, McPherson, Marshall, Potter, Roberts, Spink, Stanley, Sully, and Walworth counties.

Rural Office of Community Services - Ph: 605.384.3883 (www.rocsinc.org) serves Aurora, Bon Homme, Brule, Buffalo, Charles Mix, Clay, Davison, Douglas, Gregory, Hanson, Hutchinson, Jerauld, Jones, Lincoln, Lyman, Mellette, Sanborn, Todd, Tripp, Turner, Yankton, and Union counties.

Western South Dakota Community Action - Ph: 605.348.1460 (www.wsdca.org) serves Bennett, Butte, Corson, Custer, Dewey, Fall River, Haakon, Harding, Jackson, Lawrence, Meade, Perkins, Oglala Lakota, Pennington, and Ziebach counties.

For more information about Energy and Weatherization Assistance, visit <https://dss.sd.gov/economicassistance/energyassistance/>.

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

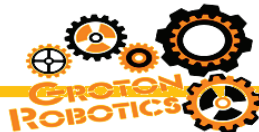
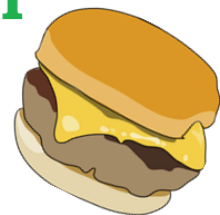


available to purchase



ALL PROCEEDS BENEFIT

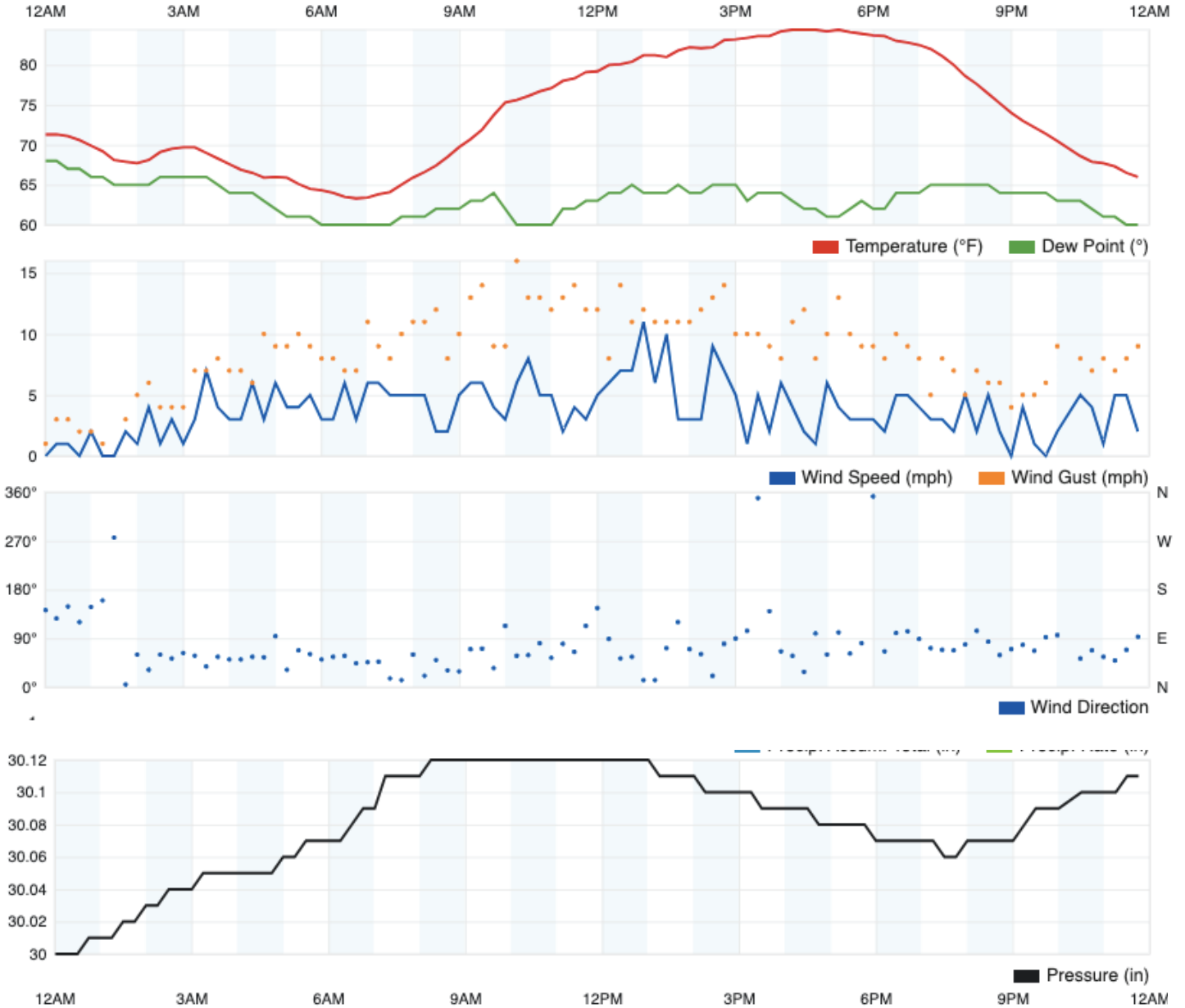
GROTON ROBOTICS



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Slight Chance Showers then Partly Sunny

High: 83 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 67 °F

Friday



Partly Sunny

High: 88 °F

Friday Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 62 °F

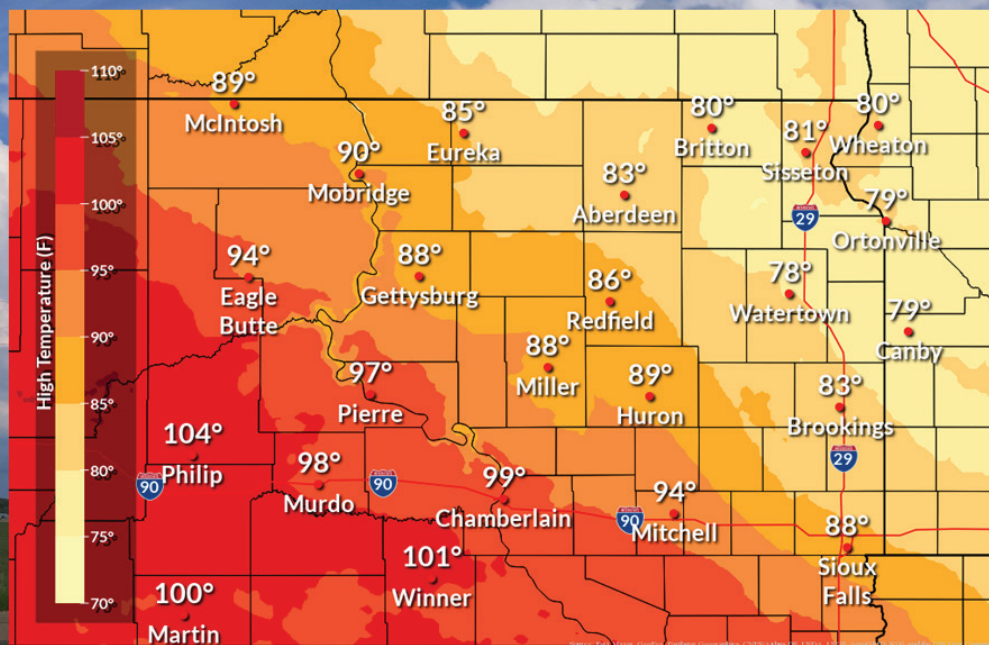
Saturday



Mostly Sunny

High: 86 °F

A Few Showers and Storms Today



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Aberdeen, SD 8/11/2022 4:08 AM



High temperatures today will range from the upper 70s, in northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota, to 100 degrees, in south central South Dakota. A few showers and storms will be possible today, but most areas will see dry conditions.

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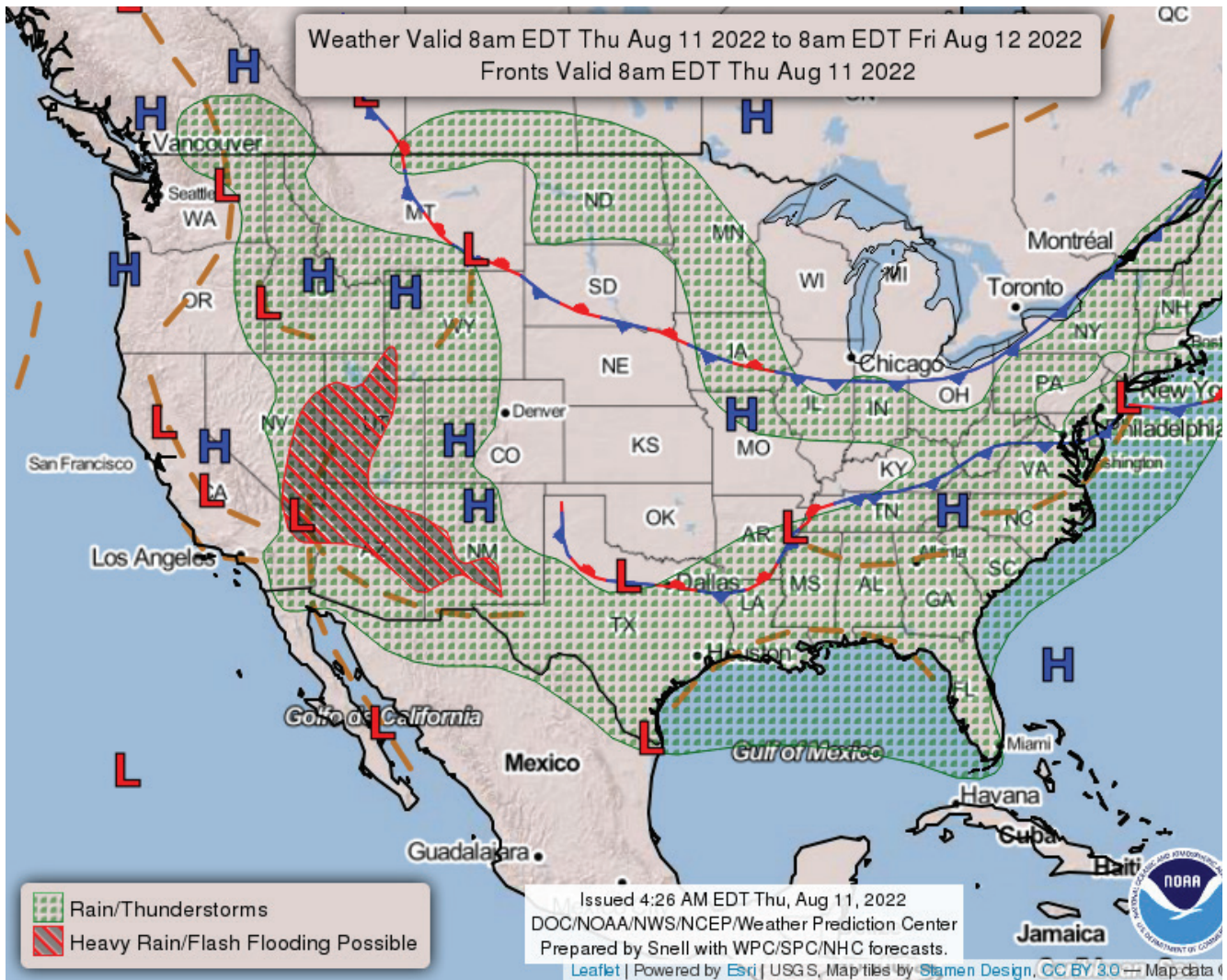
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 85 °F at 4:51 PM
Low Temp: 63 °F at 6:32 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 10:10 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 20 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 103 in 1988
Record Low: 34 in 1902
Average High: 84°F
Average Low: 58°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 0.80
Precip to date in Aug.: 0.65
Average Precip to date: 14.90
Precip Year to Date: 15.19
Sunset Tonight: 8:47:57 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:28:23 AM



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Today in Weather History

August 11, 1975: A line of thunderstorms raced across portions of central and eastern South Dakota during the early morning hours. Winds gusted to 70 mph, causing considerable damage to trees. At Canton, in Lincoln County, the winds were estimated as high as 70 mph. In Sioux Falls, the peak wind gust measured 69 mph. Wind damage was also reported in Miller and Ree Heights in Hand County, as well as in Selby and Mobridge in Walworth County.

August 11, 1985: Lightning set off eleven fires in the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation area. Twenty acres of grassland were burned two miles northeast of Bear Creek. About 600 acres of grassland were burned 8 miles southwest of Lantry. About 3,000 acres of grassland burned near Eagle Butte.

August 11, 2011: Severe thunderstorms brought hail up to the size of ping pong balls and damaging winds up to 90 mph to parts of central South Dakota. Jones and Lyman Counties received the brunt of the strong winds with eighty mph winds downing several grain bins along with knocking a few semis off of Interstate-90 near Murdo. The winds also downed some power lines and poles along with destroying a hanger. The two planes in the hanger were damaged at the Murdo Airport. Near Kennebec in Lyman County, eighty mph winds took shingles off the house and also damaged the deck. A barn was also destroyed with a horse being injured. Many tree branches were also downed.

1940: A Category 2 hurricane struck the Georgia and South Carolina coast. A 13-foot storm tide was measured along the South Carolina coast, while over 15 inches of rain fell across northern North Carolina. Significant flooding and landslides struck Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia during the system's slow trek as a weakening tropical storm, and then as an extratropical cyclone, through the Southeast. The landslides which struck North Carolina were considered a once in a century event. Damages relating to the storm totaled \$13 million (1940 USD), and 50 people perished.

1944 - The temperature at Burlington, VT, soared to an all-time record high of 101 degrees. (The Weather Channel) The Dog Days officially come to an end on this date, having begun the third day in July. Superstition has it that dogs tend to become mad during that time of the year. (The Weather Channel)

1980 - Clouds and moisture from Hurricane Allen provided a brief break from the torrid Texas heatwave, with daily highs mostly in the 70s to lower 90s. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - An early evening thunderstorm in Wyoming produced hail up to two inches in diameter from Alva to Hulett. Snow plows had to be used to clear Highway 24 south of Hulett, where hail formed drifts two feet deep. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Moisture from what remained of Tropical Storm Beryl resulted in torrential rains across eastern Texas. Twelve and a half inches of rain deluged Enterprise TX, which was more than the amount received there during the previous eight months. Philadelphia PA reported a record forty-four days of 90 degree weather for the year. Baltimore MD and Newark NJ reported a record fourteen straight days of 90 degree heat. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - One of the most severe convective outbreaks of record came to a climax in southern California after four days. Thunderstorms deluged Benton CA with six inches of rain two days in a row, and the flooding which resulted caused more than a million dollars damage to homes and highways. Thunderstorms around Yellowstone Park WY produced four inches of rain in twenty minutes resulting in fifteen mudslides. Thunderstorms over Long Island NY drenched Suffolk County with 8 to 10 inches of rain. Twenty-three cities in the southeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. It was, for some cities, the fourth straight morning of record cold temperatures. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1999: An F2 tornado touched down in the metropolitan area of Salt Lake City. The tornado lasted ten minutes and killed one person, injured more than 80 people, and caused more than \$170 million in damages. It was the most destructive tornado in Utah's history and awakened the entire state's population to the fact that the Beehive State does experience tornadoes.



Untold Riches

Scripture: Romans 11:33-36 (English Standard Version)

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?"

35 "Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?"

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Insight By: K. T. Sim

Paul isn't the first biblical writer to speak of God being unknowable (Romans 11:33–35). Two thousand years earlier, Job (who is believed to have lived around the time of Abraham) asked, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God?" (Job 11:7). The prophet Isaiah aptly summed up our incapacity to fully know God: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8). But God desires us to know Him: "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord" (Jeremiah 24:7; see Hebrews 8:10–11). The apostle John tells us that "no one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God . . . has made him known" (John 1:18). Jesus Himself affirmed, "If you knew me, you would know my Father also" (8:19). Even though we can't comprehend everything about God, John says everyone who knows Jesus knows Him (17:3).

Comment By: Dave Branon

In an orbit between Mars and Jupiter zooms an asteroid worth trillions and trillions of dollars. Scientists say 16 Psyche consists of metals such as gold, iron, nickel, and platinum worth unfathomable amounts of money. For now, earthlings are not attempting to mine this rich resource, but the United States is planning to send a probe to study the valuable rock.

The promise of untold riches just out of reach can be both tantalizing and frustrating. Surely in time there will be people who will champion the cause of reaching 16 Psyche for its treasure.

But what about the prospect of riches that are within our reach? Wouldn't everyone go for that? Writing to the first-century church at Rome, the apostle Paul spoke of attainable riches—those we find in our relationship with God. He wrote, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33). Bible scholar James Denney described these riches as "the unsearchable wealth of love that enables God to . . . far more than meet the [great needs] of the world."

Isn't that what we need—even more than gold nuggets from some far-off asteroid? We can mine the riches of God's wisdom and knowledge found in the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit helps us. May God lead us to dig into those riches and to know and treasure Him more..

Reflect and Prayer: What does it mean for you to be rich in God's love? How can you dig more for riches that last?

Father God, help me to seek out Your wisdom and knowledge, Your judgments, and Your paths as I seek to follow You.

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2022-23 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White \$48.99/year
- Colored \$79.88/year
- Colored \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly* \$31.95/year

* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

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Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul



News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

02-10-12-24-30

(two, ten, twelve, twenty-four, thirty)

Estimated jackpot: \$22,000

Lotto America

04-06-15-44-50, Star Ball: 3, ASB: 2

(four, six, fifteen, forty-four, fifty; Star Ball: three; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$18,520,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 65,000,000

Powerball

29-44-59-61-68, Powerball: 19, Power Play: 2

(twenty-nine, forty-four, fifty-nine, sixty-one, sixty-eight; Powerball: nineteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$48,000,000

North Dakota abortion clinic opens at new Minnesota site

MOORHEAD, Minn. (AP) — The operator of North Dakota's only abortion clinic said Wednesday the clinic has opened in its new location in Moorhead, just weeks before it's likely to be forced to close its Fargo location under a statewide abortion ban there.

Red River Women's Clinic has a lawsuit pending seeking to block a trigger law in North Dakota that, as in many other states, was set to go into effect if the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Roe v. Wade precedent establishing a nationwide right to abortion. But owner Tammi Kromenaker, with the aid of some \$1 million in donations, worked anyway to find a new location just a couple miles away in Minnesota, where abortion remains legal.

Volunteer escorts in rainbow vests and umbrellas stood ready to walk patients inside, while a handful of protesters demonstrated.

Kromenaker, in a text message, confirmed the clinic's opening, saying she and employees "mourn leaving North Dakota" after 24 years there.

"We had worked night and day in order to be ready to see patients in the case that we did not get relief from our trigger ban challenge," Kromenaker said. "We are so grateful to the many volunteers who helped make this move a seamless reality."

An Aug. 19 hearing is set before a state judge in the clinic's lawsuit, which argues that North Dakota's constitution grants a right to abortion. The clinic has faced an Aug. 26 deadline to close in Fargo.

Appeals court: Out-of-state petitioners can work in Montana

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — A law that said only Montana residents can gather signatures to qualify initiatives for the state ballot is unconstitutional, a panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled Wednesday.

The judges found that the residency requirement for signature gatherers is too severe a burden on the exercise of free speech rights and would limit the number of people available to gather signatures.

However, the three-judge panel upheld another part of the law that bans signature-gatherers from being paid based on the number of signatures they collect in an effort to reduce the incentive to forge signatures or commit fraud.

The ruling sends the case back to U.S. District Court Judge Charles Lovell in Helena, who had upheld the ban against using out-of-state signature gatherers and the pay-per-signature ban.

The appeals court ruling came in a recent challenge to a 2007 law passed after the signature-gathering process for three ballot initiatives in 2006 in Montana was found to have been "permeated by a pervasive and general pattern and practice of fraud," court records said.

The initiatives, including one to limit the state's taxing and spending authority, were disqualified from the ballot after court testimony found the signature gatherers had falsely attested to gathering signatures that they did not gather themselves and deceived residents into unknowingly signing petitions for more than one initiative, court records said.

The supporters of the 2006 initiatives relied primarily on out-of-state signature gatherers paid on a per-signature basis, court records said.

Montana is one of six states that ban paying petition circulators on a per-signature basis, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. The other states are: Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota and Wyoming.

Police shooting outside Sioux Falls restaurant leaves 1 dead

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Law enforcement officers fatally shot a man who fled a traffic stop in Sioux Falls and fired a gun at a police officer and a sheriff's deputy, the city's police chief said Wednesday.

Chief Jon Thum said at a briefing that law enforcement stopped a car with four occupants in the parking lot of a Burger King restaurant about 5:30 p.m. Tuesday because some were wanted and on parole.

Three of the four individuals — a woman and three men — ran from the vehicle and the fourth drove away, officials said.

One of the men fired at officers as he tried to flee and was shot, Thum said. The man, who has not been identified, was pronounced dead at a hospital.

"We came very close to losing an officer yesterday, possibly more than one," said Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead.

Police said they have arrested two who were in the vehicle. The person who drove away from the scene remains at large, the chief said.

The drive-thru restaurant was busy, but no bystanders or officers were injured, Thum said.

"These people are trying to kill our officers, and that's something we are very concerned about," he said.

The police officer and sheriff's deputy who fired their weapons are on administrative leave as the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation works the case.

Witnesses said they heard about 10 to 12 gunshots. Investigators cordoned off the area around the restaurant with yellow police tape. Patrons waited in their vehicles to be cleared from the scene.

Steven Carrillo, who was inside the Burger King with his partner and three children and more than a dozen other customers, said his family hid in the bathroom when the gunfire rang out.

"We were in there for like an hour," he said. "We didn't even eat afterward."

"I was mostly worried about my kids," Carrillo said, shaking his head. His children range in age from 4 to 9 years old.

It's the fifth police shooting in the city since the end of March, and the seventh since October 2021. Four of those seven have been fatal, according to Argus Leader.

State-licensed medical marijuana store opens next week

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Patients enrolled in South Dakota's medical marijuana program will have their first opportunity to buy cannabis from a state-licensed facility next week.

It has been a year and a-half since state voters overwhelmingly approved medical marijuana. The co-owner of one dispensary, Unity Rd. in Hartford, says the business has secured the first initial inventory available to state-run stores and the showroom is ready for customers.

The building was created with security in mind, said co-owner B.J. Olson.

"We started with a vault and then built the building around the vault. We have eight inch poured concrete walls, reinforced with rebar," Olson said.

The business is a Unity Rd. franchise, KELO-TV reported.

"The beauty of partnering with someone already established that has a plan in place is that we obtained the play book," co-owner Adam Jorgensen said. "This is stuff that we don't have the ability to go out and procure on our own. This is part of the design team that comes specifically with our partnership with Unity Rd."

Their franchise partnership means all their display tables, cases and security devices in the building are all the same as other Unity Rd. locations across the country.

Medical marijuana so far has only been available on tribal land in South Dakota, but next Wednesday Unity Rd. will be the first state-licensed dispensary to offer cannabis.

Give & take: West gives Ukraine weapons, bans Russian coal

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — On a day of give and take, Western nations made more pledges to send arms to Ukraine while the European Union's full ban on Russian coal imports kicked in on Thursday amid claims sanctions against Moscow now even affected its defense exports.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz pledged Thursday that Germany "is shipping arms — a great, great many, sweeping and very effective. And we will continue to do so in the coming time."

Germany, seen early in the war as a lackadaisical ally, has already approved military exports of at least \$710 million. Scholz said Germany's commitment to such exports was a "massive" break with its past. He added that Berlin would also provide further financial aid to Ukraine.

In Copenhagen, Britain and Denmark also made more commitments to shore up Ukraine's defense to push back Russia's invasion which has devastated the nation and reverberated across the world, causing anything from economic damage to the depletion of food supplies.

"We will not let you down," Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said as she opened a donor's conference. Denmark said a new contribution of \$113 million would push the total amount of funding from the small northern nation of 5.8 million to over \$500 million. She called it "a huge donation."

And to put more pressure on Russia, Britain announced it will send additional multiple launch rocket systems and guided missiles to Ukraine to help it resist Russia's invasion.

The new weapons, whose number wasn't specified, come on top of several rocket-launch systems given by Britain to Ukraine earlier this year. Britain said the new missiles can hit targets up to 80 kilometers (50 miles) away with pinpoint accuracy.

British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said the bolstered military support shows the West "will stand shoulder-to-shoulder, providing defensive military aid to Ukraine to help them defend against Putin's invasion," Wallace said at a meeting of mostly northern European allies of Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pleaded for more aid by videoconference.

"We need armament, munition for our defense," he said. "The sooner we stop Russia, the sooner we can feel safe."

Britain said that Moscow was already strained by the need to produce armored fighting vehicles for its troops in Ukraine and hence "is highly unlikely to be capable of fulfilling some export orders," in a sector it has long taken pride in.

The British defense intelligence update, highlighting "the increasing effect of Western sanctions," dovetails with Western belief that the series of measures they imposed on the Kremlin since the Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine are increasingly having an impact on the Russian economy.

The update said that because of the war and sanctions, "its military industrial capacity is now under significant strain, and the credibility of many of its weapon systems has been undermined by their association with Russian forces' poor performance."

Russia military credibility came under more pressure on Wednesday when Ukraine said nine Russian warplanes were destroyed in a string of explosions at an air base in Russian-controlled Crimea that ap-

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peared to be the result of a Ukrainian attack.

Russia denied any aircraft were damaged in the blasts — or that any attack took place. But satellite photos clearly showed at least seven fighter planes at the base had been blown up and others probably damaged.

Wallace dismissed Russian explanations of the blasts, including a wayward cigarette butt, as “excuses.” “When you just look at the footage of two simultaneous explosions not quite next to each other, and some of the reported damage even by the Russian authorities, I think it’s clear that that’s not something that happens by someone dropping a cigarette,” Wallace said.

Thursday also marked the day when an EU ban on coal imports from Russia was taking effect in following a long phase-in going back to April. The 27-nation EU said it will affect about 25% of Russian coal exports and create a loss of about \$8 billion a year. The EU is also trying to wean itself off Russian gas imports, but is too dependent to impose a full ban.

This week, there also were calls to impose a ban on Russian tourist visas, but Scholz placed the responsibility for what he described as “a criminal war” squarely with Russian President Vladimir Putin, indicating that he doesn’t support such a move.

As the war is now nearing the half-year point, Russia is facing other challenges too.

As Russia continues to suffer losses in its invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin has refused to announce a full-blown mobilization, also because such a move could be very unpopular for President Vladimir Putin. That has led instead to a covert recruitment effort that includes using prisoners to make up the manpower shortage.

This also is happening amid reports that hundreds of Russian soldiers are refusing to fight and trying to quit the military.

On the ground in Ukraine itself, the war continued with the repetitive blasts of incoming shells.

Three people were killed during the night of the city of Nikopol, according to the governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region, Valentyn Reznichenko, with nine others injured in the shelling which damaged about 40 apartment buildings.

Nikopol is about 50 kilometers (30 miles) downriver from Zaporizhzhia. In the Donetsk region, 11 people were killed over the past day, six of them in Bakhmut, according to regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko. Bakhmut is a key target for Russian forces as they try to advance in the east.

The governor of Russia’s Kursk region, Roman Starovoit, said Thursday that two villages near the Ukrainian border -- Tetkino and Popovo-Lezhachi -- came under fire from Ukraine. He didn’t immediately give details about casualties or the extent of damage.

Armed man demanding savings holds Beirut bank staff hostage

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A Lebanese man armed with a shotgun broke into a Beirut bank on Thursday, holding employees hostage and threatening to set himself ablaze with gasoline unless he receives his trapped savings, a security official said.

The man, identified as 42 year-old Bassam al-Sheikh Hussein, allegedly entered a branch of the Federal Bank in Beirut’s bustling Hamra district carrying a canister of gasoline and held six or seven bank employees hostage, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations. However, George al-Haj, the head of the Bank Employees Syndicate, told local media that there are some seven or eight bank employees held hostage, as well as two customers.

The man also fired three warning shots, the official said. Local media reported that he has about \$200,000 stuck in the bank.

Lebanon’s cash-strapped banks since late 2019 have implemented strict withdrawal limits on foreign currency assets, effectively evaporating the savings of many Lebanese. The country today is suffering from the worst economic crisis in its modern history, where three-quarters of the population have plunged into poverty, and the value of the Lebanese pound has declined by over 90% against the U.S. dollar.

Lebanese army soldiers, police officers from the country’s Internal Security Forces, and intelligence

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agents have surrounded the area. Officers are talking to the armed man to reach a settlement, but have thus far been unsuccessful.

Hussein released one of the hostages, who left by ambulance. Cellphone video footage from earlier shows the disgruntled man with his shotgun, demanding his money back. In another video, two police officers behind the locked bank entrance asked the man to release at least one of the hostages, but he refused.

A customer at the bank who fled the building as the situation escalated, told local media that he was demanding to withdraw \$2,000 dollars to pay for his hospitalized father's medical bills. His brother Atef, standing outside the bank, told the Associated Press that his brother would be willing to turn himself in if the bank gave him money to help with his father's medical bills and family expenses.

"My brother is not a scoundrel, he is a decent man," Atef al-Sheikh Hussein told the AP. "He takes what he has from his own pocket to give to others."

Meanwhile, dozens of protesters gathered in the area, chanting slogans against the Lebanese government and banks, hoping that Hussein would receive his trapped savings. Some bystanders even hailed him as a hero.

"What led us to this situation is the state's failure to resolve this economic crisis and the banks' and Central Bank's actions, where people can only retrieve some of their own money as if it's a weekly allowance," said Dina Abou Zor, a lawyer with the legal and advocacy group the Depositors' Union among the protesters. "And this has led to people taking matters into their own hands."

In January, a coffee shop owner successfully withdrew \$50,000 trapped in a bank branch in eastern Lebanon after holding bank staff hostage, and threatening to kill them.

Lebanon has yet to implement formal capital controls since the onset of the economic crisis.

North Korea claims disputed victory over virus, blames Seoul

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — In a striking speech before thousands of North Koreans, leader Kim Jong Un's sister said he suffered a fever while guiding the country to victory over the coronavirus. She blamed rival South Korea for the outbreak and vowed "deadly" retaliation.

Kim Yo Jong, a powerful official in charge of inter-Korean relations, glorified her brother's leadership during the outbreak in her speech Wednesday at a national meeting where he jubilantly described the country's widely disputed success over the virus as an "amazing miracle" in global public health.

North Korea's statements about its outbreak are widely believed to be manipulated to help Kim Jong Un maintain absolute authority. But experts believe the victory announcement signals his intention to move to other priorities and are concerned his sister's remarks portend a provocation, which might include nuclear or missile tests or even border skirmishes.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said Thursday that Kim Jong Un declared victory over COVID-19 and ordered an easing of preventive measures just three months after the country first acknowledged an outbreak.

In her first known televised speech, his sister said he suffered a fever and glorified his "epoch-making" leadership. In a dubious claim, she accused South Korea of spreading COVID-19 to North Korea's largely unvaccinated populace, saying the initial infections were caused by "leaflets, banknotes, awful booklets" and other items flown across the border by anti-North Korean activists in the South.

North Korea first suggested in July that its COVID-19 outbreak began in people who had contact with objects carried by balloons launched from South Korea — a questionable claim that appeared to be an attempt to blame its rival.

South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, expressed strong regret over North Korea's "extremely disrespectful and threatening comments" based on "ridiculous claims."

A senior South Korean presidential office official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in a background briefing, said Seoul is preparing for various possible North Korean provocations, including a test detonation of a nuclear device.

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Since North Korea acknowledged its coronavirus outbreak in May, it has reported about 4.8 million “fever cases” in its population of 26 million but only identified a fraction of those as COVID-19. The country, which likely lacks test kits and other public health tools, has claimed the outbreak has been slowing for weeks and that just 74 people have died.

“Since we began operating the maximum emergency anti-epidemic campaign (in May), daily fever cases that reached hundreds of thousands during the early days of the outbreak were reduced to below 90,000 a month later and continuously decreased, and not a single case of fever suspected to be linked to the evil virus has been reported since July 29,” Kim said in his speech Wednesday during a national meeting at which he announced a revised pandemic response.

“For a country that has yet to administer a single vaccine shot, our success in overcoming the spread of the illness in such a short period of time and recovering safety in public health and making our nation a clean virus-free zone again is an amazing miracle that would be recorded in the world’s history of public health,” KCNA quoted him as saying.

For Kim to declare victory against the coronavirus suggests he wants to move on to other priorities, such as boosting the country’s broken and heavily sanctioned economy, which has been further damaged by pandemic border closures, or conducting a nuclear test, said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

South Korean and U.S. officials have said North Korea could be gearing up for its first nuclear test in five years amid a torrid series of weapons tests this year that included its first launches of intercontinental ballistic missiles since 2017.

The provocative tests underscore Kim’s intent to advance his arsenal while also pressuring the Biden administration over long-stalled negotiations in which he hopes to use his nuclear weapons as leverage for badly needed sanctions relief and security concessions, experts say.

Kim Yo Jong’s bellicose rhetoric indicates she will try to blame any COVID-19 resurgence on South Korea and is also looking to justify North Korea’s next military provocation, Easley said.

Activists in South Korea for years have flown balloons across the border to distribute hundreds of thousands of propaganda leaflets critical of Kim’s regime. North Korea has often expressed fury at the activists and at South Korea’s government for not stopping them.

During Wednesday’s meeting, Kim Yo Jong called the country’s virus outbreak a “hysterical farce” kicked off by South Korea to escalate confrontation.

“(South Korean) puppets are still thrusting leaflets and dirty objects into our territory. We must counter it toughly,” she said. “We have already considered various counteraction plans, but our countermeasure must be a deadly retaliatory one.”

North Korean state TV showed some people in the audience of thousands crying as she spoke about her brother’s fever — a reference that wasn’t further explained. The crowd applauded and cheered as she vowed North Korea will “eradicate not only the virus but also (South Korean) government authorities” if the “enemies continue dangerous acts that could introduce the virus into our republic.”

While Kim Yo Jong has made many speeches and statements in recent years as one of the most powerful members of her brother’s leadership circle, Thursday was the first time North Korean media have broadcast the complete video and audio of one of her speeches, South Korea’s Unification Ministry said. The highlighting of her speech by state media reflects her rising status and could be aimed at emphasizing the threat directed at South Korea.

In 2020, Kim Yo Jong drove a pressure campaign in which North Korea blew up an empty South Korean-built liaison office in its territory and threatened to end a 2018 military agreement on reducing border tensions, in a furious response to South Korean leafletting campaigns. In 2014, North Korea fired at propaganda balloons flying toward its territory and South Korea returned fire, though there were no casualties.

North Korea’s claim about the origin of the outbreak contradicts outside experts, who believe the omicron variant spread when the country briefly reopened its border with China to freight traffic in January, and surged further following a military parade and other large-scale events in Pyongyang, its capital, in April.

In May, Kim Jong Un prohibited travel between cities and counties to slow the spread of the virus. But

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he also stressed that his economic goals should be met, which meant huge groups continued to gather at agricultural, industrial and construction sites.

At the virus meeting, Kim called for the easing of preventive measures and for the nation to maintain vigilance and effective border controls, citing the global spread of new coronavirus variants and monkeypox.

Firefighters combat major wildfire in southwestern France

PARIS (AP) — More than 1,000 firefighters were struggling Thursday to contain a major wildfire which has burned a large area of pine forest in southwestern France, in a region that was already ravaged by flames last month.

Local authorities said more than 68 square kilometers (26 square miles) have burned since Tuesday in the Gironde region and neighboring Landes as France, like other European countries, swelters through a hot and dry summer.

Temperatures were expected to reach 40 C (104 F) on Thursday in the region.

The blaze forced the evacuation of about 10,000 people and destroyed at least 16 houses.

Spanish state television showed dozens of trucks having to turn around and stay in Spain because of a border closure because of the fire raging in France. TVE reported that truckers, many carrying perishable goods, were looking for ways to cross the border because the parking areas in and around the Irun crossing are full.

A major highway near the French city of Bordeaux was also closed.

Photos released by firefighters showed flames raging through pine forests overnight, sending clouds of smoke in the air and illuminating the sky with intense orange light.

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne and Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin were due to visit the evacuated small town of Hostens Thursday to meet with firefighters, rescuers, local officials and volunteers.

Darmanin said that nine aircraft and two helicopters have been mobilized to fight the blaze.

The Gironde region was hit last month by major wildfires that forced the evacuation of more than 39,000 people, including residents and tourists.

France is this week in the midst of its fourth heat wave of the year as the country faces what the government warned is its worst drought on record.

French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted that several European countries have offered their help to combat French wildfires, listing Germany, Greece, Poland, Romania and Austria.

Gas prices dip just below \$4 for the first time in 5 months

Gasoline prices dipped to just under the \$4 mark for the first time in more than five months — good news for consumers who are struggling with high prices for many other essentials.

AAA said the national average for a gallon of regular was \$3.99 on Thursday.

Prices have dropped 15 cents in the past week and 68 cents in the last month, according to the auto club.

The shopping app GasBuddy reported that the national average was already down to \$3.98 on Wednesday.

Falling prices for gas, airline tickets and clothes are giving consumers a bit of relief, although inflation is still close to a four-decade high.

Oil prices began rising in mid-2020 as economies recovered from the initial shock of the pandemic. They rose again when the U.S. and allies announced sanctions against Russian oil over Russia's war against Ukraine.

Recently, however, oil prices have dropped on concern about slowing economic growth around the world. U.S. benchmark crude oil has recently dipped close to \$90 a barrel from over \$120 a barrel in June.

High prices also may be causing U.S. motorists to drive less. Gasoline demand in early August was down 3.3% from the same week last year after tracking more closely to 2021 numbers earlier in the summer.

Prices at the pump are likely to be a major issue heading into the mid-term elections in November.

Republicans blame President Joe Biden for the high gasoline prices, seizing on his decisions to cancel a permit for a major pipeline and suspend new oil and gas leases on federal lands.

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Biden said over the weekend that a family with two cars is saving \$100 a month because prices have dropped from their peak in mid-June.

"That's breathing room," he tweeted. "And we're not letting up any time soon."

Biden has also sparred with oil companies, accusing them of not producing as much oil and gasoline as they could while posting huge profits. "Exxon made more money than God this year," he said in June.

Exxon said it has increased oil production. The CEO of Chevron said Biden was trying to vilify his industry.

The nationwide average for gas hasn't been under \$4 since early March. Prices topped out at \$5.02 a gallon on June 14, according to AAA. They declined slowly the rest of June, then began dropping more rapidly.

Motorists in California and Hawaii are still paying above \$5, and other states in the West are paying close to that. The cheapest gas is in Texas and several other states in the South and Midwest.

A year ago, the nationwide average price was around \$3.20 a gallon.

African wildlife parks face climate, infrastructure threats

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

MOMBASA, Kenya (AP) — Africa's national parks, home to thousands of wildlife species such as lions, elephants and buffaloes, are increasingly threatened by below-average rainfall and new infrastructure projects, stressing habitats and the species that rely on them.

A prolonged drought in much of the continent's east, exacerbated by climate change, and large-scale developments, including oil drilling and livestock grazing, are hampering conservation efforts in protected areas, several environmental experts say.

The at-risk parks stretch all the way from Kenya in the east — home to Tsavo and Nairobi national parks — south to the Mkomazi and Serengeti parks in Tanzania, the Quirimbas and Gorongosa parks in Mozambique and the famous Kruger National Park in South Africa, and west to the Kahuzi Biega, Salonga and Virunga reserves in Congo.

The parks not only protect flora and fauna but also act as natural carbon sinks — storing carbon dioxide emitted into the air and reducing the effects of global warming.

An estimated 38% of Africa's biodiversity areas are under severe threat from climate change and infrastructure development, said Ken Mwathe of BirdLife International.

"Key biodiversity areas over the years, especially in Africa, have been regarded by investors as idle and ready for development," said Mwathe. "Governments allocate land in these areas for infrastructural development."

He added that the "powerlines and other energy infrastructure cause collisions with birds, due to low visibility. The numbers killed this way are not few."

In their quest to bolster living standards and achieve sustainable development goals, such as access to clean water and food, boosting jobs and economic growth and improving the quality of education, African governments have set their sights on large building projects, many of them funded by foreign investments, especially by China.

The proposed East African Oil Pipeline, for example, which the Ugandan government says can help lift millions out of poverty, runs through Uganda's Kidepo valley, Murchison Falls and Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, threatening species and drawing criticism from climate campaigners.

The growth of urban populations and the building that goes with it, like new roads, electricity grids, gas pipes, ports and railways, have also added to the pressure on parks, conservationists said.

But they add that replacing wildlife with infrastructure is the wrong approach for economic growth.

"We have to have a future where wildlife is not separated from people," said Sam Shaba, the program manager at the Honeyguide Foundation in Tanzania, an environmental non-profit organization.

When "people start to see that living with wildlife provides the answer to sustainable development ... that's the game-changer," said Shaba.

Most of Africa's wildlife parks were created in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by colonial regimes

that fenced off the areas and ordered local people to stay out. But now conservationists are finding that a more inclusive approach to running the parks and seeking the expertise of Indigenous communities that live around the parks can help protect them, said Ademola Ajagbe, Africa regional managing director of The Nature Conservancy.

"The inhabitants of these areas are forcefully evicted or prevented from living there such as the Maasai (in Tanzania and Kenya), Twa and Mbutis (in central Africa) who for generations have lived with wildlife," said Simon Counsell, an advisor with Survival International.

"Africa is depicted as a place of wildlife without people living there and this narrative needs to change," he said.

"If we don't pay attention to communities' social needs, health, education and where they are getting water, we miss the key thing," said John Kasaona the executive director of the Integrated Rural Development in Nature Conservation in Namibia.

The effects of worsening weather conditions in national parks due to climate change should also not be ignored, experts said.

A recent study conducted in Kruger National Park linked extreme weather events to the loss of plants and animals, unable cope with the drastic conditions and lack of water due to longer dry spells and hotter temperatures.

Drought has seriously threatened species like rhinos, elephants and lions as it reduces the amount of food available, said Philip Wandera, a former warden with the Kenya Wildlife Service who's now range management lecturer at the Catholic University of East Africa.

More intensive management of parks and removing fences that prevent species from migrating to less drought-prone areas are important first steps to protecting wildlife, Wandera said.

He added that financial help to "support communities in and around national parks" would also help preserve them.

Deputy coroner: House explosion in southern Indiana kills 3

EVANSVILLE, Ind. (AP) — Three people were killed Wednesday when a house exploded in the southern Indiana city of Evansville, authorities said.

David Anson, chief deputy coroner for Vanderburgh County, told The Associated Press that the identities of the people who died would not be released until the next of kin has been notified.

Evansville Police Department spokeswoman Sgt. Anna Gray said at least one other injury was reported and that victim was taken to a local hospital for treatment.

Evansville Fire Department Chief Mike Connelly said a total of 39 houses were damaged by the explosion at around 1 p.m. He said the department has not confirmed how many of the houses were occupied when the explosion happened because "some were too unstable to enter."

At least 11 of the 39 homes damaged are "uninhabitable," Connelly told the Evansville Courier & Press.

The cause of the explosion has not been determined, but the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives was investigating. A phone message seeking comment was left at the Evansville field office of the ATF.

"Debris is strewn over a 100-foot (30-meter) radius," including "typical construction materials" such as wooden boards, window glass and insulation, Connelly said.

Aerial video posted on social media shows damage in a residential neighborhood with police and fire vehicles on the scene in Evansville, on the Kentucky border.

CenterPoint Energy, the local gas utility, was last called to the home in January 2018, Connelly said. CenterPoint issued a statement saying it "worked with first responders to secure the area."

"CenterPoint Energy is working closely with the Evansville Fire Department, State Fire Marshal and other agencies as the investigation of this incident continues," the utility said.

Jacki Baumgart, an office manager at Award World Trophies about two and a half blocks from the site

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of the explosion, said she and other employees in their building panicked when they heard the loud blast and saw smoke.

"We thought a tree fell on the building or a car ran into the place," Baumgart said. "Debris from the ceiling came down."

She continued: "Everybody here immediately ran out of the building. We thought the building was going to come down."

It was the second house explosion in the area in just over five years. A house explosion on June 27, 2017, killed two people and injured three others.

Wednesday's explosion also brought to mind a massive blast in 2012 that destroyed or damaged more than 80 homes on Indianapolis' south side and killed two people. A man was convicted of tampering with a natural gas line at his then-girlfriend's home in an attempt to commit insurance fraud, with the explosion killing two next-door neighbors. That man, his half-brother and girlfriend all received long prison sentences.

Tehran unveils Western art masterpieces hidden for decades

By NASSER KARIMI and MEHDI FATTAHI Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Some of the world's most prized works of contemporary Western art have been unveiled for the first time in decades — in Tehran.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, a hard-line cleric, rails against the influence of the West. Authorities have lashed out at "deviant" artists for "attacking Iran's revolutionary culture." And the Islamic Republic has plunged further into confrontation with the United States and Europe as it rapidly accelerates its nuclear program and diplomatic efforts stall.

But contradictions abound in the Iranian capital, where thousands of well-heeled men and hijab-clad women marveled at 19th- and 20th-century American and European minimalist and conceptual masterpieces on display this summer for the first time at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.

On a recent August afternoon, art critics and students were delighted at Marcel Duchamp's see-through 1915 mural, "The Large Glass," long interpreted as an exploration of erotic frustration.

They gazed at a rare 4-meter (13-foot) untitled sculpture by American minimalist pioneer Donald Judd and one of Sol Lewitt's best-known serial pieces, "Open Cube," among other important works. The Judd sculpture, consisting of a horizontal array of lacquered brass and aluminum panels, is likely worth millions of dollars.

"Setting up a show with such a theme and such works is a bold move that takes a lot of courage," said Babak Bahari, 62, who was viewing the exhibit of 130 works for the fourth time since it opened in late June. "Even in the West these works are at the heart of discussions and dialogue."

The government of Iran's Western-backed shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and his wife, the former Empress Farah Pahlavi, built the museum and acquired the multibillion-dollar collection in the late 1970s, when oil boomed and Western economies stagnated. Upon opening, it showed sensational works by Pablo Picasso, Mark Rothko, Claude Monet, Jackson Pollock and other heavyweights, enhancing Iran's cultural standing on the world stage.

But just two years later, in 1979, Shiite clerics ousted the shah and packed away the art in the museum's vault. Some paintings — cubist, surrealist, impressionist, even pop art — sat untouched for decades to avoid offending Islamic values and catering to Western sensibilities.

But during a thaw in Iran's hard-line politics, the art started to resurface. While Andy Warhol's paintings of the Pahlavis and some choice nudes are still hidden in the basement, much of the museum's collection has been brought out to great fanfare as Iran's cultural restrictions have eased.

The ongoing exhibit on minimalism, featuring 34 Western artists, has captured particular attention. Over 17,000 people have made the trip since it opened, the museum said — nearly double the footfall of past shows.

Curator Behrang Samadzadegan credits a recent renewed interest in conceptual art, which first shocked audiences in the 1960s by drawing on political themes and taking art out of traditional galleries and into

the wider world.

The museum's spokesperson, Hasan Noferesti, said the size of the crowds coming to the exhibition, which lasts until mid-September, shows the thrill of experiencing long-hidden modern masterpieces.

It also attests to the enduring appetite for art among Iran's young generation. Over 50% of the country's roughly 85 million people are under 30 years old.

Despite their country's deepening global isolation, and fears that their already limited social and cultural freedoms may be further curtailed under the hard-line government elected a year ago, young Iranians are increasingly exploring the international art world on social media. New galleries are buzzing. Art and architecture schools are thriving.

"These are good works of art, you don't want to imitate them," said Mohammad Shahsavari, a 20-year-old architecture student standing before Lewitt's cube structure. "Rather, you get inspiration from them."

Trump's bond with GOP deepens after primary wins, FBI search

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's pick for governor in the swing state of Wisconsin easily defeated a favorite of the Republican establishment.

In Connecticut, the state that launched the Bush family and its brand of compassionate conservatism, a fiery Senate contender who promoted Trump's election lies upset the state GOP's endorsed candidate. Meanwhile in Washington, Republicans ranging from Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell to conspiracy theorist Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene defended Trump against an unprecedented FBI search.

And that was just this week.

The rapid developments crystalized the former president's singular status atop a party he has spent the past seven years breaking down and rebuilding in his image. Facing mounting legal vulnerabilities and considering another presidential run, he needs support from the party to maintain his political career. But, whether they like it or not, many in the party also need Trump, whose endorsement has proven crucial for those seeking to advance to the November ballot.

"For a pretty good stretch, it felt like the Trump movement was losing more ground than it was gaining," said Georgia Republican Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan, who is urging his party to move past Trump. But now, he said, Trump is benefiting from "an incredibly swift tail wind."

The Republican response to the FBI's search of Trump's Florida estate this week was an especially stark example of how the party is keeping Trump nearby. Some of the Republicans considering challenges to Trump in a 2024 presidential primary, such as Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, were among those defending him. Even long-established Trump critics like Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan questioned the search, pressing for details about its circumstances.

But even before the FBI showed up at Mar-a-Lago, Trump was gaining momentum in his post-presidential effort to shape the GOP. In all, nearly 180 Trump-endorsed candidates up and down the ballot have won their primaries since May while fewer than 20 have lost.

Only two of the 10 House Republicans who supported Trump's impeachment after the Jan. 6 insurrection are expected back in Congress next year. Rep. Jaime Herrera-Beutler, R-Wash., who conceded defeat after her Tuesday primary, was the latest to fall. Leading Trump antagonist Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., is at risk of joining her next week.

The Trump victories include a clean sweep of statewide primary elections in Arizona last week — including an election denier in the race for the state's chief elections official. Trump's allies also prevailed Tuesday across Wisconsin and Connecticut, a state long known for its moderate Republican leanings.

In Wisconsin's Republican primary for governor, wealthy Trump-backed businessman Tim Michels defeated former Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, an establishment favorite. And in Connecticut, Leora Levy, who promoted Trump's lie that the 2020 election was stolen, surged to an unexpected victory over a more moderate rival after earning Trump's official endorsement.

On Monday, just hours after the FBI search, Trump hosted a tele-town hall rally on her behalf. Levy

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thanked Trump in her acceptance speech, while railing against the FBI's search.

"All of us can tell him how upset and offended and disgusted we were at what happened to him," she said. "That is un-American. That is what they do in Cuba, in China, in dictatorships. And that will stop."

Despite his recent dominance, Trump — and the Republicans close to him — face political and legal threats that could undermine their momentum as the GOP fights for control of Congress and statehouses across the nation this fall.

While Trump's picks have notched notable victories in primaries this summer, they may struggle in the fall. That's especially true in several governor's races in Democratic-leaning states such as Connecticut and Maryland, where GOP candidates must track to the center to win a general election.

Meanwhile, several Republicans with White House ambitions are moving forward with a busy travel schedule that will take them to politically important states where they can back candidates on the ballot this year and build relationships heading into 2024.

DeSantis plans to boost high-profile Republican contenders across Arizona, New Mexico, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Former Vice President Mike Pence, another potential 2024 presidential contender, is scheduled to appear next week in New Hampshire.

On the legal front, the FBI search was part of an investigation into whether the former president took classified records from the White House to his Florida residence. While Republicans have rallied behind Trump, very few facts about the case have been released publicly. Trump's attorneys have so far declined to release details from the search warrant.

Prosecutors in Washington and Georgia are also investigating Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election he falsely claimed was stolen. The Jan. 6 congressional commission has exposed damning details about Trump's behavior from Republican witnesses in recent hearings, which have prompted new concerns, at least privately, among the GOP establishment and donor class.

And on Wednesday, Trump invoked his Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination as he testified under oath Wednesday in the New York attorney general's long-running civil investigation into his business dealings.

Trump's legal entanglements represent a distraction at best for Republican candidates who'd rather focus on President Joe Biden's leadership, sky-high inflation and immigration troubles to help court moderate voters and independents in the general election.

"Today, every Republican in every state in this country should be talking about how bad Joe Biden is, how bad inflation is, how difficult it is to run a business and run a household," said Duncan, the Georgia lieutenant governor. "But instead, we're talking about some investigation, we're talking about Donald Trump pleading the Fifth, we're talking about Donald Trump endorsing some conspiracy theorist."

Trump critics in both parties are ready and willing to highlight Trump's shortcomings — and his relationship with midterm candidates — as more voters begin to pay attention to politics this fall.

"This is, and always has been, Donald Trump's Republican Party," Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison said in an interview, condemning "MAGA Republicans" and their "extreme agenda" on abortion and other issues.

At the same time, the Republican Accountability Project and Protect Democracy launched a \$3 million television and digital advertising campaign this week across seven swing states focused on Trump's role in the Jan. 6 insurrection. The ads, which will run in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, feature testimonials from Republican voters who condemn Trump's lies about nonexistent election fraud that fueled the Capitol attack.

One ad features congressional testimony from Cheney, the Wyoming Republican who has publicly declared that Trump should never hold public office again.

Still, Cheney faces her own primary election against a Trump-backed challenger next week in Wyoming. One of Trump's top political targets this year, she is expected to lose. Anticipating a loss, Cheney's allies suggest she may be better positioned to run for president in 2024, either as a Republican or independent.

Trump's allies are supremely confident about his ability to win the GOP's presidential nomination in 2024.

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In fact, aides who had initially pushed him to launch his campaign after the November midterms are now encouraging him to announce sooner to help freeze out would-be Republican challengers.

"It's going to be very difficult for anyone to take the nomination away from him in 2024," said Stephen Moore, a former Trump economic adviser who has spoken with Trump about his 2024 intentions. "He is running. That is a certainty."

Rep. Tom Rice, R-S.C., predicted that Trump would "lose in a landslide" if he sought the presidency again, adding that the former president's overall grasp on the party is "eroding on the edges."

"In a normal election, you've got to win not just the base. You've got to win the middle, too, right, and maybe crossover on the other side," said Rice, who lost his recent primary after voting in favor of Trump's second impeachment.

Rice warned that Trump far-right candidates could lead to unnecessary losses for the party in November. "Donald Trump is pushing things so far to the right," he said in an interview.

Meanwhile, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, eyeing a 2024 bid himself, warned against making bold political predictions two years before the Republican Party selects its next presidential nominee.

"We're sitting here in August of 2022," Christie said in an interview. "My sense is there's a lot of water over the dam still to come before anybody can determine anybody's individual position in the primaries of '24 — except to say that if Donald Trump runs, he will certainly be a factor."

Russia struggles to replenish its troops in Ukraine

By The Associated Press undefined

The prisoners at the penal colony in St. Petersburg were expecting a visit by officials, thinking it would be some sort of inspection. Instead, men in uniform arrived and offered them amnesty — if they agreed to fight alongside the Russian army in Ukraine.

Over the following days, about a dozen or so left the prison, according to a woman whose boyfriend is serving a sentence there. Speaking on condition of anonymity because she feared reprisals, she said her boyfriend wasn't among the volunteers, although with years left on his sentence, he "couldn't not think about it."

As Russia continues to suffer losses in its invasion of Ukraine, now nearing its sixth month, the Kremlin has refused to announce a full-blown mobilization — a move that could be very unpopular for President Vladimir Putin. That has led instead to a covert recruitment effort that includes using prisoners to make up the manpower shortage.

This also is happening amid reports that hundreds of Russian soldiers are refusing to fight and trying to quit the military.

"We're seeing a huge outflow of people who want to leave the war zone — those who have been serving for a long time and those who have signed a contract just recently," said Alexei Tabalov, a lawyer who runs the Conscript's School legal aid group.

The group has seen an influx of requests from men who want to terminate their contracts, "and I personally get the impression that everyone who can is ready to run away," Tabalov said in an interview with The Associated Press. "And the Defense Ministry is digging deep to find those it can persuade to serve."

Although the Defense Ministry denies that any "mobilization activities" are taking place, authorities seem to be pulling out all the stops to bolster enlistment. Billboards and public transit ads in various regions proclaim, "This is The Job," urging men to join the professional army. Authorities have set up mobile recruiting centers in some cities, including one at the site of a half marathon in Siberia in May.

Regional administrations are forming "volunteer battalions" that are promoted on state television. The business daily Kommersant counted at least 40 such entities in 20 regions, with officials promising volunteers monthly salaries ranging from the equivalent of \$2,150 to nearly \$5,500, plus bonuses.

The AP saw thousands of openings on job search websites for various military specialists.

The British military said this week that Russia had formed a major new ground force called the 3rd Army Corps from "volunteer battalions," seeking men up to age 50 and requiring only a middle-school educa-

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tion, while offering “lucrative cash bonuses” once they are deployed to Ukraine.

But complaints also are surfacing in the media that some aren’t getting their promised payments, although those reports can’t be independently verified.

In early August, Tabalov said he began receiving multiple requests for legal help from reservists who have been ordered to take part in a two-month training in areas near the border with Ukraine.

The recruitment of prisoners has been going on in recent weeks in as many as seven regions, said Vladimir Osechkin, founder of the Gulagu.net prisoner rights group, citing inmates and their relatives that his group had contacted.

It’s not the first time that authorities have used such a tactic, with the Soviet Union employing “prisoner battalions” during World War II.

Nor is Russia alone. Early in the war, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy promised amnesty to military veterans behind bars if they volunteered to fight, although it remains unclear if anything came out of it.

In the current circumstances, Osechkin said, it isn’t the Defense Ministry that’s recruiting prisoners — instead, it was Russia’s shadowy private military force, the Wagner Group.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, an entrepreneur known as “Putin’s chef” because of his catering contracts with the Kremlin and reportedly Wagner’s manager and financier, brushed aside reports that he personally visited prisons to recruit convicts, in a written statement released by his representatives this month. Prigozhin, in fact, denies he has any ties to Wagner, which reportedly has sent military contractors to places like Syria and sub-Saharan Africa.

According to Osechkin, prisoners with military or law enforcement experience were initially offered to go to Ukraine, but that later was extended to inmates with varying backgrounds. He estimated that as of late July, about 1,500 might have applied, lured by promises of big salaries and eventual pardons.

Now, he added, many of those volunteers — or their families — are contacting him and seeking to get out of their commitments, telling him: “I really don’t want to go.”

According to the woman whose boyfriend is serving his sentence at the penal colony in St. Petersburg, the offers to leave the prison are “a glimmer of hope” for freedom. But she said he told her that of 11 volunteers, eight died in Ukraine. She added that one of the volunteers expressed regret for his decision and doesn’t believe he will return alive.

Her account couldn’t be independently verified, but was in line with multiple reports by independent Russian media and human rights groups.

According to those groups and military lawyers, some soldiers and law enforcement officers have refused deployment to Ukraine or are trying to return home after a few weeks or months of fighting.

Media reports about some troops refusing to fight in Ukraine started surfacing in the spring, but rights groups and lawyers only began talking about the number of refusals reaching the hundreds last month.

In mid-July, the Free Buryatia Foundation reported that about 150 men were able to terminate their contracts with the Defense Ministry and returned from Ukraine to Buryatia, a region in eastern Siberia that borders Mongolia.

Some of the servicemen are facing repercussions. Tabalov, the legal aid lawyer, said about 80 other soldiers who sought to nullify their contracts were detained in the Russian-controlled town of Bryanka in the Luhansk region of eastern Ukraine, according to their relatives. Last week, he said that the Bryanka detention center was shut down because of the media attention.

But the parent of one officer who was detained after trying to get out of his contract told the AP this week that some are still being detained elsewhere in the region. The parent asked not to be identified out of safety concerns.

Tabalov said a serviceman can terminate his contract for a compelling reason — normally not difficult — although the decision is usually up to his commander. But he added: “In the conditions of hostilities, not a single commander would acknowledge anything like that, because where would they find people to fight?”

Alexandra Garmazhapova, head of the Free Buryatia Foundation, told the AP that soldiers and their relatives complain of commanders tearing up termination notices and threatening “refuseniks” with pros-

education. As of late July, the foundation said it had received hundreds of requests from soldiers seeking to end their contracts.

"I'm getting messages every day," Garmazhapova said.

Tabalov said some soldiers complain that they were deceived about where they were going and didn't expect to end up in a war zone, while others are exhausted from fighting and unable to continue.

Rarely, if at all, did they appear motivated by antiwar convictions, the lawyer said.

Russia will continue to face problems with soldiers refusing to fight, military analyst Michael Kofman said, but one shouldn't underestimate Russia's ability to "muddle through ... with half-measures."

"They're going to have a lot of people who are quitting or have people who basically don't want to deploy," said Kofman, director of the Virginia-based Russia Studies Program at the Center for Naval Analyses, on a recent podcast. "And they've employed a lot of measures to try to keep people in line. But ultimately, there's not that much that they can do."

At 75, India seeks way forward in big but job-scarce economy

By KRUTIKA PATHI and BHUMIKA SARASWATI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — As India's economy grew, the hum of factories turned the sleepy, dusty village of Manesar into a booming industrial hub, cranking out everything from cars and sinks to smartphones and tablets. But jobs have run scarce over the years, prompting more and more workers to line up along the road for work, desperate to earn money.

Every day, Sugna, a young woman in her early 20s who goes by her first name, comes with her husband and two children to the city's labor chowk — a bazaar at the junction of four roads where hundreds of workers gather daily at daybreak to plead for work. It's been days since she or her husband got work and she has only five rupees (six cents) in hand.

Scenes like this are an everyday reality for millions of Indians, the most visible signs of economic distress in a country where raging unemployment is worsening insecurity and inequality between the rich and poor. It's perhaps Prime Minister Narendra Modi's biggest challenge as the country marks 75 years of independence from British rule on Monday.

"We get work only once or twice a week," said Sugna, who says she earned barely 2,000 rupees (\$25) in the past five months. "What should I do with a life like this? If I live like this, how will my children live any better?"

Entire families leave their homes in India's vast rural hinterlands to camp at such bazaars, found in nearly every city. Out of the many gathered in Manesar recently, only a lucky few got work for the day — digging roads, laying bricks and sweeping up trash for meager pay — about 80% of Indian workers toil in informal jobs including many who are self-employed.

India's phenomenal transformation from an impoverished nation in 1947 into an emerging global power whose \$3 trillion economy is Asia's third largest has turned it into a major exporter of things like software and vaccines. Millions have escaped poverty into a growing, aspirational middle class as its high-skilled sectors have soared.

"It's extraordinary — a poor country like India wasn't expected to succeed in such sectors," said Nimish Adhia, an economics professor at Manhattanville College.

This year, the economy is forecast to expand at a 7.4% annual pace, according to the International Monetary Fund, making it one of the world's fastest growing.

But even as India's economy swells, so has joblessness. The unemployment rate remains at 7% to 8% in recent months. Only 40% of working age Indians are employed, down from 46% five years ago, the Center for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE) says.

"If you look at a poor person in 1947 and a poor person now, they are far more privileged today. However if you look at it between the haves and the have nots, that chasm has grown," said Gayathri Vasudevan, chairperson of LabourNet, a social enterprise.

"While India continues to grow well, that growth is not generating enough jobs - crucially, it is not creat-

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ing enough good quality jobs," said Mahesh Vyas, chief executive at CMIE. Only 20% of jobs in India are in the formal sector, with regular wages and security, while most others are precarious and low-quality with few to no benefits.

That's partly because agriculture remains the mainstay, with about 40% of workers engaged in farming.

As workers lost jobs in cities during the pandemic, many flocked back to farms, pushing up the numbers. "This didn't necessarily improve productivity - but you're employed as a farmer. It's disguised unemployment," Vyas said.

With independence from Britain in 1947, the country's leaders faced a formidable task: GDP was a mere 3% of the world's total, literacy rates stood at 14% and the average life expectancy was 32 years, said Adhia.

By the most recent measures, literacy stands at 74% and life expectancy at 70 years. Dramatic progress came with historic reforms in the 1990s that swept away decades of socialist control over the economy and spurred remarkable growth.

The past few decades inspired comparisons to China as foreign investment poured in, exports thrived and new industries -- like information technology - were born. But India, a latecomer to offshoring by Western multinationals, is struggling to create mass employment through manufacturing. And it faces new challenges in plotting a way forward.

Financing has tended to flow into profitable, capital intensive sectors like petrol, metal and chemicals. Industries employing large numbers of workers, like textiles and leather work, have faltered. This trend continued through the pandemic: despite Modi's 2014 'Make in India' pitch to turn the country into another factory floor for the world, manufacturing now employs around 30 million. In 2017, it employed 50 million, according to CMIE data.

As factory and private sector employment shrink, young jobseekers increasingly are targeting government jobs, coveted for their security, prestige and benefits.

Some, like 21-year-old Sahil Rajput, view such work as a way out of poverty. Rajput has been fervently preparing for a job in the army, working in a low-paid data-entry job to afford private coaching to become a soldier and support his unemployed parents.

But in June, the government overhauled military recruitment to cut costs and modernize, changing long-term postings into four-year contracts after which only 25% of recruits will be retained. That move triggered weeks of protests, with young people setting vehicles on fire.

Rajput knows he might not be able to get a permanent army job. "But I have no other options," he said. "How can I dream of a future when my present is in tatters?"

The government is banking on technology, a rare bright spot, to create new jobs and opportunities. Two decades ago, India became an outsourcing powerhouse as companies and call centers boomed. An explosion of start-ups and digital innovation aims to recreate that success - "India is now home to 75,000 startups in the 75th year of independence and this is only the beginning," Minister of Commerce, Piyush Goyal, tweeted recently. More than 740,000 jobs have been created via start-ups, a 110% jump over the last six years, his ministry said.

There's still a long way to go, in educating and training a labor force qualified for such work. Another worry is the steady retreat of working women in India — from a high of nearly 27% in 2005 to just over 20% in 2021, according to World Bank data.

Meanwhile, the stopgap of farming appears increasingly precarious as climate change brings extreme temperatures, scorching crops.

Sajan Arora, a 28-year-old farmer in India's breadbasket state of Punjab, can no longer depend on ancestral farmland his family has relied on to survive. He, his wife and seven-month old daughter, plan to join family in Britain and find work there after selling some land.

"Agriculture has no way forward," said Arora, saying he will do whatever work he can get, driving a taxi, working in a store or on a construction site.

He's sad to leave his parents and childhood home behind, but believes the uncertainty of change offers

“better prospects” than his current reality.

“If everything was right and well, why would we go? If we want a better life, we will have to leave,” he said.

Georgia’s Kemp seeks tax breaks, rebutting Abrams on economy

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia GOP Gov. Brian Kemp will unfurl his first major policy proposals of his reelection bid Thursday, pledging another state income tax rebate and revival of a long-dormant state property tax break while contending with Democratic challenger Stacey Abrams over who’s best for the state’s economy.

After Abrams argued this week that “miserly” Republicans are denying basic services and ignoring inequities in pursuit of low spending and tax cuts for the rich, Kemp started swinging at Abrams as he celebrated record-high economic development numbers Wednesday.

“If anyone wants to suggest we aren’t delivering on jobs and opportunities for everyone in this state, they should get their facts straight before commenting on things that they simply do not understand,” Kemp said.

Abrams is seeking traction against a Republican incumbent she narrowly trails in the polls in a crucial swing state. The challenger argues that not only Kemp’s fiscal policies but his support for abortion restrictions, loose gun laws and even tighter controls on what’s taught in schools threaten the growth of a \$683 billion state economy.

Kemp is sticking to the script Georgia Republicans have followed in 20 years in power. He will tell voters Thursday that if they reelect him, he will seek a second round of income tax rebates like the \$1.1 billion in payments issued this year, according to a Kemp campaign official with knowledge of plans who spoke on condition of anonymity. This year’s payments gave dual-earner households \$500, single adults with dependents \$375, and single adults \$250.

The governor also will seek to revive a property tax break that succumbed in 2009 amid the state budget crisis caused by the Great Recession, the official said in previewing Kemp’s announcement. The tax break, created by Democrat Roy Barnes in 1999, cost the state \$428 million in its last year in 2008, saving homeowners \$200 to \$300 on tax bills.

Kemp said Wednesday that he wants to “help Georgians further fight through a 40-year high inflation and extremely high costs that our citizens are experiencing” focusing on the unpopularity of Democratic President Joe Biden.

Kemp can hand out cash because Georgia’s coffers are fat. The state ran a roughly \$5 billion surplus in the year ended June 30, with more than \$2 billion in surplus still banked from the year before.

The governor has also repeatedly renewed a gas tax break over five months. His administration plans to draw from the surplus to channel money to roadbuilding in place of what’s already \$750 million in foregone fuel taxes. Kemp also signed a state income tax cut that begins in 2024 and could eventually reduce taxes by more than \$2 billion.

Abrams already called for another round of income tax rebates. She’s also called on Kemp to suspend the gas tax through the end of 2022, and has pledged to not try to roll back the income tax cut, even though she criticizes benefits to the wealthy.

“While Brian Kemp is following Stacey Abrams’ lead in calling for tax rebates, he’s still pushing an extreme and dangerous agenda that threatens Georgia families and puts our economy at risk,” said Abrams spokesperson Alex Floyd.

Kemp accuses Abrams of backing his policies only because they’re popular.

“She criticized all those things before she came out and is now supporting them,” he said.

Abrams slammed the property tax break in a speech Tuesday, calling it “paying off the property taxes of mansion owners and millionaires.” The Census Bureau says 66% of Georgians own homes, but Abrams focuses on housing affordability and the Kemp administration’s stuttering payout of federal COVID-19 relief to renters.

Kemp used the power of incumbency to stomp Republican challenger David Perdue, delivering benefits and legislative accomplishments before the May primary. But he would have to wait until after any reelection for legislative approval of his new plans, barring an election-season special session.

The governor would be building off Georgia's record \$21.2 billion in state-incentivized business investments last year, with companies committing to create 51,000 jobs. Georgia also has a record-low unemployment rate.

Abrams argues many, especially in rural Georgia, are missing out. She notes Georgia's income rankings have fallen during two decades of Republican rule.

"Most Georgia families are doing everything right," Abrams said Tuesday, arguing for more state investment in education and health care to boost everyone. "They work full-time jobs. They're putting a little away when they can despite rising prices. Yet middle class families are struggling."

Kemp argues only Democrats are to blame for economic instability.

"The only reason Georgians are worried about going into poverty in rural Georgia right now is because Stacey Abrams helped Joe Biden get elected president," he said Wednesday, "and we have 40-year-high inflation and everything that they're buying — whether it's butter, eggs, milk, meat, any other protein — is astronomical right now."

Cancellation of Atlanta festival sparks new fight over guns

By SUDHIN THANAWALA Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Tens of thousands of Music Midtown festivalgoers are no longer going to descend on Atlanta's massive Piedmont Park next month to cheer on hip-hop star Future or watch beloved rock band My Chemical Romance take the stage.

In fact, some people are convinced Atlanta — center of the nation's hip-hop music scene — will lose more music festivals and performances on public land as organizers and artists learn that state law makes it nearly impossible for them to stop people from carrying guns among the alcohol-fueled crowds.

That prospect has ignited a new fight over gun rights in Georgia that is roiling the governor's race, casting a shadow over Atlanta's vaunted music scene and adding to tension between the city and state.

Live Nation has refused to say why it recently called off September's Music Midtown, a longtime fixture for pop music lovers.

But news outlets, citing anonymous sources, ascribed last week's announcement to a 2019 Georgia Supreme Court decision that outlined limits on the ability of private companies to ban guns on public property. The ruling stemmed from a 2014 state law that expanded the locations where guns were allowed.

Democrats, led by Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, pounced on the news, casting the cancellation as an example of the sort of economic fallout the state would experience from Republican Gov. Brian Kemp's "extreme gun agenda." Though the gun law cited in reports about Music Midtown was enacted under Kemp's Republican predecessor, Kemp was a key backer of a new state law this year that eliminated the need for a license — and with it, a background check — to carry a handgun in public.

An Atlanta Journal-Constitution editorial warned the gun policies threaten Atlanta's status as the "cultural capital of the South." Atlanta City Council President Doug Shipman bemoaned the loss of this year's Music Midtown, as well as its timing.

"All of these things are culminating at the moment when we should be coming out of COVID with music festivals and people gathering, a lot of economic activity," he told The Associated Press.

Beyond the immediate fallout, the fight also added to a disconnect between Georgia's heavily Democratic capital city and the GOP-controlled state Legislature that has recently expanded gun rights and restricted abortion and voting access. State leaders butted heads with huge Atlanta-based firms Delta Air Lines and Coca-Cola over the voting changes, which the companies called "unacceptable."

Live Nation did not respond to emails about the cancellation of Music Midtown. The festival's website cited "circumstances beyond our control," but no one from the company has publicly blamed the state's gun laws.

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Phillip Evans, a gun rights activist who'd previously sued the Atlanta Botanical Garden over its gun-free policy, has said he had warned Music Midtown organizers that their policy of banning guns was contrary to state law. Evans' suit prompted the 2019 state Supreme Court ruling that said private companies with a certain type of lease on public land could not ban guns.

Live Nation planned to host the festival at Piedmont Park — public land — where the festival had been held each year since 2011, with the coronavirus-related exception of 2020. And it almost certainly fell into the leasing category that would make a ban on guns illegal.

"In terms of Music Midtown, it's virtually a no-brainer that they can't ban guns there," said John Monroe, an attorney who represented a gun rights group in the case before the state Supreme Court.

Cancelling the event over the gun law would make sense from Live Nation's perspective, said Timothy Lytton, a law professor at Georgia State University.

A mass shooting at a country music festival in Las Vegas in 2017 that claimed more than 50 lives cost MGM Resorts International — the owner of the concert venue — and its insurers \$800 million in legal claims. With no restriction on guns, Live Nation was looking at potentially "astronomical" liability exposure at Music Midtown, Lytton said.

The cancellation was a blow to Georgia's economy and local businesses.

Abrams said in a statement that Kemp "cares more about protecting dangerous people carrying guns in public than saving jobs and keeping business in Georgia," and her campaign released an attack ad this week focused on the cancellation. Democrats in other states also weighed in.

Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak tweeted, "Here in Nevada, we believe in common sense gun safety and protecting our reproductive rights. @MusicMidtown, we would love to have you in the Silver state!" North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper also invited Music Midtown to his state.

Kemp accused Abrams and other Democrats of "pushing" critical narratives of Georgia's firearms landscape to distract from inflation that he blames on the party's policies.

Georgia also recently took fire from Democratic California Gov. Gavin Newsom over a state law banning most abortions once fetal cardiac activity is present. The law took effect last month.

Newsom released an ad in the entertainment magazine "Variety" last week urging film companies to end production in states, including Georgia, that he accused of a "cruel assault on essential rights." State tax credits have made Georgia a major destination for film production.

Kemp told reporters last week that he wasn't worried about attempts by Democratic governors, including in California, to lure business away from Georgia.

"You check the gas prices in those states lately?" Kemp said, citing strong industrial development, tourism and film figures in Georgia.

Gun rights advocates have identified at least one other music venue in Atlanta that they say could be in violation of the 2014 gun law — Chastain Park, which features an amphitheater nestled inside a wealthy residential neighborhood and prohibits "weapons" at shows.

But the activists say they are not looking to shut down events, just protect themselves.

"If I'm going somewhere in a big crowd, I want to be able to carry my firearm," said Jerry Henry, executive director of Georgia Second Amendment. "I will assure you there will be criminals out there."

Life gradually returns a year after fire chars Sierra Nevada

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD Associated Press

LONE PINE, Calif. (AP) — The flames fade away. Firefighters extinguish the last embers. A final curl of smoke uncoils in the wind.

A wildfire in the California wilderness has come to an end, and what's left behind is a blackened landscape of skeletal pines and leafless oaks, scorched meadows and ashen stumps where saplings once stood.

Then, slowly, life returns.

One year after a wind-whipped wildfire charged across a craggy mountainside above Lone Pine, California, flashes of new growth are emerging in this still-charred corner of the Inyo National Forest, a hiking,

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camping and fishing playground about 350 miles (563 km) southeast of San Francisco.

Tiny clusters of white and purple wildflowers stand out against denuded pines, many stripped of bark in the fire. Green shoots of horsetail as thin as yarn strands break from the ground below a tree's barren branches. A fistful of new leaves emerges like a fresh bouquet from within an incinerated stump.

It's the start of a long recovery, and a cycle that's being repeated more often across the West as climate change brings drier, hotter seasons and more wildland fires.

As it roars across the landscape, a fire burns at different intensities. Some of the towering trees on the hillside are dead, others only singed and can recover. The first plants to reappear after a burn typically have grown more resistant over time to the flames.

"Some of the shrub species and other grass species are more fire-adapted, and they can come back quicker," said Todd Ellsworth, a post-fire restoration program manager with the U.S. Forest Service.

But it can be five years before the ground cover returns to what it was before the blaze. One stand of pinyon pines was heavily damaged – needles burned off the branches, their trunks torched black – and will not come back.

"The conifer trees don't come back very quickly," Ellsworth said, referring to certain pines and other trees that bear cones. Sometimes, it's up to foresters to go in and replant them.

The tiny, fragile flowers and patches of fresh growth against a stark mountainside and slabs of gray rock were a reminder that wildfire is part of the ecosystem in California, including the eastern Sierra Nevada where the fire took place.

Firefighters said they used minimum-impact techniques to fight the blaze because "natural fire plays an important role in maintaining the landscape within these areas."

Some species only flower after a wildfire.

The area of the blaze — not far from the trailhead to Mt. Whitney, at 14,505 feet (4,421 meters) the highest mountain the contiguous United States — is home to Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, an endangered species, and to the whitebark pine, an endangered species candidate.

News reports and press releases from June and July 2021 attributed the wildfire to a lightning strike and said the nearly 600-acre (243-hectare) blaze fanned by winds forced evacuations and cut off access to nearby roads, hiking trails and campgrounds. Firefighters used helicopters to dump water on the fire, which burned across rugged terrain.

The effects of climate change can be significant on forest regeneration.

One 2018 study in the journal *Ecology Letters* that looked at nearly 1,500 wildfire sites found that because of hotter and drier climates, fewer forests are returning to their pre-burn tree mix, and in some cases trees did not return at all.

Camille Stevens-Rumann, an assistant professor at Colorado State University and co-author of the study, said wildfires have become larger and more intense, killing more trees, while also happening more frequently.

"We have a lot of places that are probably climatically different than when those (conifer) species were established," she said, which means they can struggle when trying to recover after a burn.

If a hotter, drier climate is unsuitable for those trees to come back, "they won't recover," she added.

Experts see Canada's euthanasia laws as threat to disabled

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

TORONTO (AP) — Alan Nichols had a history of depression and other medical issues, but none were life-threatening. When the 61-year-old Canadian was hospitalized in June 2019 over fears he might be suicidal, he asked his brother to "bust him out" as soon as possible.

Within a month, Nichols submitted a request to be euthanized and he was killed, despite concerns raised by his family and a nurse practitioner.

His application for euthanasia listed only one health condition as the reason for his request to die: hearing loss.

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Nichols' family reported the case to police and health authorities, arguing that he lacked the capacity to understand the process and was not suffering unbearably — among the requirements for euthanasia. They say he was not taking needed medication, wasn't using the cochlear implant that helped him hear, and that hospital staffers improperly helped him request euthanasia.

"Alan was basically put to death," his brother Gary Nichols said.

Disability experts say the story is not unique in Canada, which arguably has the world's most permissive euthanasia rules — allowing people with serious disabilities to choose to be killed in the absence of any other medical issue.

Many Canadians support euthanasia and the advocacy group Dying With Dignity says the procedure is "driven by compassion, an end to suffering and discrimination and desire for personal autonomy." But human rights advocates say the country's regulations lack necessary safeguards, devalue the lives of disabled people and are prompting doctors and health workers to suggest the procedure to those who might not otherwise consider it.

Equally troubling, advocates say, are instances in which people have sought to be killed because they weren't getting adequate government support to live.

Canada is set to expand euthanasia access next year, but these advocates say the system warrants further scrutiny now.

Euthanasia "cannot be a default for Canada's failure to fulfill its human rights obligations," said Marie-Claude Landry, the head of its Human Rights Commission.

Landry said she shares the "grave concern" voiced last year by three U.N. human rights experts, who wrote that Canada's euthanasia law appeared to violate the agency's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They said the law had a "discriminatory impact" on disabled people and was inconsistent with Canada's obligations to uphold international human rights standards.

Tim Stainton, director of the Canadian Institute for Inclusion and Citizenship at the University of British Columbia, described Canada's law as "probably the biggest existential threat to disabled people since the Nazis' program in Germany in the 1930s."

During his recent trip to Canada, Pope Francis blasted what he has labeled the culture of waste that considers elderly and disabled people disposable. "We need to learn how to listen to the pain" of the poor and most marginalized, Francis said, lamenting the "patients who, in place of affection, are administered death."

Canada prides itself on being liberal and accepting, said David Jones, director of the Anscombe Bioethics Centre in Britain, "but what's happening with euthanasia suggests there may be a darker side."

Euthanasia, where doctors use drugs to kill patients, is legal in seven countries — Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand and Spain — plus several states in Australia.

Other jurisdictions, including several U.S. states, permit assisted suicide — in which patients take the lethal drug themselves, typically in a drink prescribed by a doctor.

In Canada, the two options are referred to as medical assistance in dying, though more than 99.9% of such deaths are euthanasia. There were more than 10,000 deaths by euthanasia last year, an increase of about a third from the previous year.

Canada's road to allowing euthanasia began in 2015, when its highest court declared that outlawing assisted suicide deprived people of their dignity and autonomy. It gave national leaders a year to draft legislation.

The resulting 2016 law legalized both euthanasia and assisted suicide for people aged 18 and over provided they met certain conditions: They had to have a serious condition, disease or disability that was in an advanced, irreversible state of decline and enduring "unbearable physical or mental suffering that cannot be relieved under conditions that patients consider acceptable." Their death also had to be "reasonably foreseeable," and the request for euthanasia had to be approved by at least two physicians.

The law was later amended to allow people who are not terminally ill to choose death, significantly broadening the number of eligible people. Critics say that change removed a key safeguard aimed at

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protecting people with potentially years or decades of life left.

Today, any adult with a serious illness, disease or disability can seek help in dying.

Canadian health minister Jean-Yves Duclos said the country's euthanasia law "recognizes the rights of all persons ... as well as the inherent and equal value of every life."

The countries that allow euthanasia and assisted suicide vary in how they administer and regulate the practices, but Canada has several policies that set it apart from others. For example:

— Unlike Belgium and the Netherlands, where euthanasia has been legal for two decades, Canada doesn't have monthly commissions to review potentially troubling cases, although it does publish yearly reports of euthanasia trends.

— Canada is the only country that allows nurse practitioners, not just doctors, to end patients' lives. Medical authorities in its two largest provinces, Ontario and Quebec, explicitly instruct doctors not to indicate on death certificates if people died from euthanasia.

— Belgian doctors are advised to avoid mentioning euthanasia to patients since it could be misinterpreted as medical advice. The Australian state of Victoria forbids doctors from raising euthanasia with patients. There are no such restrictions in Canada. The association of Canadian health professionals who provide euthanasia tells physicians and nurses to inform patients if they might qualify to be killed, as one of their possible "clinical care options."

— Canadian patients are not required to have exhausted all treatment alternatives before seeking euthanasia, as is the case in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Still, Duclos said there were adequate safeguards in place, including "stringent eligibility criteria" to ensure no disabled people were being encouraged or coerced into ending their lives. Government figures show more than 65% of people are being euthanized due to cancer, followed by heart problems, respiratory issues and neurological conditions.

Theresia Degener, a professor of law and disability studies at the Protestant University for Applied Sciences in northwestern Germany, said allowing euthanasia based exclusively on disability was a clear human rights violation.

"The implication of (Canada's) law is that a life with disability is automatically less worth living and that in some cases, death is preferable," said Degener.

Alan Nichols lost his hearing after brain surgery at age 12 and suffered a stroke in recent years, but he lived mostly on his own. "He needed some help from us, but he was not so disabled that he qualified for euthanasia," said Gary Nichols.

In one of the assessments filed by a nurse practitioner before Nichols was killed, she noted his history of seizures, frailty and "a failure to thrive." She also wrote that Nichols had hearing and vision loss.

The Nichols family were horrified that his death appeared to be approved based partly on Alan's hearing loss and had other concerns about how Alan was euthanized. They lodged complaints with the British Columbia agency that regulates doctors and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, asking for criminal charges. They also wrote to Canada's minister of justice.

"Somebody needs to take responsibility so that it never happens to another family," said Trish Nichols, Gary's wife. "I am terrified of my husband or another relative being put in the hospital and somehow getting these (euthanasia) forms in their hand."

The hospital says Alan Nichols made a valid request for euthanasia and that, in line with patient privacy, it was not obligated to inform relatives or include them in treatment discussions.

The provincial regulatory agency, British Columbia's College of Doctors and Surgeons, told the family it could not proceed without a police investigation. In March, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Cpl. Patrick Maisonneuve emailed the relatives to say he had reviewed the documentation and concluded Alan Nichols "met the criteria" for euthanasia.

The family's parliamentary representative, Laurie Throness, asked British Columbia's health minister for a public investigation, calling the death "deeply disturbing."

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The health minister, Adrian Dix, said the province's oversight unit reviewed the case and "has not referred it for any further inquiry." He pointed out that the euthanasia law does not allow for families to review euthanasia requests or be privy to hospitals' decisions.

Trudo Lemmens, chair of health law and policy at the University of Toronto, said it was "astonishing" that authorities concluded Nichols' death was justified.

"This case demonstrates that the rules are too loose and that even when people die who shouldn't have died, there is almost no way to hold the doctors and hospitals responsible," he said.

Some disabled Canadians have decided to be killed in the face of mounting bills.

Before being euthanized in August 2019 at age 41, Sean Tagert struggled to get the 24-hour-a-day care he needed. The government provided Tagert, who had Lou Gehrig's disease, with 16 hours of daily care at his home in Powell River, British Columbia. He spent about 264 Canadian dollars (\$206) a day to pay coverage during the other eight hours.

Health authorities proposed that Tagert move to an institution, but he refused, saying he would be too far from his young son. He called the suggestion "a death sentence" in an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Before his death, Tagert had raised more than CA\$16,000 (\$12,400) to buy specialized medical equipment he needed to live at home with caretakers. But it still wasn't enough.

"I know I'm asking for change," Tagert wrote in a Facebook post before his death. "I just didn't realize that was an unacceptable thing to do."

Stainton, the University of British Columbia professor, pointed out that no province or territory provides a disability benefit income above the poverty line. In some regions, he said, it is as low as CA\$850 (\$662) a month — less than half the amount the government provided to people unable to work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Heidi Janz, an assistant adjunct professor in Disability Ethics at the University of Alberta, said "a person with disabilities in Canada has to jump through so many hoops to get support that it can often be enough to tip the scales" and lead them to euthanasia.

Duclos, the national health minister, told The Associated Press that he could not comment on specific cases but said all jurisdictions have a broad range of policies to support disabled people. He acknowledged "disparities in access to services and supports across the country."

Other disabled people say the easy availability of euthanasia has led to unsettling and sometimes frightening discussions.

Roger Foley, who has a degenerative brain disorder and is hospitalized in London, Ontario, was so alarmed by staffers mentioning euthanasia that he began secretly recording some of their conversations.

In one recording obtained by the AP, the hospital's director of ethics told Foley that for him to remain in the hospital, it would cost "north of \$1,500 a day." Foley replied that mentioning fees felt like coercion and asked what plan there was for his long-term care.

"Roger, this is not my show," the ethicist responded. "My piece of this was to talk to you, (to see) if you had an interest in assisted dying."

Foley said he had never previously mentioned euthanasia. The hospital says there is no prohibition on staff raising the issue.

Catherine Frazee, a professor emerita at Toronto's Ryerson University, said cases like Foley's were likely just the tip of the iceberg.

"It's difficult to quantify it, because there is no easy way to track these cases, but I and other advocates are hearing regularly from disabled people every week who are considering (euthanasia)," she said.

Frazee cited the case of Candice Lewis, a 25-year-old woman who has cerebral palsy and spina bifida. Lewis' mother, Sheila Elson, took her to an emergency room in Newfoundland five years ago. During her hospital stay, a doctor said Lewis was a candidate for euthanasia and that if her mother chose not to pursue it, that would be "selfish," Elson told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Canada has tweaked its euthanasia rules since they were first enacted six years ago, but critics say more needs to be done — especially as Canada expands access further.

Next year, the country is set to allow people to be killed exclusively for mental health reasons. It is also considering extending euthanasia to “mature” minors — children under 18 who meet the same requirements as adults.

Chantalle Aubertin, spokeswoman for Canadian Justice Minister David Lametti, said in an email that the government had taken into account concerns raised by the disabled community when it added safeguards to its euthanasia regulations last year. Those changes included that people were to be informed of all services, such as mental health support and palliative care, before asking to die.

Aubertin said those and other measures would “help to honor the difficult and personal decisions of some Canadians to end their suffering on their own terms, while enshrining important safeguards to protect the vulnerable.”

Dr. Jean Marmoreo, a family physician who regularly provides euthanasia services in Ontario, has called for specialized panels to provide a second opinion in difficult cases.

“I think this is not something you want to rush, but at the same time, if the person has made a considered request for this and they meet the eligibility criteria, then they should not be denied their right to a dignified death,” she said.

Landry, Canada’s human rights commissioner, said leaders should listen to the concerns of those facing hardships who believe euthanasia is their only option. She called for social and economic rights to be enshrined in Canadian law to ensure people can get adequate housing, health care and support.

“In an era where we recognize the right to die with dignity, we must do more to guarantee the right to live with dignity,” she said.

Serena loses 1st match since saying she’s prepared to retire

TORONTO (AP) — Serena Williams wore her game face when she stepped out into the stadium for her first match since telling the world she is ready to leave professional tennis.

Greeted by a standing ovation, the 23-time Grand Slam champion didn’t smile. She didn’t wave. She took a sip from a plastic bottle as she walked in. Some folks in the crowd captured the moment with the cameras on their cellphones. Others held aloft handdrawn signs — oh, so many signs — with messages such as “Queen” or “Thank you.”

No one knows exactly how many more matches Williams will play before she puts her rackets away for good, and the 40-year-old American exited the National Bank Open on Wednesday night with a 6-2, 6-4 loss to Belinda Bencic.

While there were some familiar fist pumps and yells of “Come on!” during competition, it was only afterward that Williams really allowed her feelings to show, her voice shaking and her eyes welling during an on-court interview when Bencic ceded the spotlight.

“A lot of emotions, obviously,” Williams told spectators who offered her encouragement throughout the clear, 75-degree evening.

The second-round match at the hard-court tuneup for the U.S. Open came a day after she announced “the countdown has begun” on her playing career, saying she wants to have another child and pursue business interests.

She did not state precisely what her last event will be, but did make it sound as if her final farewell will come at the U.S. Open, which begins Aug. 29 in New York. Williams has won the singles title at Flushing Meadows a half-dozen times — first in 1999; most recently in 2014 — to go along with seven championships apiece at Wimbledon and the Australian Open, plus three at the French Open.

“It’s been a pretty interesting 24 hours,” Williams said after Wednesday’s match.

“I’m terrible at goodbyes,” she added, her hand on her chest, “but goodbye, Toronto!”

Next up on her schedule is the Western & Southern Open in Cincinnati next week, another event that serves as preparation for the year’s last Grand Slam tournament.

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Williams, a three-time champion in Canada, started this match, fittingly enough, with an ace. Delivered another later in that game, too, showing off the superb serve that helped her to so many match victories, so many tournament titles, so many weeks at No. 1 in the rankings.

That elite ability showed up occasionally against Bencic, whether the trio of unreturnable serves to close out that opening game or a later putaway swinging volley accented with a shout and a tug on the brim of her white visor.

But because of a leg injury that sidelined her for the last half of 2021 and first half of 2022, she was playing for only the third time in the past 12 months. There were signs of that, as well, and of why Williams is no longer the dominant force she was for so long.

The breaks of her serve that were never quite so frequent when she was younger and at the height of her powers. The not-quite-on-target groundstrokes. The inability to offer up too much resistance while receiving serve; she only earned one break point in the first set, missing a return long to fritter away that chance, and none in the second.

"I wish I could have played better," Williams said, "but Belinda played so well today."

It did not help Williams that she was facing an opponent 15 years her junior and quite talented, to boot: Bencic is ranked 12th, won a gold medal for Switzerland at the Tokyo Olympics last year and has been a Grand Slam semifinalist.

"It's always an honor to be on the court with her," Bencic said, "and that's why I think tonight is about her."

Bencic took home the Toronto trophy at age 18 in 2015, when she eliminated Williams in the semifinals to earn the distinction of being the youngest woman to beat a player many consider, as one homemade poster in the stands declared Wednesday, the "GOAT" — the greatest of all-time.

In the late match, Bianca Andreescu — the final Canadian left in the singles draw — beat Alize Cornet 6-3, 4-6, 6-3. Andreescu won the tournament in 2019 when Williams retired in the final match because of back problems.

Bencic advanced to face two-time major champion Garbiñe Muguruza, who beat Kaia Kanepi 6-4, 6-4. Seeded players who left the draw Wednesday included No. 2 Anett Kontaveit, No. 4 Paula Badosa, No. 5 Ons Jabeur, No. 13 Leylah Fernandez and No. 16 Jelena Ostapenko.

Jabeur, the Wimbledon runner-up last month, stopped in the second set against Zheng Qinwen because of abdominal pain. Badosa cited muscle cramping for her mid-match retirement while trailing Yulia Putintseva.

Fernandez, the Canadian who was the U.S. Open runner-up last year, lost 7-6 (4), 6-1 to Beatriz Haddad Maia, while Alison Riske-Amritraj defeated 2017 French Open champion Ostapenko 7-6 (2), 0-6, 7-5.

Ukraine says 9 Russian warplanes destroyed in Crimea blasts

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine said Wednesday that nine Russian warplanes were destroyed in a deadly string of explosions at an air base in Crimea that appeared to be the result of a Ukrainian attack, which would represent a significant escalation in the war.

Russia denied any aircraft were damaged in Tuesday's blasts — or that any attack took place. But satellite photos clearly showed at least seven fighter planes at the base had been blown up and others probably damaged.

Ukrainian officials stopped short of publicly claiming responsibility for the explosions, while mocking Russia's explanation that a careless smoker might have caused ammunition at the Saki air base to catch fire and blow up. Analysts also said that explanation doesn't make sense and that the Ukrainians could have used anti-ship missiles to strike the base.

If Ukrainian forces were, in fact, responsible for the blasts, it would be the first known major attack on a Russian military site on the Crimean Peninsula, which was seized from Ukraine by the Kremlin in 2014. Russian warplanes have used Saki to strike areas in Ukraine's south.

Crimea holds huge strategic and symbolic significance for both sides. The Kremlin's demand that Ukraine recognize Crimea as part of Russia has been one of its key conditions for ending the fighting, while Ukraine

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has vowed to drive the Russians from the peninsula and all other occupied territories.

The explosions, which killed one person and wounded 14, sent tourists fleeing in panic as plumes of smoke rose over the coastline nearby. Video showed shattered windows and holes in the brickwork of some buildings.

One tourist, Natalia Lipovaya, said that "the earth was gone from under my feet" after the powerful blasts. "I was so scared," she said.

Sergey Milochinsky, a local resident, recalled hearing a roar and seeing a mushroom cloud from his window. "Everything began to fall around, collapse," he said.

Crimea's regional leader, Sergei Aksyonov, said some 250 residents were moved to temporary housing after dozens of apartment buildings were damaged.

Russian authorities sought to downplay the explosions, saying Wednesday that all hotels and beaches were unaffected on the peninsula, which is a popular tourist destination for many Russians. But video posted on social media showed long lines of slowly moving cars on the road to Russia as tourists headed for home.

A Ukrainian presidential adviser, Oleksiy Arestovych, cryptically said that the blasts were either caused by Ukrainian-made long-range weapons or the work of Ukrainian guerrillas operating in Crimea.

A Ukrainian parliament member, Oleksandr Zavitnevich, said the airfield was rendered unusable. He reported on Facebook that it housed fighter jets, tactical reconnaissance aircraft and military transport planes.

Satellite images from Planet Labs PBC taken at midafternoon Wednesday showed some 2 square kilometers (0.75 square mile) of grassland burned at the Saki base. Several craters marked the ground near the tarmac — typically the sign of a powerful explosion. The two runways bore no apparent damage and appeared to still be operational. Some of the fighter jets on the flight line had been moved farther down the runway, compared to images taken Tuesday before the blast.

The base has been home to the Russian 43rd Independent Naval Assault Air Squadron since Moscow seized Crimea. The squadron flies Sukhoi Su-24s and Sukhoi Su-30s. The base also includes a number of earth-covered bunkers and hangars around its periphery — typically used to house munitions in case of a fire. None appeared damaged.

"Official Kyiv has kept mum about it, but unofficially the military acknowledges that it was a Ukrainian strike," Ukrainian military analyst Oleh Zhdanov said.

The base is at least 200 kilometers (about 125 miles) from the closest Ukrainian position. Zhdanov suggested that Ukrainian forces could have struck it with Ukrainian or Western-supplied anti-ship missiles that have the necessary range.

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said it couldn't independently determine what caused the explosions but noted that simultaneous blasts in two places at the base probably rule out an accidental fire but not sabotage or a missile attack.

It added: "The Kremlin has little incentive to accuse Ukraine of conducting strikes that caused the damage since such strikes would demonstrate the ineffectiveness of Russian air defense systems."

During the war, the Kremlin has reported numerous fires and explosions on Russian territory near the Ukrainian border, blaming some of them on Ukrainian strikes. Ukrainian authorities have mostly kept silent about the incidents, preferring to keep the world guessing.

Neither side has released much information about their own casualties. In his nightly video address Wednesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy claimed nearly 43,000 Russian soldiers had been killed.

Colin Kahl, U.S. undersecretary of defense for policy, estimated Monday that Russian forces have sustained up to 80,000 deaths and injuries in the fighting. He did not break down the figure with an estimate of forces killed or provide a Ukrainian casualty count.

In other developments, Russian forces shelled areas across Ukraine on Tuesday night into Wednesday, including the central region of Dnipropetrovsk, where 13 people were killed, according to the region's governor, Valentyn Reznichenko.

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Reznichenko said the Russians fired at the city of Marganets and a nearby village. Dozens of residential buildings, two schools and several administrative buildings were damaged.

"It was a terrible night," Reznichenko said. "It's very hard to take bodies from under debris. We are facing a cruel enemy who engages in daily terror against our cities and villages."

In Ukraine's east, where fighting has raged for eight years, a Russian attack on the center of the city of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region killed seven, wounded six and damaged stores, homes and apartment buildings, setting off fires, Ukraine's prosecutor general said on Telegram. Bakhmut is a key target for Russian forces as they advance on regional hubs.

In the city of Donetsk, which has been under the control of Russia-backed separatists since 2014, Ukrainian shelling hit a brewery, killing one person and wounding two, the separatists' emergency service said. It said the shelling late Wednesday caused a leak of toxic ammonia and warned people to stay inside and breathe through cotton gauze.

Two residents of the village of Staryi Saltiv in the Kharkiv region in the northeast were killed Wednesday in Russian shelling, police reported.

In the country's southeast, Moscow's forces continued shelling the city of Nikopol across the Dnieper River from the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia power station, the biggest nuclear plant in Europe. Ukraine and Russia have accused each other of shelling it, stoking international fears of a catastrophe.

On Wednesday, foreign ministers of the Group of Seven industrialized democracies demanded that Russia immediately hand back full control of the plant to Ukraine. They said they are "profoundly concerned" about the risk of a nuclear accident with far-reaching consequences.

The U.N. Security Council scheduled an open meeting Thursday at Russia's request on what it claims were Ukrainian attacks on the Zaporizhzhia plant. Rafael Grossi, the International Atomic Energy Agency chief who said last week that the situation at the plant "is completely out of control," was expected to brief the council.

EXPLAINER: Online privacy in a post-Roe world

The Associated Press undefined

The case of a Nebraska woman charged with helping her teenage daughter end her pregnancy after investigators obtained Facebook messages between the two has raised fresh concerns about data privacy in the post-Roe world.

Since before the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June, Big Tech companies that collect personal details of their users have faced new calls to limit that tracking and surveillance amid fears that law enforcement or vigilantes could use those data troves against people seeking abortions or those who try to help them.

Meta, which owns Facebook, said Tuesday it received warrants requesting messages in the Nebraska case from local law enforcement on June 7, before the Supreme Court decision overriding *Roe* came down. The warrants, the company added, "did not mention abortion at all," and court documents at the time showed that police were investigating the "alleged illegal burning and burial of a stillborn infant."

However, in early June, the mother and daughter were only charged with a single felony for removing, concealing or abandoning a body, and two misdemeanors: concealing the death of another person and false reporting.

It wasn't until about a month later, after investigators reviewed the private Facebook messages, that prosecutors added the felony abortion-related charges against the mother.

History has repeatedly demonstrated that whenever people's personal data is tracked and stored, there's always a risk that it could be misused or abused. With the Supreme Court's overruling of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion, collected location data, text messages, search histories, emails and seemingly innocuous period and ovulation-tracking apps could be used to prosecute people who seek an abortion — or medical care for a miscarriage — as well as those who assist them.

"In the digital age, this decision opens the door to law enforcement and private bounty hunters seeking

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vast amounts of private data from ordinary Americans," said Alexandra Reeve Givens, the president and CEO of the Center for Democracy and Technology, a Washington-based digital rights nonprofit.

WHY DID FACEBOOK TURN OVER THE MESSAGES?

Facebook owner Meta said it received a legal warrant from law enforcement about the case, which did not mention the word "abortion." The company has said that officials at the social media giant "always scrutinize every government request we receive to make sure it is legally valid" and that Meta fights back against requests that it thinks are invalid or too broad.

But the company gave investigators information in about 88% of the 59,996 cases in which the government requested data in the second half of last year, according to its transparency report. Meta declined to say whether its response would have been different had the warrant mentioned the word "abortion."

NOT A NEW ISSUE

Until this past May, anyone could buy a weekly trove of data on clients at more than 600 Planned Parenthood sites around the country for as little as \$160, according to a recent Vice investigation. The files included approximate patient addresses — derived from where their cellphones "sleep" at night — income brackets, time spent at the clinic, and the top places people visited before and afterward.

It's all possible because federal law — specifically, HIPAA, the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act — protects the privacy of medical files at your doctor's office, but not any information that third-party apps or tech companies collect about you. This is also true if an app that collects your data shares it with a third party that might abuse it.

In 2017, a Black woman in Mississippi named Lattice Fisher was charged with second-degree murder after she sought medical care for a pregnancy loss.

"While receiving care from medical staff, she was also immediately treated with suspicion of committing a crime," civil rights attorney and Ford Foundation fellow Cynthia Conti-Cook wrote in her 2020 paper, "Surveilling the Digital Abortion Diary." Fisher's "statements to nurses, the medical records, and the autopsy records of her fetus were turned over to the local police to investigate whether she intentionally killed her fetus," she wrote.

Fisher was indicted on a second-degree murder charge in 2018; conviction could have led to life in prison. The murder charge was later dismissed. Evidence against her, though included her online search history, which included queries on how to induce a miscarriage and how to buy abortion pills online.

"Her digital data gave prosecutors a 'window into (her) soul' to substantiate their general theory that she did not want the fetus to survive," Conti-Cook wrote.

INDUSTRY RESPONSE

Though many companies have announced policies to protect their own employees by paying for necessary out-of-state travel to obtain an abortion, technology companies have said little about how they might cooperate with law enforcement or government agencies trying to prosecute people seeking an abortion where it is illegal — or who are helping someone do so.

In June, Democratic lawmakers asked federal regulators to investigate Apple and Google for allegedly deceiving millions of mobile phone users by enabling the collection and sale of their personal data to third parties.

The following month, Google announced it will automatically purge information about users who visit abortion clinics or other locations that could trigger legal problems following the Supreme Court decision.

Governments and law enforcement can subpoena companies for data on their users. Generally, Big Tech policies suggest the companies will comply with abortion-related data requests unless they see them as overly broad. Meta, for instance, pointed to its online transparency report, which says "we comply with government requests for user information only where we have a good-faith belief that the law requires us to do so."

Online rights advocates say that's not enough. In the Nebraska case, for instance, neither Meta nor law enforcement would have been able to read the messages had they been "end-to-end encrypted" the way messages on Meta's WhatsApp service are protected by default.

"Meta must flip the switch and make end-to-end encryption a default in all private messages, including on Facebook and Instagram. Doing so will literally save pregnant peoples' lives," said, Caitlin Seeley George, campaigns and managing director at the nonprofit rights group Fight for the Future.

BURDEN ON THE USER

Unless all of your data is securely encrypted, there's always a chance that someone, somewhere can access it. So abortion rights activists suggest that people in states where abortion is outlawed should limit the creation of such data in the first place.

For instance, they urge turning off phone location services — or just leaving your phone at home — when seeking reproductive health care. To be safe, they say, it's good to read the privacy policies of any health apps in use.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation suggests using more privacy-conscious web browsers such as Brave, Firefox and DuckDuckGo — but also recommends double-checking their privacy settings.

There are also ways to turn off ad identifiers on both Apple and Android phones that stop advertisers from being able to track you. This is generally a good idea in any case. Apple will ask you if you want to be tracked each time you download a new app. For apps you already have installed, the tracking can be turned off manually.

Lawyer: Photos of Kobe Bryant's remains shared 'for a laugh'

By ANDREW DALTON Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — An institutional "culture of callousness" led Los Angeles County deputies and firefighters to shoot and share photos of the remains of Kobe Bryant and other victims of the 2020 helicopter crash that killed the Lakers star, his 13-year-old daughter, and seven others, a lawyer for Bryant's widow told a jury Wednesday.

Vanessa Bryant's attorney Luis Li told jurors in his opening statement in U.S. District Court in her invasion of privacy trial against the county that the cell-phone photos shot at the crash scene by a deputy and a fire captain were "visual gossip" viewed "for a laugh," and had no official purpose.

"They were shared by deputies playing video games," Li said. "They were shared repeatedly with people who had absolutely no reason to receive them."

An attorney for the county defended the taking of the photos as an essential tool for first-responders seeking to share information when they thought they might still save lives at the chaotic, dangerous and hard-to-reach crash scene in the Calabasas hills west of Los Angeles

"Site photography is essential," county lawyer J. Mira Hashmall said.

Vanessa Bryant cried frequently during her lawyer's presentation. She was still wiping tears from her eyes minutes afterward during a break.

Li told jurors that learning a month after the crash about the photos' circulation not from the county but the Los Angeles Times compounded her still-raw suffering.

"January 26th, 2020, was the worst day of Vanessa Bryant's life. The county made it much worse," Li said. "They poured salt in an open wound and rubbed it in."

Li played jurors security video of an off-duty sheriff's deputy drinking at a bar showing the photos to the bartender, who shakes his head in dismay. The lawyer then showed an image of the men laughing together later. Li described firefighters looking at the phone photos two weeks later at an awards banquet, and showed the jury an animated chart documenting their spread to nearly 30 people.

Li said the county failed to conduct a thorough investigation to make sure every copy of the photo was accounted for, and because of the fear that they will someday surface, and her surviving children may see them online, Vanessa Bryant "will be haunted by what they did forever."

During the defense's opening statement, Hashmall told jurors that the fact that the pictures have not appeared in more than two years showed that leaders in the sheriff's and fire department did their jobs.

"They're not online. They're not in the media. They've never even been seen by the plaintiffs themselves," Hashmall said. She added, "That is not an accident. That is a function of how diligent they were."

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Sheriff Alex Villanueva and department officials immediately brought in all those involved and ordered them to delete the photos, rather than conduct a long official investigation that might harm the families further, she said.

"He picked what he viewed as the only option — decisive action," Hashmall said. "He felt like every second mattered."

Hashmall told the jury that the reason Li even had the video of the bartender to show, which she suggested was deceptively edited to show the men laughing together, was because the Sheriff's Department had gotten it the same day they received a complaint from another bar patron who witnessed the photo sharing.

She said the deputy was struggling emotionally from the difficulty of dealing with the crash scene, and that the bartender was a longtime friend in whom he was confiding.

"He pulled out his phone, and that should not have happened," she said. "In a lapse, in a moment of weakness, he showed those photos, and he has regretted it every day of his life."

The defense attorney urged jurors to look past the grief of those who brought the lawsuit and focus on the matter before them.

"There is no doubt these families have suffered," she said. "It's unspeakable. But this case is not about the loss from the crash. It's about the pictures."

Chris Chester, whose wife, Sara, and daughter Payton were also killed in the crash, is also a plaintiff in the lawsuit, which seeks unspecified millions.

The county already agreed to pay \$2.5 million to settle a similar case brought by two families whose relatives died in the Jan. 26, 2020, crash. Bryant and Chester declined to settle.

Kobe Bryant, his 13-year-old daughter Gianna, and other parents and players were flying to a girls basketball tournament when their chartered helicopter crashed in the fog. Federal safety officials blamed pilot error for the wreck.

Joe Arpaio loses 3rd comeback bid in town mayoral race

By JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Joe Arpaio, the 90-year-old former Arizona sheriff who was a once powerful figure in Republican politics but was ousted nearly six years ago amid frustration over his headline-grabbing tactics and legal troubles, was defeated Wednesday in a race for mayor of the affluent suburb where he has lived for more than two decades.

His defeat in the mayor's race in Fountain Hills against two-term incumbent Ginny Dickey marks Arpaio's third failed comeback bid since his 2016 loss after serving 24 years as the sheriff of Maricopa County.

Even though election officials say all votes in Maricopa County have been counted, Arpaio said Wednesday evening that he wasn't conceding the race and instead was going to consult with an attorney to explore whether to challenge the results.

"I am not saying I am going to do it," Arpaio said of a legal challenge. "I'm not a lawyer. I just want a little information. In today's environment, a large percentage of the people are not happy with the way the (election) system was working."

Dickey didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The political stakes of running in Fountain Hills, a Republican-heavy town of 24,000, were much lower for Arpaio than when he served as the top law enforcer of a county of over 4 million people.

Arpaio was crushed by a Democratic challenger in 2016 and was convicted the next year of criminal contempt of court for disobeying a judge's order to stop traffic patrols that targeted immigrants, though he was later pardoned by then-President Donald Trump.

Arpaio then finished third in a Republican primary for a U.S. Senate seat in 2018 and second in the GOP primary in a 2020 bid to win back the sheriff's post.

In his first two comeback attempts, Arpaio lost the vote in Fountain Hills.

Arpaio, a skilled political fundraiser who spent more than \$12 million in his 2016 sheriff's campaign, has

shelled out \$161,000 in the mayor's race — six times the amount spent by Dickey.

Before the federal government and the courts stripped away his immigration powers, Arpaio led 20 large-scale traffic patrols that targeted immigrants and more than 80 business raids to bust people working in the United States without permission.

While his defiant streak played well with voters for many years, Arpaio faced heavy criticism for taking on policies that he knew were controversial and racking up \$147 million in taxpayer-funded legal bills.

Though he billed himself as the toughest sheriff in America, his agency botched the investigations of more than 400 sex-crimes complaints made to his office.

New Mexico's Muslim community reels from arrest in killings

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN, STEFANIE DAZIO and MARIAM FAM Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — A fear of attacks that had rippled through Muslim communities nationwide after the fatal shootings of four Muslim men in Albuquerque gave way to shock and sadness when it turned out the suspect in the killings is one of their own.

Muhammad Syed, 51, was arrested late Monday after a traffic stop more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) from his Albuquerque home. The Afghan immigrant denied any connection to the crimes that shook the city and its small Muslim community.

In court documents, in fact, he told police that he was so unnerved by the slayings that he was driving to Houston to find a new home for his family, which includes six children.

But investigators said they have ample evidence to prove his guilt, though they have yet to uncover the motive for the ambush-style killings, the first of which was in November and then three between July 26 and last Friday.

According to the criminal complaint, police determined that bullet casings found in Syed's vehicle matched the caliber of the weapons believed to have been used in two of the killings and that casings found at the crime scenes were linked to guns found at Syed's home and in his vehicle.

Of the more than 200 tips police received, it was one from the Muslim community that led them to the Syed family, authorities said, noting that Syed knew the victims and "an interpersonal conflict may have led to the shootings."

The news of Syed's arrest stunned Muslims in Albuquerque.

"I wanted a little closure for the community, as we saw it going out of hand and people were really panicking. But, I'll be honest with you, I was shocked," said Samia Assed, a community organizer and member of the Islamic Center of New Mexico. She said she did not want "these heinous crimes to be in any way, in any capacity used to divide a community."

Salim Ansari, president of the Afghan Society of New Mexico, said he felt relief at the news that an arrest had been made. But he was especially taken back because he knew Syed through social gatherings and was dumbfounded to learn the accusations against him and that court documents showed three domestic violence cases against the man.

"We never knew," he said.

Ansari said he first met Syed and the family when he was invited into their home in 2020 to tell them about the local Afghan community and the group that he heads. The couple ended up joining the society as members. As recently as last month, Syed and his family brought food and joined a potluck gathering, Ansari said.

"I don't know what happened," he said.

On Wednesday, Syed made his first court appearance during a virtual arraignment. He was shackled and in a jumpsuit that said "HIGH RISK" on the back. His case was transferred to state District Court, where a judge will consider a motion by prosecutors to keep him detained without bond pending trial.

"He is a very dangerous person, and the only way to protect the community is to hold the defendant in custody," prosecutors said in court documents.

Syed, through an interpreter, asked for permission to speak, but his attorney asked that the court not

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take any statements from him. He was not asked to enter a plea.

Syed has lived in the United States for about five years. When interviewed by detectives, Syed said he had been with the special forces in Afghanistan and fought against the Taliban, according to a criminal complaint filed late Tuesday.

Police said they were about to search Syed's Albuquerque home on Monday when they saw him drive away in a Volkswagen Jetta that investigators believe was used in at least one of the slayings.

In the complaint, authorities said a 9mm handgun was seized from his vehicle, and they found an AK-47-style rifle and a pistol of the same caliber at the family home while serving a search warrant. Syed bought the rifle and his son Shaheen Syed purchased the pistol at a local gun shop.

On Wednesday, Shaheen Syed was charged by federal prosecutors with providing a false Florida address when he bought two rifles last year. He has denied any role in the killings and has not been charged in connection with them. He and another brother were interviewed by police on Monday.

The first of the four people fatally shot was Mohammad Ahmadi, 62, an immigrant from from Afghanistan. Naeem Hussain, a 25-year-old man from Pakistan, was killed last Friday. His death came just days after those of Muhammad Afzaal Hussain, 27, and Aftab Hussein, 41, who were also from Pakistan and members of the same mosque.

Ehsan Chahalmi, the brother-in-law of Naeem Hussain, said he was "a generous, kind, giving, forgiving and loving soul that has been taken away from us forever."

Investigators consider Syed to be the primary suspect in the deaths of Naeem Hussain and Ahmadi but have not yet filed charges in those cases. Albuquerque police said Wednesday that as long as the suspect is detained, homicide detectives will not rush the case.

Police say they are looking at a number of possible motives. When asked at a news conference Tuesday if Muhammad Syed, a Sunni Muslim, was angry that his daughter married a Shiite Muslim, Deputy Police Cmdr. Kyle Hartsock did not respond directly. He said "motives are still being explored fully to understand what they are."

CNN interviewed Syed's daughter shortly before the announcement of his arrest. She said her husband was friends with two of the men who were killed. She also acknowledged her father initially was upset about her 2018 marriage but recently had been more accepting.

"My father is not a person who can kill somebody," the woman told CNN, which did not disclose her identity to protect her safety. "My father has always talked about peace. That's why we are here in the United States. We came from Afghanistan, from fighting, from shooting."

In 2017, a boyfriend of Syed's daughter reported to police that Syed, his wife and one of their sons had pulled him out of a car, punching and kicking him before driving away, according to court documents. The boyfriend, who was found with a bloody nose, scratches and bruises, told police that he was attacked because they did not want her in a relationship with him.

Syed was arrested in May 2018 after a fight with his wife turned violent, court documents said. Prosecutors said both cases were later dismissed after the victims declined to press charges. Syed also was arrested in 2020 after he was accused of refusing to pull over for police after running a traffic light, but that case was eventually dismissed, court documents said.

Former FBI profiler Mary Ellen O'Toole said the crimes Syed is suspected of carrying out fit the definition of a serial killer even though Albuquerque police have not classified him as such. She said serial killers often have red flags like domestic violence or sexual assaults in their past that precede the killings.

"People don't wake up one morning and just become a serial killer," she said. "We would go back and we would look at other crimes that were occurring in the area before the serial murders occurred. Because there's periods of time where they have to practice being violent. And that practice can begin at home."

O'Toole said motives for the four killings may have varied from victim to victim. O'Toole said she would want to know what prompted three killings in quick succession eight months after the first.

"This behavior that we're seeing in this case is cold-blooded, pre-meditated, and it involves hunting behavior – actually hunting human beings – which is probably as cold as it can get," she said.

Trump says he took the Fifth in New York civil investigation

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump invoked his Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination as he testified under oath Wednesday in the New York attorney general's long-running civil investigation into his business dealings.

About an hour after arriving at Attorney General Letitia James' Manhattan offices, Trump announced that he "declined to answer the questions under the rights and privileges afforded to every citizen under the United States Constitution."

"I once asked, 'If you're innocent, why are you taking the Fifth Amendment?' Now I know the answer to that question," the statement said. "When your family, your company, and all the people in your orbit have become the targets of an unfounded politically motivated Witch Hunt supported by lawyers, prosecutors and the Fake News Media, you have no choice."

During more than six hours at the office building, Trump used Truth Social, the social media platform he founded, to review the decor — "very plush, beautiful and expensive" — and to suggest the attorney general was squandering time investigating him instead of attending to crime in New York.

But after leaving around 3:30 p.m., he described the encounter as "very professional" and added a plug for his "fantastic" company.

The questioning brought him face-to-face with an official he had called an "out-of-control prosecutor" and a racist. James, a Democrat, is the first Black person to hold her post.

James' office declined to detail the interview, beyond saying that she personally took part in the deposition.

One of Trump's lawyers, Ronald Fischetti, told The New York Times the former president answered one question, about his name, read a statement into the record in which he questioned James' motives, then invoked the Fifth Amendment. Trump then said "same answer" to every question he was asked over several hours, Fischetti said.

As vociferous as Trump has been in defending himself in written statements and on the rally stage, legal experts said answering questions in a deposition was risky because anything he said could potentially be used against him in a parallel criminal investigation by the Manhattan district attorney. The Fifth Amendment protects people from being compelled to be witnesses against themselves in a criminal case.

If the attorney general's investigation leads to a civil case against Trump and it went to trial, jurors could be told he invoked his protection against self-incrimination.

New York University law professor Stephen Gillers said he was surprised that Trump had done so, given his previous experience with depositions, a legal term for sworn testimony that's not given in court.

"Jousting with lawyers at depositions, while avoiding lying, is something he's proud of," Gillers said. "Perhaps his lawyers feared that his impetuosity would imperil him."

Trump has undergone many depositions, dating to his career as a real estate developer. He has sometimes seemed to relish giving answers: For example, he said he was "pleased to have had the opportunity to tell my side" last October in a lawsuit brought by protesters who say his security guard roughed them up outside Trump Tower in 2015.

However, Trump invoked the Fifth Amendment to refuse to answer 97 questions in a 1990 divorce deposition.

Messages seeking comment were left with James' office.

Wednesday's events unfolded two days after FBI agents searched Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida as part of an unrelated federal probe into whether he took classified records when he left the White House.

New York's investigation is led by James, who has said in court filings that her office has uncovered "significant" evidence that Trump's company misled lenders and tax authorities about the value of prized assets like golf courses and skyscrapers.

The company, the Trump Organization, even exaggerated the size of Trump's Manhattan penthouse, saying it was nearly three times its actual size — a difference in value of about \$200 million, James' office said.

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Trump has denied the allegations, contending that seeking the best valuations is a common practice in the real estate industry.

In May, James' office said that it was nearing the end of its investigation against Trump. The Republican's deposition was one of the few remaining missing pieces.

The attorney general could decide to bring a lawsuit seeking financial penalties against Trump or his company, or even a ban on them being involved in certain types of businesses.

Two of Trump's adult children, Donald Jr. and Ivanka, gave depositions in recent days, two people familiar with the matter said. The people were not authorized to speak publicly and did so on condition of anonymity.

It's unclear whether Ivanka Trump or Donald Trump Jr. invoked the Fifth Amendment. Eric Trump, their brother, did so more than 500 times during a deposition in the same investigation in 2020, according to court papers.

People generally don't have a constitutional right to avoid questions in a civil lawsuit, but Trump's legal team fought James' attempt to question him for months, arguing that the district attorney's parallel investigation created a risk that Trump could face criminal charges. Lawyers in James' office have assisted with that criminal investigation.

Manhattan Judge Arthur Engoron ruled that James' office had "the clear right" to question Trump and other principals in his company — though Trump also had a right to decline to answer questions because of the criminal case.

That criminal probe had appeared to be progressing toward a possible criminal indictment, but stalled after a new district attorney, Alvin Bragg, a Democrat, took office in January. A grand jury that had been hearing evidence disbanded. The top prosecutor who had been handling the probe resigned after Bragg raised questions internally about the viability of the case.

Bragg has said his investigation is continuing.

The district attorney's investigation has already led to criminal charges against the Trump Organization and its longtime finance chief, Allen Weisselberg, who are accused of tax fraud related to fringe benefits offered by the company.

Weisselberg and the company's lawyers are scheduled to be in court Friday to argue that the case should be dismissed.

Sheriff accused of pressuring candidates to drop races

TITUSVILLE, Fla. (AP) — A third candidate for public office has come forward to say a sheriff on Florida's Space Coast offered help in getting a job in exchange for leaving a race and backing his favored candidate.

Kimberly Musselman, an assistant state attorney in Brevard County, told Florida Today she was asked by Brevard County Sheriff Wayne Ivey to bow out of her race for county judge and endorse a candidate backed by him. In exchange, the sheriff said he could use his influence to help her become the district's top prosecutor, she said.

After she refused, Ivey urged some of her biggest donors to drop their support, Musselman told Florida Today.

"My donors dried up real quick," Musselman said.

In response to an inquiry Wednesday, Tod Goodyear, a spokesperson for the Brevard County Sheriff's Office, said in an email, "We are not commenting at this time."

Two other candidates for public office have made similar allegations to Florida Today.

Cocoa Beach police officer Chris Hattaway said the Republican sheriff asked him to step aside for former state Rep. Tom Goodson, another candidate in a county commission race. Shawn Overdorf, a former school resource officer, told a similar story about his race for school board. In exchange, both candidates were offered jobs in Goodson's office if he won, Florida Today reported.

When contacted by Florida Today, Goodson denied involvement with any efforts to pressure candidates

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out of the election and said he had not spoken with Ivey about hiring anyone.

Ivey has gained national attention in recent years due to his weekly "Wheel of Fugitive" videos which feature the sheriff spinning a wheel with photos of 10 of the county's most wanted.

"Everybody watches it. Even the fugitives watch it" to see who becomes "fugitive of the week," said Ivey, who was elected sheriff in 2012.

EXPLAINER: Mixed US inflation signs. Where are prices going?

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER and PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Consumers struggling with skyrocketing prices for food, gas, autos and rent got a tantalizing hint of relief last month, when prices didn't budge at all from June after 25 straight months of increases. With gas prices continuing to fall, inflation is probably slowing further this month.

So has the worst bout of inflation in four decades possibly peaked? Economists say it's too soon to know for sure. Even if inflation has peaked, it will likely remain high well into next year.

Since inflation ignited early last year, it has temporarily slowed before, only to re-accelerate in later months. When that happened last fall, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell was forced to jettison his description of higher prices as being merely "transitory" and to acknowledge that high inflation was proving to be chronic.

Even if some prices should keep declining, others — housing costs, for example — are almost sure to remain painfully high. And that means there's likely still a long way to go before inflation will get anywhere close to the 2% annual pace that the Fed has targeted and that Americans were long accustomed to.

On Wednesday, the government reported that consumer inflation jumped 8.5% in July from 12 months earlier. That was an unexpectedly sharp slowdown from the 9.1% year-over-year inflation rate in June, which was the largest in four decades. But it was still quite high.

So-called core prices, which exclude the volatile food and energy categories to produce a better picture of underlying inflation, also rose more slowly: They increased 0.3% from June to July, less than the 0.7% rise from May to June. Over the past 12 months, core prices rose 5.9%, the same as in June.

Here are some questions and answers about inflation:

WHERE IS INFLATION HEADED?

That's hard to say, because there are multiple signs pointing in both directions.

In addition to the ongoing decline in gas prices, the cost of groceries — a huge driver of inflation for the past year — could soon rise much more slowly. Futures prices for dairy, chicken and eggs have been falling in recent weeks, according to Capital Economics, a forecasting firm. And costs for such farm commodities as wheat, corn and soybeans are also well off their springtime peaks.

Many supply chain snarls are loosening, with fewer ships moored off Southern California ports and shipping costs declining. That should help reduce the cost of furniture, cars and other goods. Prices for appliances are already falling.

In addition, Americans' expectations for future inflation fell last month, according to a survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, likely reflecting the drop in gas prices that is highly visible to most consumers.

Inflation expectations can be self-fulfilling: If people believe inflation will stay high or worsen, they're likely to take steps — such as demanding higher pay — that can send prices higher in a self-perpetuating cycle. But the New York Fed survey found that Americans' foresee lower inflation in future years than they did a month ago.

ARE THERE SIGNS INFLATION COULD STAY HIGH?

Plenty. Inflation is a byproduct of broad economic trends — too much money chasing too few goods, in the classic economic view — not merely whether individual industries are struck by supply shortages or other problems.

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One trend that may be keeping Fed officials up at night is that companies are still hiring workers at a voracious pace — and are willing to pay more to find the people they need. In the April-June quarter, employees' wages and salaries, excluding government workers, jumped 1.6%, matching a two-decade high that was reached last fall.

Businesses typically pass on at least some of their higher labor costs to their customers in the form of higher prices. But if workers become more productive — if they use more technology, say, or a company streamlines operations — a business can pay more and make up for the higher costs through greater efficiency rather than through higher prices for customers.

Unfortunately, for the first half of this year, the opposite has happened: Productivity has tumbled and wages, adjusted for declining efficiency, have been growing at double-digit levels. Economists say that means further pay increases would have to be passed on to consumers through higher prices. And those price increases would fuel continued high inflation.

"This is way above anything we've seen since the high inflation of the early 1980s," said Peter Hooper, head of economic research at Deutsche Bank Securities, referring to labor costs. "The danger here is that you're entering into a wage-price spiral, that increasing wage costs are pushing up prices further and making it that much more difficult to actually bring down inflation to a more desirable level."

WHAT'S CAUSED THE SPIKE IN INFLATION?

Good news — mostly. When the pandemic paralyzed the economy in the spring of 2020 and lockdowns kicked in, businesses closed or cut hours and consumers stayed home as a health precaution, employers slashed a breathtaking 22 million jobs.

Everyone braced for more misery. Companies cut investment and postponed restocking. A severe recession ensued.

But instead of sinking into a prolonged downturn, the economy staged an unexpectedly rousing recovery, fueled by vast infusions of government aid and emergency intervention by the Fed, which slashed short-term interest rates.

Suddenly, businesses had to scramble to meet demand. They couldn't hire fast enough to fill job openings or buy enough supplies to meet customer orders. As business roared back, ports and freight yards couldn't handle the traffic. Global supply chains seized up.

With demand up and supplies down, costs jumped. And companies found that they could pass along those higher costs in the form of higher prices to consumers, many of whom had managed to pile up savings during the pandemic.

Critics blamed, in part, President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package, with its \$1,400 checks to most households, for overheating an economy that was already sizzling on its own. Many others assigned a greater blame to supply shortages. And some argued that the Fed kept rates near zero far too long, lending fuel to runaway spending and inflated prices in stocks, homes and other assets.

HOW ARE HIGHER PRICES AFFECTING CONSUMERS?

It's hitting most people pretty hard, even if they have received pay raises. On average, weekly paychecks, adjusted for inflation, fell 3.6% in July compared with a year ago.

For lower-income families, economic research shows that the hit is typically harder. Poorer Americans are more likely to spend a greater proportion of their incomes on items that have increased the most in price in the past 18 months: Food, gas and rent.

There are also subtler differences that can make inflation harder for those earning less. Many people can't afford the kind of bulk purchases of groceries that can help higher-income households economize.

Paola Becerra, 40, who lives in Stamford, Connecticut, has started to miss doctor's appointments to use the money instead for groceries or gas.

"My groceries for just one week are now never below \$100," she said. "And I can't buy in bulk because I don't have a big fridge."

Sesame Place to train workers on diversity after lawsuit

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Sesame Place has announced the implementation of diversity and inclusion training for its employees following a \$25 million class-action lawsuit alleging multiple incidents of discrimination after outcry sparked from a video of a costumed character snubbing two 6-year-old Black girls went viral online.

The Sesame Street-themed park, operated by SeaWorld Parks, in a statement Tuesday said that all employees will be mandated to participate in training created to address bias, promote inclusion and prevent discrimination by the end of September.

The training — which was developed by civil rights educators — will also be integrated into onboarding for all new employees and “will become a regular part of our training and workforce development,” the statement said.

Outrage ensued online in July when a video went viral showing a Sesame Street character waving off the two Black girls during a parade at Sesame Place. Jodi Brown, the mother of one of the girls, posted the video on Instagram.

President of Sesame Place Philadelphia Cathy Valeriano said the park has already begun implementing temporary measures while a review of the park continues.

“We are committed to making sure our guests feel welcome, included and enriched by their visits to our park,” Valeriano said.

SeaWorld’s CEO, Marc Swanson, is scheduled to meet with the Brown family alongside Rev. Jesse Jackson on Thursday to “address the deficiencies we have noted from this most recent press release,” said B’Ivory LaMarr, the family’s attorney.

Go the Distance: Cubs, Reds play at Iowa’s ‘Field of Dreams’

By JAY COHEN AP Baseball Writer

DYERSVILLE, Iowa (AP) — David Bell’s grandfather, father and brother played in the majors. Bell spent 12 years in the big leagues himself and worked as a coach and front office executive before taking over as manager of the Cincinnati Reds.

So yeah, “Field of Dreams,” a movie about family and baseball, hits a little differently for him.

“Baseball’s a big part of our life,” Bell said, “and I thought that the movie did a great job of kind of just telling the story of how important baseball can be to families and just to people in general.”

“Field of Dreams” gets another tribute Thursday night when Bell’s Reds take on the Chicago Cubs in a throwback ballpark in the cornfields of eastern Iowa, a short walk from the field where Kevin Costner, James Earl Jones, Ray Liotta and Amy Madigan filmed the 1989 movie.

Under a light blue sky with a few dashes of clouds, workers put the final touches on the major league park on a warm Wednesday afternoon. A couple of youth teams played on the field from the movie as Cubs and Reds fans wandered around the grounds.

The game comes 2 1/2 months after Liotta, who played the ghost of Shoeless Joe Jackson, died in May at age 67.

Each team will wear special uniforms inspired by how the franchises looked in the early 20th century, and Cincinnati first baseman Joey Votto and Chicago outfielder Ian Happ will be on two-way mics for the broadcast on FOX.

The Reds are considered the home team, and the three-game set concludes with games in Cincinnati on Saturday and Sunday.

But first, Iowa.

“Just really excited,” Cubs outfielder Seiya Suzuki said through a translator. “It’s not a field where you can play on every day.”

It’s the second go-round for Major League Baseball at the site in Dyersville — population of about 4,400 — after the New York Yankees and Chicago White Sox put on a show last year in the first MLB game in Iowa.

After Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton rallied New York to the lead in the top of the ninth inning, Tim Anderson lifted Chicago to a 9-8 victory with a dramatic two-run homer, sending the energetic shortstop

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on a memorable trip around the bases as fireworks exploded through the night sky.

"It looked amazing. It looked packed," Reds second baseman Jonathan India said. "It's in the middle of nowhere, which is kind of crazy, to have a game like that. We're going to go out there and enjoy it."

Just like Jones' wise author Terence Mann says to Costner's Ray Kinsella in the film, people most definitely will come.

The makeshift ballpark seats only about 8,000 fans, less than the spring training homes for each team. The Cubs have strong ties to the Hawkeye State, going back to the franchise's time on WGN-TV and continuing to today with its Triple-A club a couple of hours away in Des Moines.

"There's moments in the season where you get something different that's exciting, and making sure you appreciate that I think is the main thing for me," Cubs manager David Ross said.

"We'll be ready to go play."

While people will come, will they watch at home? That could go a long way toward determining if the "Field of Dreams" site becomes an annual date on the major league calendar or maybe just an occasional one.

Last year's game, featuring two playoff contenders filled with stars, attracted nearly 6 million viewers in what MLB said was the most-watched regular-season game on any network since 1998.

But the lowly Cubs and rebuilding Reds aren't exactly last year's Yankees and White Sox. The playoff hopes for the NL Central clubs evaporated a long time ago. There aren't a lot of major names around, either.

But there is nostalgia for the movie, an Academy Award nominee for best picture, and the sure-to-be picturesque landscape surrounding the game.

"It's a popular movie that resonates with a lot of people, and I'm no different," Votto said. "I'm looking forward to it."

Lower prices offer Americans slight reprieve from inflation

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Falling prices for gas, airline tickets and clothes gave Americans a little bit of relief last month, though overall inflation is still running at close to its highest level in four decades.

Consumer prices jumped 8.5% in July compared with a year earlier, the government said Wednesday, down from a 9.1% year-over-year increase in June. On a monthly basis, prices were unchanged from June to July, the first time that has happened after 25 months of increases.

The report offered welcome news for congressional Democrats and President Joe Biden heading into the midterm elections. Biden highlighted the flat monthly inflation figure.

"I just want to say a number: zero," he told reporters. "Today we received news that our economy had zero percent inflation in the month of July."

Republicans, who have made inflation a top campaign issue, stressed that prices are still painfully high. Texas GOP Rep. Kevin Brady highlighted grocery costs and said Americans "continue to struggle under President Biden's cruel economy, with shrinking paychecks, a shrinking economy and a shrinking workforce."

The reprieve offered no certainty that prices would stay on the decline. Inflation has slowed in the recent past only to re-accelerate in subsequent months. And even if price increases continue to weaken, they are a long way from the Fed's 2% annual target.

"There's good reason to think inflation will continue to slow," said Michael Pugliese, an economist at Wells Fargo. "What I think gets lost in that discussion is, slow by how much?"

Even if it were to fall to 4% — less than half its current level — Pugliese suggested that the Federal Reserve would need to keep raising interest rates or at least keep them high.

Much of the relief last month was felt by travelers: Hotel room costs fell 2.7% from June to July, airfares nearly 8% and rental car prices a whopping 9.5%. Those price drops followed steep increases in the past year after COVID-19 cases eased and travel rebounded. Airfares are still nearly 30% higher than they were a year ago.

Gas prices dropped from \$5 a gallon, on average, in mid-June to \$4.20 by the end of last month, and were just \$4.01 on Wednesday, according to AAA. Oil prices have also fallen, and cheaper gas will likely

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pull down inflation this month as well, economists said.

Last month's declines in travel-related prices helped lower core inflation, a measure that excludes the volatile food and energy categories and provides a clearer picture of underlying price trends. Core prices rose just 0.3% from June, the smallest month-to-month increase since March. Compared with a year ago, core inflation amounted to 5.9% in July, the same year-over-year increase as in June.

All told, the July figures raised hope that inflation may have peaked after more than a year of relentless increases that have strained household finances, soured Americans on the economy, led the Federal Reserve to raise borrowing rates aggressively and diminished President Joe Biden's public approval ratings.

Americans are still absorbing bigger price increases than they have in decades. Grocery prices jumped 1.1% in July and are 13% higher than a year ago, the largest year-over-year increase since 1979. Bread prices leaped 2.8% last month, the most in more than two years. Rental and medical care costs rose, though slightly less than in previous months.

A strong job market and healthy wage increases have encouraged more Americans to move out on their own, reducing the number of available apartments and pushing up rental costs. Wall Street purchases of homes and trailer parks have also lifted monthly payments.

Average paychecks are rising faster than they have in decades, but not fast enough to keep up with inflation. As a result, some retirees have felt the need in recent months to return to the workforce.

Among them is Charla Bulich, who lives in San Leandro, California. For the past six months Bulich, 73, has worked a few hours a week caring for an elderly woman because her Social Security and food stamps don't cover her rising costs.

"I go over my budget all the time — that's why I had to go get a job," Bulich said. "I wouldn't even think about buying hamburger meat or a steak or something like that."

Now she worries that she will lose her food stamps in the coming months because of her extra income.

Michael Altfest, director of community engagement at the Alameda County Community Food Bank in Oakland, said his organization now provides about 4.5 million pounds of food a month, up from below 4 million in January. The group has also budgeted for a 66% increase in fuel costs. That's mostly because of higher gas prices but also because it's now using more trucks to keep up with the demand for food.

Altfest's own rent recently jumped 14%, he said, forcing him to recalibrate his budget.

"All these costs are going up, all at once," he said. "The people here were stretched already."

Last month's modest slowdown in inflation might enable the Fed to slow the pace of its increases in short-term rates when it meets in late September — a possibility that sent stock prices jumping. How quickly and how far the Fed raises borrowing costs has significant effects on the economy: Sharper hikes tend to reduce consumer and business borrowing and spending and make a recession more likely.

If the Fed doesn't have to raise rates as high to restrain prices, it has a better chance of engineering an elusive "soft landing," whereby growth slows enough to curb high inflation but not so much as to cause a recession.

Still, Fed Chair Jerome Powell has emphasized that the central bank needs to see a series of lower readings on core inflation before it will pause rate hikes. The Fed has boosted its short term rate by 2.25 percentage points in the past four meetings, the fastest series of increases since the early 1980s.

Biden has pointed to declining gas prices as a sign that his policies — including large releases from the nation's strategic oil reserve — are helping lessen the higher costs that have hurt household finances, particularly for lower-income Americans and Black and Hispanic households.

There are other signs that inflation may fade in coming months. Americans' expectations for future inflation have fallen, according to a survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, likely reflecting the drop in gas prices that is highly visible to most consumers.

Inflation expectations can be self-fulfilling: If people believe inflation will stay high or worsen, they're likely to take steps — such as demanding higher pay — that can send prices higher in a self-perpetuating cycle.

Companies then often raise prices to offset higher their higher labor costs. But the New York Fed survey found that Americans' foresee lower inflation one, three and five years from now than they did a month ago.

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Supply chain snarls are also loosening, with fewer ships moored off Southern California ports and shipping costs declining. Prices for commodities like corn, wheat and copper have fallen steeply.

Stubborn inflation isn't just a U.S. phenomenon. Prices have jumped in the United Kingdom, Europe and in less developed nations such as Argentina.

In the U.K., inflation soared 9.4% in June from a year earlier, a four-decade high. In the 19 countries that use the euro currency, it reached 8.9% in June compared with a year earlier, the highest since record-keeping for the euro began.

In Mississippi, a trespasser, a killing and DEA meddling

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

CRYSTAL SPRINGS, Miss. (AP) — U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Agent Harold Duane Poole was waiting with his semiautomatic service rifle — and an explanation — when deputies arrived at his sprawling wooded property on a warm spring night last year and found a bullet-riddled body near the driveway.

A veteran of the DEA's military-style commando teams, Poole acknowledged he fatally shot a mentally ill neighbor just minutes after calling law enforcement to report the man was trespassing on his land — yet again — “out of his mind” and threatening him with a rock.

“I'm going to kill you!” Poole recalled Chase Brewer yelling before he responded by firing eight high-powered rounds, striking the man in the chest, gut and hip.

Sheriff's investigators were skeptical of Poole's self-defense claim from the start, reports show, mostly because he mentioned in his call for help that the trespasser was already leaving. No rock of any kind could be found. And the shooting happened 200 yards from Poole's house, near the edge of his property, prompting deputies to determine Mississippi's “castle doctrine” didn't apply.

Yet a little more than a year after Poole was arrested on a murder charge in the April 27, 2021, shooting, he has quietly returned to work as a supervisor in the DEA office a half-hour's drive north in Jackson after a grand jury this spring declined to indict him.

What happened with the case amid the farm fields and pastures of Mississippi has baffled and frustrated the slain man's family, and it's something neither local prosecutors, the DEA nor Poole himself would discuss. But interviews and hundreds of law enforcement records obtained by The Associated Press raise new questions about the justification for the shooting, how Poole avoided trial and whether DEA brass overreached to protect one of their own amid a flurry of misconduct cases in the agency.

“No citizen could have done what this DEA agent did and walked away,” said W. Lloyd Grafton, a use-of-force expert who reviewed the investigative case file at AP's request.

Former DEA supervisors who examined the case for AP questioned the agency's heavy-handed involvement in the critical first hours, even though the shooting had no nexus to federal law enforcement and Poole had been off duty feeding his chickens when he first spotted the trespasser.

Multiple DEA agents responded to the crowded crime scene and one supervisor declared himself “in charge” and blocked state and local investigators from interviewing Poole for at least 48 hours, citing an unspecified policy, the law enforcement records show. Later that night, the DEA's ranking official in New Orleans called the local sheriff after deputies decided they would arrest Poole. But by that time, the federal lawman had already left the scene to seek medical treatment for being “shaken up” — telling DEA officials but not local authorities.

“They tried everything they could to get us not to charge him,” Copiah County Sheriff Byron Swilley told the dead man's family the day after the shooting, according to a recording of the private conversation obtained by the AP.

“I done had people calling me all out of Virginia about this guy because he's an agent,” he added, referring to DEA headquarters.

Deputies charged Poole anyway, the sheriff explained, because it was obvious the agent failed to wait for law enforcement to arrive and “took the law into his own hands.”

“When it's wrong, it's wrong,” Swilley added. “You take somebody's life because of a rock?”

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Hours after the shooting, the U.S. Justice Department issued an internal determination that Poole was not acting in the line of duty and DEA should defer to local authorities, according to current and former law enforcement officials familiar with the case.

A former ranking DEA official said the agency was nonetheless able to show its interest in the case and have an effect.

"You just had DEA impeding and obstructing a local investigation," said Karl C. Colder, a former DEA special agent in charge who also served as the agency's deputy chief inspector.

The DEA did not respond to repeated requests for comment. The Justice Department declined to comment.

Poole's shooting case followed a series of misconduct scandals that have dogged the DEA for years.

Just weeks before, DEA brass responded to a separate controversy involving another off-duty agent, Mark Ibrahim, who posed for photos in which he flashed his DEA badge and firearm outside the U.S. Capitol during the Jan. 6 riot. Ibrahim is awaiting trial on four federal counts.

And only months before that case, a once-standout DEA agent admitted conspiring to launder money with a Colombian drug cartel. Jose Irizarry was sentenced to 12 years in federal prison, joining a growing list of former agents behind bars.

Poole, 48, has been held in high regard in DEA for more than two decades, serving as group supervisor in the agency's Jackson District Office, which targets major drug trafficking cases in 32 counties in Mississippi.

Beginning in 2013, Poole traveled the world with DEA's Foreign-Deployed Advisory and Support Teams, the military-style commandos that battled drug traffickers in Afghanistan and Latin America. The so-called FAST teams were disbanded in 2017 after coming under criticism for a series of fatal shootings in Honduras that predated Poole's overseas service.

Poole chronicled some of his adventures on Facebook, sharing photos of himself in combat gear. One showed him firing an assault-style rifle somewhere in South America. "This has been without a doubt the most rewarding period of my 21 year career," he wrote in a late 2016 post before returning home to his family in Mississippi.

Poole and his neighbor Brewer, or the "guy across the street," as the agent once described him, had known each other for years and were once on such good terms that Poole invited Brewer to his cookouts.

But by the time of the shooting, bad blood had been building for months. Brewer repeatedly trespassed onto Poole's 9-acre property and even attempted breaking into the home through a bedroom window in September 2020, prompting Poole to draw his pistol, according to charging papers.

Brewer was rambling incoherently by the time deputies arrested him emerging from a creek, armed with a pistol and two pocket knives.

An avid outdoorsman and truck mechanic who lived in a trailer, the diminutive, 47-year-old Brewer was also regarded by those close to him as a miracle of modern medicine. In 1996, he received a five-organ transplant at the University of Pittsburgh that replaced his stomach, duodenum, pancreas, intestine and liver after suffering intestinal failure due to a hereditary defect.

But Brewer began spiraling following a stroke in 2019, said his mother, Andrea Breedlove. He was hearing voices, and his drug use expanded from marijuana to crystal meth. In the months before Brewer's death, his mother tried to have him committed but was told state facilities didn't have enough beds.

"Chase had been a good, quiet neighbor for years — and then he changed," Breedlove said in an interview at her home. "He would hallucinate at times and talk to people who weren't there. He needed help."

Poole, meanwhile, grew increasingly concerned for his family's safety, and he was frustrated that his pleas to local law enforcement were going unheeded. In October 2020, a month after the attempted break-in, the agent's wife told deputies following yet another trespassing incident that Brewer had a habit of sneaking onto the property when Poole was away. Brewer, who in this instance was chased away by Poole's dog, falsely told the deputy taking him into custody that he was a law enforcement agent who "cannot be arrested," according to sheriff's records.

So it didn't take long for Poole to recognize Brewer walking up his driveway that fateful night in April 2021. At 6:57 p.m., Poole called the Copiah County Sheriff's Office non-emergency line to report the tres-

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passing and request a deputy.

"Mr. Poole said that he went inside and got his rifle and when he came back out Chase Brewer was leaving," according to a sheriff's report.

The agent followed Brewer toward a roadway abutting his pasture, flashed his badge and ordered him to the ground. Instead, Poole told deputies, Brewer hurled a rock and said, "I'm going to kill you!" That's when Poole raised his AR-15-style rifle and fired.

Three minutes after his initial call, Poole phoned the sheriff's office again to report he shot Brewer because he had charged at him.

"Mr. Poole said that Chase Brewer was out of his mind and that he is always shooting guns just down the road at his trailer," the sheriff's report says. An autopsy detected meth in Brewer's system, a drug he was also carrying at the time of his death.

Even after arresting Poole, deputies acknowledged they did not know the full extent of the encounter, in part because the agent never provided a full statement.

Also, some members of state law enforcement second-guessed Poole's arrest. A Mississippi Bureau of Investigation agent, Dennis Weaver, told a judge in a preliminary hearing that he disagreed with the sheriff's decision to arrest Poole, even though he acknowledged he had not reviewed critical body-camera footage of the agent's statements to deputies at the scene.

It's unclear why the grand jury rejected the state's murder case, despite the sheriff's assurances to the Brewer family that he would seek "real justice."

The local district attorney, Daniella Shorter, would not talk about her handling of the case, and neither her office nor the sheriff would release the body-camera footage, citing an investigation of the case by the Justice Department's Office of Inspector General.

"To release it to the public would be counter to their efforts in the event of a prosecution by the federal government," said Elise Munn, a Copleah County prosecutor. The Office of Inspector General declined to comment.

For Brewer's family, the loss of a loved one has been compounded by the lack of answers. At the very least, they want Poole to offer an apology or condolences for his neighbor's death. But the agent, like the DEA, has remained silent.

"He wanted Chase dead, that's all there is to it," said Breedlove, Brewer's mother. "This wasn't David versus Goliath. What was he going to do with a rock?"

Run, Laal, run: Aamir Khan stars in Indian 'Forrest Gump'

By HILARY FOX Associated Press

Indian actor Aamir Khan enjoyed "Forrest Gump" so much that he's starring in a Hindi remake.

Released in 1994, the original film went on to sweep the Oscars, taking six trophies including best picture and best actor for Tom Hanks. Directed by Robert Zemeckis and written by Eric Roth based on Winston Groom's novel, "Forrest Gump," is the tale of a slow-witted but mathematically gifted man who witnesses key points and figures of U.S. history, like the Vietnam War, presidents and Elvis Presley.

Nearly 30 years later, the story has been given an Indian makeover — with Khan taking on the role of the titular character "Laal Singh Chaddha" — including converting the line "Run, Forrest, run" into "Run, Laal, run."

"I just remember seeing it a couple of times in a short span, and it had a deep impact on me, Khan says "I loved the character of Forrest. I loved the way Tom played the part as well. And it's a film that stayed with me."

It took a decade for Khan to get the movie rights. But big changes were made to root "Laal Singh Chaddha" in Indian history and culture, with both the Kargil war and superstar Shah Rukh Khan appearing.

Laal does not think life is like a box of chocolates, he instead likes to quote his mother talking about Gulgappas - small circles of filled, deep-fried flatbread enjoyed with spiced water, which has a slightly different meaning than the original motto.

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“(Forrest says) ‘my momma used to say life is like a box of chocolates: you never know which one you would get.’ And in this one, the English translation is, ‘My mama used to say that life is like a Golgappa: your stomach gets full, but your heart desires more,’” explains Khan.

He says writer Atul Kulkarni was adapting what was “essentially American” into something “quintessentially Indian and very relevant to us culturally.”

Directed by Advait Chandan, “Laal Singh Chaddha” also stars Kareena Kapoor Khan, Mona Singh and Naga Chaitanya.

Khan says he asked Kapoor Khan, who’s had a successful career for more than two decades, to try out for the pivotal role of Laal’s friend, Rupa D’souza.

“She’s such a huge star and she’s never auditioned for a part in her life. But for me, doing an audition for the part is perfectly natural because even I want to see how close I am to the character. So we’re not really testing to see that a person can act or not, but really how suitable the person is for the part. But that’s something which is very unusual in India.”

Another huge star who makes a small but important appearance in the movie is legendary Indian actor Shah Rukh Khan. No audition needed, as he’s portraying himself.

“We were trying to look for an equivalent to Elvis Presley in America. And I think for us, it was an obvious choice to go for Shah Rukh, because he’s such a huge star and everyone loves him so much,” Khan says. “He was really sporting and generous and said, yes, I’d love to do that.”

“Laal Singh Chaddha” is releasing around the world this month — including on 350 screens in the U.K., which is a new record for an Indian movie.

“I’m really nervous,” Khan admits.

“It’s a film that we’ve made with so much love and care and it’s been such a challenging film to make. The whole journey has been difficult but exciting and fun.”

A lot of that journey was spent sprinting towards the finish line — and he “ran a lot,” Khan says.

“For a month and a half we were traveling across the country, and each place we went to I just was running, and Advait as a director was quite heartless. He would start a shot and he would be in the car, and there would be a camera in the car, and I would be running and the car would be just driving, and it would be a few kilometers by the time he said cut.”

“Laal Singh Chaddha” releases in India, Germany, France, Singapore, the U.K. and the U.S. on Thursday.

AP FACT CHECK: GOP skews budget bill’s impact on IRS, taxes

By JOSH KELETY and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

Republican politicians and candidates are distorting how a major economic bill passed over the weekend by the Senate would reform the IRS and affect taxes for the middle class.

The “Inflation Reduction Act,” which awaits a House vote after passing in the Senate on Sunday, would increase the ranks of the IRS, but it would not create a mob of armed auditors looking to harass middle-class taxpayers, as some Republicans are claiming.

While experts say corporate tax increases could indirectly burden people in the middle class, claims that they will face higher taxes are not supported by what is in the legislation.

A look at some of the claims about the package that emerged from a deal negotiated by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va.:

HOUSE MINORITY LEADER KEVIN MCCARTHY, R-CALIF.: “Do you make \$75,000 or less? Democrats’ new army of 87,000 IRS agents will be coming for you -- with 710,000 new audits for Americans who earn less than \$75k.” — tweet Tuesday.

SEN. TED CRUZ, R-TEXAS: “The Manchin-Schumer bill will create 87,000 new IRS agents to target regular, everyday Americans.” — Friday tweet.

THE FACTS: That’s misleading. Last year, before the bill emerged, the Treasury Department had proposed a plan to hire roughly that many IRS employees over the next decade if it got the money. The IRS will be releasing final numbers for its hiring plans in the coming months, according to a Treasury official.

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But those employees will not all be hired at the same time, they will not all be auditors and many will be replacing employees who are expected to quit or retire, experts and officials say.

The IRS currently has about 80,000 employees, including clerical workers, customer service representatives, enforcement officials, and others. The agency has lost roughly 50,000 employees over the past five years due to attrition, according to the IRS. More than half of IRS employees who work in enforcement are currently eligible for retirement, said Natasha Sarin, the Treasury Department's counselor for tax policy and implementation.

Budget cuts, mostly demanded by Republicans, have also diminished the ranks of enforcement staff, which fell roughly 30% since 2010 despite the fact that the filing population has increased. The IRS-related money in the Inflation Reduction Act is intended to boost efforts against high-end tax evasion, Sarin said.

The nearly \$80 billion for the IRS in the bill will also pay for other improvements, such as revamping the agency's technology, said Janet Holtzblatt, a senior fellow at the Tax Policy Center and former Treasury official.

The Treasury says it will hire experienced auditors and workers who will improve taxpayer services, and that audit rates for those earning less than \$400,000 are not expected to rise in relation to historic norms.

So that's a long way from hiring 87,000 "agents" to go after average people in the United States, as the GOP claims have it. In any case, the bill has no mandate to hire that many people.

REP. TROY NEHLS, R-TEXAS: "Americans asked for lower inflation and the Democrats gave us an armed IRS shadow army to spy on your bank accounts." — Sunday tweet.

REP. MARJORIE TAYLOR GREENE, R-Ga.: "It's going to hire 87,000 new IRS agents and it's going to arm — as in guns, you know, Democrats are always upset about guns — 70,000 of these IRS agents." — at the Conservative Political Action Conference, in an interview with the conservative Canadian news magazine The Post Millennial.

THE FACTS: That's false. The bill will not create any such army, officials and experts say. Only some IRS employees who work on criminal investigations carry firearms as part of their work.

A division of the IRS called criminal investigation serves as the agency's law enforcement branch. Its agents, who work on issues such as seizing illicit crypto currency and Russian oligarchs' assets, carry weapons, Sarin said.

There were just more than 2,000 such special agents working at the IRS in 2021, according to agency documents. The branch will get money from the Inflation Reduction Act, but the bulk of the dollars will go toward other areas, according to Sarin.

The bill does not designate money specifically for a large number of armed IRS employees.

NEVADA SENATE CANDIDATE ADAM LAXALT, criticizing his opponent, Democrat Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto: ".@CortezMasto just voted to raise taxes for Nevadans making as low as \$30k/year." — Sunday tweet.

THE FACTS: Nothing in the bill raises taxes on people earning less than \$400,000, contrary to Laxalt's claims. There are no individual tax rate increases for anyone in the bill, experts say.

It's possible, though, that the bill's new corporate taxes, including a minimum 15% tax for large corporations, could cause indirect economic impacts. A report from the Joint Committee on Taxation said some people who make less than \$400,000 might see such impacts.

"Economists are generally in agreement that the corporate income tax is borne not just by the businesses, but also by shareholders and by workers," Holtzblatt said. "So that tax that gets imposed on the corporation, some of that might end up getting shifted to workers in the form of lower wages."

Added Garrett Watson, a senior policy analyst at the Tax Foundation: "Distinguishing between whether lower after-tax incomes happen because of a direct tax hike or indirect incidence may be a distinction without a difference for many households."

Nevertheless, supporters of the bill did not vote for tax increases on people earning \$30,000, as Laxalt claimed.

EXPLAINER: Can the spread of monkeypox be stopped?

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — Since May, nearly 90 countries have reported more than 31,000 cases of monkeypox. The World Health Organization classified the escalating outbreak of the once-rare disease as an international emergency in July; the U.S. declared it a national emergency last week.

Outside of Africa, 98% of cases are in men who have sex with men. With only a limited global supply of vaccines, authorities are racing to stop monkeypox before it becomes entrenched as a new disease.

CAN MONKEYPOX BE CONTAINED?

Theoretically, yes. The virus does not spread easily and there is a vaccine. But there are only about 16 million doses available now and only one company makes the shot.

Except for Africa, there is no sign of sustained monkeypox transmission beyond men who have sex with men, meaning that stopping spread among that group could effectively end the outbreak. Last week, British scientists said there were “early signs” the monkeypox cases in the U.K. — which once had the world’s biggest outbreak outside Africa — had peaked.

IS THIS ANOTHER PANDEMIC?

No. A pandemic means that a disease outbreak has spread to the entire world. Monkeypox does not transmit as quickly as the coronavirus and stopping it will not require dramatic interventions like the COVID-19 lockdowns.

WHO’s Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he declared monkeypox an emergency in part to prompt countries to take the epidemic seriously, saying there is still an opportunity to contain the disease before it becomes a global problem.

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

Monkeypox spread typically requires skin-to-skin or skin-to-mouth contact with an infected patient’s lesions. People can also be infected through contact with the clothing or bedsheets of someone who has monkeypox lesions.

It also can be spread through contact with respiratory droplets, but scientists are still trying to figure out how often that happens. British health officials say they haven’t confirmed any instances of airborne transmission.

WHO IS GETTING INFECTED?

A large percentage of cases have been in gay and bisexual men. The initial outbreaks in Europe and North America were likely triggered by sex at two raves in Spain and Belgium.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 99% of monkeypox cases in the U.S. are men. Of those, 94% reported sexual contact with other men in the three weeks before they developed symptoms.

Still, anyone can catch the virus if they are in close contact with an infected person or fabrics that touched an infected person.

WHO IS GETTING VACCINATED?

With supplies limited, health officials are not recommending mass vaccination. They are suggesting the shots for health workers, people who have been in close contact with an infected person, and men at high risk of catching monkeypox.

Officials are also trying to stretch supplies of the vaccine, Jynneos. It requires two doses, but many places are only giving one dose.

U.S. health officials on Tuesday authorized a new strategy that would allow health professionals to vaccinate up to five people — instead of one — with each vial. The approach uses just a fraction of the typical amount of vaccine and administers it with an injection just under the skin rather than into deeper tissue. Recipients would still get two shots a month apart.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO LOWER MY RISK?

WHO’s Tedros recommended that men at risk of catching monkeypox consider making “safe choices” and reducing their sexual partners “for the moment.”

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Britain's Health Security Agency has advised people to check themselves for monkeypox lesions before they have sex or go to a social event, noting that most of the country's cases are believed to have originated at festivals, saunas and other venues where sex has taken place. Anyone with monkeypox lesions should isolate until they are completely healed, which can take up to three weeks.

WHAT'S THE CONNECTION TO AFRICA?

Monkeypox has been endemic for decades in parts of central and west Africa, where people have mostly been sickened after contact with infected wild animals like rodents and squirrels. The acting director of Africa's top public health agency said last week that sex among gay and bisexual men was "not relevant" to the continent's outbreak, with about 40% of cases among women.

Scientists think the monkeypox outbreaks in Europe and North America originated in Africa long before the disease started spreading. Samples from cases in Europe show dozens of mutations, suggesting the initial virus was silently spreading for months or years before the current epidemics were detected.

The version of monkeypox spreading in Europe and North America has a lower fatality rate than the one circulating in Africa. Countries that didn't see many monkeypox cases before this outbreak have reported a handful of deaths, while Africa has had at least 100 suspected deaths this year.

WHO IS AT HIGHER RISK FOR SERIOUS ILLNESS?

Most people infected with monkeypox recover without treatment, but it can cause more severe symptoms like brain inflammation and in rare cases, death.

Monkeypox can be serious in children, pregnant women and people with underlying health conditions, like cancer, tuberculosis or HIV. In the U.S., the CDC says about 40% of people with monkeypox also have HIV.

The longer the current outbreaks continue, the greater the chances the virus could spread in other communities, similar to how HIV was first spotted in gay men before becoming established more widely.

"There is some crossover between the sexual networks of gay and bisexual men and networks of heterosexual people with high sexual activity, so it is possible we could see monkeypox more widely," said Dr. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at Britain's University of East Anglia. "If that happens, we may have a much bigger problem."

Reviving Mexico's groundbreaking muralism a century later

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

POXINDEJE, Mexico (AP) — A painter in orange overalls touches up the image of a hand holding a rifle while an artist perched on scaffolding painstakingly places bits of colorful ceramic in a mosaic of a guerrilla fighter.

The artists aren't just decorating a wall: Together, they are helping to revive muralism, a movement that put Mexico at the vanguard of art a century ago.

Just as their famous predecessors did shortly after the Mexican Revolution, teachers and students of the Siqueiros School of Muralism are on a mission to keep alive the practice of using visual imagery to share messages of social and political importance.

The mural in progress is on three walls of a municipal building in San Salvador, a small town of about 29,000 people north of Mexico City in Hidalgo state. The Siqueiros School is based in a converted elementary school in the nearby hamlet of Poxindeje, and one of its co-founders is Jesús Rodríguez Arévalo, a pupil of disciples of Mexico's three muralism masters: Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco.

"The school is small, a humble space, but it is very serious and it is professional," Rodríguez said.

One hundred years ago, Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco also started out at a colonial-era school-turned art laboratory. It was 1922, and they were charged with fulfilling the then-Mexican education minister's mission to take art out of the galleries and into public spaces. The plan, part of a national literacy campaign sponsored by the national government, transformed Mexico and permeated the entire continent.

The artists' manifesto was to make "ideological propaganda for the good of the people" and give art "a purpose of beauty, of education and combat for all."

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They identified with the agrarian and proletarian revolutions and mingled with European artists who fled to Mexico from both world wars. Sponsored by the government, they had access to the country's most majestic buildings and the necessary resources to experiment with new techniques. Eventually, they began to paint in other nations: Argentina, Chile, Cuba and the United States among them.

Despite the backing of Mexican political leaders, their work turned out to be too provocative in some places outside the country: A mural Rivera painted in New York's Rockefeller Center was censored and then demolished because it glorified communism.

"We are a bit more cowardly," said Ernesto Ríos Rocha, 53, a muralist who is currently trying to found Mexico's first muralism university in the Pacific coast state of Sinaloa. "We talk more about peace."

The murals being created in San Salvador and other small towns today still have much in common with those created in the early 20th century, however: They encapsulate themes of war, injustice, and oppression — as well as 21st century issues such as climate change and violence against women.

But Rodríguez and his students don't anticipate monumental reverberations from their work. Their aspirations are lower and their income more modest, coming mostly from local governments that commission them to paint murals and support from community members who donate meals and house foreign students.

The Poxindeje school bets on recycling and reusing discarded materials donated by glassmakers or flooring manufacturers, said Janet Calderón, who co-founded the Siqueiros School with Rodríguez five years ago. They're even making murals from garbage.

Luz Asturizaga, a 36-year-old sculptor from Bolivia, has enjoyed every moment of her stay in the iconic home of muralism. She wasn't able to learn much about the art form in her own country, where she said professional artists' circles are very closed. In Mexico, "they give you opportunity, they teach you," she said.

Few students have completed training at the school — about 40 since it opened five years ago — but all leave with clear ideas instilled by their instructors: "Go to the communities, teach, carry out a comprehensive work of historic themes, of social content, of criticism of everything that oppresses man," Rodríguez said.

The first step for the artists is to decide what elements they want to include, what metaphors to lay out. Then they build a sort of collage of portraits and photographs of historical figures whom they want to immortalize.

Composition and perspective are key. Dressed in paint-splotched jeans, his black hair tied back in a ponytail, the 54-year-old Rodríguez closes one eye in front of the mural in progress in San Salvador, and with the other glances through a transparent sheet of paper containing sketches of figures intended for the wall. The goal is to calculate the right scale, taking into account from where and what distance people will be viewing the work.

"You have to know local history and then begin with the sketches," said Luis Manuel Vélez, 52, a worker for Mexico's national oil company who spends his weekends painting murals.

Sometimes models for the work come from the neighborhood. A 6-year-old girl passing by the mural in San Salvador pointed and smiled before exclaiming: "That's me and my grandpa."

Purists have long lamented that starting in the late 20th century, muralism was replaced by urban art or short-lived graffiti.

Ríos Rocha agrees, but is still optimistic.

"Muralism is in intensive care, but it is not going to die," he said.

Historian David Martínez Bourget is a researcher at the 88-year-old Bellas Artes Museum, a palatial art nouveau performing arts center in Mexico City whose interior walls are graced with famous murals by Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco.

Martínez Bourget said the art movement that the fathers of muralism began in the 20th century is over, but its spirit remains — not just in Poxindeje and San Salvador — but also in marginalized Chicano communities in the western United States and in Zapatista villages in southern Mexico. In both places, public art displays capture the communities' history and rebellion, he noted.

As long as people are fighting for social justice, this kind of artistic expression will exist, Martínez Bourget says, because in difficult moments "art is politicized."

Biden signs 'burn pits' help for vets; a personal win, too

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden, whose elder son Beau died of cancer years after deploying to Iraq, signed legislation on Wednesday expanding federal health care services for millions of veterans who served at military bases where toxic smoke billowed from huge "burn pits."

"We owe you," Biden said. "You're the backbone. You're the steel. You're the sinew. You're the very fiber that makes this country what it is."

The law, which Biden described as long overdue, caps a years-long battle to ensure treatment for chronic illnesses that veterans have blamed on burn pits, which were used to dispose of chemicals, tires, plastics, medical equipment and human waste on military bases. Estimates of affected troops run to 3.5 million.

"So many of you here today remind us that we have fought for this for so many years," he said during an emotional White House ceremony that reflected the struggles of military families — and the president's personal experience.

Biden was introduced by Danielle Robinson, the widow of Sgt. 1st Class Heath Robinson, who died of cancer two years ago. The legislation is named for him.

She described her late husband as "a soldier as strong as an ox" but also "the ultimate cuddler" for his daughter Brielle, who stood to her mother's side clutching a stuffed figurine wearing military camouflage.

"Ours is just one story," Danielle Robinson said. "So many military families have had to fight this terrible emotional battle. So many veterans are still battling burn pit illnesses today."

After the Robinsons took their seats for the president's remarks, Biden addressed Brielle directly.

"I know you miss your daddy. But he's with you all the time," he said. "He's inside you. He's going to whisper in your ear when you have hard decisions to make."

Then he pointed out that Brielle was sitting next to his grandson, the son of Beau Biden.

"His daddy lost to the same burn pits," Biden said. "He knows what you're going through."

It was the most direct link the president has publicly drawn between Beau's fatal brain cancer and burn pits. The president made addressing the problem one of his priorities during his State of the Union address in March.

"I was going to get this done, come hell or high water," he said Wednesday.

Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., who chairs the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, said Biden was a driving force behind the legislation, which passed last week.

"He was continually pushing because whether Beau died of this or not, I think Joe thinks that it had some impact, and so he wanted this fixed," Tester said. "And because he thinks it was the right thing to do. So different president, different set of priorities, this would have probably never happened."

Burn pits were used in Iraq and Afghanistan to dispose of chemicals, cans, tires, plastics, medical equipment and human waste. However, 70% of disability claims involving exposure to the pits were denied by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"For too long, too many veterans who got sick while fighting for our country had to fight for their care here at home," VA Secretary Denis McDonough said at Wednesday's ceremony.

Elizabeth Beck, a city councilwoman from Fort Worth, Texas, who served in the Army reserves in Iraq, said "we knew something wasn't right" during her deployment.

"You saw the burn pits. You smelled the burn pits. You felt the burn pits in your body," she said after Wednesday's ceremony. When she blew her nose, Beck said, "black material would just stream out."

However, she was reluctant to seek benefits for years because the process seemed too daunting, especially when others had been unsuccessful. Beck described the legislation as "light at the end of the tunnel."

The law will direct officials to assume that certain respiratory illnesses and cancers were related to burn pit exposure, helping veterans get disability payments without having to prove the illness was the result of their service.

"Veterans who have been sickened to the point of being unable to work, unable to take care of their families, won't have to spend that time fighting the government to get the healthcare they earned," said Jeremy Butler, head of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. "This is monumental."

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Butler attended Wednesday's ceremony, along with Le Roy and Rosie Torres, husband and wife advocates for veterans health care who started the organization Burn Pits 360. Le Roy developed constrictive bronchitis after serving in Iraq, making breathing difficult.

Although the provision involving burn pits has garnered the most attention, other health care services will be expanded as well.

Veterans who have served since the Sept. 11 attacks will have a decade to sign up for VA health care, double the current five years.

And there's more help for veterans from the Vietnam War. The legislation adds hypertension to list of ailments that are presumed to be caused by exposure to Agent Orange, a herbicide used by the U.S. military to clear vegetation.

In addition, veterans who served during the war in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Guam, American Samoa and Johnston Atoll will also be considered to have been exposed to the chemical.

The legislation is considered to be the largest expansion of veterans health care in more than three decades, but it became an unlikely political football shortly before it passed.

On the day that the Senate was expected to grant it final approval, Republicans unexpectedly blocked it. Veterans who had traveled to Washington for a moment of triumph were devastated.

"All the veterans were down there because they were expecting to celebrate," Butler said. "And then they were absolutely stabbed in the back."

Republicans said they were concerned about technical changes to how the legislation was funded. Democrats accused them of throwing a fit because they were unhappy about a separate deal to advance Biden's domestic agenda on climate change, taxes and prescription drugs.

Instead of going home, some veterans began holding what they called a "fire watch" outside the Capitol, an impromptu vigil to keep public pressure on the Senate.

They stayed around the clock, despite the stifling summer heat and torrential thunderstorms. Jon Stewart, the comedian who has advocated for veterans, joined them as well. Biden wanted to go but couldn't because he was isolating with a coronavirus infection, so he spoke to the demonstrators in a video call when VA Secretary Denis McDonough dropped off pizza.

Days after the demonstration began, the Senate held another vote, and the measure passed with overwhelming bipartisan support.

Veterans were in the gallery watching the vote take place.

"Every single person I was with was bawling. Just bawling," said Matt Zeller, a former Army captain who was among the demonstrators. "I cried for a solid five minutes."

What's next for Alex Jones after \$49M Sandy Hook verdict?

By JAKE BLEIBERG, DAVE COLLINS and MICHAEL TARM Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — The nearly \$50 million defamation verdict against Alex Jones for his years of lies about the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre is far from a final reckoning.

Jones' attorneys plan to appeal and try to lower the price tag a Texas jury put on his false claim that the nation's deadliest school shooting — which killed 20 students and six teachers — was a hoax. The conspiracy theorist faces bankruptcy and other defamation lawsuits. And the courtroom conduct of Jones and his lawyers has exposed the Infowars host to new legal perils, including possible sanctions, allegations of perjury and renewed scrutiny in the investigation of the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Here's a look at the fallout from the successful suit against Jones by the parents of one of the child victims in the Dec. 14, 2012, shooting at the school in Newtown, Connecticut.

WILL JONES PAY AND HOW MUCH?

A Travis County jury last week ordered Jones to pay Neil Heslin and Scarlett Lewis \$4.1 million in compensatory damages for the suffering he put them through by saying the shooting that killed their 6-year-old son, Jesse Lewis, was staged to increase gun controls. The jurors also leveled \$45.2 million in punitive damages against Jones, bringing the total fine to roughly a third of the \$150 million the couple had sought.

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It's the first time Jones has been held financially liable for repeatedly claiming the Sandy Hook shooting was faked. Lewis said after the trial that Jones had been held accountable. His lawyers plan to appeal and to seek to reduce the damages.

Legal experts say Jones probably won't pay the full amount.

In most civil cases, Texas law limits how much defendants have to pay in "exemplary," or punitive, damages to twice the "economic damages" plus up to \$750,000. But jurors are not told about this cap, and eye-popping verdicts are often hacked down by judges.

Russ Horton, an Austin attorney, said it's "almost a surety" that the damages against Jones will be cut to conform with the law, either by an appeals court or the trial judge.

A Virginia judge did just that in Johnny Depp's defamation lawsuit against his ex-wife, Amber Heard. Under a cap similar to Texas' law, the judge in July cut the \$10 million in compensatory damages that a jury awarded Depp to \$350,000.

What Jones can afford is also disputed.

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

But economist Bernard Pettingill testified that Jones and his company are worth up to \$270 million. He said Jones withdrew \$62 million from the firm in 2021, when default judgments were issued in that case and two other Sandy Hook defamation suits.

Since the verdict, Jones has urged Infowars' supporters to buy the nutritional supplements, survival gear and other products he sells, saying he needs funds to continue the show and his legal fights.

"If we don't get solvent and get enough money to come out of this bankruptcy, they'll appoint a receiver and start selling off the equipment," he said Monday.

PERJURY?

There would be extensive court wrangling before the Infowars studio could be sold for parts. But Jones has more immediate risks and may see his legal bills mount.

Jones appeared to be caught in at least one lie while on the witness stand, when a lawyer for the parents suing him revealed he had digital copies of texts and other content from Jones' cellphone. The messages, including communications about Sandy Hook, were accidentally emailed to the plaintiffs' attorneys by one of Jones' lawyers.

Jones sought to shrug the revelation off in cross-examination, ridiculing an opposing lawyer and denying that he lied. But legal experts say the episode could open Jones up to a possible perjury charge.

Criminal charges of perjury are rare and difficult to prove, but Jones' prominence may make him an attractive target, especially in liberal Austin.

"It would be very hard to imagine a state prosecutor going after someone in a civil case for perjury," said Benson Varghese, an attorney in Fort Worth, Texas. "The chance are slightly higher for Jones, given the high-profile case."

Aggravated perjury, the charge frequently brought in Texas for lies on the witness stand, is punishable with up to 10 years in prison.

A spokesman for the Travis County District Attorney's Office, which would handle a potential criminal case against Jones, declined to comment.

SANCTIONS?

Even if prosecutors never pursue a case, Jones could face further consequences from Judge Maya Guerra Gamble.

Before the trial, lawyers for the parents suing Jones filed a motion asking the judge to sanction him for failing to produce evidence. Gamble is set to take up that motion.

And in court, Gamble repeatedly admonished Jones to tell the truth.

At one point, she sent the jury out of the room and scolded him for telling jurors he complied with pretrial evidence gathering when he hadn't. And the judge scolded him further for testifying that he's bankrupt, which has not been determined by a court and prompted fury from the lawyers opposing Jones.

"This is not your show," Gamble told Jones. "Your beliefs do not make something true. You are under

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oath.”

Judges have wide discretion to set sanctions – including fines, imprisonment and other punishments – but it’s rare to see them imposed.

Avi Moshenberg, a lawyer for the parents, declined to say whether they would seek other sanctions but said “there were certainly some troubling things that happened during trial.”

Jones attorney, Andino Reynal, did not respond to a request for comment.

JONES AND THE JAN. 6 INVESTIGATION

Jones’ lawyers accidentally handing over his text messages in the case also exposes him to further scrutiny from the U.S. House committee examining the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot that sought to overturn Joe Biden’s victory in the presidential election.

The committee, which has spent months showing how former President Donald Trump relentlessly pushed his false claims of a rigged election, subpoenaed Jones to testify. And the panel’s chairman accused him of helping to organize a rally near the Capitol that preceded the insurrection.

Now, the lawmakers reportedly have Jones’ texts.

An attorney for the parents suing Jones, Mark Bankston, gave the committee two years’ worth of Jones’ messages, CNN reported Monday, citing an unnamed person familiar with the matter. Bankston told The Associated Press that he was “cooperating with the committee” but did not comment further.

On his Tuesday show, Jones downplayed the significance of the messages. He showed a photo of his wife in a swimsuit that he had sent to Roger Stone, a Trump confidant who was also subpoenaed by the Jan. 6 committee, and said the messages didn’t include anything past April 2020.

“It’s six months of limited texts,” Jones said. “It’s a fraction of my phone.”

OTHER CASES

Before the trial in Austin, Jones had already been found liable in a separate defamation lawsuit in Texas and another in Connecticut by relatives of some of the Sandy Hook victims.

The other Texas case was filed by Leonard Pozner and Veronique De La Rosa, whose son Noah was killed in the shooting. The Connecticut case has the potential for a larger award because it consolidates three lawsuits filed by 15 plaintiffs, a former FBI agent who responded to the school and the relatives of nine Sandy Hook victims.

It will be up to a Connecticut jury to decide what, if any, damages Jones’ owes in that case, although law there could also limit what he would have to pay.

Trials for damages were scheduled to begin in both cases next month, but their progress has been complicated by Free Speech Systems’ July filing for bankruptcy protection, a process that freezes pending litigation.

Horton, the Austin lawyer, said the cases could potentially proceed against Jones personally while Free Speech Systems is in bankruptcy court, and he warned that filing for Chapter 11 gives the bankruptcy court tremendous power to examine Jones’ finances.

“Bankruptcy is not a place to hide out if you have anything to hide,” Horton said.

London kids to be offered polio shot after more virus found

LONDON (AP) — Children ages 1-9 in London were made eligible for booster doses of a polio vaccine Wednesday after British health authorities reported finding evidence the virus has spread in multiple areas of the city but found no cases of the paralytic disease in people.

Britain’s Health Security Agency said it detected viruses derived from the oral polio vaccine in the sewage water of eight London boroughs. The agency’s analysis of the virus samples suggested “transmission has gone beyond a close network of a few individuals.”

The agency said it had not located anyone infected with the virus and that the risk to the wider population was low. The decision to offer young children boosters was a precaution, it said.

“This will ensure a high level of protection from paralysis and help reduce further spread,” the agency said.

The agency said it is also expanding surveillance of sewage water to at least another 25 sites in London

and nationally.

Most people across Britain are vaccinated against polio in childhood. According to the World Health Organization, only one in 200 polio infections leads to paralysis; most people don't show any symptoms.

The Health Security Agency said it was working closely with health authorities at the WHO and in the United States and Israel to investigate any links to polio viruses detected in those two countries.

Kathleen O'Reilly, a polio expert at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said the polio virus circulating in London was "genetically related" to recent cases identified in the U.S. and Israel.

"Further investigation is needed to fully understand how they are connected, but it does illustrate that this virus has the potential to cause disease," O'Reilly said in a statement.

Polio is a disease often spread in water that mostly affects children under 5. It has mostly been wiped out from developed countries, but outbreaks remain in Pakistan, Afghanistan and parts of Africa.

Initial symptoms include fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, and muscle stiffness. Among people paralyzed by the disease, death can occur in up to 10% of cases when their breathing muscles become paralyzed.

In rare cases, the live virus contained in the oral polio vaccine used in the global effort to eradicate the disease can mutate into new forms potent enough to trigger new outbreaks. The vaccination booster effort in London will use injected polio vaccines that do not carry that risk.

Experts called the finding of polio spread in London "concerning" and said the virus posed a significant risk to anyone not vaccinated.

"If (polio) continues to spread, it will result in cases of paralysis," said Nicholas Grassly, a professor of vaccine epidemiology at Imperial College London. "It is therefore of paramount importance that children are up to date with their polio vaccines."

Grassly said the injectable polio vaccine was less effective against stopping virus transmission than the oral vaccine and that it was possible it might be necessary to reintroduce the oral vaccine to eliminate the virus.

Young Gaza artist was among those killed in Israeli strikes

By FARES AKRAM Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — When Israeli bombs began falling last week, 22-year-old Duniana al-Amour ran into her room and tried to escape into her art and drawing, just as she had during Gaza's past wars.

But this time around, her pencil never met the paper.

An Israeli shell struck outside her home on Friday, making her one of the first of at least 47 Palestinians — including 16 children — who were killed during three days of heavy fighting between Israel and the Islamic Jihad militant group. She was killed during Israel's surprise opening salvo, hours before militants had fired any rockets.

Her drawings, mostly black and white portraits of relatives, some killed in previous rounds of fighting in Gaza, can be seen in the shattered bedroom where she died. Her mother, her brother and two sisters-in-law were in another room baking bread and suffered only minor injuries. Days later, the bread sits out on a wooden tray — a still-life from the moment the shell hit.

One of her sisters-in-law, Simone, said al-Amour's life revolved around her art. "She painted whether she was happy or sad. She would bring a chair to the backyard, sit and draw. She drew all of us," Simone said.

Her death underscores the vulnerability of Palestinian civilians during the frequent conflicts, including four wars fought between Israel and the territory's militant Hamas rulers since they seized power in Gaza 15 years ago. The wars have killed more than 4,000 Palestinians, over half of whom were civilians, according to the United Nations. More than 100 people have been killed on the Israeli side.

Those killed during the latest violence include two senior Islamic Jihad commanders, one of whom Israel said it targeted in order to foil an imminent attack. But many civilians also perished, including as many as 16 who might have been killed by rockets misfired by Palestinian militants.

Islamic Jihad fired some 1,100 rockets, but the Israeli military said some 200 fell short and most of the

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rest were intercepted or fell in open areas. No Israelis were killed or seriously wounded in the latest round of fighting.

An Egyptian brokered cease-fire ended the violence late Sunday, but grief still hangs over the impoverished territory.

Gaza has also been under a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade since the Hamas takeover, which Israel says is needed to keep the militants from re-arming. Critics view the blockade, which severely limits movement in and out of the narrow seaside territory — home to more than 2 million Palestinians — as collective punishment.

Al-Amour had tried to escape Gaza's tribulations through art. Her relatives said she had little interest in politics and dreamed of making a Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia.

Her family home, nestled among farmland and olive groves near the border, was a bucolic escape from Gaza's densely-packed cities and refugee camps. It was also on the front line whenever a new round of fighting broke out.

The Israeli military said it "precisely attacked legitimate military targets" during the latest operation and made "every effort to prevent and minimize harm to civilians." It did not immediately comment on the strike near al-Amour's home.

Israel destroyed several guard towers manned by Palestinian militants near the border, apparently with artillery or tank shells, including one about 500 meters (yards) from al-Amour's family home. The military distributed video showing some of the hits — the towers going up in smoke and the men inside vanishing in a flash.

All the family knows is that the shell that killed al-Amour came from the direction of the border fence. Mohammed al-Amour, Duniana's grieving brother, said that Israel, with its sophisticated surveillance and targeting capabilities, had to have known what it was aiming at.

"They brag about this technology," he said. "They know who is a civilian or not."

Serena's Legacy: Plenty of wins, plenty of stands on issues

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

A couple of days before Serena Williams claimed the 22nd of her 23 Grand Slam singles titles at Wimbledon in 2016, she was asked what she makes of it when people refer to her as one of history's greatest female athletes.

Her reply: She prefers being characterized as "one of the greatest athletes of all time."

That one, brief response from Williams said quite a lot — about her one-of-a-kind talent with a racket in hand, about her status as an icon, about her willingness to stand up for herself, about why women's sports should not be thought of any differently than men's sports.

That all came to mind again Tuesday, when Williams indicated she is preparing to walk away from her professional tennis career as the start of the U.S. Open approaches on Aug. 29 and her 41st birthday next month nears.

Yes, with shouts of "Come on!" marking the journey, she's won the most major singles championships in the professional era of tennis, which began in 1968; more than the 22 for Steffi Graf or Rafael Nadal, more than the 21 for Novak Djokovic, more than the 20 for Roger Federer, more than the 18 for Chris Evert or Martina Navratilova, more than anyone else. And, yes, Williams won a total of 73 tour-level singles titles and spent more than six years' worth of weeks ranked No. 1. And she combined with older sister Venus to claim 14 Grand Slam women's doubles titles. And then there are the four Olympic gold medals. And so on. And so on.

Still, mere numbers can't capture everything Williams has represented during a distinguished career that began when she was a teenager in the 1990s and is remarkable for not just the successes but also the longevity, including a record 10 major championships after turning 30.

"She's lasted longer than most, if not all, female tennis pros. She's transcended tennis and become a leader on many important cultural, social and gender issues. She has lived an extraordinary life," Evert

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wrote in a text message to The Associated Press, "and will undoubtedly continue to crash the glass ceiling in the future."

Indeed, what Williams did without a racket in her hand is rather noteworthy, and extends past the millions in endorsement deals; the flirtations with acting; the interest in fashion design and penchant for bringing the catwalk to the court with body suits and knee-high boots and whatever else she decided to try; the celebrity and place in pop culture; and, most recently, the work as a venture capitalist ("Seventy-eight% of our portfolio happens to be companies started by women and people of color, because that's who we are," Williams said).

"It is important to take a step back and think about everything that Serena has brought to our sport and what she has accomplished both on and off the court," said Steve Simon, the head of the WTA women's tennis tour. "She is one of the greatest champions, an entrepreneur, a mother, an investor in women's business ventures and an inspiration to women and girls across the world."

Williams spoke out about being Black in her sport — she was the first to win a Grand Slam tournament since Althea Gibson in the 1950s — and in her country. She stayed away from a tournament in California for years after she and her father heard racist taunts there. She talked about being a woman in tennis, about being a woman who dealt with complications in childbirth, about being a mother (her daughter, Olympia, turns 5 on Sept. 1, and Williams wants to have another baby).

She and Venus helped their sport reach a broader audience and helped bring a broader slice of society into their sport (Coco Gauff, the 18-year-old African-American who was the runner-up at the French Open in May, said Tuesday she plays what she called "a predominantly white sport" because she "saw somebody who looked like me dominating the game").

"I don't particularly like to think about my legacy. I get asked about it a lot, and I never know exactly what to say," Williams wrote in an essay released by Vogue magazine. "But I'd like to think that thanks to opportunities afforded to me, women athletes feel that they can be themselves on the court. They can play with aggression and pump their fists. They can be strong yet beautiful. They can wear what they want and say what they want and kick butt and be proud of it all."

There were, to be sure, moments that she perhaps was not as proud of, confrontations with match officials that led to getting docked a point or a game in U.S. Open losses to Naomi Osaka and Kim Clijsters — maybe the sorts of episodes she was referring to in her essay when she said: "I've made a lot of mistakes in my career. Mistakes are learning experiences, and I embrace those moments. I'm far from perfect, but I've also taken a lot of criticism, and I'd like to think that I went through some hard times as a professional tennis player so that the next generation could have it easier."

Her serve was a gift, as were the powerful groundstrokes that she and Venus — her opponent in nine all-in-the-family Grand Slam finals — made a permanent part of the game. So, too, was an unbending will and desire to always come out on top, whether the person across the net was Big Sis or anyone else, whether she was trying to win a point during a match or make a point in an interview.

"I want to be great. I want to be perfect," Williams said. "I know perfect doesn't exist, but whatever my perfect was, I never wanted to stop until I got it right."

In tennis, of course, and beyond.

Nebraska woman charged with helping daughter have abortion

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A Nebraska woman has been charged with helping her teenage daughter end her pregnancy at about 24 weeks after investigators obtained Facebook messages in which the two discussed using medication to induce an abortion and plans to burn the fetus afterward.

The prosecutor handling the case said it's the first time he has charged anyone for illegally performing an abortion after 20 weeks, a restriction that was passed in 2010. Before the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in June, states weren't allowed to enforce abortion bans until the point at which a fetus is considered viable outside the womb, at roughly 24 weeks.

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In one of the Facebook messages, Jessica Burgess, 41, tells her then 17-year-old daughter that she has obtained abortion pills for her and gives her instructions on how to take them to end the pregnancy.

The daughter, meanwhile, "talks about how she can't wait to get the 'thing' out of her body," a detective wrote in court documents. "I will finally be able to wear jeans," she says in one of the messages. Law enforcement authorities obtained the messages with a search warrant, and detailed some of them in court documents.

In early June, the mother and daughter were only charged with a single felony for removing, concealing or abandoning a body, and two misdemeanors: concealing the death of another person and false reporting. It wasn't until about a month later, after investigators reviewed the private Facebook messages, that they added the felony abortion-related charges against the mother. The daughter, who is now 18, is being charged as an adult at prosecutors' request.

Burgess' attorney didn't immediately respond to a message Tuesday, and the public defender representing the daughter declined to comment.

When first interviewed, the two told investigators that the teen had unexpectedly given birth to a stillborn baby in the shower in the early morning hours of April 22. They said they put the fetus in a bag, placed it in a box in the back of their van, and later drove several miles north of town, where they buried the body with the help of a 22-year-old man.

The man, whom The Associated Press is not identifying because he has only been charged with a misdemeanor, has pleaded no contest to helping bury the fetus on rural land his parents own north of Norfolk in northeast Nebraska. He's set to be sentenced later this month.

In court documents, the detective said the fetus showed signs of "thermal wounds" and that the man told investigators the mother and daughter did burn it. He also wrote that the daughter confirmed in the Facebook exchange with her mother that the two would "burn the evidence afterward." Based on medical records, the fetus was more than 23 weeks old, the detective wrote.

Burgess later admitted to investigators to buying the abortion pills "for the purpose of instigating a miscarriage."

At first, both mother and daughter said they didn't remember the date when the stillbirth happened, but according to the detective, the daughter later confirmed the date by consulting her Facebook messages. After that he sought the warrant, he said.

Madison County Attorney Joseph Smith told the Lincoln Journal Star that he's never filed charges like this related to performing an abortion illegally in his 32 years as the county prosecutor. He didn't immediately respond to a message from the AP on Tuesday.

The group National Advocates for Pregnant Women, which supports abortion rights, found 1,331 arrests or detentions of women for crimes related to their pregnancy from 2006 to 2020.

In addition to its current 20-week abortion ban, Nebraska tried — but failed — earlier this year to pass a so-called trigger law that would have banned all abortions when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

Facebook spokesman Andy Stone defended the way the company handled authorities' request for information in this case after a gag order about it was lifted Tuesday.

"Nothing in the valid warrants we received from local law enforcement in early June, prior to the Supreme Court decision, mentioned abortion," Stone said. "The warrants concerned charges related to a criminal investigation and court documents indicate that police at the time were investigating the case of a stillborn baby who was burned and buried, not a decision to have an abortion."

Facebook has said that officials at the social media giant "always scrutinize every government request we receive to make sure it is legally valid."

Facebook says it will fight back against requests that it thinks are invalid or too broad, but the company said it gave investigators information in about 88% of the 59,996 times when the government requested data in the second half of last year.

WHO: COVID-19 deaths fall overall by 9%, infections stable

LONDON (AP) — The number of coronavirus deaths fell by 9% in the last week while new cases remained relatively stable, according to the latest weekly pandemic report released by the World Health Organization Wednesday.

The U.N. health agency said there were more than 14,000 COVID-19 deaths in the last week and nearly 7 million new infections. The Western Pacific reported a 30% jump in cases while Africa reported a 46% drop. Cases also fell by more than 20% in the Americas and the Middle East.

The number of new deaths rose by 19% in the Middle East, while dropping by more than 70% in Africa, 15% in Europe and 10% in the Americas.

The WHO said that the omicron subvariant BA.5 remains dominant globally, accounting for nearly 70% of all virus sequences shared with the world's biggest publicly available virus database. The agency said other omicron subvariants, including BA.4 and BA.2, appear to be decreasing in prevalence as BA.5 takes over.

The WHO cautioned that its assessment of COVID-19 trends remains compromised by countries dropping many of their testing, surveillance and sequencing efforts as most countries have relaxed pandemic controls.

Still, Chinese authorities have announced new restrictions this week, after finding COVID-19 cases in the tourist island of Hainan and in Tibet. Earlier this week, the Chinese government shut down Lhasa's Potala Palace, the traditional home of the Dalai Lama, and also locked down Haikou, the capital of Hainan, in addition to several other cities including the beach resort Sanya.

About 80,000 tourists were stranded this week in Sanya after Chinese officials declared it a COVID-19 hot spot and required people to test negative five times within a week before being allowed to leave.

On Tuesday, the Chinese government sent a first planeload of 125 tourists out of Sanya and said other flights would be organized to fly out tourists in batches once they fulfilled the criteria to leave.

Social media offers parents more controls. But do they help?

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

As concerns about social media's harmful effects on teens continue to rise, platforms from Snapchat to TikTok to Instagram are bolting on new features they say will make their services safer and more age appropriate. But the changes rarely address the elephant in the room — the algorithms pushing endless content that can drag anyone, not just teens, into harmful rabbit holes.

The tools do offer some help, such as blocking strangers from messaging kids. But they also share some deeper flaws, starting with the fact that teenagers can get around limits if they lie about their age. The platforms also place the burden of enforcement on parents. And they do little or nothing to screen for inappropriate and harmful material served up by algorithms that can affect teens' mental and physical well-being.

"These platforms know that their algorithms can sometimes be amplifying harmful content, and they're not taking steps to stop that," said Irene Ly, privacy counsel at the nonprofit Common Sense Media. The more teens keep scrolling, the more engaged they get — and the more engaged they are, the more profitable they are to the platforms, she said. "I don't think they have too much incentive to be changing that."

Take, for instance, Snapchat, which on Tuesday introduced new parental controls in what it calls the "Family Center" — a tool that lets parents see who their teens are messaging, though not the content of the messages themselves. One catch: both parents and their children have to opt into the service.

Nona Farahnik Yadegar, Snap's director of platform policy and social impact, likens it to parents wanting to know who their kids are going out with.

If kids are headed out to a friend's house or are meeting up at the mall, she said, parents will typically ask, "Hey, who are you going to meet up with? How do you know them?" The new tool, she said, aims to give parents "the insight they really want to have in order to have these conversations with their teen while preserving teen privacy and autonomy."

These conversations, experts agree, are important. In an ideal world, parents would regularly sit down

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with their kids and have honest talks about social media and the dangers and pitfalls of the online world.

But many kids use a bewildering variety of platforms, all of which are constantly evolving — and that stacks the odds against parents expected to master and monitor the controls on multiple platforms, said Josh Golin, executive director of children's digital advocacy group Fairplay.

"Far better to require platforms to make their platforms safer by design and default instead of increasing the workload on already overburdened parents," he said.

The new controls, Golin said, also fail to address a myriad of existing problems with Snapchat. These range from kids misrepresenting their ages to "compulsive use" encouraged by the app's Snapstreak feature to cyberbullying made easier by the disappearing messages that still serve as Snapchat's claim to fame.

Farahnik Yadegar said Snapchat has "strong measures" to deter kids from falsely claiming to be over 13. Those caught lying about their age have their account immediately deleted, she said. Teens who are over 13 but pretend to be even older get one chance to correct their age.

Detecting such lies isn't foolproof, but the platforms have several ways to get at the truth. For instance, if a user's friends are mostly in their early teens, it's likely that the user is also a teenager, even if they said they were born in 1968 when they signed up. Companies use artificial intelligence to look for age mismatches. A person's interests might also reveal their real age. And, Farahnik Yadegar pointed out, parents might also find out their kids were fibbing about their birth date if they try to turn on parental controls but find their teens ineligible.

Child safety and teen mental health are front and center in both Democratic and Republican critiques of tech companies. States, which have been much more aggressive about regulating technology companies than the federal government, are also turning their attention to the matter. In March, several state attorneys general launched a nationwide investigation into TikTok and its possible harmful effects on young users' mental health.

TikTok is the most popular social app U.S. teenagers use, according to a new report out Wednesday from the Pew Research Center, which found that 67% say they use the Chinese-owned video sharing platform. The company has said that it focuses on age-appropriate experiences, noting that some features, such as direct messaging, are not available to younger users. It says features such as a screen-time management tool help young people and parents moderate how long children spend on the app and what they see. But critics note such controls are leaky at best.

"It's really easy for kids to try to get past these these features and just go off on their own," said Ly of Common Sense Media.

Instagram, which is owned by Facebook parent Meta, is the second most popular app with teens, Pew found, with 62% saying they use it, followed by Snapchat with 59%. Not surprisingly, only 32% of teens reported ever having used Facebook, down from 71% in 2014 and 2015, according to the report.

Last fall, former Facebook employee-turned whistleblower Frances Haugen exposed internal research from the company concluding that the social network's attention-seeking algorithms contributed to mental health and emotional problems among Instagram-using teens, especially girls. That revelation led to some changes; Meta, for instance, scrapped plans for an Instagram version aimed at kids under 13. The company has also introduced new parental control and teen well-being features, such as nudging teens to take a break if they scroll for too long.

Such solutions, Ly said, are "sort of getting at the problem, but basically going around it and not getting to the root cause of it."

Beluga whale lost in French river euthanized during rescue

By THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A beluga whale that became a French celebrity after a wrong turn took it up the Seine River had to be euthanized Wednesday after experiencing health complications during an urgent rescue operation, authorities said.

The sparkling white marine mammal appeared deep inside France last week, having accidentally veered

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off the normal ocean migration route that takes belugas to and from Arctic waters.

Fearing the malnourished creature would not survive in the Seine much longer, a wildlife conservation group and veterinarians planned to move the lost whale to a saltwater port in Normandy, from where they hoped to return it to the open sea.

A team of 80 people assembled to try to save the animal's life, and it was successfully moved Tuesday night from a river lock in Saint-Pierre-la-Garenne, west of Paris, into a refrigerated truck for the 160-kilometer (99-mile) journey to the port in Ouistreham.

But during the drive, the 4-meter-long (13-foot-long) whale started to breathe with difficulty, according to Florence Ollivet Courtois, a French veterinarian who worked on the rescue operation.

"During the journey, the veterinarians confirmed a worsening of its state, notably in its respiratory activities, and at the same time noticed the animal was in pain, not breathing enough," Courtois said.

"The suffering was obvious for the animal, so it was important to release its tension, and so we had to proceed to euthanize it," she added.

Environmentalists had acknowledged the plan to move the beluga risked fatally stressing the mammal. But marine conservation group Sea Shepherd said that it couldn't have survived much longer in the Seine's fresh water.

The group and veterinarians noted the whale had responded to a cocktail of antibiotics and vitamins over the last few days, making them hopeful it would recover once it was back in a saltwater environment.

A necropsy is planned on the whale, which weighed about 800 kilograms (1,764 pounds).

Rescuers had hoped to spare the whale the fate of an orca that strayed into the Seine and died in May. In 2006, a bottlenose whale — nicknamed "Willy" — swam up the Thames River as far as London and died during its attempted rescue.

Another complicating factor during the beluga's rescue attempt was the extreme heat gripping France. Authorities tried to keep it cool and wet with soaked towels and moved it at nightfall when temperatures are at their lowest.

The sad end to a saga that gripped France in recent days came after experts determined the whale "was too weakened to be put back into water," Guillaume Lericolais, the sub-prefect of France's Calvados region, said.

Rescuers tried to feed the whale fish without success since Friday. Sea Shepherd France said veterinary exams after the beluga's removal from the river showed it has no digestive activity.

Evictions spiking as assistance, protections disappear

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

Jada Riley thought she had beaten homelessness.

The 26-year-old New Orleans resident was finally making a steady income cleaning houses during the pandemic to afford a \$700-a-month, one-bedroom apartment. But she lost nearly all her clients after Hurricane Ida hit last year. Then she was fired from a grocery store job in February after taking time off to help a relative.

Two months behind on rent, she made the difficult decision last month to leave her apartment rather than risk an eviction judgment on her record. Now, she's living in her car with her 6-year-old son, sometimes spending nights at the apartments of friends or her son's father.

"I've slept outside for a whole year before. It's very depressing, I'm not going to lie," said Riley, who often doesn't have enough money to buy gas or afford food every day.

"I don't want to have my son experience any struggles that I went through."

Eviction filings nationwide have steadily risen in recent months and are approaching or exceeding pre-pandemic levels in many cities and states. That's in stark contrast to the pandemic, when state and federal moratoriums on evictions, combined with \$46.5 billion in federal Emergency Rental Assistance, kept millions of families housed.

"I really think this is the tip of the iceberg," Shannon MacKenzie, executive director of Colorado Poverty

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Law Project, said of June filings in Denver, which were about 24% higher than the same time three years ago. "Our numbers of evictions are increasing every month at an astonishing rate, and I just don't see that abating any time soon."

According to The Eviction Lab, several cities are running far above historic averages, with Minneapolis-St. Paul 91% higher in June, Las Vegas up 56%, Hartford, Connecticut, up 32%, and Jacksonville, Florida, up 17%. In Maricopa County, home to Phoenix, eviction filings in July were the highest in 13 years, officials said.

Some legal advocates said the sharp increase in housing prices due to inflation is partly to blame. Rental prices nationwide are up nearly 15% from a year ago and almost 25% from 2019, according to the real estate company Zillow. Rental vacancy rates, meanwhile, have declined to a 35-year low of 5.8%, according to the Census Bureau.

A report last month from the National Low Income Housing Coalition found that a tenant working full time needs to make nearly \$26 per hour on average nationally to afford a modest two-bedroom rental and \$21.25 for a one-bedroom. The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour.

"Landlords are raising the rent and making it very unaffordable for tenants to stay," said Marie Claire Tran-Leung, the eviction initiative project director for the National Housing Law Project.

"Inflation has really shrunk the supply of housing that is available for people with the lowest incomes," she added. "Without more protections in place, which not all states have, a lot of those families will be rendered homeless."

Patrick McCloud, chief executive officer of the Virginia Apartment Management Association, said the trend is a return to normal. "No one likes evictions, but they are in some ways a reset to the economy," McCloud said, adding that evictions have been "artificially depressed."

"Housing is based on supply and demand. And when no one moves and you have no vacancies, you have a tight market and prices go up."

Graham Bowman, a staff attorney with Legal Aid Society of Columbus, Ohio, said evictions there are rising — 15% above historic averages in June alone — at a time when there are fewer places for those forced out to go.

Sheryl Lynne Smith was evicted in May from her two-bedroom townhouse in Columbus after she used her rent money to repair a sewage leak in the basement. Smith, who is legally blind and has a federal housing voucher, fears she won't be able to find anything by September when the voucher expires because of rising housing prices and the eviction on her record.

"It's very scary," said Smith, 53, whose temporary stay at a hotel funded through a state program ends this weekend.

In Boise, Idaho, Jeremy McKenney, 45, moved into his car last week after a judge sided with a property management company that nearly tripled the rent on his two-bedroom house. The Lyft and DoorDash driver will have to rent a hotel room whenever he has custody of his children, 9 and 12.

"It's definitely mind blowing," said McKenney, adding that everything on the market is beyond his reach even after a nonprofit offered to cover the security deposit. "I have never been homeless before. I have always had a roof over my head."

The other challenge is the federal emergency rental assistance that helped keep millions housed during the pandemic has dried up in some jurisdictions or been increasingly rejected by some landlords.

"What really gets me is there is rental assistance and so many landlords just don't want it. They would rather throw someone on the street than take money," Eric Kwartler, managing attorney of Lone Star Legal Aid's Eviction Right to Counsel Project, which covers Houston and Harris County in Texas. "If you take the money, you can't evict them. They want them out."

The U.S. Treasury said last week that more than \$40 billion of the \$46.5 billion in Emergency Rental Assistance had been spent or allocated.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Virginia have gone through at least 90% of their first disbursement. Twelve states and the District of Columbia had used 50% of the second allocation, known as ERA2, by the end

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of May. Three — Idaho, Ohio and Iowa — haven't spent any ERA2 money and two — Nebraska and Arkansas — didn't accept the funds.

"The public health emergency may still be here but the funds to deal with it are rapidly disappearing," said Martin Wegbreit, director of litigation for the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society.

Treasury is encouraging states and cities to tap other federal stimulus funds to cover the gaps. So far, over 600 state and local governments had budgeted \$12.9 billion in stimulus funds to meet housing needs, including affordable housing development.

Gene Sperling, who oversees President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus rescue package, highlighted the success of its rental assistance program, which has reached 7 million mostly low-income households.

But, more needs to be done to ensure the country doesn't return to pre-pandemic times when 3.6 million tenants were evicted annually and "evictions were too often a first resort, not a last resort," he told a forum on eviction reforms at the White House last week.

Some lawmakers said the answer is a permanent rental assistance program. A bill introduced in July would provide \$3 billion annually for rental assistance and fund services to keep families housed. A study commissioned by the National Apartment Association and the National Multifamily Housing Council says the answer is building 4.3 million apartments by 2035.

Other advocates called for permanent legal protections like right to counsel for tenants or eviction diversion programs to resolve evictions before they reach the courts.

In Richmond, Virginia, eviction filings in June were 54% below historic averages, attributed to rental assistance and more legal representation for tenants in court, Wegbreit said. Similar programs were credited with New Mexico's eviction filings being 29% below historic averages in June.

Philadelphia, which passed a law making eviction diversion mandatory through this year, saw filings down 33%. The City Council in Philadelphia also approved spending \$30 million over two years for rental assistance.

"We are trying to change the way we look at this issue in Philadelphia, where the only thing you do is go to landlord tenant court or start an eviction," said Catherine Anderson, supervising attorney with Philadelphia Legal Assistance, who oversees the paralegals on the Save Your Home Philly hotline.

Italy's far-right Meloni on vote: I'm no danger to democracy

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Italy's far-right leader Giorgia Meloni, who is leading in opinion polls ahead of Sept. 25 parliamentary elections, insists she won't be a danger to democracy if she becomes premier, contending that the Italian political right has "unambiguously" condemned the legacy of fascism.

She also dismissed as "nonsense" concerns that if her Brothers of Italy party comes to power, making her Italy's first far-right premier, there would be a risk of an "anti-democratic drift" or "authoritarian turn," or that the country might exit the group of European nations using the euro currency.

Meloni made the comments in a message recorded in English, French and Spanish, and distributed Wednesday by her campaign.

Meloni has railed against European Union bureaucracy for years as infringing on national sovereignty. But she blasted Wednesday as an "absurd narrative" that a center-right government — with her campaign allies League leader Matteo Salvini and former Premier Silvio Berlusconi — would jeopardize implementation of reforms needed to receive all of the 200 billion euros (dollars) earmarked for Italy in EU pandemic recovery funds.

"For days, I have been reading articles in the international press about the upcoming elections that will give Italy a new government, in which I am described as a danger to democracy, to Italian, European and international stability," Meloni said, sitting at a desk and reading the message with a stern, no-nonsense tone.

She also referred to media accounts depicting any victory by Brothers of Italy as "a disaster, leading to an authoritarian turn, Italy's departure from the euro and other nonsense of this sort."

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"None of this is true," she declared.

Fast-growing in popularity, her party uses a symbol featuring a tri-colored flame that had been an icon of an Italian neo-fascist party whose members included some open admirers of the rule of Benito Mussolini, the fascist dictator in the decades leading up to World War II and during the conflict. Mussolini's regime brought about a 1938 law targeting Italy's small Jewish population, excluding them from public life, including in education and business.

Meloni has been dogged by criticism that she has been ambiguous about denouncing Italy's fascist past.

In Wednesday's message, she summarily dismissed such contentions.

"The Italian right has handed fascism over to history for decades now, unambiguously condemning the suppression of democracy and the ignominious anti-Jewish laws," Meloni said.

Her contention ignored attempts, including by her allies, to minimize some of Mussolini's legacy. For example, Berlusconi, referring to internal exile for Italian opponents of fascism, once said that the dictator sent them on "vacation" to Italian islands.

Recent opinion polls have indicated Meloni's support among eligible voters slightly ahead of her main rival in the election, Democratic Party leader Enrico Letta, a former premier.

Under Italy's complex electoral rules, victors need extensive campaign alliances with other parties to control Parliament. But the Democrats have struggled to match the reach of the center-right's campaign alliance, especially when they refused to ally with the populist 5-Stars, who triggered a crisis that eventually collapsed Premier Mario Draghi's broad pandemic unity coalition last month.

Still, the dynamics between the center-right and center-left bloc could shift. Letta announced on Wednesday that coming on board as a Democratic Party candidate for a Parliamentary seat will be Carlo Cottarelli, a widely-respected economist who held positions in Italy's central bank and with the International Monetary Fund.

"The next election is probably the most important we have had and likely to be in the years to come," Cottarelli said. The vote essentially comes down to "progressives vs. conservatives. Italy has to decide" its future, he said.

China appears to wind down threatening wargames near Taiwan

BEIJING (AP) — China on Wednesday repeated military threats against Taiwan while appearing to wind down wargames near the self-governing island it claims as its own territory that have raised tensions between the two sides to their highest level in years.

The message in a lengthy policy statement issued by the Cabinet's Taiwan Affairs Office and its news department followed almost a week of missile firings and incursions into Taiwanese waters and airspace by Chinese warships and air force planes.

The actions disrupted flights and shipping in a region crucial to global supply chains, prompting strong condemnation from the U.S., Japan and others.

An English-language version of the Chinese statement said Beijing would "work with the greatest sincerity and exert our utmost efforts to achieve peaceful reunification."

"But we will not renounce the use of force, and we reserve the option of taking all necessary measures. This is to guard against external interference and all separatist activities," it said.

"We will always be ready to respond with the use of force or other necessary means to interference by external forces or radical action by separatist elements. Our ultimate goal is to ensure the prospects of China's peaceful reunification and advance this process," it said.

China says its threatening moves were prompted by a visit to Taiwan last week by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, but Taiwan says such visits are routine and that China used her trip merely as a pretext to up its threats.

In an additional response to Pelosi's visit, China said it was cutting off dialogue on issues from maritime security to climate change with the U.S., Taiwan's chief military and political backer.

Taiwan's foreign minister warned Tuesday that the Chinese military drills reflect ambitions to control

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large swaths of the western Pacific, while Taipei conducted its own exercises to underscore its readiness to defend itself.

Beijing's strategy would include controlling the East and South China seas via the Taiwan Strait and imposing a blockade to prevent the U.S. and its allies from aiding Taiwan in the event of an attack, Joseph Wu told a news conference in Taipei.

Beijing extended the ongoing exercises without announcing when they would end, although they appeared to have run their course for the time being.

China's Defense Ministry and its Eastern Theater Command both issued statements saying the exercises had achieved their targets of sending a warning to those favoring Taiwan's formal independence and their foreign backers.

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen and her Democratic Progressive Party administration are "pushing Taiwan into the abyss of disaster and sooner or later will be nailed to the pillar of historical shame!" Defense Ministry spokesperson Col. Tan Kefei was quoted as saying in a statement on the ministry's website.

Troops taking part in the exercises had "effectively tested integrated joint combat capabilities," the Eastern Theater Command said on its Twitter-like Weixin microblog.

"The theater troops will monitor changes in the situation in the Taiwan Strait, continue to conduct military training and preparations, organize regular combat readiness patrols in the Taiwan Strait, and resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity," spokesperson Col. Shi Yi was quoted as saying.

Taiwan split with the mainland amid civil war in 1949, and its 23 million people overwhelmingly oppose political unification with China while preferring to maintain close economic links and de facto independence.

Through its maneuvers, China has pushed closer to Taiwan's borders and may be seeking to establish a new normal in which it could eventually control access to the island's ports and airspace.

Along with lobbing missiles into the Taiwan Strait, the nearly week-long drills saw Chinese ships and planes crossing the center line in the strait that has long been seen as a buffer against outright conflict.

The U.S., Taipei's main backer, has also shown itself to be willing to face down China's threats. Washington has no formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan in deference to Beijing, but is legally bound to ensure the island can defend itself and to treat all threats against it as matters of grave concern.

That leaves open the question of whether Washington would dispatch forces if China attacked Taiwan. U.S. President Joe Biden has said repeatedly the U.S. is bound to do so — but staff members have quickly walked back those comments.

Beyond the geopolitical risks, an extended crisis in the Taiwan Strait — a significant thoroughfare for global trade — could have major implications for international supply chains at a time when the world is already facing disruptions and uncertainty in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

In particular, Taiwan is a crucial provider of computer chips for the global economy, including China's high-tech sector.

In response to the drills, Taiwan has put its forces on alert, but has so far refrained from taking active countermeasures.

On Tuesday, its military held live-fire artillery drills in Pingtung County on its southeastern coast.

Australia's recent change of government is a chance to "reset" its troubled relationship with China, but the new administration must "handle the Taiwan question with caution," a Chinese envoy said Wednesday.

China has brushed aside foreign criticism of its actions, and its ambassador to Australia said he was "surprised" that Australia had signed a statement with the United States and Japan that condemned China's firing of missiles into Japanese waters in response to Pelosi's visit.

Xiao Qian told the National Press Club that China wanted to resolve the situation peacefully, but "we can never rule out the option to use other means."

"So when necessary, when compelled, we are ready to use all necessary means," Xiao said. "As to what does it mean by 'all necessary means?' You can use your imagination."

In London, the British government summoned Chinese Ambassador Zheng Zeguang to the Foreign Office on Wednesday to demand an explanation of "Beijing's aggressive and wide-ranging escalation against

Taiwan" following Pelosi's visit.

"We have seen increasingly aggressive behavior and rhetoric from Beijing in recent months, which threaten peace and stability in the region," said Foreign Secretary Liz Truss. "The United Kingdom urges China to resolve any differences by peaceful means, without the threat or use of force or coercion."

EXPLAINER: Fighting in Ukraine endangers big nuclear plant

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia and Ukraine have accused each other of shelling Europe's largest nuclear power plant, stoking international fears of a catastrophe on the continent. A look at the plant and the situation around it:

EUROPE'S BIGGEST NUCLEAR PLANT

The Zaporizhzhia plant is in southern Ukraine, near the town of Enerhodar on the banks of the Dnieper River. It is one of the 10 biggest nuclear plants in the world.

Built during the Soviet era, it has six reactors with a total capacity of 5,700 megawatts. Three of the reactors are in operation.

Before the war, the plant accounted for about half of the electricity generated by nuclear power in Ukraine. The country has 15 reactors at four active plants, and also is home to the decommissioned Chernobyl plant, the site of the 1986 nuclear disaster.

RUSSIANS TAKE CONTROL

Russian troops overran the plant shortly after invading Ukraine on Feb. 24.

During the fighting in early March, Russian and Ukrainian forces exchanged fire near the plant. The skirmishes resulted in a fire at its training complex.

The Russians have left the Ukrainian staff in place to keep the plant operating, and it has continued to supply electricity to government-controlled parts of Ukraine.

The fighting around the plant has fueled fears of a disaster like the one at Chernobyl, where a reactor exploded and spewed deadly radiation, contaminating a vast area in the world's worst nuclear accident.

Russian forces occupied the heavily contaminated Chernobyl site soon after the invasion but handed control back to the Ukrainians after withdrawing from the area at the end of March.

RUSSIA AND UKRAINE TRADE ACCUSATIONS

Ukraine has accused Russia of storing troops and weapons at the plant and using its grounds to launch strikes against Ukrainian-controlled territory across the Dnieper. Ukrainian officials and military analysts say Moscow's forces have cynically employed the plant as a shield, knowing that the Ukrainians would be hesitant to fire back.

Russia has denied the accusations and, in turn, accused Ukrainian forces of repeatedly shelling the plant.

A series of attacks on the plant over the past few days has damaged some of its auxiliary equipment but not its reactors, and there has been no threat of a radiation leak, according to Russian authorities.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Ukrainian shelling of the plant on Sunday caused a power surge and smoke, triggering an emergency shutdown and forcing the staff to lower output from two of the reactors.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov warned that the Ukrainian shelling of the plant is "fraught with catastrophic consequences for vast territories, for all of Europe," while the Russian Foreign Ministry has accused Ukraine of "taking all of Europe hostage."

Ukrainian officials countered by accusing Russian forces of planting explosives at the plant in preparation for an expected Ukrainian counteroffensive in the region. They also have accused Russia of launching attacks from the plant using Ukrainian workers there as human shields and shelling the place themselves.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the Russian shelling and mining of the plant amount to "nuclear blackmail."

Zaporizhzhia Gov. Oleksandr Starukh said that while the reactors are well protected by their thick concrete containment domes, it is impossible to guarantee their safe operation because of the Russian troops' presence. He noted, too, that the storage sites at the plant for spent nuclear fuel are not as well protected as the reactors.

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Mark Wenman, a nuclear expert at London's Imperial College, said the plant's reactors are designed "to protect against natural disasters and or man-made incidents such as aircraft crashes or reactor accidents."

"I do not believe there would be a high probability of a breach of the containment building even if it was accidentally struck by an explosive shell, and even less likely the reactor itself could be damaged by such," he said. He added that the spent fuel is also stored in "very robust steel and concrete containers that are designed to withstand very high-energy impacts."

CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL MONITORING

Rafael Mariano Grossi, director-general of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, told The Associated Press last week that the situation surrounding the Zaporizhzhia plant "is completely out of control," and he issued an urgent plea to Russia and Ukraine to allow experts to visit the complex to stabilize matters and avoid a nuclear accident.

"Every principle of nuclear safety has been violated" at the plant, Grossi said. "What is at stake is extremely serious and extremely grave and dangerous."

Grossi said the supply chain of equipment and spare parts has been interrupted, "so we are not sure the plant is getting all it needs." He noted that the IAEA also needs to perform highly important inspections to ensure that nuclear material is being safeguarded.

Grossi added that there have been instances of friction and reports of violence between the Russians and the Ukrainian staff.

"When you put this together, you have a catalog of things that should never be happening in any nuclear facility," Grossi said.

RUSSIA AND UKRAINE CLASH OVER IAEA VISIT

The IAEA has sought in vain to send an inspection team to the plant for months.

Moscow has said it welcomes a visit to the plant by the IAEA, but it is unclear whether it is ready to actually help arrange such a trip.

Ukraine previously opposed Grossi's visit to the site for as long as it remains under Moscow's control, demanding the Russian military withdraw.

This week, however, Ukrainian officials appeared to warm up to such a trip, with Ukraine's ombudsman, Dmytro Lubinets, urging the U.N. and IAEA to send a delegation to help "completely demilitarize the territory" and provide security guarantees to plant employees.

Today in History: August 11, Biden names Harris

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Aug. 11, the 223rd day of 2022. There are 142 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 11, 1997, President Bill Clinton made the first use of the historic line-item veto, rejecting three items in spending and tax bills. (However, the U.S. Supreme Court later struck down the veto as unconstitutional.)

On this date:

In 1860, the nation's first successful silver mill began operation near Virginia City, Nevada.

In 1919, Germany's Weimar Constitution was signed by President Friedrich Ebert.

In 1934, the first federal prisoners arrived at Alcatraz Island (a former military prison) in San Francisco Bay.

In 1949, President Harry S. Truman nominated General Omar N. Bradley to become the first chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In 1952, Hussein bin Talal was proclaimed King of Jordan, beginning a reign lasting nearly 47 years.

In 1956, abstract painter Jackson Pollock, 44, died in an automobile accident on Long Island, New York.

In 1965, rioting and looting that claimed 34 lives broke out in the predominantly Black Watts section of Los Angeles.

In 1992, the Mall of America, the nation's largest shopping-entertainment center, opened in Bloomington,

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Minnesota.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton named Army Gen. John Shalikashvili (shah-lee-kash-VEE'-lee) to be the new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, succeeding the retiring Gen. Colin Powell.

In 2014, Academy Award-winning actor and comedian Robin Williams, 63, died in Tiburon, California, a suicide.

In 2016, the Obama administration said it had decided marijuana would remain on the list of most dangerous drugs, rebuffing growing support across the country for broad legalization, but said it would allow more research into its medical uses.

In 2020, Democrat Joe Biden named California Sen. Kamala Harris as his running mate; Harris was the first Black woman on a major party's presidential ticket. The newly elected district attorney in Portland, Oregon, said he would not prosecute people arrested on non-violent misdemeanor charges during protests.

Ten years ago: Republican presidential contender Mitt Romney announced his choice of Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin to be his running mate. Usain Bolt capped his perfect London Olympics by leading Jamaica to victory in a world-record 36.84 seconds in the 4x100 meters. Allyson Felix won her third gold medal as the Americans rolled to an easy victory in the women's 4x400 relay.

Five years ago: A federal judge ordered Charlottesville, Virginia, to allow a weekend rally of white nationalists and other extremists to take place at its originally-planned location downtown. (Violence erupted at the rally, and a woman was killed when a man plowed his car into a group of counterprotesters.) President Donald Trump unleashed fresh threats against North Korea, warning Kim Jong Un that he "will regret it fast" if he takes any action against U.S. territories or allies. Two passenger trains collided outside Egypt's port city of Alexandria, killing 43 people.

One year ago: The Taliban seized three more Afghan provincial capitals and a local army headquarters, completing a blitz across the country's northeast. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urged all pregnant women to get the COVID-19 vaccine as hospitals in hot spots around the U.S. saw disturbing numbers of unvaccinated mothers-to-be seriously ill with the virus. California's largest single wildfire in recorded history continued to grow after destroying more than 1,000 buildings, nearly half of them homes, in the northern Sierra Nevada.

Today's Birthdays: Songwriter-producer Kenny Gamble is 79. Rock musician Jim Kale (Guess Who) is 79. Magazine columnist Marilyn Vos Savant is 76. Country singer John Conlee is 76. Singer Eric Carmen is 73. Computer scientist and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak is 72. Wrestler-actor Hulk Hogan is 69. Singer Joe Jackson is 68. Playwright David Henry Hwang is 65. Actor Miguel A. Nunez Jr. is 63. Actor Viola Davis is 57. Actor Embeth Davidtz is 57. Actor Duane Martin is 57. Actor-host Joe Rogan is 55. R&B musician Chris Dave is 54. Actor Anna Gunn is 54. Actor Ashley Jensen is 54. Actor Sophie Okonedo (oh-koh-NAY'-doh) is 54. Rock guitarist Charlie Sexton is 54. Hip-hop artist Ali Shaheed Muhammad is 52. Actor Nigel Harman is 49. Actor Will Friedle is 46. Rock singer Ben Gibbard is 46. Actor Rob Kerkovich is 43. Actor Merritt Wever is 42. Actor Chris Hemsworth is 39. Rock musician Heath Fogg (Alabama Shakes) is 38. Rapper Asher Roth is 37. Actor Alyson Stoner is 29.