

# 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

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**Jasom Wambach and Mary Carrico filled one of the tubs with corn as they were setting up for the Family Fun Fest held. This was a project being done by Poet Bioprocessing.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Pastor Josh Jetto of the Groton Christian & Missionary Alliance Church loaded up the fish hook.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Groton Police Officer Justin Cleveland talks with the kids and has them sign up for a bicycle helmet.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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**A good crowd showed up for the Family Fun Fest held Thursday night at Groton's Main Street.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Mayor Scott Hanlon had autographed photos that he handed out.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Booths were set up on the sidewalks downtown.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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## Highway Patrol Sturgis Rally Daily Information

Compiled from 6 a.m. Saturday August 6, 2022, to 6 a.m. Thursday August 11, 2022

Item	Sturgis	Rapid City District	District Total	Last Year to Date
DUI Arrests	75	22	97	84
Misd Drug Arrests	68	34	102	108
Felony Drug Arrests	79	7	86	73
Total Citations	551	363	914	1046
Total Warnings	1987	1266	3253	2848
Cash Seized	\$4335.00	\$0.00	\$4335.00	\$1862.00
Vehicles Seized	4	0	4	0
For Drug Poss.	4	0	4	0
For Serial No.	0	0	0	0
Non-Injury Accidents	9	18	27	31
Injury Accidents	21	14	35	44
Fatal Accidents	1	2	3	1
# of Fatalities	1	2	3	1

Fatal Crashes:

None reported Wednesday.

Injury Crashes:

At 6:17 a.m., Wednesday, Dickson Drive, within Sturgis city limits: A 2020 Volvo semi-truck and trailer was eastbound on Interstate 90, near mile marker 32, went off the roadway to the right, eventually into a private yard, and hit the front of a residential home. The 68-year-old female driver of the truck and the 65-year-old male passenger both suffered minor injuries and were taken to the Sturgis hospital. The driver was wearing a seatbelt and the passenger was not. The 74-year-old male resident of the home was not injured.

At 9 a.m., Wednesday, west of the Nemo Road and Vanocker Canyon Road intersection, within Nemo city limits: Two motorcycles were westbound together on Nemo Road at the intersection of the Vanocker Canyon Road when the male driver of a 2005 Harley-Davidson Heritage motorcycle hit his brakes and lost control on a curve. The male driver of the second motorcycle, a 2009 Harley-Davidson FXDL Dyna Low Glide motorcycle, also lost control. Both motorcycles went across the centerline and into the opposite lane. The Heritage motorcycle came to rest in the south ditch and the Dyna Low Glide motorcycle against a guard rail. Both the 76-year-old driver of the Heritage and the 66-year-old driver of the Dyna Low Glide suffered minor injuries. Each were treated on scene. Both were wearing helmets.

At 10:38 a.m., Wednesday, U.S. Highway 16A, mile marker 37, 12 miles east of Custer: A 2005 Harley-Davidson FXD motorcycle was westbound on U.S. Highway 16A when the driver failed to negotiate a curve



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and the motorcycle went into the ditch. The 52-year-old male driver received serious non-life threatening injuries and was taken to the Rapid City hospital. He was wearing a helmet.

At 6:58 p.m., Wednesday, U.S. Highway 85, mile marker 64, seven miles north of Belle Fourche: A 2019 Ford F350 Super Duty pickup was southbound on U.S. Highway 85 when it crossed into the northbound lane and collided with a 2007 Peterbilt semi-truck and trailer. The 22-year-old male driver of the pickup received serious non-life threatening injuries and was taken to the Spearfish hospital. He was wearing a seatbelt. The 29-year-old male driver of the semi-truck was not injured. He was wearing a seatbelt.

At 8:31 p.m., Wednesday, U.S. Highway 14A, mile marker 39, a half-mile east of Central City: A 2007 Harley-Davidson motorcycle collided with a deer in the roadway. The 73-year-old male driver received serious non-life threatening injuries and was transported to the Rapid City hospital. He was not wearing a helmet.

## 2022 Sturgis Rally Vehicle Count - Through Day Six

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:

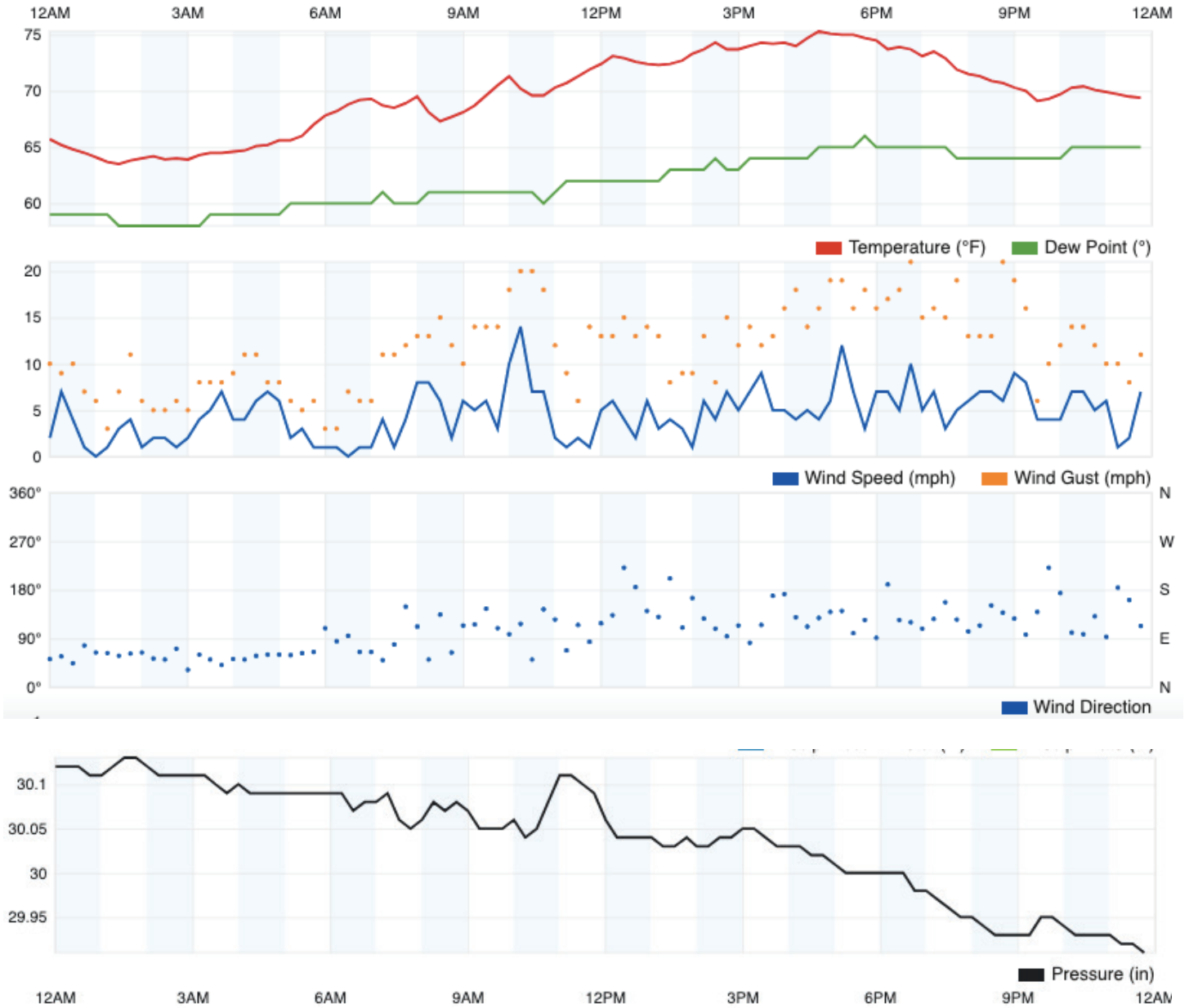
**Friday, Aug. 5: 56,855 entering:** Up 11.4% from the previous five-year average  
**Saturday, Aug. 6: 62,199 entering:** Up 5% from the previous five-year average  
**Sunday, Aug. 7: 60,672 entering:** Up 6.8% from the previous five-year average  
**Monday, Aug. 8: 62,050 entering:** Up 3.3% from the previous five-year average  
**Tuesday, Aug. 9: 58,610 entering:** Up 1.6% from the previous five-year average  
**Wednesday, Aug. 10: 54,599 entering:** Down 1.9% from the previous five-year average

**2022 - 6 Day Total: 354,985 Vehicles**  
Previous 5-Year Average: 340,447 Vehicles

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Slight Chance  
Showers then  
Mostly Sunny

High: 87 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 62 °F

Saturday



Decreasing  
Clouds

High: 83 °F

Saturday  
Night



Partly Cloudy  
then Slight  
Chance  
Showers

Low: 62 °F

Sunday



Slight Chance  
Showers

High: 85 °F

## Weekend Forecast Mostly Dry

Today

85 to 99°

Saturday

80 to 90°

Sunday

82 to 92°

**A few Showers/Storms This Morning and Again  
Saturday Night – Sunday Morning**

[www.weather.gov/abr](http://www.weather.gov/abr)



A few showers and storms will be possible this morning, mainly along the North Dakota and South Dakota border. Dry and warm conditions can be expected this afternoon. The weekend will feature mostly dry conditions with highs near to above average.



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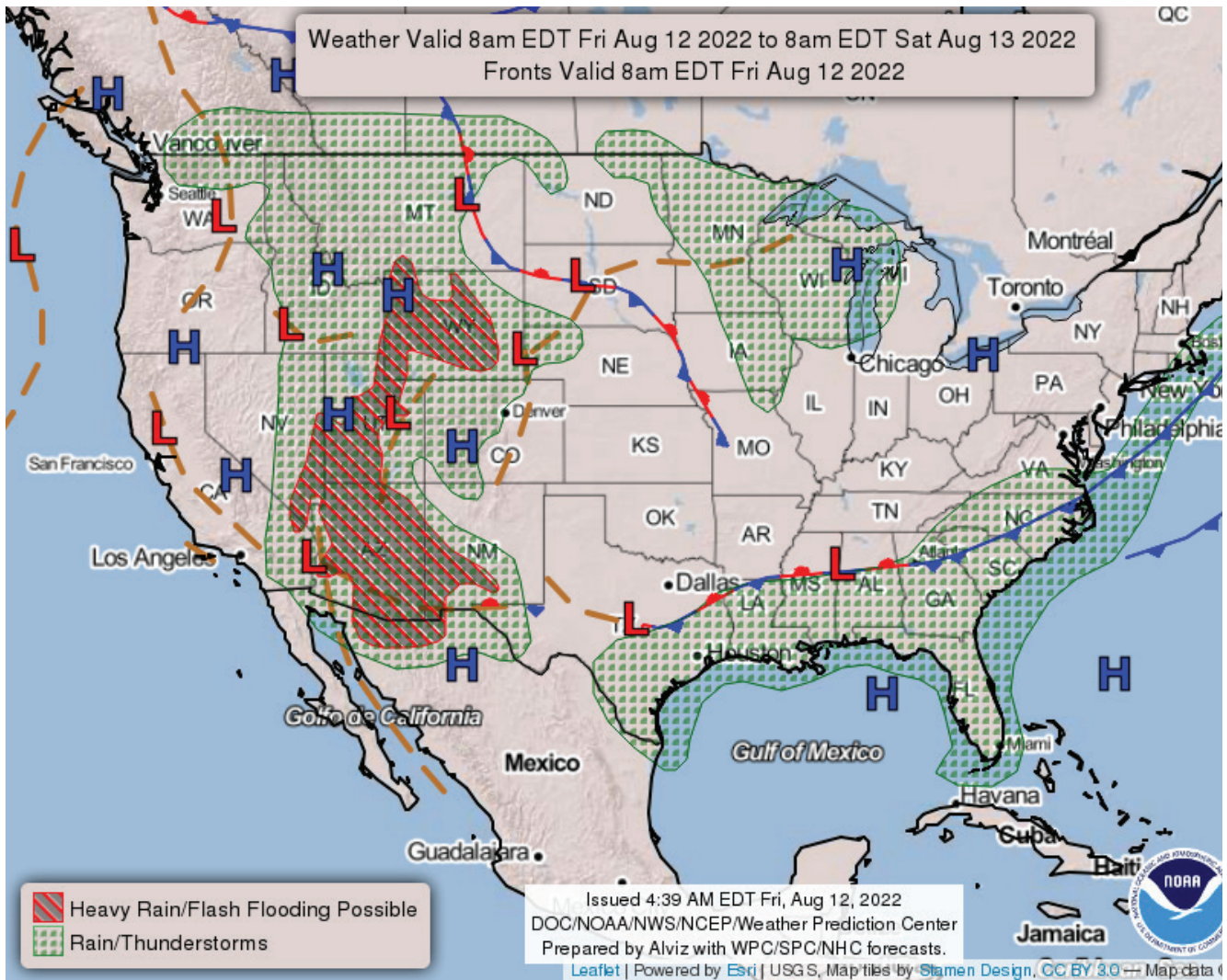
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 75.3 °F at 4:45 PM**  
**Low Temp: 63.5 °F at 1:30 AM**  
**Wind: 21 mph at 8:45 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 14 hours, 18 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 102 in 1933  
Record Low: 40 in 1898  
Average High: 84°F  
Average Low: 58°F  
Average Precip in Aug.: 0.87  
Precip to date in Aug.: 0.65  
Average Precip to date: 14.97  
Precip Year to Date: 15.19  
Sunset Tonight: 8:46:24 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:29:36 AM





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## Today in Weather History

August 12, 1986: Thunderstorms produced 2.53 inches of rain in twenty minutes in downtown Rapid City. The heavy rain caused street and basement flooding. Golf ball size hail fell in Zeona, in Perkins County, which covered the ground.

1752: The following is from the Journals of the Rev. Thomas Smith, and the Rev. Samuel Deane, published in 1849. "In the evening there was dismal thunder and lightning, and abundance of rain, and such a hurricane as was never the like in these parts of the world." This hurricane struck Portland, Maine.

1778 - A Rhode Island hurricane prevented an impending British-French sea battle, and caused extensive damage over southeast New England. (David Ludlum)

1933 - The temperature at Greenland Ranch in Death Valley, CA, hit 127 degrees to establish a U.S. record for the month of August. (The Weather Channel)

1936 - The temperature at Seymour, TX, hit 120 degrees to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1955 - During the second week of August hurricanes Connie and Diane produced as much as 19 inches of rain in the northeastern U.S. forcing rivers from Virginia to Massachusetts into a high flood. Westfield MA was deluged with 18.15 inches of rain in 24 hours, and at Woonsocket RI the Blackstone River swelled from seventy feet in width to a mile and a half. Connecticut and the Delaware Valley were hardest hit. Total damage in New England was 800 million dollars, and flooding claimed 187 lives. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Early afternoon thunderstorms in Arizona produced 3.90 inches of rain in ninety minutes at Walnut National Monument (located east of Flagstaff), along with three inches of pea size hail, which had to be plowed off the roads. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Fifteen cities in the northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Youngstown OH reported twenty-six days of 90 degree weather for the year, a total equal to that for the entire decade of the 1970s. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms were scattered across nearly every state in the Union by late in the day. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Fergus Falls MN, and golf ball size hail and wind gusts to 60 mph at Black Creek WI. In the Chicago area, seven persons at a forest preserve in North Riverside were injured by lightning. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2004: Hurricane Charley was the third named storm and the second hurricane of the 2004 Atlantic hurricane season. Charley lasted from August 9 to August 15, and at its peak intensity, it attained 150 mph winds, making it a strong Category 4 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale. It made landfall in southwestern Florida at maximum strength, making it the most powerful hurricane to hit the United States since Hurricane Andrew struck Florida in 1992.

2005: A tornado strikes Wright, Wyoming, a coal-mining community, killing two and destroying 91 homes and damaging about 30 more in around the town.



## Drawn by Disaster

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

1 The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel: 2 Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? 3 Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation. 4 What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. 5 Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth. 6 For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness. 7 It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white.

19 To you, O Lord, I call. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flame has burned all the trees of the field. 20 Even the beasts of the field pant for you because the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

### Insight By: Tim Gustafson

God was to be the focal point of every aspect of life in Israel. Yet, despite enjoying God's material blessings, the people forgot Him. They demonstrated their godlessness by taking His blessings for granted, repeatedly turning their bountiful grape harvest into an excessive lifestyle of drunkenness. So the prophet told them, "Wail, all you drinkers of wine; . . . for it has been snatched from your lips" (Joel 1:5). A horde of locusts would destroy all the grapes (vv. 6–7). In keeping with His character, God used this punishment to correct His people. From the context of the locust plague, Joel called the people to repentance: "Rend your heart and not your garments," he said. "Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate" (2:13).

### Comment

In 1717, a devastating storm raged for days, leading to widespread flooding in northern Europe. Thousands of people lost their lives in the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark. History reveals an interesting and customary—for that time—response by at least one local government. The provincial authorities of the Dutch city of Groningen called for a "prayer day" in response to the disaster. A historian reports that the citizens gathered in churches and "listened to sermons, sang psalms, and prayed for hours."

The prophet Joel describes an overwhelming disaster faced by the people of Judah that also led to prayer. A massive swarm of locusts had covered the land and "laid waste [its] vines and ruined [its] fig trees" (Joel 1:7). As he and his people reeled from the devastation, Joel prayed, "Lord, help us!" (1:19 nlt). Directly and indirectly, both the people of northern Europe and Judah experienced disasters that originated with the effects of sin and this fallen world (Genesis 3:17–19; Romans 8:20–22). But they also found that these times led them to call out to God and seek Him in prayer (Joel 1:19). And God said, "Even now . . . return to me with all your heart" (2:12).

When we face difficulties and disaster, may we turn to God—perhaps in anguish, perhaps in repentance. "Compassionate" and "abounding in love" (v. 13), He draws us to Himself—providing the comfort and help we need.

**Reflect and Prayer:** Why do people often turn to God when they face disaster? How can He use difficult times to draw us to Himself?

Heavenly Father, in the face of difficulty, help me to call out to You and find the hope You alone can provide.



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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

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[www.397news.com](http://www.397news.com)

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## News from the Associated Press

### **Kansas abortion vote shows limits of GOP's strength**

By AARON M. KESSLER, JOHN HANNA, NUHA DOLBY and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press  
TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — An increase in turnout among Democrats and independents and a notable shift in Republican-leaning counties contributed to the overwhelming support of abortion rights last week in traditionally conservative Kansas, according to a detailed Associated Press analysis of the voting results.

A proposed state constitutional amendment would have allowed the Republican-controlled Legislature to tighten restrictions or ban abortions outright. But Kansas voters rejected the measure by nearly 20 percentage points, almost a mirror of Republican Donald Trump's statewide margin over Democrat Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election.

In the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to repeal a woman's constitutional right to an abortion, the threat of new restrictions in the state galvanized Democrats and independents more than anticipated. At the same time, Republicans showed less interest in turning out to support the measure.

The findings reinforce a sense in both parties that the Supreme Court's decision may have altered the dynamics of this year's midterm elections. Here's how it played out:

#### 'OVERPLAYED THEIR HAND'

In 2020, Trump carried Kansas by 18 points. Last week, not a single county in the state favored the ballot measure as much as it had supported the former president, the AP found.

In 99 of the state's 105 counties, support for the abortion measure was more than 10 percentage points lower than its support for Trump against Biden. In 29 of those counties, that difference was more than 20 points.

And in 14 Kansas counties that Trump won, majorities rejected the amendment.

"The anti-abortion politicians have just overplayed their hand on these bans," said Tamarra Wieder, director for Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates in Kentucky, where another abortion measure will be on the ballot in November.

The Kansas county with the largest drop from the presidential election to the abortion referendum was Greenwood, in rural southeast Kansas. Trump won nearly 80% of the vote there in 2020, but there was about a 30-point shift on abortion, with voters narrowly favoring "no," the position that leaves abortion rights in place for women in Kansas.

Beyond counties that flipped entirely, dozens of deeply Republican counties saw voters favor the abortion amendment as expected, but by much narrower margins than their preference for Trump two years ago. Near Topeka, for example, 72% of voters in Pottawatomie County backed the former president's re-election, while just 57% supported the amendment.

Abortion opponents said they were stunned by the margin of the results.

"I was surprised for sure," said Ruth Tisdale, executive director of the Advice and Aid Pregnancy Center. "I thought that it would be a closer outcome either way. I didn't have a strong sense of whether it would pass or not, but I thought that it would be closer, you know, 51 to 49 kind of thing. ... It was very sad."

#### HUGE TURNOUT, SURGE OF INDEPENDENTS

It wasn't just the amendment's margin of defeat that jolted the political consciousness. It was also the seam-busting turnout in what otherwise should have been a normal, low-turnout primary in a midterm election year.

The latest AP tallies show that more than 922,000 votes were cast by Kansas voters on the abortion referendum. That's roughly twice as many voters as turned out for the state's previous midterm primary election in 2018, and it's about as many as turn out for Kansas' midterm general elections in some years. Overall turnout — 48% of registered voters — outpaced the 34% turnout for the 2020 presidential primaries.

The most recent electorate also was considerably less Republican than in a typical Kansas primary. From 2010 through 2020, Republican primary ballots outnumbered non-Republican ballots by about 2-to-1. In

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last week's election, according to the Kansas secretary of state's office, the two groups turned out in nearly equal numbers.

Advocates on both sides of the amendment spent more than \$14 million blanketing Kansas with ads and signs, knocking on doors and calling voters, according to state campaign finance reports.

That effort helped attract an unusual variable in Kansas primaries: independent voters. That group is eligible to vote on referenda but not for candidates running in any party primary. But campaign ads emphasized that "no affiliation" voters could indeed vote on the abortion question. It worked: Around 184,000 more votes were cast for the abortion amendment than voted for governor, a likely barometer to measure their portion of the electorate.

"The decision to overturn Roe really was a wake-up call for more moderate voters," said Ashley All, a spokesperson for Kansans for Constitutional Freedom, a group that fought against the ballot measure.

## 'ENERGY AROUND BALLOT MEASURES'

The result from Kansas is rippling into numerous other states.

In Georgia, the membership for NARAL Pro-Choice America jumped from 53,000 to more than 80,000 and could hit 100,000 by the November election, said Alicia Stallworth, the director of NARAL campaigns in the Southeastern U.S.

"I don't think this is something that disappears," Stallworth said of the current energy among abortion rights advocates.

Abortion-rights advocates said the decision to strike down Roe vs. Wade, the 1973 case that recognized a woman's constitutional right to an abortion, energized many voters who had assumed abortion access was safe.

"It was such a beacon of light in this moment," said Helen Shumaker, director of state abortion access at the National Women's Law Center, of the Kansas vote. "I think there is energy around ballot measures for the foreseeable future."

In Ohio, Democratic gubernatorial nominee Nan Whaley has called for a statewide ballot question on a state constitutional amendment to protect abortion rights as soon as 2023.

In South Dakota, a group called Dakotans for Health is pushing a similar ballot initiative in 2024. And in Colorado, advocates want a 2024 referendum that could allow public funding for abortion.

But getting measures on ballots without going through a state legislature can be difficult. The Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, which advises liberal groups on initiative campaigns, advises the process could take three years.

## 'WHY WE'RE LOSING'

In half of the states, including Kansas, only lawmakers can put propositions on the statewide ballot. That means in Texas, which bans most abortions, the only options are to wait for legislators to put an initiative to a vote—as anti-abortion lawmakers did in Kansas — or vote out the incumbents.

"In Texas we know that's why we're losing," said Delma Catalina Limones, communications director for Avow, an abortion-rights group in that state.

But despite the apparent confidence of Kansas legislators to put the abortion amendment on the ballot this month, their expectations were upended by the resounding defeat.

Value Them Both Coalition, the main group in Kansas that fought in favor of the amendment, called it a "temporary setback" and promised in a statement that "our dedicated fight to value women and babies is far from over."

## Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. August 9, 2022.

Editorial: Insulin Cap: Why Is There Resistance?

What's the argument against capping the price of insulin for people with private insurance?

It's a timely question amid the negotiations over the wide-ranging Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which



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wound up passing the Senate Sunday but only after the insulin cap for private insurance policyholders failed to survive.

Insulin is a lifeline for many people with diabetes — it's essential to their health and, indeed, their lives. According to a Yale University report, 30 million Americans have diabetes, and 7 million of them need insulin.

But Americans, by a staggeringly wide margin, pay the highest price in the world for a unit of insulin. According to a Rand Corporation survey last year, the average unit price for insulin in the U.S. was \$98.70, while Japan was in second place at just \$14.40 per unit. Canada was third at \$12 a unit.

"The differences were especially stark when the researchers looked at rapid-acting insulin, which makes up about a third of the U.S. market," the Rand report said. "Its average price in other countries was just over \$8. In America, it was \$119."

Thus, the \$35 cap proposed in the IRA, which would profoundly impact those Americans struggling to pay for insulin, would still leave this nation with the highest insulin price in the world. But at least it would be within sight of what everyone else pays.

The insulin cap proposal for private insurance fell three votes short of passage in the Senate — it needed 60 votes to overcome a filibuster. Forty-three senators, all Republicans (and including the Senate delegations from both South Dakota and Nebraska), voted against it. However, the cap will apply to those on Medicare, one in three of whom have diabetes, and 3.3 million of them need insulin

Why is U.S. insulin so expensive?

According to ABC News, one big issue — and this is a familiar economic refrain in this country — is that there are only three insulin manufacturers in the U.S.: Eli Lilly, Novo Nordisk and Sanofi. "They've been historically raising their list prices for their respective products in lockstep with one another," according to Dr. Jing Luo, a professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh. "There hasn't been a lot of pricing pressure."

There are also a lot of regulatory hurdles that must be cleared for other firms to enter into production.

The cap for those on private insurance was dumped because, according to USA Today, Republicans argued that such a cap should be separate from the large IRA reconciliation bill that deals with numerous health issues, as well as climate and economic matters. It was pulled out when the Senate parliamentarian ruled it didn't fit within the rules of bill reconciliation, and the insulin proposal died on its own. However, senators will likely get their chance to vote on it again soon, according to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

Also, since America's insulin is so spendy, a \$35 cap would be expensive for the federal government to cover. That's something that we'll likely hear more about when this debate returns. (Of course, it's already expensive for the consumers, so there's that.)

Given that, one could argue that California may be taking the best approach on this. There, Gov. Gavin Newsom has announced the state will manufacture its own insulin and sell it close to cost.

The bottom line is, America has the most exponentially expensive insulin in the world, which seems to suggest the rest of the world has apparently figured out how to produce this medication in a cost-efficient manner for betterment of all who need it. Or there's simply more profit-taking going on here.

Either way, this country must figure this insulin price issue out, because maintaining this devastating status quo is madness and life-threatening.

END

## Man who fled from police shooting in Sioux Falls arrested

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police have arrested a driver who fled from a fatal police shooting in Sioux Falls, officials said.

Police tweeted Wednesday night that the man was arrested after a brief pursuit in a stolen vehicle. He was driving a car with three other occupants when the vehicle was stopped by law enforcement in the parking lot of a Burger King restaurant in Sioux Falls Tuesday about 5:30 p.m.

While the driver sped away, the three others in the car tried to flee on foot with one man firing at law enforcement officers who returned gunshots, killing the man, according to police. Family members have

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identified him as 21-year-old Jacob James.

The other two in the vehicle, a man and woman, were arrested.

The drive-thru restaurant was busy, but no bystanders or officers were injured in the exchange of gunfire, said police Chief Jon Thum said.

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.

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

Dozens of people gathered outside the Burger King Wednesday night where relatives leaned on each other and cried as they held up pictures of James.

Robert Johnson, a friend of James, asked for the youth to support each other during tough times such as the one they were experiencing, the Argus Leader reported.

"Trust your instincts and your hearts but use your minds to navigate through and make a positive impact," Johnson said to those in attendance.

## Senate climate bill has West Virginia written all over it

By LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — The sprawling economic package passed by the U.S. Senate this week has a certain West Virginia flavor.

The package, passed with no Republican votes, could be read largely as an effort to help West Virginia look to the future without turning away entirely from its roots.

The bill contains billions in incentives for clean energy — while also offering renewed support for traditional fuel sources such as coal and natural gas — as well as big boosts for national parks and health care for low-income people and coal miners with black lung disease. That's no accident. Most provisions were included as the price the Democrats had to pay to win the all-important support of Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, who says they will help folks back home.

John Palmer, a 67-year-old retired coal miner from Monongah, says it's about time.

"We ain't had too many people care about us," Palmer said. "We're always out there fighting for different things. Everybody's got an agenda, and our agenda was for working-class people. That's what everybody's agenda should be, but it's not."

Manchin, a conservative Democrat who chairs the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, was a key vote needed to pass the spending package in the 50-50 Senate and send it to the House, where lawmakers are expected to take it up Friday.

The bill invests nearly \$375 billion to fight climate change, caps prescription drug costs at \$2,000 out-of-pocket for Medicare recipients and helps an estimated 13 million Americans pay for health insurance by extending subsidies provided during the coronavirus pandemic.

If those subsidies are not extended, West Virginia is among the states that will lose the most support for people paying for health insurance, according to the Urban Institute, meaning thousands of people could lose coverage.

Kelly Allen, executive director of the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, said the provision in the bill to cap insulin prices at \$35 a dose for seniors will make a big impact in the state, which has the greatest number of people living with diabetes per capita in the country.

"There are people who ration insulin, or who have to make decisions between getting groceries and paying for a drug cost, or paying rent and paying for drug costs," she said.

But Manchin, who has received more campaign contributions this election cycle from natural gas pipeline companies than any other lawmaker, won concessions on the climate front. The bill includes money to encourage alternative energy and to bolster fossil fuels with steps such as subsidies for technology that reduces carbon emissions. It also requires the government to open more federal land and waters to oil drilling.



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In a statement, Manchin said he worked with colleagues to craft the "most effective way" to help West Virginia. He declined to be interviewed for this story.

Manchin also has proposed a separate list of legislation to speed up federal permitting and make energy projects harder to block under federal acts. As part of an agreement with Democratic leadership, he specifically asked that federal agencies "take all necessary actions" to streamline completion of the Mountain Valley Pipeline, a project long opposed by environmental activists.

The 303-mile (487-kilometer) pipeline, which is mostly finished, would transport natural gas drilled from the Appalachian Basin through West Virginia and Virginia. Legal battles have delayed completion by nearly four years and doubled the pipeline's cost, now estimated at \$6.6 billion.

Chelsea Barnes, legislative director for Appalachian Voices, an environmental organization that sued to stop the pipeline, said there's a lot to be excited about in the legislation. But she deemed Manchin's concessions to the fossil fuel industry "unacceptable."

"We'd really love to just be celebrating," Barnes said, "but we know that there's so much in the bill that is also going to hurt communities."

Barnes said the bill contains many provisions her organization has wanted for a long time, such as extending and increasing tax credits for clean energy projects, with bonus credits for low-income communities and for communities where a coal mine or power plant has closed.

That means there's going to be a higher incentive for clean energy developers to set up shop in Appalachia. She said many people she's worked with on clean energy projects are not excited to see coal jobs disappear but are excited to be part of "the energy economy of the future."

"They like the idea of retaining that energy-producing heritage, and I think there's a lot of pride in continuing that role in our society, in our culture," she said.

Still, she's concerned about support for carbon sequestration and storage projects in the bill, saying they haven't been cost-effective compared with clean energy alternatives. She fears that might prolong the life of power plants.

She also said permitting reform in the bill amounts to "permitting destruction" that would damage the environmental review process and silence residents' voices.

The bill also contains millions of dollars for tourism, long seen in West Virginia as a way to boost the state's beleaguered economy. West Virginia is home to multiple national parks, including the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, which opened in 2020.

The National Park System would receive at least \$1 billion in the package to hire new employees and carry out projects to conserve and protect wilderness areas.

The bill also permanently extends the excise tax on coal that pays for monthly benefits for coal miners with black lung disease, which is caused by inhaling coal dust.

Since the program's inception, more retired miners in West Virginia have received black lung benefits than any other state, with 4,423 people receiving benefits last year. But the fund is \$6 billion in debt.

For decades, the tax has required annual legislative approval. Twice in recent years, federal lawmakers failed to extend the tax, most recently for this year. That cut the tax by more than half — a windfall to coal companies that put benefits in jeopardy.

The fund is needed more than ever, United Mine Workers of America Chief of Staff Phil Smith said, with miners being diagnosed with black lung at younger ages than before because of higher amounts of silica dust in mines — something that's not regulated.

Palmer worked underground for 40 years at the Federal No. 2 Mine in Monongalia County, which went bankrupt and shut down shortly after he retired a few years ago. His father, a coal miner, died of a lung disease, and his younger brother also has black lung. He said knowing the money will be there is a "relief" and that miners earn the benefit — an average of just over \$700 a month — when they risk doing dangerous work.

"We went down in these holes that kept the lights on for everybody," he said. "We're the ones sacrificing our bodies."

## Grain ship to dock in Ukraine, leave for Africa

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Expectations were raised Friday that the first U.N. grain transport ship could soon be leaving Ukraine for Africa, while more Russian shelling struck the east of the country — shifting the war between hope and despair on Friday.

Closing in on the half-year mark, the war has sent food prices sky-high and left poorer countries with ever less hope they would be getting supplies from the breadbasket of Europe. On Friday, European Council President Charles Michel announced though that the first World Food Program transport for Africa was poised to depart.

He said the ship would load in a Ukrainian port and depart for Ethiopia, saying “cooperation of all involved actors is key” to avoid food shortage and hunger around the world. Such a move would be a big step in the food crisis caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.

The ship, Brave Commander, would take more than 23,000 metric tons (27,500 short tons) of grain and export it to Ethiopia through Djibouti.

While Ukrainian and Western officials have repeatedly spoken of the crucial role of grain shipments from Ukraine’s Black Sea ports in staving off a global food crisis, many of the first dozen vessels to leave the ports were bound for destinations in Turkey and Western Europe. Some analysts attributed this to the need to free up scarce docking space, saying that ships which have been trapped in the ports the longest were likely prioritized.

Ethiopia, along with neighboring Somalia and Kenya, is in the grip of the driest drought in four decades in the Horn of Africa. Thousands of people across the region have died from hunger or illness this year. Forecasts for the coming weeks indicate that for the first time, a fifth straight rainy season will fail to materialize. Millions of livestock, the basis of many families’ wealth and food security, have died.

It makes any resumption of food shipments all the more welcome.

If such news provided a rare glimmer of hope from the gloomiest of surroundings, it was offset by the incessant fighting in eastern Ukraine, where the war entered its 170th day. Specifically the Donbas town of Kramatorsk was hit by 11 rockets overnight. Seven people were killed and 14 others were wounded in the region, which remains cut off from gas, running water and electricity.

“Three quarters of the population of the region have already been evacuated, because incessant shelling by the Russian army doesn’t leave civilians any choice — it’s either to die from wounds, or from hunger and cold in winter,” Donetsk regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko told Ukrainian television.

The world also continued to worry about the threat of a nuclear disaster in eastern Ukraine where shelling has hit the area, which is home to Europe’s largest nuclear plant.

Shelling near the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia facility continued overnight. Russian forces fired more than 40 rockets at the city of Marhanets, which is across the Dnieper river from the power plant. Three people were wounded in the most recent shelling, including a 12-year-old boy. The neighboring city of Nikopol was shelled as well, said Valentyn Reznichenko, the governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region.

The U.N. nuclear chief warned late Thursday that “very alarming” military activity at the nuclear plant could lead to dangerous consequences.

International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Grossi urged Russia and Ukraine, who blame each other for the attacks at the plant, to immediately allow nuclear experts to assess damage and evaluate safety and security at the sprawling nuclear complex where the situation “has been deteriorating very rapidly.”

He pointed to shelling and several explosions at Zaporizhzhia last Friday that forced the shutdown of the electrical power transformer and two backup transformers, forcing the shutdown of one nuclear reactor.

## South Korea to pardon Samsung’s Lee, other corporate giants

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

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SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Samsung's de-facto leader secured a pardon Friday of his conviction for bribing a former president in a corruption scandal that toppled a previous South Korean government, an act of leniency that underscored the tech company's huge influence in the nation.

Lee Jae-yong's pardon is partially symbolic since he was released on parole a year ago after serving 18 months of a prison term that would have ended in July, and critics say the billionaire has remained in control of Samsung even while behind bars. Still, the pardon will allow the heir to the electronics juggernaut to fully resume his management duties and could make it easier for the company to pursue investments and mergers.

The Justice Ministry said President Yoon Suk Yeol, who as a prosecutor investigated the corruption scandal involving Lee, will issue the pardon Monday, a national holiday when some 1,700 people are set to receive clemency, including other top business leaders.

Lee, 54, was convicted in 2017 of bribing former President Park Geun-hye and her close confidante to win government support for a merger between two Samsung affiliates that tightened Lee's control over the corporate empire. Park and the confidante were also convicted in the scandal, which enraged South Koreans, who staged massive protests for months demanding an end to the shady ties between business and politics. The demonstrations eventually led to Park's ouster from office.

While some civic groups criticized the decision, recent opinion polls have indicated South Koreans — years removed from the protests in 2016 and 2017 — largely favored granting Lee a pardon. That reflects the continuing hold Samsung has in a country where it makes not just smartphones and TVs but also issues credit cards, builds luxury apartment buildings and runs the country's most sought-after hospital.

Business leaders and politicians had also called for Lee's pardon, which they said would allow Samsung, one of the world's largest makers of computer memory chips and smartphones, to be bolder and quicker in business decisions by fully reinstating his rights to run the business empire.

Justice Minister Han Dong-hoon said the pardons of the business tycoons were aimed at "overcoming the economic crisis through encouraging business activity" at a time when South Koreans are grappling with rising prices, high personal debt and a faltering job market.

Lee's detractors say he already fully resumed his management duties once out on parole — even though South Korea's law bans people convicted of major financial crimes from returning to work for five years following the end of their sentences. Former Justice Minister Park Beom-kye defended Lee's involvement in Samsung's management, insisting that his activities weren't in violation of the ban because the billionaire wasn't receiving wages from Samsung.

In a statement released through Samsung, Lee said he was grateful for "receiving an opportunity to start anew."

"I want to express my apologies for causing concerns for many people because of my shortcomings. I will work even harder to fulfill my responsibilities and duties as a businessperson," Lee said.

Lee still faces a separate trial on charges of stock price manipulation and auditing violations related to the 2015 merger.

Among others set to be pardoned is Lotte Group Chairman Shin Dong-bin, who received a suspended prison term in 2018 on similar charges of bribing Park, whom then-President Moon Jae-in pardoned in December. Chang Sae-joo, chairman of Dongkuk Steel Mill, and former STX Group Chairman Kang Duk-soo will also receive clemency.

A coalition of civic groups, including People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, issued a statement criticizing the move to pardon the business leaders, accusing Yoon of cozying up to "chaebol," referring to the family-owned conglomerates that dominate the country's economy.

"President Yoon Suk Yeol's sell-out (to business) sends a signal to chaebol chiefs that they are free to commit all the crimes they want," the groups said, accusing Yoon of damaging the rule of law.

Former President Park was convicted of a broad range of corruption crimes, including colluding with her longtime confidante, Choi Soon-sil, to take millions of dollars in bribes and extortion from Samsung and other major companies while she was in office.



She faced a prison term of more than two decades before Moon pardoned her in December, citing a need to promote unity in the politically divided nation. Choi remains in jail. Chang, of Dongkuk Steel Mill, was released on parole in 2018 with about six months left on a 3 1/2-year prison term on charges that he embezzled millions of dollars in corporate funds and used some of it to gamble in Las Vegas.

South Korea's Supreme Court last year confirmed a suspended prison sentence for Kang, who headed STX from 2003 to 2014, on charges of embezzling corporate funds and other crimes.

A notable exclusion from Yoon's pardons was former President Lee Myung-bak, who in June was granted a temporary release from a 17-year prison term after prosecutors acknowledged his health problems.

Han, the justice minister, said that the government did not consider the pardons of any convicted politicians or government employees this time, saying that the focus was on the economy.

Lee, a CEO-turned-conservative hero before his fall from grace, was convicted of taking bribes from big businesses including Samsung, embezzling funds from a company that he owned, and other corruption-related crimes before and during his presidency from 2008 to 2013.

## Dairy farm in Ukraine's Donbas region struggles to survive

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

DMYTRIVKA, Ukraine (AP) — One of the last working dairy farms on Ukrainian-controlled territory in the eastern Donbas region is doing everything it can to stay afloat in a place where neither workers nor animals are safe from Russia's devastating war.

Only around 200 head of cattle remain of the nearly 1,300 kept at the farm before Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. The 8,000-acre (3,200-hectare) farm, set amid rolling hills in embattled Donetsk province, is producing two tons of milk a day compared to 11 tons daily before the war, its managers say.

While a significant proportion of the KramAgroSvit farm's revenues also once came from cultivating wheat, continuing that work comes with risks. As a farm employee harvested wheat with a grain combine on Sunday, the machine hit two land mines, resulting in a fire that burned more than 60% of the worker's body.

The worker survived, but is in critical condition as doctors tend to an infection.

An inspection by an emergency services team found 19 additional mines in the field, said Ihor Kriuchenko, the farm's senior livestock technician, adding that going out to harvest now is "very dangerous due to the shelling and mines." Farmhands drive combines around visible artillery fragments to avoid them.

Such realities of war have created a cascading series of complications that coalesced to drive the farm's business down dramatically. In the nearby city of Kramatorsk, the provisional capital of Donetsk province, Russia's attacks and a lack of gas for heating and cooking have caused most residents to evacuate, creating less demand for dairy products and, consequently, falling profits.

Business also took a hit as Russian forces captured several other cities where the farm had distributed its milk and those markets disappeared behind the front line.

Such conditions — disrupted demand and supply chains along with danger from shelling and mines — have made the prospect of farming in eastern Ukraine fraught with risks that threaten the future of the KramAgroSvit farm, which has been in business since 2003.

"This farm was hit (by a rocket), and 38 cows were killed, plus some of our farming equipment and vehicles were destroyed. Investors decided it was too risky to keep so many cows here, so they were sold abroad," Kriuchenko said.

The farm's owner had all the pigs and rabbits once raised there slaughtered and sold amid the uncertainty, he said.

Anna Lavrenyuk, general director of Ukraine's Association of Milk Producers, said at the end of June that Ukrainian dairy farms lost at least 50,000 head of cattle worth an estimated \$136 million during the first three months of the war.

Approximately 800 industrial dairy farms lost assets that included animals, barns, farming equipment and animal feed, Lavrenyuk said, while milk yields in front-line and Russian-occupied territories dropped by more than half since the war began.

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Ukrainian milk production was likely to fall to 2 million tons for the year, down by 750,000 tons since 2021, she said.

Only around a third of the KramAgroSvit farm's previous staff of 63 employees remains, Kriuchenko said, and revenues have dropped six-fold since Russian forces launched their offensive to seize the Donbas, an industrial region made up of Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk province.

One such worker, Nataliia Onatska, lined up around 50 cows side by side on Wednesday and attached vacuum pumps to their udders in one of the farm's long, musty milking hangars.

She's spent her entire life on a farm and calls her job "the point of my life."

"I wish everything was like it was before and everyone had kept their jobs," Onatska said. "It's scary to live now. I'm just living from day to day."

The farm now feeds its wheat to the cows as grain prices have fallen and logistics costs have spiked, Kriuchenko said. The crop wasn't profitable on the market because of a Russian naval blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports that a U.N.-brokered agreement is only now slowly remedying.

But of all the myriad challenges facing the farm, he said, the most difficult part has been saying goodbye to colleagues who had invested so much in its success. Amid the cutbacks, he said, he had to fire his wife.

"It was very hard and sad to let all our staff go. Our team was brought together from nothing, and there was great teamwork, everything was good," he said. "It was a shock for me to say goodbye to them."

As Halyna Borysenko, another worker in the dairy, finished milking the cows for the day, she said she pitied them for also having to live through the war.

"The animals are acting differently. They're scared just like we are," she said. "They just can't say it out loud."

## Smyly stars as Cubs beat Reds in 2nd 'Field of Dreams' game

By JAY COHEN AP Baseball Writer

DYERSVILLE, Iowa (AP) — Standing among rows of Iowa cornstalks, Nico Hoerner had Johnny Bench on his left and Billy Williams right next to him.

"Pretty incredible," Hoerner said.

For sure. Even for a "Field of Dreams."

Led by Drew Smyly and a 10-hit attack, the Chicago Cubs beat the Cincinnati Reds 4-2 on Thursday night in Major League Baseball's second "Field of Dreams" game.

Nick Madrigal had three hits for Chicago in a throwback ballpark a short walk away from the main field for the 1989 movie. Smyly (5-6) pitched five scoreless innings and Ian Happ had two hits, including an RBI double that drove in Hoerner during a fast start for the Cubs.

"The atmosphere was amazing," Chicago manager David Ross said. "Really cool event."

The night began with Hall of Famer Ken Griffey Jr. and his father emerging from the iconic outfield cornstalks for their own version of a memorable scene from the film, delighting the sellout crowd of 7,823.

"Hey dad, do you wanna have a catch," Junior said.

"I'd like that," Senior said.

The Griffey's then played catch as more parents and children joined them on the field with their own balls and gloves, followed by the Cubs and Reds, dressed in special uniforms inspired by how the franchises looked in the early 20th century.

Williams and Bench were among a group of Hall of Famers from each franchise that also joined the festivities. Bench stood behind the plate for a ceremonial first pitch from Fergie Jenkins.

"What they've done here is incredible. ... I think every baseball player should experience this," Reds third baseman Kyle Farmer said.

Backed by Chicago's three-run first, Smyly improved to 3-1 with a 2.49 ERA in his last four starts. The left-hander allowed four hits and walked two while celebrating the fifth birthday for his daughter, Parker.

Rowan Wick worked the ninth for his seventh save.

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"A game like this ... you just feel like a kid again," Smyly said. "You're just out there playing baseball in the middle of Iowa."

Cincinnati dropped its fourth straight game. Matt Reynolds hit a two-run double in the seventh, but the last-place Reds went down in order in the final two innings.

Major League Baseball returned to Dyersville — population of about 4,400 — after its first "Field of Dreams" game was a smashing success. The Chicago White Sox topped the New York Yankees 9-8 on Tim Anderson's electric homer last year in the first MLB game in Iowa.

But the sequel lacked the drama of the original version. Chicago and Cincinnati dropped out of contention a long time ago, and the Cubs grabbed control right at the start against Nick Lodolo (3-4).

Seiya Suzuki and Happ each hit an RBI double in the first, and Hoerner had a run-scoring single. The rally started after Lodolo retired the first two batters.

"I didn't make pitches when I needed to when I was ahead in the count," Lodolo said.

Madrigal tacked on an RBI single for a 4-0 lead in the fourth.

## REMEMBERING RAY

The 1989 movie starred Kevin Costner, James Earl Jones, Ray Liotta and Amy Madigan. Liotta, who played the ghost of Shoeless Joe Jackson, died in May at age 67.

Costner narrated a tribute video for Liotta that was aired in the first.

"Long live Shoeless Joe and long live Ray," Costner said.

## IN MOURNING

Hall of Fame right-hander John Smoltz was on the broadcast for FOX Sports after his father, John Adam Smoltz, died earlier Thursday.

"He lived by his faith, he loved family and he would be so mad if I didn't do this game," the 55-year-old Smoltz said during the broadcast.

## TRAINER'S ROOM

Cubs: Willson Contreras appeared to roll his left ankle when he tried to scurry back to second after rounding the bag on Patrick Wisdom's single in the third. He was tagged out, but he was back behind the plate for the bottom half of the inning.

Reds: 2B Jonathan India (leg contusion) was replaced by Reynolds before the start of the fourth. India was hit on his lower left leg by a pitch in the first. Manager David Bell said India is day to day.

## UP NEXT

Following an off day, the three-game series resumes on Saturday in Cincinnati. Graham Ashcraft (5-2, 3.94 ERA) pitches for the Reds, and fellow right-hander Adrian Sampson (0-3, 3.83 ERA) starts for the Cubs.

## Afghan girls face uncertain future after 1 year of no school

By RAHIM FAIEZ and SIDDIQUILLA ALIZAI Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — For most teenage girls in Afghanistan, it's been a year since they set foot in a classroom. With no sign the ruling Taliban will allow them back to school, some are trying to find ways to keep education from stalling for a generation of young women.

At a house in Kabul, dozens gathered on a recent day for classes in an informal school set up by Sodaba Nazhand. She and her sister teach English, science and math to girls who should be in secondary school.

"When the Taliban wanted to take away the rights of education and the rights of work from women, I wanted to stand against their decision by teaching these girls," Nazhand told The Associated Press.

Hers is one of a number of underground schools in operation since the Taliban took over the country a year ago and banned girls from continuing their education past the sixth grade. While the Taliban have permitted women to continue attending universities, this exception will become irrelevant when there are no more girls graduating from high schools.

"There is no way to fill this gap, and this situation is very sad and concerning," Nazhand said.

The relief agency Save the Children interviewed nearly 1,700 boys and girls between the ages of 9 and 17 in seven provinces to assess the impact of the education restrictions.



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The survey, conducted in May and June and released Wednesday, found that more than 45% of girls are not going to school, compared with 20% of boys. It also found that 26% of girls are showing signs of depression, compared with 16% of boys.

Nearly the entire population of Afghanistan was thrown into poverty and millions were left unable to feed their families when the world cut off financing in response to the Taliban takeover.

Teachers, parents and experts all warn that the country's multiple crises, including the devastating collapse of the economy, are proving especially damaging to girls. The Taliban have restricted women's work, encouraged them to stay at home and issued dress codes requiring them to cover their faces, except for their eyes, though the codes are not always enforced.

The international community is demanding that the Taliban open schools for all girls, and the U.S. and EU have created plans to pay salaries directly to Afghanistan's teachers, keeping the sector going without putting the funds through the Taliban.

But the question of girls' education appears to have been tangled in behind-the-scenes differences among the Taliban. Some in the movement support returning girls to school — whether because they see no religious objection to it or because they want to improve ties with the world. Others, especially rural, tribal elders who make up the backbone of the movement, staunchly oppose it.

During their first time ruling Afghanistan in the 1990s, the Taliban imposed much stricter restrictions on women, banning school for all girls, barring women from work and requiring them to wear an all-encompassing burka if they went outside.

In the 20 years after the Taliban were driven from power in 2001, an entire generation of women returned to school and work, particularly in urban areas. Seemingly acknowledging those changes, the Taliban reassured Afghans when they seized control again last year that they would not return to the heavy hand of the past.

Officials have publicly insisted that they will allow teen girls back into school, but say time is needed to set up logistics for strict gender segregation to ensure an "Islamic framework."

Hopes were raised in March: Just before the new school year was to begin, the Taliban Education Ministry proclaimed everyone would be allowed back. But on March 23, the day of the reopening, the decision was suddenly reversed, surprising even ministry officials. It appeared that at the last minute, the Taliban's supreme leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, bowed to the opposition.

Shekiba Qaderi, a 16-year-old, recalled how she showed up that day, ready to start the 10th grade. She and all her classmates were laughing and excited, until a teacher came in and told them to go home. The girls broke into tears, she said. "That was the worst moment in our lives."

Since then, she's been trying to keep up with studies at home, reading her textbooks, novels and history books. She's studying English through movies and YouTube videos.

The unequal access to education cuts through families. Shekiba and a younger sister can't go to her school, but her two brothers can. Her older sister is at a private university studying law. But that is little comfort, said their father, Mohammad Shah Qaderi. Most of the professors have left the country, bringing down the quality of the education.

Even if the young woman gets a university degree, "what is the benefit?" asked Qaderi, a 58-year-old retired government employee.

"She won't have a job. The Taliban won't allow her to work," he said.

Qaderi said he has always wanted his children to get a higher education. Now that may be impossible, so he's thinking of leaving Afghanistan for the first time after riding out years of war.

"I can't see them growing in front of my eyes with no education; it is just not acceptable to me," he said.

Underground schools present another alternative, though with limitations.

A month after the Taliban takeover, Nazhand started teaching street children to read with informal outdoor classes in a park in her neighborhood. Women who couldn't read or write joined them, she said. Some time later, a benefactor who saw her in the park rented a house for her to hold classes in, and bought tables and chairs. Once she was operating inside, Nazhand included teen girls who were no longer

allowed to go to public school.

Now there are about 250 students, including 50 or 60 schoolgirls above sixth grade.

"I am not only teaching them school subjects, but also trying to teach them how to fight and stand for their rights," Nazhand said. The Taliban haven't changed from their first time in power in the late 1990s, she said. "These are the same Taliban, but we shouldn't be the same women of those years. We must struggle: by writing, by raising our voice, by any way possible."

Nazhand's school, and others like it, are technically illegal under the Taliban's current restrictions, but so far they haven't shut hers down. At least one other person operating a school declined to speak to reporters, however, fearing possible repercussions.

Despite her unwavering commitment, Nazhand worries about her school's future. Her benefactor paid for six months' rent on the house, but he died recently, and she doesn't have any way to keep paying for rent or supplies.

For students, the underground schools are a lifeline.

"It is so hard when you can't go to school," said one of them, Dunya Arbabzada. "Whenever I pass by my school and see the closed door ... it's so upsetting for me."

## European drought dries up rivers, kills fish, shrivels crops

By SYLVIE CORBET and NICOLAS GARRIGA Associated Press

LUX, France (AP) — Once, a river ran through it. Now, white dust and thousands of dead fish cover the wide trench that winds amid rows of trees in France's Burgundy region in what was the Tille River in the village of Lux.

From dry and cracked reservoirs in Spain to falling water levels on major arteries like the Danube, the Rhine and the Po, an unprecedented drought is afflicting nearly half of the European continent. It is damaging farm economies, forcing water restrictions, causing wildfires and threatening aquatic species.

There has been no significant rainfall for almost two months in Western, Central and Southern Europe. And the dry period is expected to continue in what experts say could be the worst drought in 500 years.

Climate change is exacerbating conditions as hotter temperatures speed up evaporation, thirsty plants take in more moisture and reduced snowfall in the winter limits supplies of fresh water available for irrigation in the summer. Europe isn't alone in the crisis, with drought conditions also reported in East Africa, the western United States and northern Mexico.

As he walked in the 15-meter-wide (50-foot-wide) riverbed in Lux, Jean-Philippe Couasné, chief technician at the local Federation for Fishing and Protection of the Aquatic Environment, listed the species of fish that had died in the Tille.

"It's heartbreaking," he said. "On average, about 8,000 liters (about 2,100 gallons) per second are flowing. ... And now, zero liters."

In some areas upstream, some of the trout and other freshwater species are able take shelter in pools via fish ladders. But such systems aren't available everywhere.

Without rain, the river "will continue to empty. And yes, all fish will die. ... They are trapped upstream and downstream, there's no water coming in, so the oxygen level will keep decreasing as the (water) volume will go down," Couasné said. "These are species that will gradually disappear."

Jean-Pierre Sonvico, the regional head of the federation, said diverting the fish to other rivers won't help because those waterways also are affected, which will lead to overcrowding and more deaths.

"Yes, it's dramatic because what can we do? Nothing," he said. "We're waiting, hoping for storms with rain, but storms are very local so we can't count on it."

The European Commission's Joint Research Center warned this week that drought conditions will get worse and potentially affect 47% of the continent.

Andrea Toreti, a senior researcher at the European Drought Observatory, said a drought in 2018 was so extreme that there were no similar events for the last 500 years, "but this year, I think, it is really worse."

For the next three months, "we see still a very high risk of dry conditions over Western and Central

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Europe, as well as the U.K.," Toretì said.

The current situation is the result of long periods of dry weather caused by changes in world weather systems, said meteorologist Peter Hoffmann of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research near Berlin.

"It's just that in summer we feel it the most," he said. "But actually the drought builds up across the year."

Climate change has lessened the temperature differences between regions, sapping the forces that drive the jet stream, which normally brings wet Atlantic weather to Europe, he said.

A weaker or unstable jet stream can result in unusually hot air coming to Europe from North Africa, leading to prolonged periods of heat. The reverse is also true, when a polar vortex of cold air from the Arctic can cause freezing conditions far south of where it would normally reach.

Hoffmann said observations in recent years have all been at the upper end of what the existing climate models predicted.

The drought has caused some European countries to impose restrictions on water usage, and shipping is endangered on the Rhine and the Danube.

The Rhine could reach critical low levels in the coming days, making the transport of goods — including coal and gasoline — increasingly difficult. On the Danube, authorities in Serbia have started dredging sand to deepen the waterway and keep vessels moving smoothly.

In neighboring Hungary, wide parts of popular Lake Velence near Budapest, have turned into patches of dried mud, beaching small boats. Aeration and water circulation equipment have been installed to protect wildlife, but water quality has deteriorated to the point that a ban on swimming was imposed at one beach on weekends.

Stretches of the Po, Italy's longest river, are so low that barges and boats that sank decades ago are resurfacing.

The drought also has affected southern England, which received only 10% of its average rainfall in July. Firefighters are battling an unprecedented number of grass fires and people in several areas have been banned from watering their lawns.

The Rivers Trust charity said England's chalk streams — which allow underground springs to bubble up through the spongy layer of rock — are drying up, endangering aquatic wildlife like kingfishers and trout.

Even in countries like Spain and Portugal, which are used to long periods without rain, there have been major consequences. In the Spanish region of Andalucia, some avocado farmers have had to sacrifice hundreds of trees to save others from wilting as the Vinuela reservoir in Malaga province dropped to only 13% of capacity, down 55% from a year ago.

Some European farmers are using water from the tap for their livestock in areas where ponds and streams have gone dry, using up to 100 litres (26 gallons) a day per cow.

In normally green Burgundy, home to the source of Paris' Seine River, the grass has turned yellow-brown and tractors churn up giant clouds of dust.

Baptiste Colson, who owns dairy cows and grows feed crops in the village of Moloy, said his animals are suffering in the drought, with the quality and quantity of the milk decreasing.

The 31-year-old head of the local Jeunes Agriculteurs (Young Farmers) union said he has been forced to dip into his winter supply of fodder in August.

"That is the biggest concern," Colson said.

EU corn production is expected to be 12.5 million tons below last year and sunflower production is projected to be 1.6 million tons lower, according to a report from S&P Global Commodity Insights.

Colson expects at least a 30% drop in corn yield, a major problem for feeding his cows.

"We know we'll have to buy food ... so the cows can continue producing milk," he said. "From an economic point of view, the cost will be high."

**At 75, India's democracy is under pressure like never before**

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press



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NEW DELHI (AP) — The Aug. 5 demonstrations by India's main opposition Congress party against soaring food prices and unemployment began like any other recent protest — an electorally weak opposition taking to the New Delhi streets against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's massively popular government.

The protests, however, quickly took a turn when key Congress lawmakers led by Rahul Gandhi — Modi's main opponent in the last two general elections — trooped to the Parliament, leading to fierce standoffs with police.

"Democracy is a memory (in India)," Gandhi later tweeted, describing the dramatic photographs that showed him and his party leaders being briefly detained by police.

Gandhi's statement was largely seen as yet another frantic effort by a crisis-ridden opposition party to shore up its relevance and was dismissed by the government. But it resonated amid growing sentiment that India's democracy — the world's largest with nearly 1.4 billion people — is in retreat and its democratic foundations are floundering.

Experts and critics say trust in the judiciary as a check on executive power is eroding. Assaults on the press and free speech have grown brazen. Religious minorities are facing increasing attacks by Hindu nationalists. And largely peaceful protests, sometimes against provocative policies, have been stamped out by internet clampdowns and the jailing of activists.

"Most former colonies have struggled to put a lasting democratic process in place. India was more successful than most in doing that," said Booker Prize-winning novelist and activist Arundhati Roy. "And now, 75 years on, to witness it being dismantled systematically and in shockingly violent ways is traumatic."

Modi's ministers say India's democratic principles are robust, even thriving.

"If today there is a sense in the world that democracy is, in some form, the future, then a large part of it is due to India," External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said in April. "There was a time when, in this part of the world, we were the only democracy."

History is on Jaishankar's side.

At midnight on August 15, 1947, the red sandstone parliamentary building in the heart of India's capital echoed with the high-pitched voice of Jawaharlal Nehru, the country's first prime minister.

"At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom," Nehru famously spoke, words that were heard over live radio by millions of Indians. Then he promised: "To the nations and peoples of the world, we send greetings and pledge ourselves to cooperate with them in furthering peace, freedom and democracy."

It marked India's transition from a British colony to a democracy — the first in South Asia — that has since transformed from a poverty-stricken nation into one of the world's fastest-growing economies, earning itself a seat at the global high table and becoming a democratic counterweight to its authoritarian neighbor, China.

Apart from a brief interruption in 1975 when a formal emergency was declared under the Congress party rule that saw outright censorship, India clung doggedly to its democratic convictions — largely due to free elections, an independent judiciary that confronted the executive, a thriving media, strong opposition and peaceful transitions of power.

But experts and critics say the country has been gradually departing from some commitments and argue the backsliding has accelerated since Modi came to power in 2014. They accuse his populist government of using unbridled political power to undermine democratic freedoms and preoccupying itself with pursuing a Hindu nationalist agenda.

"The decline seems to continue across several core formal democratic institutions... such as the freedom of expression and alternative sources of information, and freedom of association," said Staffan I. Lindberg, political scientist and director of the V-Dem Institute, a Sweden-based research center that rates the health of democracies.

Modi's party denies this. A spokesperson, Shehzad Poonawalla, said India has been a "thriving democracy" under Modi's rule and has witnessed "reclamation of the republic."

Most democracies are hardly immune to strains.

The number of countries experiencing democratic backsliding "has never been as high" as in the past

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decade, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance said last year, adding the U.S. to the list along with India and Brazil.

Still, the descent appears to be striking in India.

Earlier this year, the U.S.-based non-profit Freedom House downgraded India from a free democracy to "partially free." The V-Dem Institute classified it as an "electoral autocracy" on par with Russia. And the Democracy Index published by The Economist Intelligence Unit called India a "flawed democracy."

India's Foreign Ministry has called the downgrades "inaccurate" and "distorted." Many Indian leaders have said such reports are an intrusion in "internal matters," with India's Parliament disallowing debates on them.

Globally, India strongly advocates democracy. During the inaugural Summit for Democracy organized by the U.S. in December, Modi asserted the "democratic spirit" is integral to India's "civilization ethos."

At home, however, his government is seen bucking that very spirit, with independent institutions coming under increasing scrutiny.

Experts point to long pending cases with India's Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of key decisions taken by Modi's government as major concerns.

They include cases related to a controversial citizenship review process that has already left nearly 2 million people in Assam state potentially stateless, the now revoked semi-autonomous powers pertaining to disputed Kashmir, the opaque campaign finance laws that are seen disproportionately favoring Modi's party, and its alleged use of military-grade spyware to monitor political opponents and journalists.

India's judiciary, which is independent of the executive, has faced criticism in the past but the intensity has increased, said Deepak Gupta, a former Supreme Court judge.

Gupta said India's democracy appears to be "on the downswing" due to the court's inability to uphold civil liberties in some cases by denying people bail and the misuse of sedition and anti-terror laws by police, tactics that were also used by earlier governments.

"When it comes to adjudication of disputes... the courts have done a good job. But when it comes to their role as protectors of the rights of the people, I wish the courts had done more," he said.

The country's democratic health has also taken a hit due to the status of minorities.

The largely Hindu nation has been proud of its multiculturalism and has about 200 million Muslims. It also has a history of bloody sectarian violence, but hate speech and violence against Muslims have increased recently. Some states ruled by Modi's party have used bulldozers to demolish the homes and shops of alleged Muslim protesters, a move critics say is a form of collective punishment.

The government has sought to downplay these attacks, but the incidents have left the minority community reeling under fear.

"Sometimes you need extra protection for the minorities so that they don't feel that they are second-rate citizens," said Gupta.

That the rising tide of Hindu nationalism has helped buoy the fortunes of Modi's party is evident in its electoral successes. It has also coincided with a rather glaring fact: the ruling party has no Muslim lawmaker in the Parliament, a first in the history of India.

The inability to fully eliminate discrimination and attacks against other minorities like Christians, tribals and Dalits — who form the lowest rung of India's Hindu caste hierarchy — has exacerbated these concerns. Even though the government sees the ascent of an indigenous woman as India's ceremonial president as a significant step toward equal representation, critics have cast their doubts calling it political optics.

Under Modi, India's Parliament has also come under scrutiny for passing important laws with little debate, including a religious-driven citizenship law and controversial agricultural reform that led to massive protests. In a rare retreat, his government withdrew the farm laws and some saw it as a triumph of democracy, but that sentiment faded quickly with increased attacks on free speech and the press.

The country fell eight places, to 150, out of 180 countries in this year's Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders, which said "Indian journalists who are too critical of the government are subjected to all-out harassment and attack campaigns."

Shrinking press freedoms in India date to previous governments but the last few years have been worse. Journalists have been arrested. Some are stopped from traveling abroad. Dozens are facing criminal prosecution, including sedition. At the same time, the government has introduced sweeping regulatory laws for social media companies that give it more power to police online content.

"One has only to look around to see that the media has certainly shriveled up during Mr. Modi's regime," said Coomi Kapoor, journalist and author of "The Emergency: A Personal History," which chronicles India's only period of emergency.

"What happened in the emergency was upfront and there was no pretense. What is happening now is more gradual and sinister," she said.

Still, optimists like Kapoor say not everything is lost "if India strengthens its democratic institutions" and "pins its hopes on the judiciary."

"If the independence of the judiciary goes, then I'm afraid nothing will survive," she said.

Others, however, insist India's democracy has taken so many body blows that the future looks increasingly bleak.

"The damage is too structural, too fundamental," said Roy, the novelist and activist.

## **Anne Heche on life support, survival of crash 'not expected'**

By LYNN ELBER and ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writers

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Anne Heche is on life support after suffering a brain injury in a fiery crash a week ago and her survival isn't expected, according to a statement from a representative.

The actor, who is in a coma and in critical condition, is being kept on life support for possible organ donation, according to the statement released Thursday night on behalf of her family and friends.

Heche, who's been hospitalized at the Grossman Burn Center at West Hills hospital north of Los Angeles, suffered a "severe anoxic brain injury," the statement said. Such an injury is caused by a sustained lack of oxygen to the brain.

"She is not expected to survive," the statement said. "It has long been her choice to donate her organs and she is being kept on life support to determine if any are viable."

On the morning of Aug. 5, Heche's car smashed into a house in a neighborhood in west Los Angeles and a fire erupted with the car embedded inside the home.

Earlier Thursday, police said they were investigating Heche for driving under the influence. Detectives with a search warrant took a sample of her blood and found narcotics in her system, LAPD spokesperson Officer Jeff Lee said.

Toxicology tests, which can take weeks to complete, must be performed to identify the drugs more clearly and to differentiate them from any medication she may have been given for treatment at the hospital.

Evidence is still being gathered from the crash, police said, and they would present a case to prosecutors if it is warranted when the investigation is complete.

A representative for Heche declined comment on the investigation.

On Tuesday, Heche spokesperson Heather Duffy Boylston said she had been in a coma since after the accident, with burns that required surgery and lung injuries that required the use of a ventilator to breathe.

"Anne had a huge heart and touched everyone she met with her generous spirit. More than her extraordinary talent, she saw spreading kindness and joy as her life's work — especially moving the needle for acceptance of who you love," Thursday's statement said. "She will be remembered for her courageous honesty and dearly missed for her light."

Heche, 53, was among the most prominent film stars in Hollywood in the late 1990s, playing opposite actors including Johnny Depp ("Donnie Brasco") and Harrison Ford ("Six Days, Seven Nights"). In a 2001 memoir, she discussed her lifelong struggles with mental health.

She recently had recurring roles on the network TV series "Chicago P.D." and "All Rise," and in 2020 was a contestant on "Dancing With the Stars."



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## House Dems set to overcome GOP for climate, health care win

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A flagship Democratic economic bill perched on the edge of House passage Friday, placing President Joe Biden on the brink of a back-from-the-dead triumph on his climate, health and tax goals that could energize his party ahead of November's elections.

Democrats were poised to muscle the measure through the narrowly divided House Friday over solid Republican opposition. They employed similar party unity and Vice President Kamala Harris' tie-breaking vote Sunday to power the measure through the 50-50 Senate.

The package is but a shadow of Biden's initial vision and was produced only after a year of often bitter infighting between party leaders, progressives and centrists led by Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., empowered by that chamber's even split. Ultimately, Democrats thirsty to declare victory forged a compromise on abiding goals like reining in pharmaceutical costs, taxing large companies and, especially, curbing carbon emissions. They are hoping to show they can wring accomplishments from an often fractiously gridlocked Washington that alienates many voters.

"Climate is a health issue. It's a jobs issue. It's a security issue. And it's a values issue for us," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., told reporters this week. "I want more, of course, we always want more, but this is a great deal."

The bill's pillar is about \$375 billion over 10 years to encourage industry and consumers to shift from carbon-emitting to cleaner forms of energy, hailed by experts as Congress' biggest climate investment ever. That includes \$4 billion added to cope with the West's catastrophic drought.

Spending, tax credits and loans would bolster technology like solar panels, consumer efforts to improve home energy efficiency, emission-reducing equipment for coal- and gas-powered power plants and air pollution controls for farms, ports and low-income communities.

In a pair of top Democratic health priorities, another \$64 billion would help 13 million people pay premiums over the next three years for privately bought health insurance. Medicare would gain the power to negotiate its costs for pharmaceuticals, initially in 2026 for only 10 drugs. Medicare beneficiaries' out-of-pocket prescription costs would be limited to \$2,000 starting in 2025, and starting next year they would pay no more than \$35 monthly for insulin, the costly diabetes drug.

The bill would raise around \$740 billion in revenue over the decade, over a third from government savings from lower drug prices. More would flow from higher taxes on some \$1 billion corporations, levies on companies that repurchase their own stock and stronger IRS tax collections. Around \$300 billion would remain to defray budget deficits, a fraction of the period's projected total of \$16 trillion.

Republicans say the legislation's tax hikes will force companies to raise prices, worsening the nation's bout with its worst inflation since 1981 that is wounding Democrats' election prospects. Nonpartisan analysts say the measure will have negligible inflation impact one way or the other.

Echoing other culture war themes, the GOP has criticized initiatives like tax breaks for clean energy and electric vehicles as wasteful liberal daydreams. "If the Green New Deal and corporate welfare had a baby, it would look like this," said Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, the House Ways and Means Committee's top Republican.

Republicans say Democrats' plan to expand the IRS budget, aimed at collecting about \$120 billion in unpaid taxes, envisions 87,000 agents who'd be coming after families. Democrats called foul, saying their \$80 billion IRS budget boost would be to replace waves of retirees, not just agents, and to modernize equipment, and say families and small businesses earning below \$400,000 annually would not be targeted.

The GOP also says the bill would raise taxes on lower- and middle-income families. An analysis by Congress' nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation, which didn't include the bill's tax breaks for health care and energy, estimated that the corporate tax boosts would marginally affect those taxpayers, partly due to lower stock prices and wages.

The bill caps a fertile three months in which Congress has voted to improve veterans' health benefits, gird the semiconductor industry, moderately strengthen gun restrictions for younger buyers, finance Ukraine's

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war with Russia and add Finland and Sweden to NATO. All passed with bipartisan support, suggesting Republicans also want to display their productive side.

It's unclear voters will reward Democrats for the legislation after months of painfully high inflation dominating voters' attention. Though record gasoline prices have dipped, Biden's popularity dangles damagingly low and midterm elections have a consistent history of ending careers of lawmakers from the party that holds the White House.

Democrats' economic bill had its roots in early 2021, after Congress approved a \$1.9 trillion measure over GOP opposition to combat the pandemic-induced economic downturn. Emboldened, the new president and his party reached further.

They initially produced an ambitious 10-year, \$3.5 trillion environment and social plan they called Build Back Better. It featured free prekindergarten, paid family and medical leave, expanded Medicare benefits, increases for education and housing and an easing of immigration restrictions. It sought to roll back Trump-era tax breaks for the rich and corporations and proposed \$555 billion for climate efforts, well above the resources in Friday's legislation.

With Manchin opposing those amounts, it was sliced to a roughly \$2 trillion measure that Democrats moved through the House in November. Just before Christmas, Manchin unexpectedly sank that bill, citing fears of inflation and international uncertainty and earning brickbats from exasperated fellow Democrats from Capitol Hill and the White House.

With on-and-off closed-door talks between Manchin and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., seemingly dying, the two lawmakers shocked Washington and announced agreement last month on the new, pared-down package.

Manchin won billions for carbon capture technology for the fossil fuel industries he champions, plus procedures for more oil drilling on federal lands and promises for faster energy project permitting.

Centrist Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., also used her leverage for late concessions, eliminating planned higher taxes on hedge fund managers and helping win the drought funds.

## Fetterman plans 'raw' remarks in return to PA Senate race

By STEVE PEOPLES and JOHN WAWROW Associated Press

ERIE, Pa. (AP) — Pennsylvania Senate candidate John Fetterman is expected to open up about his personal health challenges as he officially returns to the campaign trail Friday, more than 90 days after the Democrat suffered a stroke that threatened his life and political prospects in one of the nation's premier Senate contests.

Fetterman will address voters Friday evening in Erie County, a politically competitive region in the state's northwestern corner. The appearance marks the 52-year-old lieutenant governor's only scheduled rally this month, although he's expected to appear at a handful of lower-profile events as he gradually ramps up his public schedule, according to campaign spokesman Joe Calvello.

Fetterman, who was hospitalized for several days after the May health scare, is expected to offer emotional remarks about his experience. He said in June that he almost died.

"He'll talk about how blessed he is to be back," Calvello said. "It'll be somewhat emotional — a little raw about what he went through, how grateful he is to be campaigning again."

Fetterman's return marks a significant development in the race to fill retiring Republican Sen. Pat Toomey's seat. The Pennsylvania contest offers Democrats perhaps their best pickup opportunity nationally as the two parties battle for Senate control in the November midterm elections. The chamber is now split 50-50, with Vice President Kamala Harris giving Democrats the narrowest of majorities with her tie-breaking vote.

Republican nominee Dr. Mehmet Oz, a celebrity heart surgeon endorsed by former President Donald Trump, has railed against Fetterman's prolonged public absence throughout the summer.

Oz posted a fake "Have You Seen This Person?" poster online last month. He needled Fetterman again Wednesday on social media. "It has been 90 DAYS since Fetterman's last public campaign event," Oz tweeted. "Pennsylvanians deserve answers."

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Fetterman's physical appearance is a central element of his nontraditional political brand.

At 6 feet, 9 inches, he sports a shaved head and tattooed arms, while usually wearing shorts and a sweatshirt. He's also an unapologetic progressive with a working-class background who supports legalizing marijuana, abolishing the Senate filibuster and establishing a national government health insurance program for everyone — "Medicare for all" in progressives' campaign jargon.

Fetterman's health has been a dominant issue in the Senate contest since the days before the May 17 primary, when his campaign revealed he had a stroke. He required surgery to implant a pacemaker with a defibrillator, and later disclosed that he also had a serious heart condition.

His doctor offered a blunt letter in early June detailing Fetterman's decision not to take prescribed medication or see a doctor for several years after a 2017 health scare.

"If he does what I've told him, and I do believe that he is taking his recovery and his health very seriously this time, he should be able to campaign and serve in the U.S. Senate without a problem," Dr. Ramesh Chandra wrote.

Fetterman is now taking his medication as prescribed, eating a low-sodium diet and walking 3 to 5 miles most days, Calvello said: "He's following the doctor's orders."

Voters may not detect any lingering symptoms, but he has mild speech and hearing issues.

"He'll miss a word here or there when he's speaking sometimes, or maybe in a crowded room he'll miss hearing a word," Calvello said. "Besides that, he's rock solid."

The high-profile Senate contest has been playing out on television and social media despite his extended absence.

Fetterman, who has dominated Oz in fundraising, has been running television ads promoting his candidacy for months. The Democrat has also drawn millions of views from creative social media posts, including one featuring a character from the infamous MTV show "Jersey Shore" telling Oz to come home. Oz is a former New Jersey resident, and it has been a major issue throughout the campaign.

Fetterman insisted he was well enough to win the Senate contest in a recent interview with the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

"I would never be in this if we were not absolutely, 100% able to run fully and to win — and we believe that we are," Fetterman told the newspaper.

## Suspect who tried to breach FBI office dies in standoff

By ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS and PATRICK ORSAGOS Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Ohio (AP) — Authorities are investigating the motives of an armed man who they say tried to breach the FBI's Cincinnati office, fled and died hours later in a rural standoff with law enforcement, a case unfolding as the FBI warns agents to take extra precautions amid increased social media threats to its employees and facilities.

Officials have warned of a rise in threats against federal agents in the days following a search of former President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

In the Cincinnati case, officials said a man tried to breach the visitor's screening area at the FBI office Thursday morning and fled when agents confronted him. He was later spotted by a state trooper along Interstate 71 and fired shots as the trooper chased him, said Lt. Nathan Dennis, an Ohio State Highway Patrol spokesperson.

The suspect eventually got out of his car on a rural road, exchanged gunfire with police and was injured, Dennis said. No one else was hurt.

Attempted negotiations failed, and police tried unsuccessfully to use unspecified "less lethal tactics," but the suspect was shot when he raised a gun toward officers, Dennis said. The man died at the scene.

Dennis said he couldn't comment Thursday on whether the suspect said anything to officers during the standoff.

The man is believed to have been in Washington in the days leading up to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection and may have been present at the Capitol on the day of the attack, according to a law enforcement



official briefed on the matter. The official could not discuss details of the investigation publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The suspect was identified as Ricky Shiffer, 42, according to the law enforcement official. He was not charged with any crimes in connection with the Jan. 6 attack, the official said. Federal investigators are examining whether Shiffer may have had ties to far-right extremist groups, including the Proud Boys, the official said.

There have been growing threats in recent days against FBI agents and offices across the country after federal agents executed a search warrant at Mar-a-Lago. On Gab, a social media site popular with white supremacists and antisemites, users have warned they are preparing for an armed revolution.

Federal officials have also been tracking an array of other concerning chatter on Gab and other platforms threatening violence against federal agents. FBI Director Christopher Wray denounced the threats as he visited another FBI office in Nebraska on Wednesday.

"Violence against law enforcement is not the answer, no matter who you're upset with," Wray said Wednesday in Omaha.

The FBI on Wednesday also warned its agents to avoid potential protesters, and to ensure their security key cards are "not visible outside FBI space," citing an increase in social media threats to bureau personnel and facilities.

The warning did not specifically mention this week's search of Mar-a-Lago but attributed the online threats to "recent media reporting on FBI investigative activity."

## Trump calls for 'immediate' release of Mar-a-Lago warrant

By ERIC TUCKER and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump called late Thursday for the "immediate" release of the federal warrant the FBI used to search his Florida estate, hours after the Justice Department had asked a court to unseal the warrant, with Attorney General Merrick Garland citing the "substantial public interest in this matter."

In messages posted on his Truth Social platform, Trump wrote, "Not only will I not oppose the release of documents ... I am going a step further by ENCOURAGING the immediate release of those documents." He continued to assail the FBI search of Mar-a-Lago as "unAmerican, unwarranted and unnecessary."

"Release the documents now!" he wrote.

The Justice Department request earlier Thursday is striking because such documents traditionally remain sealed during a pending investigation. But the department appeared to recognize that its silence since the search had created a vacuum for bitter verbal attacks by Trump and his allies, and that the public was entitled to the FBI's side about what prompted Monday's action at the former president's home.

"The public's clear and powerful interest in understanding what occurred under these circumstances weighs heavily in favor of unsealing," said a motion filed in federal court in Florida on Thursday.

Should the warrant be released — the request is now with the judge — it could disclose unflattering information about the former president and about FBI scrutiny of his handling of sensitive government documents right as he prepares for another run for the White House. During his successful 2016 campaign, he pointed frequently to an FBI investigation into his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, over whether she mishandled classified information.

It's unclear at this point how much information would be included in the documents, if made public, or if they would encompass an FBI affidavit that would presumably lay out a detailed factual basis for the search. The department specifically requested the unsealing of the warrant as well as a property receipt listing the items that were seized, along with two unspecified attachments.

To obtain a search warrant, federal authorities must prove to a judge that probable cause exists to believe that a crime was committed. Garland said he personally approved the warrant, a decision he said the department did not take lightly given that standard practice where possible is to select less intrusive tactics than a search of one's home.

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In this case, according to a person familiar with the matter, there was substantial engagement with Trump and his representatives prior to the search warrant, including a subpoena for records and a visit to Mar-a-Lago a couple of months ago by FBI and Justice Department officials to assess how the documents were stored. The person was not authorized to discuss the matter by name and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Neither Trump nor the FBI has said anything about what documents the FBI might have recovered, or what precisely agents were looking for. But the former president complained anew Thursday about the search.

Trump, who for years has lambasted the FBI and sought to sow distrust among his supporters in its decisions, said the warrant was served and the search conducted despite his cooperation with the Justice Department over the search.

In a post to his Truth Social platform, Trump said that his "attorneys and representatives were cooperating fully" prior to the search, and that government officials "could have had whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, if we had it."

The Justice Department has until Friday afternoon to alert the judge about whether Trump will object to the release.

FBI and Justice Department policy cautions against discussing ongoing investigations, both to protect the integrity of probes and to avoid unfairly maligning someone who is being scrutinized but winds up ultimately not being charged. That's especially true in the case of search warrants, where supporting court papers are routinely kept secret as the investigation proceeds.

In this case, though, Garland cited the fact that Trump himself had provided the first public confirmation of the FBI search, "as is his right." The Justice Department, in its new filing, also said that disclosing information about it now would not harm the court's functions.

Even so, Garland, in a hastily scheduled public statement delivered from the Justice Department podium, appeared to acknowledge the unusual nature of the department's request as he declined to take questions or provide any substantive details about the FBI's investigation.

"Much of our work is by necessity conducted out of the public eye. We do that to protect the constitutional rights of all Americans and to protect the integrity of our investigations," he said. "Federal law, longstanding department rules and our ethical obligations prevent me from providing further details as to the basis of the search at this time."

The Justice Department under Garland has been leery of public statements about politically charged investigations, or of confirming to what extent it might be investigating Trump as part of a broader probe into the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol and efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

The department has tried to avoid being seen as injecting itself into presidential politics, as happened in 2016 when then-FBI Director James Comey made an unusual public statement announcing that the FBI would not be recommending criminal charges against Clinton regarding her handling of email — and when he spoke up again just over a week before the election to notify Congress that the probe was being effectively reopened because of the discovery of new emails.

The Mar-a-Lago search warrant served Monday was part of an ongoing Justice Department investigation into the discovery of classified White House records recovered from Trump's home in Palm Beach, Florida, earlier this year. The National Archives had asked the department to investigate after saying 15 boxes of records it retrieved from the estate included classified records. Multiple federal laws govern the handling of classified information.

The attorney general also condemned verbal attacks on FBI and Justice Department personnel over the search. Some Republican allies of Trump have called for the FBI to be defunded. Large numbers of Trump supporters have called for the warrant to be released hoping they it will show that Trump was unfairly targeted.

"I will not stand by silently when their integrity is unfairly attacked," Garland said of federal law enforcement agents, calling them "dedicated, patriotic public servants."

Earlier Thursday, an armed man wearing body armor tried to breach a security screening area at an FBI

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field office in Ohio, then fled and was later killed after a standoff with law enforcement. A law enforcement official briefed on the matter identified the man as Ricky Shiffer and said he is believed to have been in Washington in the days leading up to the attack on the Capitol and may have been there on the day it took place.

## Man who tried to breach FBI office killed after standoff

By ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS and PATRICK ORSAGOS Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Ohio (AP) — An armed man clad in body armor who tried to breach the FBI's Cincinnati office on Thursday was shot and killed by police after he fled the scene and engaged in an hourslong standoff in a rural part of the state, the Ohio State Highway Patrol said.

The confrontation came as officials warned of an increase in threats against federal agents in the days following a search of former President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

The man is believed to have been in Washington in the days leading up to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection and may have been present at the Capitol on the day of the attack, according to a law enforcement official briefed on the matter. The official could not discuss details of the investigation publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The suspect was identified as Ricky Shiffer, 42, according to the law enforcement official. He was not charged with any crimes in connection with the Jan. 6 attack, the official said. Federal investigators are examining whether Shiffer may have had ties to far-right extremist groups, including the Proud Boys, the official said.

Shiffer "attempted to breach" the visitor's screening area at the FBI office at around 9:15 a.m. and fled when agents confronted him, according to federal authorities' account of the incident. After fleeing onto Interstate 71, he was spotted by a trooper and fired shots as the trooper pursued him, said Lt. Nathan Dennis, a Ohio State Highway Patrol spokesperson, at a press conference.

Shiffer left the interstate north of Cincinnati with police in pursuit, and got out of his car on a rural road. He exchanged gunfire with police and sustained injuries, although no one else was hurt, Dennis said. A separate highway patrol statement said Shiffer had used his car for cover during the standoff.

Shiffer was shot after he raised a gun toward police at around 3:45 p.m. Thursday, Dennis said. The fatal encounter with police happened after negotiations failed and police tried unsuccessfully to use "less lethal tactics," Dennis said, without providing details.

State highway workers blocked off roads leading to the scene as a helicopter flew over the area. Officials locked down a mile radius near the interstate and urged residents and business owners to lock doors and stay inside.

There have been growing threats in recent days against FBI agents and offices across the country after federal agents executed a search warrant at Mar-a-Lago. On Gab, a social media site popular with white supremacists and antisemites, users have warned they are preparing for an armed revolution.

Federal officials have also been tracking an array of other concerning chatter on Gab and other platforms threatening violence against federal agents. FBI Director Christopher Wray denounced the threats as he visited another FBI office in Nebraska on Wednesday.

"Violence against law enforcement is not the answer, no matter who you're upset with," Wray said Wednesday in Omaha.

The FBI on Wednesday also warned its agents to avoid potential protesters, and to ensure their security key cards are "not visible outside FBI space," citing an increase in social media threats to bureau personnel and facilities.

The warning did not specifically mention this week's search of Mar-a-Lago but attributed the online threats to "recent media reporting on FBI investigative activity."

## Brazilians rally for democracy, seek to rein in Bolsonaro

By DIANE JEANTET, DÉBORA ÁLVARES and MAURÍCIO SAVARESE Associated Press



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SAO PAULO (AP) — Thousands of Brazilians flocked to a law school Thursday in defense of the nation's democratic institutions, an event that carried echoes of a gathering nearly 45 years ago when citizens joined together at the same site to denounce a brutal military dictatorship.

In 1977, the masses poured into the University of Sao Paulo's law school to listen to a reading of "A Letter to Brazilians," a manifesto calling for a prompt return of the rule of law. On Thursday, they heard declarations defending democracy and the country's elections systems, which President Jair Bolsonaro has repeatedly attacked ahead of his reelection bid.

While the current manifestos don't specifically name Bolsonaro, they underscore the country's widespread concern that the far-right leader may follow in former U.S. President Donald Trump's footsteps and reject election results not in his favor in an attempt to cling to power.

"We are at risk of a coup, so civil society must stand up and fight against that to guarantee democracy," José Carlos Dias, a former justice minister who helped write the 1977 letter and the two documents read Thursday, told The Associated Press.

In Sao Paulo, drivers stuck in traffic on one of the main roads to the law school applauded and honked as marching students chanted pro-democracy slogans. A huge inflatable electronic voting machine by the building's main entrance bore the slogan "RESPECT THE VOTE".

Inside, hundreds of guests gathered in the university's Great Hall to hear speeches, while others stood outside watching on big flat screens.

The proclamations are contained in two letters. The first went online on July 26 and has been signed by nearly 1 million citizens, including ordinary people; popular musicians such as Caetano Veloso and Anitta; high-profile bankers and executives; and presidential candidates, among them former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who leads all polls ahead of the October election.

The second letter, published in newspapers last Friday, carries the endorsement of hundreds of companies in banking, oil, construction and transportation — sectors that traditionally have been averse to taking public political stances, said Carlos Melo, a political science professor at Insper University in Sao Paulo. They appear to have made an exception now, given the fear that any democratic backslide would be bad for business, he said.

"Democracy is important for the economy," he said.

Bolsonaro's commitment to democracy has been scrutinized since he took office, in large part because the former army captain has insistently glorified the country's two-decade dictatorship, which ended in 1985. Earlier this year he met with Hungary's autocratic leader, Viktor Orbán, and Russia's Vladimir Putin.

The president only spoke about the event late Thursday, saying it was crafted to support da Silva's campaign. He also criticized the Workers' Party party for supporting leftist authoritarian regimes in Cuba and Venezuela.

For over a year, in actions that appear to be lifted directly from Trump's playbook, Bolsonaro has claimed Brazil's electronic voting machines are prone to fraud, though — like Trump — he never presented any evidence. At one point, he threatened that elections would be suspended if Congress didn't approve a bill to introduce printed receipts of votes. The bill didn't pass.

Bolsonaro also began expressing desire for greater involvement of the armed forces in election oversight. Last week, army officials visited the electoral authority's headquarters to inspect the voting machines' source codes. Bolsonaro has alleged that some of the authority's top officials are working against him.

At the law school on Thursday, Carlos Silveira carried a sign that read: "The military doesn't count votes."

"We are here because it is riskier not to do anything," said Silveira, 43. "Bolsonaro has suggested a big anti-democratic act before the election, and the military has remained on his side, it seems. We want to show them we are the majority, and that our quest for democracy will win."

When Bolsonaro launched his campaign, he called on supporters to flood the streets for Sept. 7 independence day celebrations. On that date last year, he declared before tens of thousands who rallied at his behest that only God can remove him from power. That same day, he declared he would no longer heed rulings from a Supreme Court justice, threatening to plunge the country into an institutional crisis.

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He later backtracked, saying his comment was made in the heat of the moment.

Bolsonaro's rhetoric resonates with his base, but is increasingly alienating him politically, Melo said.

Since last year, the electoral authority has been proactive in countering claims against the voting system. Its top officials, who are also Supreme Court justices, have made repeated statements in its defense. Behind the scenes, they have been working overtime to recruit allies in the legislature and private sector, though many had been loath to echo their public pronouncements.

A turning point came last month, after Bolsonaro called foreign ambassadors to the presidential residence to lecture them on the electronic vote's supposed vulnerabilities. Since then, both leaders of Congress and the prosecutor-general, all of whom are considered Bolsonaro allies, have expressed confidence in the system's reliability.

The U.S. also weighed in, with its State Department issuing a statement the day after the ambassadors' meeting to say the Brazilian electoral system and democratic institutions are a "model for the world." In a July conference with regional defense ministers in Brazil's capital, Brasilia, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said militaries should carry out their missions responsibly, especially during elections.

The letters — which at any other time might have been a dry exercise relegated to academia — have struck a chord with society. Television stations in recent days have aired clips of artists reading the pro-democracy pledge, and rallies are being called in 22 cities nationwide.

One of those invited to speak at the university law school was Arminio Fraga, a prominent asset manager and former central bank chief during a previous, center-right administration.

"I am here today ... with such a diverse group that sometimes fought on opposite sides, doing all we can now to preserve what is sacred to us all. That's our democracy," said Fraga, an outspoken Bolsonaro critic.

Bolsonaro, for his part, has played down concerns, deriding the manifestos as "little letters" and insisting that he respects the Constitution. On Thursday, in a public swipe to the law school rally on Twitter, he remarked: "Today, a very important act took place ... Petrobras reduced, once again, the price of diesel."

On Twitter, he added Thursday night: "Brazil already has its letter for democracy; the constitution. That is the only letter that matters to assure the democratic rule of law, but it was precisely the one that was attacked by those who promote a parallel text that, for legal effects, is worth less than toilet paper."

Still, concern about Bolsonaro's fiery rhetoric has spread even among some allies and has undermined their efforts to keep the peace between the administration and other institutions, two Cabinet ministers told The Associated Press. They spoke on condition of anonymity, as they weren't authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Bolsonaro's party has distanced itself from claims that the election could be compromised. The party's leader sought out the electoral court's president to assure him of his trust in the voting system, Augusto Rosa, the party's vice president, told the AP.

In any case, the election will be an uphill battle for Bolsonaro. More than half the people surveyed by pollster Datafolha said they wouldn't vote for him under any circumstance, though support has perked up recently amid lower unemployment, reduced gasoline prices and higher welfare spending. Analysts said they expected da Silva's lead to fall as the election nears, given that incumbents tend to benefit from the state machine. A close race would make preelection promises to respect results all the more relevant.

## Groups get creative to help Alaska voters with ranked voting

By BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — Drag performers shimmied up and down a walkway between café tables, as enthusiastic patrons took photos, waved cash and filled out ballots ranking the shows.

The mock election, fueled by performances that brought the din of an Anchorage, Alaska, café to a roar, was aimed at teaching voters about the state's new ranked choice voting system.

The first ranked voting election under a suite of elections changes approved by Alaska voters in 2020 will be the Aug. 16 special U.S. House election featuring Republicans Sarah Palin and Nick Begich and Democrat Mary Peltola.

Organizations have gotten creative in trying to help voters understand how to cast their ballot, as the

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mock election featuring drag performers shows.

Under ranked voting, ballots are counted in rounds. A candidate can win outright with more than 50% of the vote in the first round. If no one hits that threshold, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. Voters who chose that candidate as their top pick have their votes count for their next choice. Rounds continue until two candidates remain, and whoever has the most votes wins.

Leaders of some of the efforts see their work as critical to getting voters comfortable with ranked voting, whether they like the system or not, and to helping voters avoid errors in casting their ballots.

"In the spirit of democracy, you need to at least understand how this works," said Bernadette Wilson, state director of Americans for Prosperity-Alaska. The group opposed the 2020 ballot initiative but "we lost," she said. The new system is "the law of the land, and we have an election coming up."

While Americans for Prosperity Action-Alaska has endorsed Begich, Wilson has avoided using the actual candidates as examples in videos she's posted on Facebook explaining the system, opting instead to demonstrate with colorful sticky notes on a whiteboard. She also did a presentation and Q&A at an Anchorage theater, an event sponsored by an education wing of the group, Americans for Prosperity Foundation.

A commenter on one of Wilson's posts said: "I am glad she understands. Clear as mud to me."

Wilson said she wonders how many people risk incorrectly filling out their ballot and having it rejected because "they read a comment on Facebook somewhere" or got bad information from a friend.

Maine uses ranked voting in state-level primaries and in general elections for federal offices. But Alaska's unique system combines open primaries with ranked vote general elections. The top four finishers in each primary race, regardless of party affiliation, advance to the general election.

Supporters see ranked choice as a way to give voters more choice and to have candidates seek support from beyond their traditional bases.

Three candidates are in the House special election after elections officials and courts determined that independent Al Gross, who finished third in the special primary, withdrew from the race too late for fifth-place finisher Republican Tara Sweeney to make the ballot in his place.

The winner will serve the remainder of the late Rep. Don Young's term, which ends early next year. Young died in March.

The special election will be on one side of the ballot. The other side will feature regular primary races, in which voters select one candidate per race.

Palin at a recent forum called ranked voting "convoluted" and complicated and said it should be changed. Former President Donald Trump, who has endorsed Palin, at a rally in Anchorage last month called ranked choice a "rigged deal."

Palin's campaign did not respond to questions from The Associated Press about whether the campaign is trying to help voters understand the system or encouraging them to rank a certain way. Neither did Peltola's. Peltola, at the forum, said she was hopeful about the new system.

Begich said his job is to make sure voters mark him first. Begich, who said he would like to see Alaska return to its old system, said he's focused on campaigning and leaving education around the process to others.

The Alaska Division of Elections, which oversees elections, has produced ads, videos, fliers and online explainers. But a candidate for governor, Democrat Les Gara, said one of its mailers risks confusing people because it uses a mock state Senate race as a ranked choice example when no state legislative races will be ranked in August. A division spokesperson did not respond to the criticism.

Some of the outreach efforts are political. For example, the National Republican Congressional Committee in a video encourages voters to "leave the Democrat blank" and only rank the Republicans in the House special election.

The Alaska Democratic Party is urging voters to "rank the candidate(s) that most closely align with their values."

The Alaska Center Education Fund, a nonpartisan arm of the progressive-leaning The Alaska Center, helped sponsor the recent "Drag out the Vote" event in Anchorage. Kyla Kosednar, the fund's advocacy director, said the fund's work is focused this year on young and first-time voters.



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"We try to add those fun elements into these voting events so that folks are more likely to take time out of their busy summer schedule and come learn about ranked choice voting," Kosednar said.

Kosednar said Young's death accelerated the timeline for educating voters. She said some people don't realize an election is happening or are unfamiliar with the new system. She said practicing helps.

"Once people do practice it they're like, 'Oh, this makes total sense,'" she said.

Sarah Erkmann Ward, who owns a communications agency in Anchorage, has a contract with Alaskans for Better Elections and is doing outreach to help conservatives understand the system, she said. Alaskans for Better Elections backed the new elections system and has been working with a variety of groups in efforts to help voters understand it.

Ward said she hasn't seen any ranked voting skeptics leave her presentations an advocate.

"It's more of a realization that, 'OK, this is not as hard as I thought, still not wild about the idea but I know how to vote.' And that's really the goal here, just to get people comfortable with how you vote."

## Sweeping climate bill pushes American energy to go green

By SETH BORENSTEIN, MATTHEW DALY and MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After decades of inaction in the face of escalating natural disasters and sustained global warming, Congress hopes to make clean energy so cheap in all aspects of life that it's nearly irresistible. The House is poised to pass a transformative bill Friday that would provide the most spending to fight climate change by any one nation ever in a single push.

Friday's anticipated action comes 34 years after a top scientist grabbed headlines warning Congress about the dangers of global warming. In the decades since, there have been 308 weather disasters that have each cost the nation at least \$1 billion, the record for the hottest year has been broken 10 times and wildfires have burned an area larger than Texas.

The crux of the long-delayed bill, singularly pushed by Democrats in a closely divided Congress, is to use incentives to spur investors to accelerate the expansion of clean energy such as wind and solar power, speeding the transition away from the oil, coal and gas that largely cause climate change.

The United States has put the most heat-trapping gases into the air, burning more inexpensive dirty fuels than any other country. But the nearly \$375 billion in climate incentives in the Inflation Reduction Act are designed to make the already plummeting costs of renewable energy substantially lower at home, on the highways and in the factory. Together these could help shrink U.S. carbon emissions by about two-fifths by 2030 and should chop emissions from electricity by as much as 80%.

Experts say it isn't enough, but it's a big start.

"This legislation is a true game-changer. It will create jobs, lower costs, increase U.S. competitiveness, reduce air pollution," said former Vice President Al Gore, who held his first global warming hearing 40 years ago. "The momentum that will come out of this legislation, cannot be underestimated."

The U.S. action could spur other nations to do more — especially China and India, the two largest carbon emitters along with the U.S. That in turn could lower prices for renewable energy globally, experts said.

Because of the specific legislative process in which this compromise was formed, which limits it to budget-related actions, the bill does not regulate greenhouse gas emissions, but deals mainly in spending, most of it through tax credits as well as rebates to industry, consumers and utilities.

Investments work better at fostering clean energy than regulations, said Leah Stokes, an environmental policy professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The climate bill is likely to spur billions in private investment, she said: "That's what's going to be so transformative."

The bill promotes vital technologies such as battery storage. Clean energy manufacturing gets a big boost. It will be cheaper for consumers to make climate-friendly purchasing decisions. There are tax credits to make electric cars more affordable, help for low-income people making energy-efficiency upgrades and incentives for rooftop solar and heat pumps.

There are also incentives for nuclear power and projects that aim to capture and remove carbon from the atmosphere.

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The bill moves to ensure that poor and minority communities that have borne the brunt of pollution benefit from climate spending. Farmers will receive help switching to climate-friendly practices and there's money for energy research and to encourage electric heavy-duty trucks in place of diesel.

The Superfund program, used to pay for cleanup of the nation's most heavily-polluted industrial sites, will receive more revenue from a bigger tax on oil.

The Rhodium Group research firm estimates the bill would dramatically change the arc of future U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, cutting them by 31% to 44% in 2030, compared to what had been shaping up to be 24% to 35% by 2005 without the bill, said Rhodium partner John Larsen. Clean power on the grid, an upcoming Rhodium report says, would jump from under 40% now to between 60% and 81% by 2030, he said.

"It's not as big as I want, but it's also bigger than anything we've ever done," said Sen. Brian Schatz, a Hawaii Democrat who leads the Senate climate caucus. "A 40% emissions reduction is nothing the U.S. has ever come close to before."

As decisive a change as it is for U.S. policy and emissions, it still does not reach the official U.S. goal of cutting carbon pollution roughly in half by 2030 to achieve net-zero carbon emissions across the economy by 2050.

Not everyone is impressed.

"This law is big for the U.S. but in global terms long overdue," said Niklas Hohne, co-founder of the New Climate Institute in Germany. "The U.S. has a long way to go on climate change and is starting from a very, very high emission level."

When U.S. historic carbon emissions are factored in, U.S. spending still lags behind Italy, France, South Korea, Japan and Canada, according to Brian O'Callaghan, lead researcher at the Oxford Economic Recovery Project at the University of Oxford. He noted the bill has nothing to fulfill America's broken promise of billions of dollars in climate aid for poor nations.

President Joe Biden has frequently said America is back in the fight against climate change, but other leaders have been skeptical with no legislation to back his claim.

And there may be disappointment. Americans hoping to buy an electric car may find many models ineligible for rebates until more components are made in the U.S. Local fights over siting new renewable energy projects could also hamper the pace of the buildout, some experts said. Environmental justice communities are concerned they'll be asked to accept new carbon capture projects.

Republicans, who unanimously opposed the bill in the Senate, say it would add to consumers' energy costs, with House GOP Whip Steve Scalise claiming it "wastes billions of dollars in Green New Deal slush funds."

Rhodium's Larsen, who crunched the numbers in the bill, said it would lead to consumers paying up to \$112 less a year in energy costs.

"As long as I've been in this game, progress on climate has always been higher costs for consumers. That's not how this bill works," Larsen said in an interview.

The Democrats didn't have a vote to spare in the evenly divided Senate and Sen. Joe Manchin, a conservative Democrat from coal-producing West Virginia, had long dashed hopes of an ambitious deal. But two weeks ago, faced with public shaming by environmental groups and sharp criticism even from his own colleagues, he stunned Washington by announcing his support for a bill that reduces drug costs, targets inflation and boosts renewables. Since the deal was announced July 27, Manchin has been an avid cheerleader for its passage. Sen. Krysten Sinema, D-Arizona, provided the vital 50th vote, allowing Vice President Kamala Harris to break the Senate tie.

The result is a 730-page bill that spends money without directly taking on fossil fuels, a disappointment to many on the left. Gore said the fossil fuel industry ran a decades-long "deeply unethical campaign to deceive people around the world," casting doubt on climate change science.

The industry will face higher royalties and new fees for certain excess methane emissions, a potent greenhouse gas — a rare stick amid carrots. But the fossil fuel industry will remain a powerful force and

have guaranteed opportunities to expand on federal lands and off the coast before renewables can be built in those places.

Nevertheless, "the undeniable outcome of this will be a real expansion of wind and solar," said Harrison Fell, a professor focused on energy policy at North Carolina State University.

In 1988 on a steamy summer day, top NASA climate scientist Jim Hansen brought to public attention for the first time the decades-old concept of global warming when he told Congress carbon dioxide was heating up the Earth. That year became the hottest on record. Now, there have been so many hot years it ranks 28th hottest and Hansen has said he wishes his warnings didn't come true about climate change.

"It's a mark of shame that it took this long for our political system to react," said Bill McKibben, a long-time climate activist, adding that it leaves the fossil fuel industry with too much power. "But this will help catalyze action elsewhere in the world; it's a declaration that hydrocarbons are finally in decline and clean energy ascendant, and that the climate movement is finally at least something of a match for Big Oil."

## Albuquerque Muslims help bid to keep killings suspect jailed

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Members of New Mexico's Muslim community pushed Thursday for the Afghan refugee suspected of killing four Muslim men to remain behind bars pending trial — citing previous accusations of domestic violence and video surveillance that appeared to show him slashing the tires of a vehicle parked outside the local mosque.

The video from early 2020 had prompted leaders of the Islamic Center of New Mexico at the time to admonish Muhammad Syed and tell him not to return to the mosque.

The woman whose tires were slashed never went to the police and charges were never filed, said Ahmad Assed, the Islamic center's president.

But nearly two years later, her brother-in-law became one of the victims. Muhammad Zahir Ahmadi was fatally shot last November behind the market he owned with his brother.

Police have named Syed, 51, as the primary suspect in Ahmadi's death and in the fatal shooting of another man in early August. Authorities already have charged him with two counts of murder in the deaths of two other Muslim men in recent weeks.

Syed was arrested late Monday more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) from his Albuquerque home. He told authorities he was on his way to Texas, citing the ambush-style killings as his concern.

Albuquerque police on Thursday released two brief videos showing part of Syed's arrest. The footage from body-worn cameras includes an 18-second clip of Syed face-down on the ground as officers tell him to put his hands behind his back. He appears to tell them he does not speak English as they put him in handcuffs.

In the other clip, he is shown walking from the back of a police cruiser into the department's headquarters. He wore a striped long-sleeved shirt, dark pants and sandals.

Syed is scheduled to appear in court Monday, when a state judge will consider a motion by prosecutors seeking to detain Syed without bond pending trial. Prosecutors have argued that Syed is dangerous and that no conditions of release will ensure the community's safety.

Syed denied any connection to the crimes that shook the city and its small Muslim community after he was arrested during a traffic stop, saying he was heading to Houston to find a new home for his family over fear about the killings.

His public defenders declined comment on the case Thursday except to say that they were reviewing evidence and preparing for Monday's hearing.

"Given the level of media attention, we need to be very careful to not let this case be tried in the public forum and not a court of law," said Tom Clark, one of Syed's state appointed attorneys.

Assed and other members of the city's Muslim community said they were working with law enforcement to try to keep Syed in custody.

Despite police saying personal conflicts might be part of the motive for the killings, Assed said in an



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interview that Muslims are struggling to understand why the men who were killed were targeted and that the killings raised questions and concerns about whether more attacks had been planned.

"It's certainly our concern for this community as we move forward and it's a concern because not knowing more about the motive, we are at a disadvantage in understanding whether that was what was planned, that was it, or whether more victims were on the radar," Assed said.

The first killing in November was followed by three between July 26 and Aug. 5.

According to a 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.

Police said they received more than 200 tips and one from the Muslim community that led them to the Syed family. Syed knew the victims, authorities have said.

Syed has lived in the United States for about five years. When interviewed by detectives, Syed said he had fought against the Taliban, according to a criminal complaint filed in court Tuesday.

He lived in an apartment in Albuquerque with family members who told reporters that he was a truck driver but hadn't worked for a company in a long time.

Court documents show the domestic violence allegations Syed was accused of involved separate altercations with his wife, a son and his future son-in-law. The cases were dismissed because the victims declined to press charges.

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

By DAVID KOENIG AP Business Writer

DALLAS (AP) — Gasoline prices have dipped under \$4 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, down from the mid-June record of \$5.02. However, that's still about 80 cents higher than the average a year ago.

Energy is a key factor in the cost of many goods and services, and 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.

Glen Smith, a for-hire driver, sized up the price — \$3.85 a gallon — while waiting between rides at a gas station in Kenner, Louisiana.

"I'm not tickled pink, but I'm happier it's less than what it was," Smith said. "There for a while, every two days I put \$50 of gas in my car. It's \$12 to run from the airport to drop off in the city -- \$12 a trip!"

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 the country'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.

It is unclear whether gasoline prices got so high that consumers cut back on their driving. Some experts believe that is true, although they acknowledge that the evidence is largely anecdotal.

"I don't know that \$5 was the magic amount. I think it was the amount of increase in a short period of time," said Peter Schwarz, an expert on energy pricing and an economics professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. "People were starting to watch their driving."

Schwarz expects oil prices to remain relatively stable at least for the next month or so, particularly after OPEC and partners including Russia agreed to only a small oil production increase in September, which won't be enough to drive prices lower.

Christian vom Lehn, an economics professor at Brigham Young University, said the price of oil is the key factor for gasoline, but that seasonal trends could also keep prices from surging again.

"We are coming to the end of summer, and summer is a peak travel season, so demand is naturally going to fall," he said. "That is certainly contributing to the most recent decline" in gas prices.

The average gas price has dropped 58 straight days, but that streak will end soon, predicted Tom Kloza,

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head of energy analysis at the Oil Price Information Service. He said the industry will face challenges to meet gasoline demand for the rest of the year.

Kloza noted that it's still early in the hurricane season, which in the past has shut down some of the nation's biggest refineries that sit in hurricane-prone areas of the Gulf Coast; the Gulf of Mexico is speckled with oil-producing platforms. Also, he said, "refinery runs will come down because of a lot of delayed maintenance that can't be delayed indefinitely."

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.

Biden touted the sub-\$4 gas on Thursday.

"That's over one dollar down from peak prices," he tweeted. "And I'm not done calling on oil producers to increase global supply so prices can drop even more."

Biden has previously targeted the oil companies, accusing them of not producing as much energy 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.

Biden has also ordered the release of oil from the nation's strategic petroleum reserve this year. While not large enough to account for the drop in gasoline prices, the extra supply from reserves might have helped stem the rise in pump prices, according to analysts.

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. The shopping app GasBuddy reported that the national average dropped under \$4 on Tuesday.

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 just under \$3.19 a gallon, according to AAA. After a long climb, that price has dropped steadily this summer, falling 15 cents in the past week and 69 cents in the last month,

"If you talk to people who are not economists, gas prices always go up faster than they come down," said Schwarz, the energy-pricing expert. "These are still high gas prices."

## **Beto O'Rourke responds to heckler over Uvalde with expletive**

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Democrat Beto O'Rourke responded to a heckler at a campaign stop with an expletive after the Texas gubernatorial candidate heard a cackled laugh while criticizing the ease with which the Uvalde elementary school gunman legally purchased an AR-15-style rifle.

By Thursday, video of O'Rourke's exchange at a town hall in rural Mineral Wells had drawn millions of views on social media, becoming the latest instance in which O'Rourke has gotten attention for his calls for stricter gun laws following one of the deadliest classroom shootings in U.S. history.

O'Rourke on Wednesday was railing against how the 18-year-old gunman in Uvalde was able to legally purchase a weapon "originally designed for use on the battlefields" and take it into a classroom of fourth-graders. When a person in the crowd laughed, O'Rourke paused and pointed in their direction.

"It may be funny to you, (obscenity), but it's not funny to me," O'Rourke said.

Supporters stood up and cheered. Video shows a small number of people in the crowd were holding signs for Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, O'Rourke's opponent in November, though it does not show who O'Rourke was specifically addressing.

Chris Evans, a campaign spokesman, said the town hall continued without any further encounters.

Nineteen children and two teachers were killed in the May massacre. O'Rourke, who has called for raising the age to legally purchase AR-style and other such high-powered guns in the U.S. to 21 years old, interrupted a news conference led by Abbott in Uvalde after the shooting and accused the two-term governor of not taking action.

Gun violence has been one of O'Rourke's most animated issues as a candidate, including during his run for president in 2019, when he said, "Hell yes, we're gonna take your AR-15" on a debate stage. He has sought to give a more moderated message on firearms during his run for governor in gun-friendly Texas.

## **CDC drops quarantine, distancing recommendations for COVID**

By MIKE STOBBE and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The nation's top public health agency relaxed its COVID-19 guidelines Thursday, dropping the recommendation that Americans quarantine themselves if they come into close contact with an infected person.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also said people no longer need to stay at least 6 feet away from others.

The changes, which come more than 2 1/2 years after the start of the pandemic, are driven by a recognition that an estimated 95% of Americans 16 and older have acquired some level of immunity, either from being vaccinated or infected, agency officials said.

"The current conditions of this pandemic are very different from those of the last two years," said the CDC's Greta Massetti, an author of the guidelines.

Many places around the country long ago abandoned social distancing and other once-common precautions, but some of the changes could be particularly important for schools, which resume classes this month in many parts of the country.

Perhaps the biggest education-related change is the end of the recommendation that schools do routine daily testing, although that practice can be reinstated in certain situations during a surge in infections, officials said.

The CDC also dropped a "test-to-stay" recommendation, which said students exposed to COVID-19 could regularly test — instead of quarantining at home — to keep attending school. With no quarantine recommendation anymore, the testing option disappeared too.

Masks continue to be recommended only in areas where community transmission is deemed high, or if a person is considered at high risk of severe illness.

School districts across the U.S. have scaled back their COVID-19 precautions in recent weeks even before the latest guidance was issued. Some have promised a return to pre-pandemic schooling.

Masks will be optional in most districts when classes resume this fall, and some of the nation's largest districts have dialed back or eliminated COVID-19 testing requirements.

Public schools in Los Angeles are ending weekly COVID-19 tests, instead making at-home tests available to families, the district announced last week. Schools in North Carolina's Wake County also dropped weekly testing.

Some others have moved away from test-to-stay programs that became unmanageable during surges of the omicron variant last school year.

The American Federation of Teachers, one of the nation's largest teachers unions, said it welcomes the guidance.

"Every educator and every parent starts every school year with great hope, and this year even more so," President Randi Weingarten said. "After two years of uncertainty and disruption, we need as normal a year as possible so we can focus like a laser on what kids need."

The new recommendations prioritize keeping children in school as much as possible, said Joseph Allen, director of Harvard University's healthy building program. Previous isolation policies forced millions of students to stay home from school, he said, even though the virus poses a relatively low risk to young people.

"Entire classrooms of kids had to miss school if they were deemed a close contact," he said. "The closed schools and learning disruption have been devastating."

Others say the CDC is going too far in relaxing its guidelines.

Allowing students to return to school five days after infection, without proof of a negative COVID-19 test, could lead to outbreaks in schools, said Anne Sosin, a public health researcher at Dartmouth College.

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That could force entire schools to close temporarily if teachers get sick in large numbers, a dilemma that some schools faced last year.

"All of us want a stable school year, but wishful thinking is not the strategy for getting there," she said. "If we want a return to normal in our schools, we have to invest in the conditions for that, not just drop everything haphazardly like we're seeing across the country."

The average numbers of reported COVID-19 cases and deaths have been relatively flat this summer, at around 100,000 cases a day and 300 to 400 deaths.

The CDC previously said that if people who are not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccinations come into close contact with a person who tests positive, they should stay home for at least five days. Now the agency says quarantining at home is not necessary, but it urges those people to wear a high-quality mask for 10 days and get tested after five.

The agency continues to say that people who test positive should isolate from others for at least five days, regardless of whether they were vaccinated. CDC officials advise that people can end isolation if they are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of medication and they are without symptoms or the symptoms are improving.

Also on Thursday, the Food and Drug Administration updated its recommendations for how many times people exposed to COVID-19 should test.

Previously, the FDA had advised taking two rapid antigen tests over two or three days to rule out infection. Now the agency recommends three tests.

FDA officials said the change was based on new studies that suggest the old protocol can miss too many infections and result in people spreading the coronavirus, especially if they don't develop symptoms.

## **Buried as numbers, more of Bucha's victims are laid to rest**

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

BUCHA, UKRAINE (AP) — With graves marked only with numbers, not names, burial services were held Thursday for 11 more unidentified bodies found in Bucha, the town outside the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv that saw hundreds of people slaughtered under Russian occupation early in the war.

Under a grim gray sky, the two women and eight men were buried following their discovery in a mass grave near the town's Church of Andrew the Apostle, in the wake of the Russian withdrawal in late March. The 11th victim had been shot dead and was found in the village of Chervone, 17 kilometers (10 miles) further outside the Ukrainian capital. Another man who was shot dead but who was identified was also buried Thursday at the same cemetery.

The civilian killings at Bucha have become a symbol of brutality of the war. They were carried out as Russia launched a failed effort to capture the Ukrainian capital after it invaded the country on Feb. 24.

Wrapped in plastic, the bodies arrived in a refrigerator truck, were placed in wooden caskets and then buried separately.

"We are praying for the souls of those killed unjustly," said Father Andriy, an Orthodox priest who led Thursday's service near the site where the mass grave was found. "God knows their names."

It was a second such funeral of unidentified bodies in Bucha, after an Aug. 9 service in which 15 people were buried.

Municipal authorities say 458 bodies have been found in the Bucha area after the 33-day Russian occupation. They include 12 bodies of children, in most cases killed with their parents.

Authorities said 116 bodies were found in the mass grave near the Church of Andrew the Apostle.

The process of identification began in April at several morgues in Kyiv region. The bodies are buried one month after the autopsy, remaining unidentified if relatives cannot be found to formally name them.

Oleksandr Khmaruk, 37, was originally listed as a number, as his parents at first were unable to find his body due to a bureaucratic mix-up. Khmaruk, who served in the Ukrainian armed forces in 2014-15, is believed to have been dragged from his home and shot at a checkpoint by Russian soldiers.

He was one of the 458 dead in Bucha after the Russian occupation and was found in the same mass



grave as the 10 unnamed bodies that were buried Thursday. His family also buried him Thursday at the same cemetery.

"We are working with a list of approximately 50 bodies that remain unidentified," said Mykhailyna Skoryk-Shkarivska, the deputy mayor of Bucha, adding that the number can change as more family members are found.

"We hope these numbers will change into names," she said.

## Cause sought for Indiana house explosion that killed 3

EVANSVILLE, Ind. (AP) — Authorities worked Thursday to determine the cause of a house explosion in a southern Indiana neighborhood that killed three people and left another person hospitalized.

The explosion Wednesday afternoon in Evansville damaged 39 homes. Crews on Thursday completed a secondary search of buildings that were left unstable by the explosion and no more victims were found, Fire Chief Mike Connelly told reporters.

"It's a huge relief, for everybody," the chief said of the results of the secondary search.

Eleven of the damaged homes were uninhabitable and will have to be demolished, Connelly said, and finding a cause is expected to be a "very tedious process — and lengthy."

The Vanderburgh County Coroner's Office identified the victims as a married couple, 43-year-old Charles Hite and 37-year-old Martina Hite, and 29-year-old neighbor Jessica Teague. The cause and manner of their deaths have not yet been determined, the office said.

Suzanne Dabkowski, a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, spokeswoman, said the agency can't speak to any possible causes of the explosion. Dabkowski said the ATF has explosive specialists and firearms investigators on-site in Evansville who were helping with the investigation.

The ATF's involvement does not mean there is an intentional or illegal act behind them, she added. Typically, the agency gets involved in local cases when its help is requested or if there is some federal connection, Dabkowski said.

"When we come to these types of events we've either been asked in by the local fire officials or the state fire marshal for our agents who have had additional training," she said. "We can be extra hands to help them. Most places aren't used to seeing a scene of this size."

Evansville authorities have declined to speculate whether natural gas or another issue is responsible for the explosion.

Evansville is along Indiana's border with Kentucky. The blast left debris that included wooden boards, window glass and insulation strewn over a 100-foot (30-meter) radius.

CenterPoint Energy, the local gas utility, was last called to the home in January 2018, according to Connelly.

The utility said it was working with fire officials and other agencies as the investigation continues.

It was the second house explosion in the area in just over five years. A June 27, 2017, explosion 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 in Indianapolis 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.

According the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration's public database on accident reports involving gas distribution systems, at least 40 such accidents have caused 59 fatalities since 2010 on private property, including homes.

The highest death count in a single accident during that time was in 2014, when an explosion and fire destroyed two buildings in New York City's Harlem, according to the agency's records. Eight people died and 48 more were injured. The National Transportation Safety Board later attributed the explosion to a defective joint that allowed natural gas to leak into the building, worsened by a sewer line breach that caused the gas line to sag.

The public database reviewed by The Associated Press on Thursday did not include the 2017 explosion in Evansville that killed two people. Messages for agency representatives seeking information about why

that explosion was not included were not immediately returned.

## **Russell's No. 6 being retired across NBA, a 1st for league**

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Bill Russell's No. 6 jersey is being retired across the NBA, a first for the league.

The NBA and the National Basketball Players Association announced Thursday that the number worn by the 11-time champion, civil rights activist and person good enough to be enshrined in the Basketball Hall of Fame as both a player and a coach was being permanently retired by all 30 teams.

"Bill Russell's unparalleled success on the court and pioneering civil rights activism deserve to be honored in a unique and historic way," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said. "Permanently retiring his No. 6 across every NBA team ensures that Bill's transcendent career will always be recognized."

Players who currently wear No. 6 — including the Los Angeles Lakers' LeBron James — may continue doing so. But the number cannot be issued again, the league said.

All NBA players will wear a patch on the right shoulder of their jerseys this season, the league said, and every NBA court will display a clover-shaped logo with the No. 6 on the sideline near the scorer's table.

The Boston Celtics have "separate and unique recognition for him on their uniforms" planned, the NBA said.

Russell died on July 31 at the age of 88. He was the most prolific winner in NBA history, an 11-time champion during a 13-year career — winning the last two of those titles as a player-coach — and the first Black coach in any of the major U.S. pro sports to win a championship.

He marched with Martin Luther King Jr., stood with Muhammad Ali and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama.

And having his number retired leaguewide puts him in a very exclusive club.

Major League Baseball permanently retired No. 42 — in honor of Jackie Robinson, who broke the big league's color barrier — with the understanding that those who were wearing that number could continue to do so. Mariano Rivera of the New York Yankees was the last in the majors to wear No. 42, doing so through his final season in 2013.

The NHL, upon Wayne Gretzky's retirement in 1999, said his No. 99 would be retired leaguewide in honor of that sport's all-time scoring leader.

And now, Russell gets the same treatment. It also seems fitting that he and Robinson — both barrier-breakers — are linked again. Russell called Robinson a hero, once saying that "he showed me the way to be a man in professional sports."

Robinson, clearly, held Russell in high esteem as well. Rachel Robinson, his widow, asked Russell to be a pallbearer at her husband's funeral in 1972.

"This is a momentous honor reserved for one of the greatest champions to ever play the game," NBPA Executive Director Tamika Tremaglio said. "Bill's actions on and off the court throughout the course of his life helped to shape generations of players for the better and for that, we are forever grateful. We are proud to continue the celebration of his life and legacy alongside the league."

There have been more than 250 players in NBA history to wear a No. 6 jersey, including 24 who did so in at least one game last season — most notably, James, who has alternated between 6 and 23 throughout his NBA career.

Nobody has worn No. 6 for the Celtics since Russell's final season, 1968-69.

Russell is one of 12 players currently enshrined in the Basketball Hall of Fame who wore No. 6 at at least some point in their careers. The others: Julius Erving, Patrick Ewing, Ben Wallace, Don Barksdale, Chuck Cooper, Larry Costello, Tom Gola, Cliff Hagan, Alex Hannum, Buddy Jeanette and Neil Johnston.

## **Wildfires spread, fish die off amid severe drought in Europe**

By SYLVIE CORBET and VANESSA GERA Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Firefighters from across Europe struggled Thursday to contain a huge wildfire in France

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that has swept through a large swath of pine forest, while Germans and Poles faced a mass fish die-off in a river flowing between their countries.

Europe is suffering under a severe heat wave and drought that has produced tragic consequences for farmers and ecosystems already under threat from climate change and pollution.

The drought is causing a loss of agricultural products and other food at a time when supply shortages and Russia's war against Ukraine have caused inflation to spike.

In France, which is enduring its worst drought on record, flames raged through pine forests overnight, illuminating the sky with an intense orange light in the Gironde region, which was already ravaged by flames last month, and in neighboring Landes. More than 68 square kilometers (26 square miles) have burned since Tuesday.

The French wildfires have already forced the evacuation of about 10,000 people and destroyed at least 16 houses.

Along the Oder River, which flows from Czechia north into the Baltic Sea, volunteers have been collecting dead fish that have washed ashore in Poland and Germany.

Piotr Nieznanski, the conservation policy director at WWF Poland, said it appears that a toxic chemical was released into the water by an industry and the low water levels caused by the drought has made conditions far more dangerous for the fish.

"A tragic event is happening along the Oder River, an international river, and there is no transparent information about what is going on," he said, calling on government authorities to investigate.

People living along the river have been warned not to swim in the water or even touch it.

Poland's state water management body said the drought and high temperatures can cause even small amounts of pollution to lead to an ecological disaster but it has not identified the source of the pollution.

In northern Serbia, the dry bed of the Conopljankso reservoir is now littered with dead fish that were unable to survive the drought.

The water level along Germany's Rhine River was at risk of falling so low that it could become difficult to transport goods — including critical energy items like coal and gasoline.

In Italy, which is experiencing its worst drought in seven decades, the parched Po River has already caused billions of euros in losses to farmers who normally rely on Italy's longest river to irrigate their fields and rice paddies.

"I am young and I do not remember anything like this, but even the elderly in my village or the other villages around here have never seen anything like this, never ever," said Antonio Cestari, a 35-year-old farmer in Ficarolo who says he expects to produce only half his usual crops of corn, wheat and soy because his river-fed wells have such low water levels.

The Po runs 652 kilometers (405 miles) from the northwestern city of Turin to Venice. It has dozens of tributary rivers but northern Italy hasn't seen rainfall for months and this year's snowfall was down by 70%. The drying up of the Po is also jeopardizing drinking water in Italy's densely populated and highly industrialized districts.

Over in Portugal, the Serra da Estrela national park was also being ravaged by a wildfire. Some 1,500 firefighters, 476 vehicles and 12 aircraft were deployed to fight it but the wind-driven blaze 250 kilometers (150 miles) northeast of Lisbon was very hard to reach, with inaccessible peaks almost 2,000 meters (6,560 feet) high and deep ravines. The fire has charred 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of woodland.

In Britain, where temperatures hit a record 40.3 degrees Celsius (104.5 degrees Fahrenheit) in July, the weather office has issued a new warning for "extreme heat" from Thursday through Sunday, with temperatures forecast to reach 36 C (96.8 F).

It has been one of the driest summers on record in southern Britain, and the Met Office weather service said there is an "exceptional risk" of wildfires over the next few days.

London Fire Brigade said its control room had dealt with 340 grass, garbage and open-land fires during the first week of August, eight times the number from last year. Assistant Commissioner Jonathan Smith said "the grass in London is tinderbox dry and the smallest of sparks can start a blaze which could cause

devastation.”

In Switzerland, a drought and high temperatures have endangered fish populations and authorities have begun moving fish out of some creeks that were running dry.

In Hausen, in the canton of Zurich, officials caught hundreds of fish, many of them brown trout, in the almost dried-up Heischerbach, Juchbach and Muehlebach creeks this week by anesthetizing them with electric shocks and then immediately placing them in a water tank enriched with oxygen, local media reported. Later, the fish were taken to creeks that still carry enough water.

Despite all the harm caused by the extreme weather, Swiss authorities see one morbid upside: they believe there's hope of finding some people who went missing in the mountains in the last few years because their bodies are being released as glaciers melt.

In the Swiss canton of Valais, melting glaciers have recently revealed parts of a crashed airplane and, at separate locations, at least two skeletons. The bodies have not yet been identified, news website 20Minuten reported Thursday.

Spanish state television showed dozens of trucks heading to France having to turn around and stay in Spain because wildfires had forced authorities to close some border crossings. TVE reported that truckers, many carrying perishable goods, were looking for ways to cross the border because the parking areas around the Irun crossing were full.

France this week is in its fourth heat wave of the year as it faces what the government describes as the country's worst drought on record. Temperatures were expected to reach 40 C (104 F) on Thursday.

## Scientists use tiny trackers, plane to follow moths on move

By MADDIE BURAKOFF AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Trillions of insects migrate across the globe each year, yet little is known about their journeys. So to look for clues, scientists in Germany took to the skies, placing tiny trackers on the backs of giant moths and following them by plane.

To the researchers' surprise, the moths seemed to have a strong sense of where they were going. Even when the winds changed, the insects stayed on a straight course, the scientists reported in a study published Thursday in the journal *Science*.

Their flight paths suggest these death's-head hawk moths have some complex navigation skills, the authors said, challenging earlier ideas that insects are just wanderers.

“For many, many years, it was thought that insect migration was mostly just dictated by winds, and they were blowing around,” said lead author Myles Menz, now a zoologist at James Cook University in Australia.

It's been tough for scientists to get a close look at how insects travel, in part because of their small size, Menz said. The kinds of radio tags used to follow birds can be too heavy for smaller fliers.

But transmitters have gotten tinier. And it helps that the death's-head hawk moth is huge compared to other insects, with a wingspan up to 5 inches (127 millimeters).

The iconic species — dark colored with yellow underwings and skull-like markings — was able to fly well with the tiny tracker glued to its back, said Martin Wikelski, a study co-author and migration researcher at Germany's Max Planck Institute for Animal Behavior.

The moths are thought to migrate thousands of miles between Europe and Africa in the autumn, flying by night.

For the study, researchers released tagged moths in Germany in the hopes they'd start flying on their migration path toward the Alps.

Wikelski, the study's pilot, took off in his plane, circling the area and waiting for any moths on the move. If he did pick up a signal from a tiny traveler, he would follow its radio blips for hours at a time.

“The little moth is guiding you,” he said.

The researchers followed the flight paths of 14 moths, with their longest track around 56 miles (90 kilometers).

Not only did the moths fly in straight lines, but they also seemed to work around wind conditions, Menz



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said, flying low to the ground when the winds were against them, or rising up to catch a helpful tail wind.

Though the number of moths tracked was fairly small, getting any close-up look at insect migration is significant, said Ryan Norris, an insect and bird migration researcher at the University of Guelph in Canada, who was not involved in the study.

"I was surprised at how far they could track them," Norris said. "And it certainly is surprising that individual moths stay on this straight trajectory."

## Review: Want to really waste time? Watch 'Mack & Rita'

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

The movie "Mack & Rita" — which adds grandma chic to two things no one needs on screen like lazy filmmaking and a tired old concept — can be distilled into one word: cringe.

Virtually no one associated with this film should be congratulated in any way, having ruptured any bridges between Hollywood and senior citizens or for the shocking misuse of Diane Keaton's considerable skills.

"Mack & Rita," which opens Friday in cinemas, takes the traditional body-swap concept — think "Big," "Freaky Friday," "13 Going on 30" and even "Jumanji" — and makes it worse, much worse.

This time, it's a 30-year-old author with a perfect apartment and a little dog who goes to a sketchy past-life regression treatment and winds up as a 70-year-old hipster granny, played by Keaton, who is given such a poor role that she mostly just flails about in a series of flat, pointless scenes.

Written by Madeline Walter and Paul Welsh, it's got the sort of science-supernatural plot and vibe from '80s films like "Weird Science" or "Back to the Future" and adds a rom-com, mismatched love interest to spice up a failing premise. It wants us to learn to embrace age gracefully and let everyone be happy with who they are. But first there must be a lot of anti-ageist physical comedy.

It starts with our author Mack (played nicely by Elizabeth Lail) who is struggling with a second book and must do lowly Instagram posts for cash. She feels out of step with her fashionable Los Angeles friends — among them a memorably good Tylour Paige — and though she's styled to slay, her inner soul is pooped and just wants to sit down holding a red wine with an ice cube.

If you were wondering what was going to happen in this film, a voice over helpfully announces: "I grew up always feeling like I was an older woman trapped in the body of a little girl." Presto, that becomes reality.

Keaton takes over about the 20-minute mark as Rita, but she's usually the butt of jokes, not the creator. Director Katie Aselton not only misuses the Oscar-winner, but her scenes often don't end as much as they are abandoned or peter out awkwardly.

This is a movie where if there's a swimming pool, Keaton will stumble into it. If there's wine, she's gonna guzzle it and say something inappropriate. The film's lowest point is set at a Pilates studio, where a montage of Keaton using resistance straps in utterly unexpected ways ends with a face plant.

"This is really a nightmare. My hair's different. It's like really weird," she says. "It feels like it's well-coated wire or something." Then, after losing four decades in 10 minutes, she's shown happily trying on clothes.

In some ways, we must credit Keaton herself partly with the making of this monstrosity long before it was a script. She has been hailed as inspiration for the so-called "coastal grandma" look that is apparently all the rage among the cardigan-and-linen pants-wearing crowd. But she didn't deserve this horror show, did she?

Though the young author inside the grandma initially tries to fight her instant aging with various procedures and youthful treatments — and a terrible scene where she's high on 'shrooms — she comes to realize something about age: "It's not an insult. It's just where I'm at: I'm old."

So why has this film seemed like such an insult?

There was some outcry recently about "Batgirl," a film that was fully made but never released due to creative and financial calculations. Why that fate wasn't destined for "Mack & Rita" is a bafflement.

"Mack & Rita," a Gravitas Ventures release, is rated PG-13 for "some drug use, sexual references, and language." Running time: 94 minutes. No stars out of four.

## Initial dives in collapsed Mexican mine unsuccessful

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MEXICO CITY (AP) — Rescue divers' first attempts to reach 10 miners trapped inside a flooded coal mine since last week were stopped by debris-filled shafts and poor visibility, Mexican authorities said Thursday.

They made four attempts Wednesday and managed to remove more than a dozen pieces of wood and some 15 yards of hose, but were not able to go far.

"They found they didn't have space to advance," said Defense Secretary Luis Cresencio Sandoval. "With the lights they carry they don't have the visibility they need to identify what they find."

On Aug. 3, 15 miners were inside the coal mine in Sabinas, Coahuila about 70 miles southwest of Eagle Pass, Texas. Authorities believe the miners breached a wall containing another flooded area. Five miners managed to escape with injuries, but there has been no contact with the remaining 10.

For much of the past week authorities have used dozens of pumps to try to lower the water level inside the flooded mine shafts. Wednesday's dives were the first attempt to enter the mine.

Coahuila Gov. Miguel Riquelme said via Twitter Wednesday that pumping would resume before more attempts were made to enter.

In June and July of 2021, cave-ins at two Coahuila mines claimed the lives of nine miners.

Mexico's worst mining accident also occurred in Coahuila on Feb. 19, 2006, when an explosion ripped through the Pasta de Conchos mine while 73 miners were inside. Eight were rescued with injuries including serious burns. The rest died and only two of their bodies were recovered.

López Obrador's administration promised two years ago to recover the remaining 63 bodies, a highly technical endeavor that has still not begun.

## **EXPLAINER: How is inflation affecting commuting costs?**

By ADRIANA MORGA The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Gas prices have fallen from the record highs they reached earlier this summer, but they're still much higher than a year ago. And with inflation driving up the cost of pretty much everything else, finding the funds to cover your commute may be increasingly tricky.

"Being able to get to work is so essential to people's basic survival that other things have to go first," said Abbie Langston, director of equitable economy at PolicyLink, a national research institute. "When we see these massive increases in gas prices, it's really hurting people."

Whether you drive, take the bus or ride the subway, here's what you need to know about how commuters are affected by the cost of living in the United States.

### **HOW ARE GAS PRICES AFFECTING COMMUTERS?**

More than 76% of Americans commute by car. In June, they saw gas prices spike beyond \$5 per gallon. While prices have dropped significantly since, the national average price of a gallon of regular unleaded was \$3.99 on Thursday, still higher than \$3.19 a year ago.

Costanza Bentancor, a paralegal from Mohegan Lake, New York, needs gas to commute 20 minutes each way to work and also uses her car to get to clients, who are families who recently immigrated to the U.S.

"It's been very difficult, I've been learning to budget my money a little bit better," Bentancor said.

Because of the high cost of living in Westchester County, she has also struggled with moving out of her parents' home into her own.

AAA survey data published in July found that almost 64 percent of U.S. adults have changed their driving habits or lifestyle since March of this year. The top three changes included driving less, combining errands and reducing shopping or dining out.

"People choose houses, the type of car that they drive and how much they drive based on the assumption of how much they can afford to drive, and when that changes, it becomes really difficult to give people alternatives," said Yonah Freemark, senior research associate at the Urban Institute, a non-profit research organization based in Washington, D.C.

For workers who take public transportation, increasing gas prices might not directly affect their bus or train fare, but the rising costs of living might affect their ability to afford those tickets.

### **WHICH COMMUNITIES ARE THE MOST AFFECTED?**

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Housing and transportation combined account for more than half of an average families' spending, according to the Brookings Institution's Affordability Index. For low-income families, the percentage spent on housing and transportation can be even higher, meaning they're hit hardest by rising prices.

"People are really struggling right now. They are forgoing childcare, they are not seeking medical care or rationing prescription drugs," said Langston, who points out that one in three people in the U.S. are at or near poverty.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted many inequalities in society, including who got to work from home. "The majority of the Latino and immigrant workforce doesn't have the luxury to work from home," said Yanira Merino, national president of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement.

Only 16.2% of Latino workers and 19.7% of Black workers were able to work from home in 2020, compared to 37% of Asian workers and 29.9% of non-Hispanic white workers, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

Low-income families are also more likely to rent their homes, which then makes them more vulnerable to the rising prices of housing, according to Freemark.

Vicente Gonzalez, a postal worker in Boyle Heights, a neighborhood of Los Angeles, has seen members of his community move farther away because they can't afford to pay their rent.

"A lot of people are moving to cheaper areas, but there's no jobs out there so they end up driving all day," said Gonzalez. "As much as people want to buy an electric car and save gas, they really have no choice."

The average worker commutes for 26.9 minutes, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. However, workers of color have longer commute times than white workers, regardless of income level, according to data by the National Equity Atlas.

## HOW DO EXPERTS RECOMMEND TACKLING THIS ISSUE IN THE LONG TERM?

San Jose State University professor Asha Weinstein Agrawal believes that in order to make a long-term change, government officials need to invest in public transportation but also incentivize the use of fuel efficient vehicles.

"If we truly want to reduce people's transportation costs, it's not something you can do in a month. But we should help them get more electric vehicles. That is going to have far more impact, especially low-income families," she said.

E-bikes or electric vehicles are also a more environmentally-friendly mode of transportation, Freemark said.

Alternatively, both Langston and Freemark believe that raising people's wages and developing affordable housing would help to create an environment where everyone can weather hard times.

## US wholesale inflation fell in July for 1st time in 2 years

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Prices at the wholesale level fell from June to July, the first month-to-month drop in more than two years and a sign that some of the U.S. economy's inflationary pressures cooled last month.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department showed that the producer price index — which measures inflation before it reaches consumers — declined 0.5% in July. It was the first monthly drop since April 2020 and was down from a sharp 1% increase from May to June.

The easing of wholesale inflation suggests that consumers could get some relief from relentless inflation in the coming months. The wholesale report follows government data Wednesday that showed that consumer inflation was unchanged from June to July — the first flat figure after 25 straight months of increases.

Yet economists caution that it's still too early to say that inflation is headed steadily lower.

"The July deceleration ... is a move in the right direction," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics. "But producer costs continue to rise at a rapid pace, well above target."

Wholesale food prices rose 1% from June to July, a sign that grocery prices will likely keep rising in the coming months. The wholesale costs of eggs, beef and vegetables all jumped.

Trucking freight costs, though, fell 0.3%, evidence that some supply chain snarls are easing.

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Inflation at the wholesale level still jumped 9.8% in July compared with a year earlier, suggesting that inflation will remain at painful levels for months to come. That was down from a year-over-year surge of 11.3% in June — near a four-decade high — and was the smallest annual rise in eight months.

Thursday's report showed that wholesale gas prices tumbled 16.7% from June to July, a sign that retail prices at the pump will continue to decline this month and likely into September. Consumers are already seeing steady reductions: Gas prices fell below \$4 a gallon, on average, on Thursday for the first time in five months.

The milder inflation data, and last month's unexpectedly robust hiring that helped lower the unemployment rate to a half-century low of 3.5%, have provided President Joe Biden with some positive economic news after months of accelerating price spikes hammered his approval ratings. Congressional Republicans have made rising inflation a major line of attack in the upcoming midterm elections.

And the Federal Reserve has embarked on its fastest pace of interest rate hikes since the early 1980s in an effort to quell inflation, and will likely keep raising borrowing costs for the rest of this year. Its short-term rate is currently in a range of 2.25% to 2.5%, the highest since 2018.

Chair Jerome Powell has said the Fed would need to see a series of declining inflation readings before it would consider pausing its rate increases. The Fed could announce a third straight three-quarter point rate hike when it next meets in late September or instead carry out a less drastic half-point hike.

Thursday's producer price data captures inflation at an earlier stage of production and can sometimes signal where consumer prices are headed. It also feeds into the Fed's preferred measure of inflation, which is called the personal consumption expenditures price index.

## 'Disturbing': Experts troubled by Canada's euthanasia laws

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.

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.



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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 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.”

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— 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.

Theresa 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.”

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.

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"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 fac-

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ing 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.

## Big Mac is coming back: McDonald's to reopen in Ukraine

CHICAGO (AP) — McDonald's will start reopening some of its restaurants in Ukraine in the coming months, a symbol of the war-torn country's return to some sense of normalcy and a show of support after the American fast-food chain pulled out of Russia.

The burger giant closed its Ukrainian restaurants after Russia's invasion nearly six months ago but has continued to pay more than 10,000 McDonald's employees in the country.

McDonald's said Thursday that it will begin gradually reopening some restaurants in the capital, Kyiv, and western Ukraine, where other companies are doing business away from the fighting. Western businesses like Nike, KFC and Spanish clothing retailer Mango are open in Kyiv.

"We've spoken extensively to our employees who have expressed a strong desire to return to work and see our restaurants in Ukraine reopen," Paul Pomroy, corporate senior vice president of international operated markets, said in a message to employees. "In recent months, the belief that this would support a small but important sense of normalcy has grown stronger."

The Ukrainian economy has been severely damaged by the war and restarting businesses, even in a limited capacity, would help. The International Monetary Fund expects Ukraine's economy to shrink by 35% this year.

McDonald's has 109 restaurants in Ukraine but didn't say how many would reopen, when that would happen or which locations would be the first to welcome back customers. Over the next few months, the company said it will start working with vendors to get supplies into restaurants, prepare those stores, bring back employees and launch safety procedures with the war still raging to the east.

While it will start to reopen in Ukraine, McDonald's has sold its 850 restaurants in Russia to a franchise owner. That came three decades after McDonald's opened its first location in Moscow, becoming a powerful symbol of easing Cold War tensions.

McDonald's had shuttered hundreds of Russian locations in March, costing the company about \$55 million per month. Selling its Russian restaurants was the first time the company has "de-arched," or exited a major market.

Alexander Govor, who held a license for 25 McDonald's outposts in Siberia, has begun reopening former McDonald's locations under the name Vkusno-i Tochka, or Tasty-period.

## US unemployment claims rise by 14,000 to 262,000

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans who signed up for unemployment benefits rose last week to the highest level since November, though the U.S. job market continues to show signs of strength.

Applications for jobless aid climbed by 14,000 to 262,000 and now have risen five out of the last six weeks, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

The four-week average for claims, which smooths out weekly ups and downs, rose by 4,500 to 252,000, also the highest since November.

The number of Americans collecting traditional unemployment benefits increased by 8,000 the week that ended July 30 to 1.43 million, highest since early April.

Unemployment applications are a proxy for layoffs and are often seen as an early indicator of where the job market is headed.

So far this year, hiring in the United States has been remarkably strong and resilient in the face of rising interest rates and weak economic growth.

The Labor Department reported last week that U.S. employers added 528,000 jobs last month, more



than double what forecasters had expected. The unemployment rate dipped to 3.5% in July, tying a 50-year low reached just before coronavirus pandemic slammed the U.S. economy in early 2020.

The United States recovered with unexpected strength from 2020's COVID-19 recession, leaving businesses scrambling to find enough workers.

But the U.S. economy faces challenges. Consumer prices have been surging, rising 8.5% in July from a year earlier — down slightly from June's 40-year high 9.1%. To combat inflation, the Federal Reserve has raised its benchmark short-term interest rate four times this year.

Higher borrowing costs have taken a toll. The economy contracted in the first half of the year — one rule of thumb for the onset of a recession. But the strength of the job market is inconsistent with an economic downturn.

"Demand for labor remains quite strong," economists Thomas Simons and Aneta Markowska of Jefferies wrote Thursday. "The modest pickup in claims suggests that turnover may be increasing in weaker firms that are struggling with slowing growth."

## 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 education, 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.

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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 prosecution. 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.

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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."

## Today in History: August 12, deadliest single-aircraft crash

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Aug. 12, the 224th day of 2022. There are 141 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 12, 1953, the Soviet Union conducted a secret test of its first hydrogen bomb.

On this date:

In 1867, President Andrew Johnson sparked a move to impeach him as he defied Congress by suspending Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, with whom he had clashed over Reconstruction policies. (Johnson was acquitted by the Senate.)

In 1898, fighting in the Spanish-American War came to an end.

In 1909, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, home to the Indianapolis 500, first opened.

In 1944, during World War II, Joseph P. Kennedy Jr., eldest son of Joseph and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, was killed with his co-pilot when their explosives-laden Navy plane blew up over England.

In 1960, the first balloon communications satellite — the Echo 1 — was launched by the United States from Cape Canaveral.

In 1964, author Ian Fleming, 56, the creator of James Bond, died in Canterbury, Kent, England.

In 1978, Pope Paul VI, who had died Aug. 6 at age 80, was buried in St. Peter's Basilica.

In 1981, IBM introduced its first personal computer, the model 5150, at a press conference in New York.

In 1985, the world's worst single-aircraft disaster occurred as a crippled Japan Airlines Boeing 747 on a domestic flight crashed into a mountain, killing 520 people. (Four people survived.)

In 1994, in baseball's eighth work stoppage since 1972, players went on strike rather than allow team owners to limit their salaries. (The strike ended in April 1995.)

In 2000, the Russian nuclear submarine Kursk and its 118-man crew were lost during naval exercises in the Barents Sea.

In 2013, James "Whitey" Bulger, the feared Boston mob boss who became one of the nation's most-wanted fugitives, was convicted in a string of 11 killings and dozens of other gangland crimes, many of them committed while he was said to be an FBI informant. (Bulger was sentenced to life; he was fatally beaten at a West Virginia prison in 2018, hours after being transferred from a facility in Florida.)

Ten years ago: With a little British pomp and a lot of British pop, London brought the curtain down on the Olympic Games with a spectacular pageant. Before the closing ceremony, the U.S. men's basketball team defended its title by fighting off another huge challenge from Spain, pulling away in the final minutes for a 107-100 victory and its second straight Olympic championship. The victory by the men's basketball team gave the United States its 46th gold medal in London; the U.S. initially won 104 medals overall, but was later stripped of a silver medal after a men's relay team member tested positive for steroids. Rory McIlroy won the PGA Championship with a 6-under 66 for an eight-shot victory at Kiawah Island, South Carolina.

Five years ago: A car plowed into a crowd of people peacefully protesting a white nationalist rally in the Virginia college town of Charlottesville, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer and hurting more than a dozen others. (The attacker, James Alex Fields, was sentenced to life in prison on 29 federal hate crime charges, and life plus 419 years on state charges.) President Donald Trump condemned what he called an "egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides."

One year ago: The Taliban captured two major Afghan cities — Kandahar and Herat — and a strategic

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provincial capital, further squeezing the country's embattled government. The Pentagon said an additional 3,000 U.S. troops would go to Afghanistan to assist in the evacuation of some personnel from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. U.S. health regulators authorized an extra dose of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines in people with weakened immune systems to better protect them from the virus. The Chicago White Sox beat the New York Yankees 9-8 in the first Major League Baseball game ever played in Iowa; the teams combined to hit eight home runs into the cornstalks beyond the outfield fence, next to the site used for the 1989 movie "Field of Dreams."

Today's Birthdays: Actor George Hamilton is 83. Actor Dana Ivey is 81. Actor Jennifer Warren is 81. Rock singer-musician Mark Knopfler (Dire Straits) is 73. Actor Jim Beaver is 72. Singer Kid Creole (of Kid Creole and the Coconuts) is 72. Jazz musician Pat Metheny is 68. Actor Sam J. Jones is 68. Actor Bruce Greenwood is 66. Country singer Danny Shirley is 66. Pop musician Roy Hay (Culture Club) is 61. Rapper Sir Mix-A-Lot is 59. Actor Peter Krause (KROW'-zuh) is 57. Actor Brent Sexton is 55. International Tennis Hall of Famer Pete Sampras is 51. Actor-comedian Michael Ian Black is 51. Actor Yvette Nicole Brown is 51. Actor Rebecca Gayheart is 51. Actor Casey Affleck is 47. Actor Maggie Lawson is 42. Actor Dominique Swain is 42. Actor Leah Pipes is 34. Actor Lakeith Stanfield is 31. NBA All-Star Khris Middleton is 31. Actor Cara Delevingne (DEHL'-eh-veen) is 30. Actor Imani Hakim is 29.



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