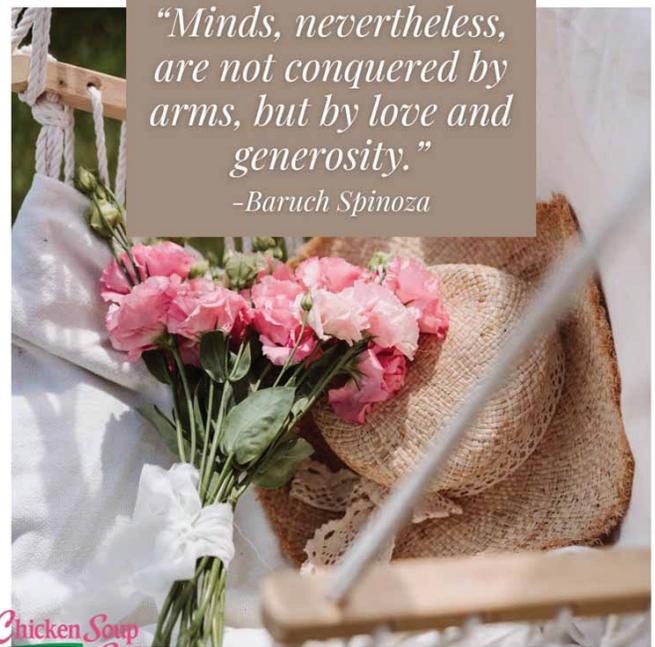


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“Minds, nevertheless, are not conquered by arms, but by love and generosity.”

-Baruch Spinoza

Chicken Soup
for the Soul



Help Wanted

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

CLEANER WANTED

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

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

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

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!

Sharon Busch

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)

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

© 2022 Groton Daily Independent

Groton Golfers Take Fourth at Sioux Valley

The Groton Area boys soccer team placed fourth at the Sioux Valley meet held August 15. Carter Simon placed eighth, shooting a 43 in the front nine and a 41 in the back nine for a total score of 83. Brevin Flihs shot a 41 and a 46 for a total score of 87. Logan Pearson shot a 41 and a 50 for a total score of 91. Jace Johnson shot a 48 and a 44 for a total score of 92. Cole Simon shot a 52 and a 44 for a total score of 96. Andrew Marzahn shot a 51 and a 49 for a total score of 100.

Sioux Valley Blue won the team title with a 324 followed by Roncalli with a 336, Sioux Valley Gold with a 341, Groton 353, Milbank 356, Flandreau 370, Redfield 404 and Sisseton 426.

City Water Restriction starts September 1st

The city is asking for the public's help to minimize water use during September & October. The water restriction is for no irrigation watering. The city is taking the ground storage water tank out of service to perform maintenance and painting before temperatures get too cold. The work is expected to last 6 to 8 weeks depending on weather conditions. This ground storage tank helps maintain water capacity in the city's water system. WEB Rural Water system supply's water to the city ground storage tank. The city then pumps this water up into the elevated tower for storage and maintain system pressure. WEB Water can meet and exceed the city's normal water demand when supplying water directly into the city ground storage tank but cannot supply water at the same rate when supplying directly into the city's elevated water tower. Also, while the city ground storage tank is out of service to do the work, this temporary change may present flow and pressure problems within both WEB & City water systems without the Groton public's help by reducing water use.

Gov. Noem Releases Report from Department of Education on Critical Race Theory and Divisive Concepts

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem released a report from the Department of Education (DOE) detailing examples of Critical Race Theory and other divisive concepts in DOE policies, guidance, websites, trainings, content standards, or other materials.

"We are proactively removing Critical Race Theory before it has any opportunity to take hold in our schools," said Governor Kristi Noem. "We are taking action to promote America's true and honest history, including the history and culture of our Native American tribes, without any influence of Critical Race Theory or other divisive concepts."

The report does not extend to the policies, materials, and resources of local schools. This report was prepared pursuant to Section 6 of [Executive Order 2022-02](#). You can find the DOE report [here](#).

"Out of the thousands of items reviewed, a very small number were deemed to be out of alignment with Governor Noem's executive order," said Tiffany Sanderson, Secretary of the Department of Education. "The department is taking action to modify or discontinue those items. I am proud of the department's work, and we will continue working to ensure that South Dakota students have the opportunity to receive a robust and honest social studies education."

Earlier this year, Governor Noem also signed [HB 1012](#), which bans mandatory college trainings and orientations based on Critical Race Theory and other divisive concepts.

Weekly Vikings Recap

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

The 2022 preseason is finally here, and the Minnesota Vikings lined up against the Las Vegas Raiders on Sunday afternoon. As expected, both teams sat the majority of their starters and are leaving these games up to the reserves and rookies to earn a spot on an NFL roster.

For the past four seasons, despite many fans thinking we could do better at quarterback, the one thing that has been consistent is Kirk Cousins does not miss many games due to injury (Covid is another subject) and is one of the most durable quarterbacks in football. That said, the Vikings have a heated competition at the backup role. Sean Mannion is the lead candidate, having been the backup for the past two seasons, and Kellen Mond, the 2nd year player from Texas A&M, who many feel can be Kirk's replacement someday, will be battling it out for a roster spot. The rumors going into Sunday's game was that the new Viking regime does not have their backup QB on the roster today and may be looking at the waiver wire as teams begin cutting players.

In Sunday's game, Kellen Mond may have moved ahead of Mannion for the #2 spot. Mond looked much more poised in the backfield and made a couple of nice throws to extend drives and ultimately hitting on a pair of touchdowns. Obviously the Vikings need to make sure they have a solid backup and cannot rely on past history to assume Kirk will always be available.

A few things stood out in Sunday's game.

First, the Vikings stable of running backs looks to be a bright spot for this team. Alexander Mattison is the confirmed backup to Dalvin Cook, but Ty Chandler (50 yds) and Kene Nwangwu (41 yds) will push Mattison for the #2 spot. Mattison is in the final year of his rookie contract, and the Vikings will need to decide on whether to keep him for years to come or look to trade him to a team that may incur an injury to their starter.

Secondly, the tight end position needs to get shored up. We all know Irv Smith, Jr. has all the talent in the world, but his inability to stay on the field due to injuries may cause the Vikings to look elsewhere. Allowing Tyler Conklin to leave in free agency may have been a mistake as he proved he could be a starter in this league. With one of the best wide receiving groups in the league, maybe Kevin O'Connell is not too concerned with production as opposed to needing a solid blocker to give Kirk some extra time.

Third, the young defensive players have a long way to go. Now that all of the guys they are playing against are big and fast, they will need to adjust to the speed of the NFL and turn it up a notch. It's still hard to tell in the first game of the preseason as most of the top defensive players did not dress for the game and will undoubtedly make life easier for the youngsters when the regular season begins.

Finally, rookie Ed Ingram may have earned himself a starting spot at right guard. He stood out when the Vikings ran the ball well, but we need to be cautious as he was lined up mostly against backups and practice squad players. Solid guard play is critical as there have been concerns about the center position and Bradbury can use as much help as possible.

A view from training camp.

The family ventured out to the open practice at TCO Performance Center on August 8th. It has been a couple of years due to Covid restrictions, but we highly recommend it to all Viking fans. In addition to watching the players close-up on the field, the Viking museum and pro shops are well worth the visit. You never know what former players might be hanging out around the facility. It is hard to believe that any player that visits the facility as a rookie or free agent would want to play anywhere else. Make the trip in you get the chance.

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Encourage more federal arts funding for SD

By Jim Speirs, Executive Director, Arts South Dakota

It was disappointing to see our lone Congressman, Dusty Johnson, recently support a funding bill amendment that would have reduced National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) appropriations by 25%, sending the NEA budget back to 2017 levels. Johnson has been a past supporter of South Dakota arts programs, and has expressed his belief that our state benefits from cultural development and artistic creativity. To go backward with federal arts funding—especially important in a rural state like ours—is damaging to education and the quality of life for all South Dakotans.

Now, more than ever, we need to strengthen our support for the arts. During the height of the pandemic, a creative-industry analysis estimated losses of 2.7 million jobs and more than \$150 billion in sales of goods and services for creative industries nationwide, representing nearly a third of all jobs in those industries and 9% of annual sales. In South Dakota during 2020 and early 2021, a survey of arts nonprofits tells us 94% had to cancel events. That equated to 879,259 lost program attendance with an over \$11 million negative financial impact on the sector. In addition, over 500 South Dakotans had been laid off or furloughed in the arts sector during the pandemic.

National arts funding is vital for South Dakota's cultural growth. The NEA and its state partner, the South Dakota Arts Council (SDAC), support creative expression in nearly all South Dakota counties. In FY19, the SDAC awarded 439 grants, impacting 1.35 million people throughout South Dakota, including the nine Native Nations with lands in our state. These programs often provide the only contact to the arts for underserved populations in rural areas and limited-resource communities across the state.

Please join us in reminding Congressman Johnson that South Dakota needs the NEA and annual growth in federal arts funding appropriations! To learn more about the impact of NEA support to South Dakota, check out the facts online at ArtsSouthDakota.org.

Gov. Noem Announces Draft Social Studies Standards

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem released draft social studies standards for K-12 students in South Dakota.

“South Dakota’s children deserve the very best social studies education in the nation,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “These standards raise the bar for the breadth and depth of civics and history education. They feature a true, honest, and balanced approach to American history that is not influenced by political agendas. And under these standards, our students will focus more on Native American history and culture than ever before.”

The draft standards were compiled by the Social Studies Content Standards Commission, which was facilitated by former Hillsdale College professor William Morrisey.

“We are grateful for the efforts of the working group to approach these draft standards from a wide variety of perspectives, including parents, teachers, college professors, administrators, historians, and experts in Native American history and culture,” said Department of Education Secretary Tiffany Sander-son. “Retired Hillsdale College Professor Will Morrisey did an excellent job guiding the conversation and ensuring that all perspectives were represented.”

“I couldn’t be more thrilled with the new social studies standards. They are substantial and straightforward standards that emphasize our founding documents, our pursuit of freedom, and treat our nation’s history honestly,” said Representative Sue Peterson, Vice Chair of the House Education Committee.

These standards feature expanded South Dakota and Native American history and civics, representing the most robust emphasis on Native American history and civics of any draft standards to-date.

“I am glad that Native American heritage and culture will be well represented in these standards,” said Joe Circle Bear, member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and member of the Commission. “Governor Noem promised to tell our story as part of American history, and these standards do that.”

“I am very proud of the work we as a committee have put into the new Social Studies Standards,” said Stephanie Hiatt, doctorate in education, member of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, and member of the Commission. “The new standards offer a chronological history of the founding of America. With these new standards, I am confident South Dakota students will develop a historical appreciation that will foster hopeful and prosperous communities.”

In preparing the draft standards, the Commission focused on the four following goals:

Genuine content in the form of specific stories, historical figures, maps, research, images, and historical documents;

Sound skills for making sense of the past, understanding their neighbors, earning a livelihood, and exercising the rights and responsibilities of citizenship with prudence;

Honest, balanced, and complete accounts of historical events and debates that foster a love of country that is not blind to faults; and

History and civics instruction free from political agendas and activism.

The standards feature integrated civics, ensuring that civics-related topics are interwoven into history classes.

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"The standards developed by the Social Studies Commission represent a raising of the bar for social studies education in South Dakota," said Jon Schaff, Director of the Center for Public History and Civic Engagement at Northern State University and member of the Commission. "We should be proud that our state is taking the lead in promoting civic education firmly grounded in the admirable principles of the American founding. Students educated under these standards will be ready to take on the role of educated citizen.

Last year, Governor Noem became the first candidate or public official in the country to sign the "[1776 Pledge to Save our Schools](#)." At the time, she and Dr. Ben Carson co-wrote an article for Fox News outlining the Pledge and why it is important.

"Since becoming the first office holder in the country to sign the '1776 Pledge,' Governor Noem has followed through with action to promote a true and balanced telling of American history," said Adam Waldeck, President of 1776 Action. "These standards will set the bar for social studies education in this country. I look forward to continuing to work with Governor Noem to restore honest, patriotic education."

The draft standards made several other notable adjustments to previous South Dakota social studies standards, including:

- Enhanced Content to ensure that standards are meaningful and clear;
- A Spiraled Sequence to ensure that students have the opportunity to build on what they have previously learned; and
- Streamlined Identification to improve accessibility and allow for easier use by both teachers and parents.

"I am very proud of the work we've done, and I encourage people to read these standards," said Dr. Ben Jones, South Dakota State Historian and member of the Commission. "I believe South Dakotans will see that American history education now includes a great deal of American Indian history and South Dakota's history in ways that speak to all students and provide a greater foundation for understanding America and their home state after students graduate."

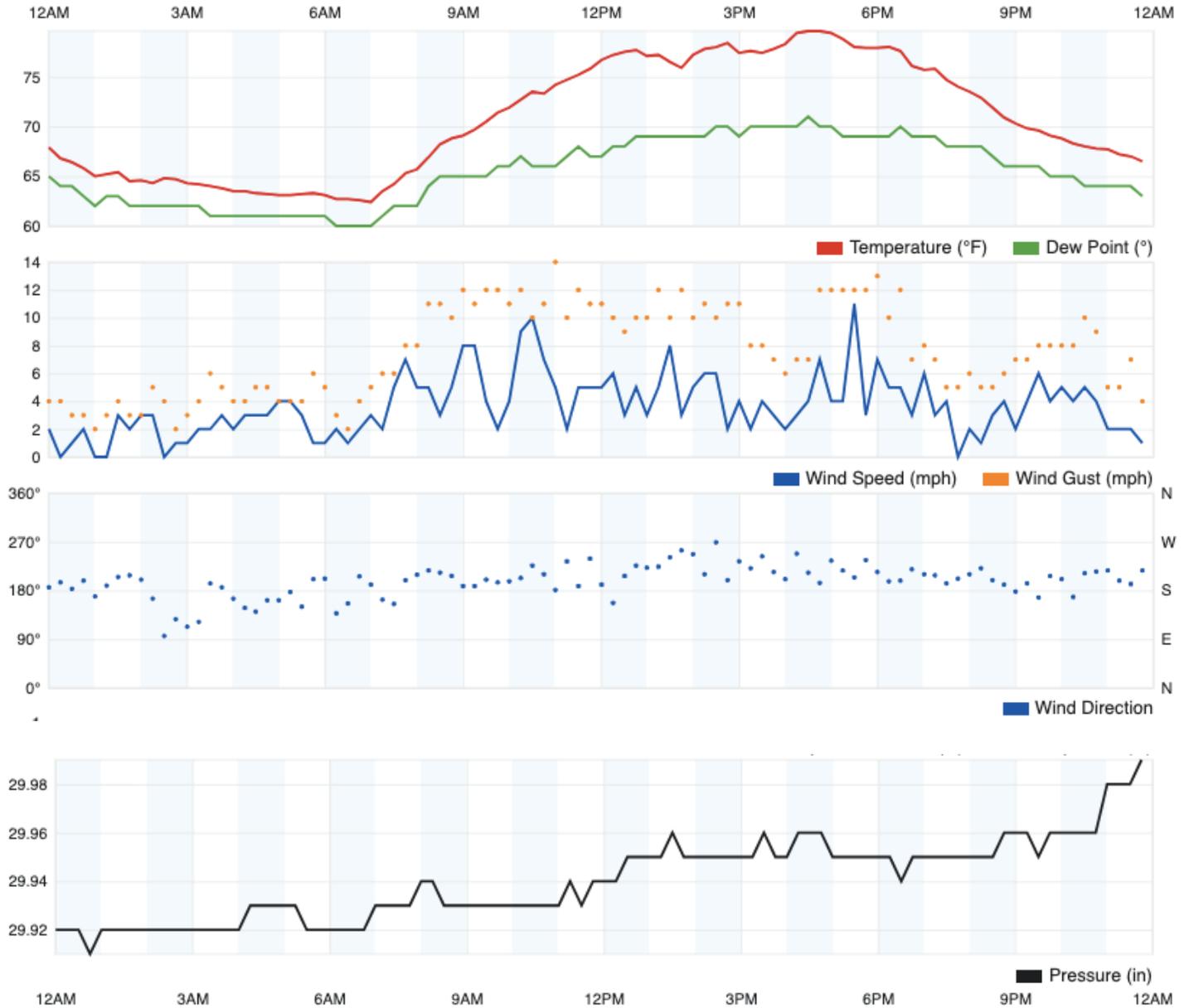
The Department of Education intends to offer comprehensive professional development to support teachers in building their own knowledge and skills for teaching social studies. Events will be held beginning summer of 2023 and continue throughout the school year to ensure educators are well equipped to implement the standards.

You can find the draft standards [here](#).

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny

High: 80 °F

Tonight



Slight Chance
T-storms then
Mostly Clear

Low: 60 °F

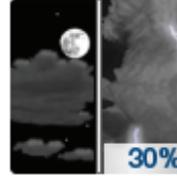
Wednesday



Sunny

High: 84 °F

Wednesday
Night



Partly Cloudy
then Chance
T-storms

Low: 61 °F

Thursday

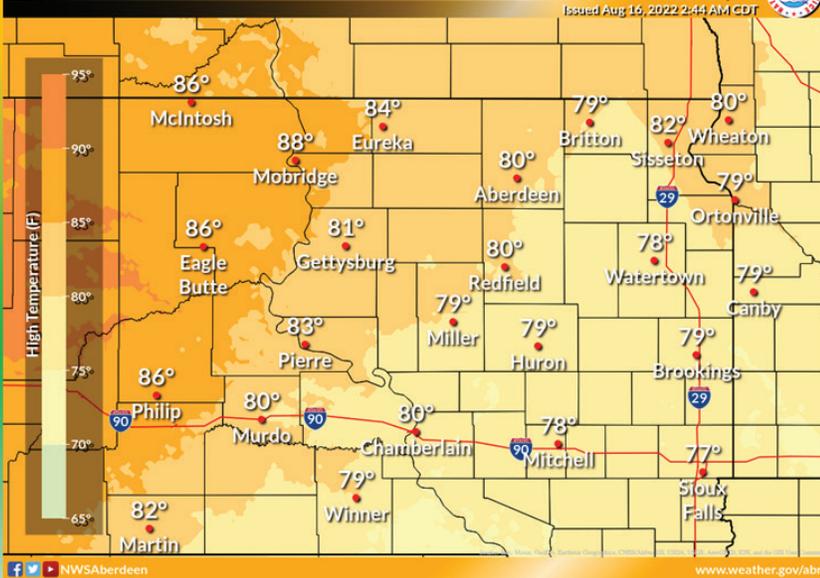


Showers
Likely

High: 78 °F

Today's Forecast

High Temperatures for Today



Probability of Precipitation Forecast

	8/16 Tue		8/17 Wed		Maximum
	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	
Aberdeen	5	16	12	4	16
Britton	5	18	17	10	18
Eagle Butte	11	15	1	2	15
Eureka	16	16	10	2	16
Gettysburg	5	14	7	1	14
Kennebec	2	2	1	1	2
McIntosh	17	14	2	4	17
Milbank	4	17	18	16	18
Miller	2	2	2	2	2
Mobridge	17	16	4	1	17
Murdo	1	1	1	1	1
Pierre	1	1	1	1	1
Redfield	3	9	7	2	9
Sisseton	5	22	25	19	25
Watertown	2	12	11	8	12
Webster	3	17	15	10	17
Wheaton	6	26	26	19	26



National Weather Service Aberdeen, South Dakota

A few passing clouds early, otherwise, mostly sunny for today with highs ranging from the upper 70s to the upper 80s with overnight lows in the upper 50s to lower 60s. A weak system could bring slight chances of rain/thunderstorms late this afternoon and continuing chances overnight across northeastern SD into western MN. However, greater chances of precipitation returns Thursday through Friday. No severe weather is anticipated at this time.

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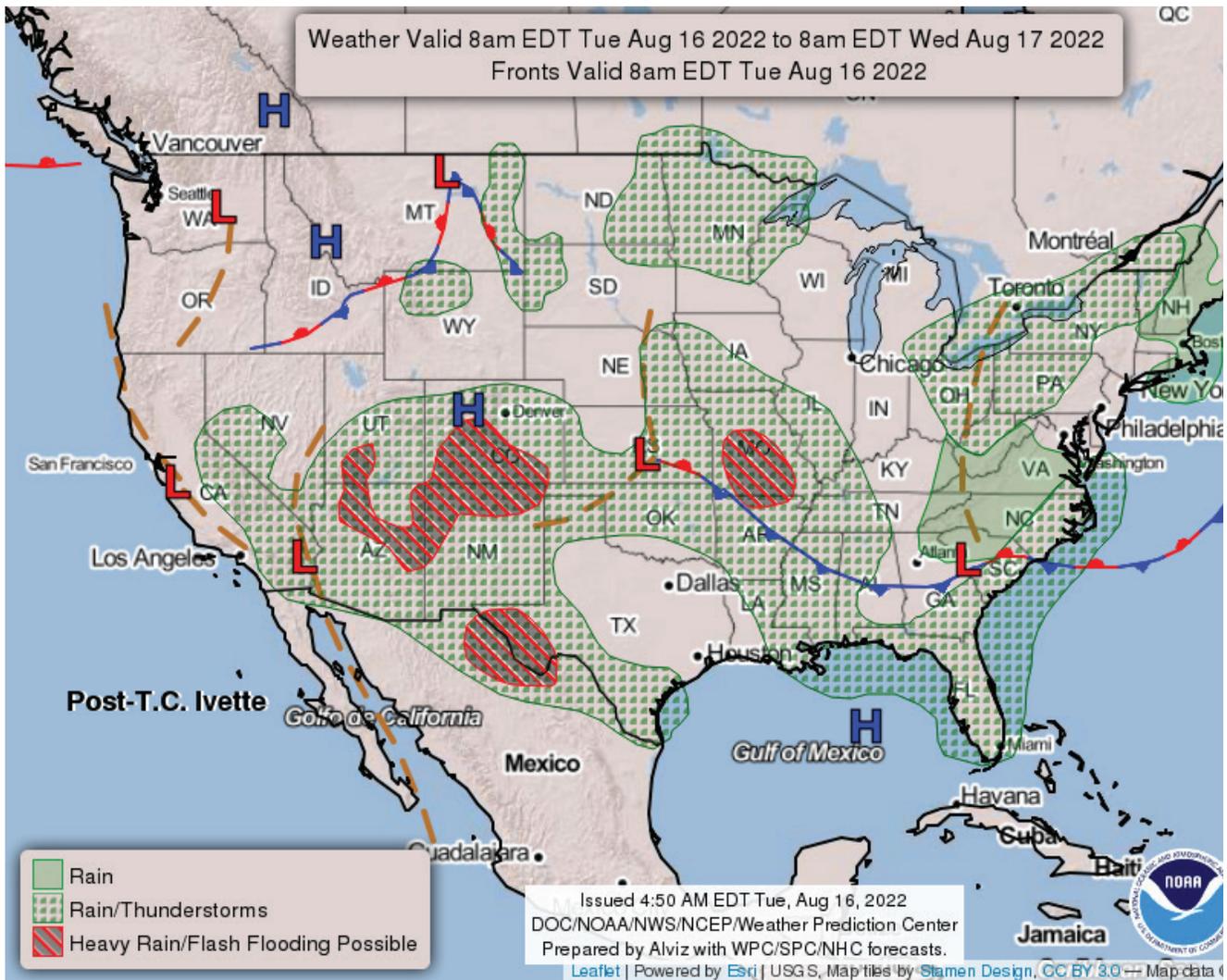
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 79.6 °F at 4:45 PM
Low Temp: 62.4 °F at 7:00 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 11:00 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 6 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 105 in 1988
Record Low: 42 in 1897
Average High: 83°F
Average Low: 57°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 1.15
Precip to date in Aug.: 0.65
Average Precip to date: 15.25
Precip Year to Date: 15.19
Sunset Tonight: 8:40:00 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:34:28 AM



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Today in Weather History

August 16, 1986: Thunderstorm winds gusted to 60 mph in Forestburg, in Sanborn County. Thunderstorm winds gusting to 100 mph uprooted trees and damaged buildings in the northern part of Hanson County. On several farms, barns, garages, silos, and small buildings were destroyed. The worst affected area was south of Epiphany where large steel sheds were damaged, and a roof was blown in.

1777: The Battle of Bennington, delayed a day by rain, was fought. The rain-delayed British reinforcements and allowed the Vermont Militia to arrive in time, enabling the Americans to win a victory by defeating two enemy forces, one at a time.

1909 - A dry spell began in San Bernardino County of southern California that lasted until the 6th of May in 1912, a stretch of 994 days! Another dry spell, lasting 767 days, then began in October of 1912. (The Weather Channel)

1916 - Altapass, NC, was deluged with 22.22 inches of rain in 24 hours to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather from Oklahoma to Wisconsin and Lower Michigan. Thunderstorms in central Illinois produced wind gusts to 80 mph at Springfield which toppled two large beer tents at the state fair injuring 58 persons. Thunderstorms also drenched Chicago IL with 2.90 inches of rain, making August 1987 their wettest month of record. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a slow moving cold front produced severe weather from North Dakota to Lower Michigan during the day. Nine tornadoes were sighted in North Dakota, and thunderstorms also produced hail three inches in diameter at Lakota ND, and wind gusts to 83 mph at Marais MI. Thirty-seven cities in the northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Rockford IL with a reading of 104 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Late afternoon and evening thunderstorms in the Central High Plains Region produced golf ball size hail at La Junta CO, Intercanyon CO, and Custer SD. Afternoon thunderstorms over South Texas drenched Brownsville with 2.60 inches of rain. Fair skies allowed viewing of the late evening full lunar eclipse from the Great Lakes Region to the Northern and Central Plains Region, and across much of the western third of the country. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1992: One of the most destructive United States hurricanes of record started modestly as a tropical wave that emerged from the west coast of Africa on August 14. The wave spawned a tropical depression on August 16, which became Tropical Storm Andrew the next day.



Crushed and Beautiful

Scripture: Psalm 51:10-17 (NIV)

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right[a] spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise..

Insight By: K. T. Sim

The superscription to Psalm 51 reads: "A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba." The backstory to this psalm can be found in 2 Samuel 11–12, where we read that David refused to confess his double sin of murdering Uriah and committing adultery with Bathsheba for almost a year. God then sent the prophet Nathan to confront him. After repenting from his sins, many scholars believe David penned Psalms 32 and 51. (Some scholars add Psalm 86 as well.) Psalm 51 is one of the seven "penitential psalms" (also Psalms 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, 143), so called because the writer, in repentant sorrow, confessed his sins and turned to God for His mercy and forgiveness. Psalm 51 has become a model prayer for believers in Jesus today as we seek God to forgive our sins..

Comment By: Lisa M. Samra

At first glance I dismissed the painting Consider the Lilies by Makoto Fujimura as a simple, monochromatic painting featuring a lily seemingly hiding in the background. However, the painting came alive when I learned it was actually painted with more than eighty layers of finely crushed minerals in a style of Japanese art known as Nihonga, a style Fujimura calls "slow art." Looking closely reveals layers of complexity and beauty. Fujimura explains that he sees the gospel echoed in the technique of making "beauty through brokenness," just as Jesus' suffering brought the world wholeness and hope.

God loves to take aspects of our lives where we've been crushed and broken and create something new and beautiful. King David needed God's help to repair the brokenness in his life caused by his own devastating actions. In Psalm 51, written after admitting to abusing his kingly power to take another man's wife and arrange the murder of her husband, David offered God his "broken and contrite heart" (v. 17) and pleaded for mercy. The Hebrew word translated "contrite" is *nidkeh*, meaning "crushed."

For God to refashion his heart (v. 10), David had to first offer Him the broken pieces. It was both an admission of sorrow and trust. David entrusted his heart to a faithful and forgiving God, who lovingly takes what's been crushed and transforms it into something beautiful..

Reflect and Prayer: What parts of your heart are crushed? How might you entrust your brokenness to God?

Dear God, I entrust my brokenness to You, believing that in Your time, You'll transform it into something truly beautiful.

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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)
09/11/2022: 6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3-5pm
09/11/2022: Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10 a.m.
09/02-04: Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/01/2022: Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/07/2022: Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
10/31/2022: Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2022: United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/12/2022: Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course
12/10/2022: Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm
01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
07/04/2023 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start (4th of July)
07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Lotto America

08-15-22-49-50, Star Ball: 3, ASB: 3

(eight, fifteen, twenty-two, forty-nine, fifty; Star Ball: three; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$19,050,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 82,000,000

Powerball

20-24-47-50-63, Powerball: 5, Power Play: 2

(twenty, twenty-four, forty-seven, fifty, sixty-three; Powerball: five; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$66,000,000

Noem releases social study standards burnishing U.S. history

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Monday released a revised proposal for social studies standards in public schools that lays out a mostly shining vision of American history, after an initial draft of the standards came under heavy criticism last year from conservatives and Native American educators.

The Republican governor claimed the new proposed standards are free from “political agendas” and include an increased focus on Native American history. But they received swift criticism from some educators as a thinly-veiled political document. They emphasize the qualities of America’s founders and mimic language Noem has used as she jumped on the conservative cause of weeding certain “divisive” teachings on race from public schools.

The 15-member standards workgroup, selected partially by the governor, included Noem’s chief of staff, two Republican lawmakers and the director of the South Dakota Catholic Conference, but just three educators certified by the Department of Education. The group’s work was facilitated by William Morrissey, a former professor at Hillsdale College — a conservative institution in Michigan that has tried to remake education across the country.

“South Dakota’s children deserve the very best social studies education in the nation,” Noem said in a statement. “These standards raise the bar for the breadth and depth of civics and history education. They feature a true, honest, and balanced approach to American history that is not influenced by political agendas.”

Noem, who is seen as a potential 2024 White House contender, has also advocated for the “1776 Pledge to Save Our Schools” as part of a conservative drive to emphasize the qualities of the founders of the United States. She has also tried to purge so-called critical race theory from the state’s public schools.

Despite the academic framework being one of her favorite targets, her administration has provided scant evidence that teaching associated with critical race theory — an academic framework that centers on the idea that racism is systemic in the nation’s institutions and that those institutions maintain the dominance of white people — exists in South Dakota schools. The state Department of Education spent hundreds of hours combing through its policies, guidance materials and websites, but its report released Monday found “a very small number” of instances where its material didn’t line up with Noem’s order to get rid of anything that contained “divisive concepts” on race.

The governor in a statement cast the report as “proactively removing” critical race theory as she promotes “America’s true and honest history.”

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The social studies standards, which provide a list of topics students should comprehend at each K-12 grade level, give her an opportunity to stamp that vision of U.S. history on the state's public schools. They are widely followed by school districts but are not mandatory.

The new 128-page document more than doubles the length of the proposed standards the Department of Education released last year. They would make the sprawling argument that the United States, though not without fault, is an exceptional nation that has uniquely advanced rights for every race and gender. They are also peppered with Christian history and explore the religion's influence on the nation's leading figures and on Western civilization.

For example, seventh grade students are expected to explain how the nation's founders advanced equal rights for every person and advanced the idea that each person "is endowed with these rights by the God that created them, and that the existence of human slavery was understood by most, but not all, of the founders to be a contradiction of the principle of human equality."

Seventh graders are also to be taught: "Patriotism is the love of country, meaning that one holds his or her country up to an objective standard of moral right and wrong, preserving the ways in which the country does good and correcting the ways it sometimes does wrong."

The standards state they are intended, in part, to "foster a love of country that, like any love, is not blind to faults."

Nick Tilsen, the president of an Indigenous advocacy organization called NDN Collective, said that when the standards start out with goals like that, they are bound to further a narrative that continues to treat minority groups unjustly.

"Her approach in this curriculum further perpetuates ignorance, further perpetuates racism and white supremacy," he said, adding "These priority areas are dominated by nationalism."

The proposed standards are the Noem administration's second attempt to update the learning objectives. Both the political left and right criticized last year's standard-setting process and led Noem to scrap that proposal and relaunch the process. Noem's new version, released Monday, appeased conservative critics.

Republican state Rep. Sue Peterson, who resigned in protest from last year's workgroup, praised the new standards in a statement released by the governor's office. She called them "substantial and straightforward standards that emphasize our founding documents, our pursuit of freedom, and treat our nation's history honestly."

Noem's office also attempted to head off criticism from Native American education advocates and included a statement from Joe Circle Bear, a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe who was part of the workgroup.

"Governor Noem promised to tell our story as part of American history, and these standards do that," Circle Bear said in the statement.

The new standards ask schools to teach students about the "removal and relocation" of the Dakota, Lakota and Nakota, major battles and massacres in their history, the effects of forced boarding schools on Native Americans, as well as Indigenous leaders such as Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull and Spotted Tail. It also covers the Civil Rights Movement and its leading figures, such as Rosa Parks and Malcolm X.

But Native American educators, who protested after the Department of Education last year cut references to Indigenous culture and history from a draft the workgroup submitted for final approval, said the new standards continued to push Indigenous history and culture to the periphery.

"They are not inclusive to say the least. The goal was to get away from inclusivity to push an agenda that the governor deems important," said Sarah White, who directs the South Dakota Education Equity Coalition. "It's definitely going to further disenfranchise our students when it's missing that Indigenous lens."

White said her group is strategizing how to weigh in on the social studies standards as they next become open to public comment at several hearings in the coming months. After the public comment period and potential revisions, the Board of Education Standards, which is appointed by the governor, will approve the new education standards.

White said, "We're hopeful that we can pack the house at all the public hearings."

The Department of Education is planning a separate review of the instructions for teachers included in

the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards, which teach Lakota, Dakota and Nakota culture and history. The department also found two content standards in a technical education course called Introduction to Law and Public Safety II that ran afoul of Noem's executive order. Even though those standards align with industry expectations for law enforcement training, the department said it would recommend changes to the courses.

Blasts, fire hits military depot in Russian-annexed Crimea

By PAUL BYRNE Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Massive explosions and fires hit a military depot in Russia-annexed Crimea on Tuesday, forcing the evacuation of more than 3,000 people, the second time in recent days that the Ukraine war's focus has turned to the contested peninsula.

Russia blamed the blasts at an ammunition storage facility in Mayskoye on an "act of sabotage" without naming the perpetrators. As with last week's explosions, they led to speculation that Ukrainian forces may have staged an attack on the peninsula, which Russia has controlled since 2014.

Separately, the Russian business newspaper Kommersant quoted local residents as saying that plumes of black smoke also rose over an air base in Crimea's Gvardeyskoye.

Ukraine has stopped short of publicly claiming responsibility for any of the fires or explosions, including last week's at another air base that destroyed nine Russian planes. If Ukrainian forces were, in fact, responsible for any of the explosions, they would represent a significant escalation in the war.

Videos posted on social media showed thick plumes of smoke rising over raging flames in Mayskoye, and a series of explosions could be heard in the background. The Russian Defense Ministry said the fires at the depot caused damage to a power plant, power lines, rail tracks and some apartment buildings. It said in a statement that "there were no serious injuries."

Earlier, Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti reported a fire at a transformer substation after "a loud thump sound" in what appeared to be a result of the blasts at the depot.

Crimea holds huge strategic and symbolic significance for Russia and Ukraine. The Kremlin's demand that Kyiv recognize the peninsula as part of Russia has been one of its key conditions for ending the fighting, while Ukraine has vowed to drive the Russians from the peninsula and all other occupied territories.

The district where the blasts happened, Dzhankoi, is in the north of the peninsula, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the Russian-controlled region of Kherson in southern Ukraine. Kyiv has recently mounted a series of attacks on various sites in the region, targeting supply routes for the Russian military there and ammunition depots.

Last week's explosions at Saki air base sent sunbathers on nearby beaches fleeing as huge flames and pillars of smoke rose over the horizon. Ukrainian officials emphasized Tuesday that Crimea — which is a popular destination for Russian tourists — would not be spared the ravages of war experienced throughout Ukraine.

Rather than a travel destination, "Crimea occupied by Russians is about warehouses explosions and high risk of death for invaders and thieves," Ukraine presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said on Twitter, though he did not claim any Ukraine responsibility for the blasts.

Crimea's regional leader, Sergei Aksyonov, said that two people were injured and more than 3,000 evacuated from the villages of Mayskoye and Azovskoye near Dzhankoi following the munitions depot explosions. who can we attribute the injured to?

Because the explosions damaged rail tracks, some trains in northern Crimea were diverted to other lines.

The Russian military blamed last week's blasts at the Saki air base on an accidental detonation of munitions there, but it appeared to be the result of a Ukrainian attack.

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

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A British Defense Ministry intelligence update said vessels in Russia's Black Sea Fleet "continue to pursue an extremely defensive posture" in the waters off Crimea, with the ships barely venturing out of sight of the coastline.

Russia already lost its flagship Moskva in the Black Sea and last month the Ukrainian military retook the strategic Snake Island outpost off Ukraine's southwestern coast. It is vital for guaranteeing sea lanes out of Odesa, Ukraine's biggest port.

The Russian fleet's "limited effectiveness undermines Russia's overall invasion strategy," the British statement said. "This means Ukraine can divert resources to press Russian ground forces elsewhere."

Meanwhile, in the Donbas, which has been the focus of the fighting in recent months, one civilian was killed in Russian shelling, and two others wounded, according to the Ukrainian governor of the Donetsk region, Pavlo Kyrylenko.

In Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, one civilian was killed and nine others were wounded by Russian shelling, regional governor Oleh Syniehubov said. He added that the overnight attack on the city was "one of the most massive shelling of Kharkiv in recent days."

Officials in the central region of Dnipropetrovsk also reported shelling of the Nikopol and the Kryvyi Rih districts.

US, South Korea to begin expanded military drills next week

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The United States and South Korea will begin their biggest combined military training in years next week in the face of an increasingly aggressive North Korea, which has been ramping up weapons tests and threats of nuclear conflict against Seoul and Washington, the South Korean military said Tuesday.

The allies' summertime drills, named Ulchi Freedom Shield, will take place from Aug. 22 to Sept. 1 in South Korea and include field exercises involving aircraft, warships, tanks and potentially tens of thousands of troops.

The drills underscore Washington and Seoul's commitment to restore large-scale training after they canceled some of their regular drills and downsized others to computer simulations in recent years to create space for diplomacy with North Korea and because of COVID-19 concerns.

The U.S. Department of Defense also said the U.S., South Korean and Japanese navies took part in missile warning and ballistic missile search and tracking exercises off the coast of Hawaii from Aug. 8 to 14, which it said were aimed at furthering three-way cooperation in the face of North Korean challenges.

While the United States and South Korea describe their exercises as defensive, Ulchi Freedom Shield will almost surely draw an angry reaction from North Korea, which describes all allied training as invasion rehearsals and has used them to justify its nuclear weapons and missiles development.

China, North Korea's main ally, expressed concern over the expansion of U.S. military exercises with its Asian allies, saying they could worsen tensions with the North. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin didn't offer a specific answer when asked whether Beijing believes the trilateral drills in Hawaii were in some way directed at China.

"North Korea has repeatedly expressed its concern" over the joint drills, Wang said in a briefing in Beijing on Tuesday.

"The negative impact of the military exercises on the situation on the Korean Peninsula is worth paying attention to. All parties should act prudently and stop any actions that may increase tension and confrontation and damage the mutual trust," he said.

Before being shelved or downsized, the U.S. and South Korea held major joint exercises every spring and summer in South Korea. The spring ones had been highlighted by live-fire drills involving a broad range of land, air and sea assets and usually involved around 10,000 American and 200,000 Korean troops.

Tens of thousands of allied troops participated in the summertime drills, which mainly consisted of computer simulations to hone joint decision making and planning, although South Korea's military has

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emphasized the revival of large-scale field training this time.

Officials at Seoul's Defense Ministry and its Joint Chiefs of Staff did not comment on the number of U.S. and South Korean troops that will participate in Ulchi Freedom Shield.

The drills, which will kick off along with a four-day South Korean civil defense training program led by government employees, will reportedly include exercises simulating joint attacks, front-line reinforcements of arms and fuel, and removals of weapons of mass destruction.

The allies will also train for drone attacks and other new developments in warfare shown during Russia's war on Ukraine and practice joint military-civilian responses to attacks on seaports, airports and major industrial facilities such as semiconductor factories.

"The biggest meaning of (Ulchi Freedom Shield) is that it normalizes the South Korea-U.S. combined exercises and field training, (contributing) to the rebuilding of the South Korea-U.S. alliance and the combined defense posture," Moon Hong-sik, a Defense Ministry spokesperson, said during a briefing.

Some experts say North Korea may use the drills as an excuse to increase tensions.

North Korea has already warned of "deadly" retaliation against South Korea over its own COVID-19 outbreak, which it dubiously claims was caused by anti-North Korean propaganda leaflets and other objects flown across the border by balloons launched by southern activists. There are concerns that the North Korean threat, issued last week by the powerful sister of leader Kim Jong Un, portends a provocation which might include a nuclear or missile test or even border skirmishes.

In an interview with Associated Press Television last month, Choe Jin, deputy director of a think tank run by North Korea's Foreign Ministry, said the United States and South Korea would face "unprecedented" security challenges if they don't drop their hostile military pressure campaign against North Korea, including joint military drills.

Kim Jun-rak, spokesperson of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the South Korean and U.S. militaries are maintaining a close watch on North Korean military activities and facilities.

Animosity has increased on the Korean Peninsula since U.S.-North Korea nuclear negotiations derailed in early 2019 because of differences over a relaxation of crippling U.S.-led sanctions on North Korea in exchange for disarmament steps.

Kim Jong Un has since declared North Korea will bolster its nuclear deterrent in the face of "gangster-like" U.S. pressure and halted all cooperation with South Korea. Exploiting a division in the U.N. Security Council over Russia's war on Ukraine, North Korea has dialed up its weapons testing to a record pace this year, conducting more than 30 ballistic launches. They included the country's first intercontinental ballistic missiles since 2017 and tests of tactical systems designed to be armed with small battlefield nuclear weapons.

Kim has punctuated the testing binge with repeated warnings that North Korea will proactively use its nuclear weapons in conflicts with South Korea and the United States, which experts say indicate an escalation in its nuclear doctrine that could cause greater concern for its neighbors.

South Korea and U.S. officials say North Korea has been gearing up for its first nuclear test since September 2017, when it claimed to have developed a thermonuclear warhead to fit on its ICBMs.

Companies facing 1st tax on stock buybacks in Biden bill

By MARCY GORDON AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats have pulled off a quiet first in their just-passed legislation addressing climate change and health care: the creation of a tax on stock buybacks, a cherished tool of Corporate America that had long seemed untouchable.

Under the bill President Joe Biden is scheduled to sign into law Tuesday, companies will face a new 1% excise tax on purchases of their own shares, effectively paying a penalty for a maneuver that they have long used to return cash to investors and bolster their stock price. The tax takes effect in 2023.

Buybacks have ballooned in recent years — they're forecast to reach \$1 trillion in 2022 — as companies have swelled with cash from sky-high profits.

Investors, including pension and retirement funds, like the buybacks. But fiery critics of big corporations

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and Wall Street like Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders loathe them, calling the practice “paper manipulation” to enrich senior executives and big shareholders.

Centrist Democrats, too, such as Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, have long criticized buybacks.

Democrats say that instead of returning cash to shareholders, big companies should use the money to increase employees’ wages or invest in the business. They are hoping the excise tax — it’s projected to bring the government an additional \$74 billion in revenue over 10 years — will cause a major shift in corporate behavior.

But some experts are skeptical that the tax will work as intended. They note that businesses have other methods for rewarding shareholders, raising the prospect that legislation aimed at halting one corporate stock practice could instead facilitate another, with new and unpredictable effects on the economy.

How it all plays out could be significant for the future landscape of big U.S. companies, their employees and their shareholders, and for the political staying power of one of the signature legislative initiatives of Biden and his Democratic majorities in Congress.

Where stock buybacks stand as the Democratic bill becomes law:

BUYBACK BONANZA

The major companies in the S&P 500 index bought a record amount of their own stock last year, \$882 billion. Their buybacks reached \$984 billion in the 12 months ended in March, another record.

Among the biggest repurchasers of stock are Big Tech companies such as Apple, Facebook parent Meta and Google parent Alphabet.

Companies have been plowing more of their cash into buying their own stock even as they’ve grappled with rising inflation, higher interest rates and the potential for stunted economic growth. They’ve faced higher expenses for raw materials, shipping and labor. Companies have largely been able to pass those costs on to their customers, but higher prices for food, clothing and everything else could threaten consumer spending — with resulting crimped sales growth for many companies. Americans are still spending, though more tepidly, the latest government reports show.

Buybacks can increase companies’ earnings per share because there are fewer shares universally held by shareholders. The buybacks can also signal confidence from executives about a company’s financial prospects.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE TAX?

“I hate stock buybacks,” Schumer, D-N.Y., told reporters as the legislative package advanced through Congress. “I think they’re one of the most self-serving things that Corporate America does, instead of investing in workers and training and research and equipment.”

That makes for appealing election-year rhetoric, but whether the Democrats’ aspiration will translate into different business behavior is less clear.

It’s an admirable policy goal, says Steven Rosenthal, senior fellow at the nonpartisan Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center, who calls the new excise tax on buybacks “efficient, fair and easily administered.”

But will the goal be achieved? Rosenthal noted that in the wake of the 2017 Republican tax law, which gave companies a cash windfall by slashing the corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%, a wave of buybacks ensued. After the new excise tax goes into effect, companies might use some of the money they would have spent on buybacks to pay more dividends to shareholders instead, he suggested. The new tax puts buybacks closer to an equal tax footing with dividends.

Rosenthal doesn’t rule out, though, that companies decide to put some of the saved money into raising workers’ pay or investing in the business.

Counterpoint: The tax “is not going to translate into higher pay for workers,” said Jesse Fried, a professor at Harvard Law School who is an expert on corporate governance. And investing money back into the business may not be an option, he said, because “investment is already at very high levels, and there’s no indication that companies aren’t pursuing worthwhile projects because they lack the cash.”

In the end, Fried expects that most of the money not spent on buybacks would end up being added to the pile of some \$8 trillion in cash that U.S. companies are sitting on.

A MODEST HIT?

Because the new excise tax will be calculated on the smaller, net amount of a company's buybacks — total repurchases minus shares issued during the year — some companies may see it as modest hit worth taking and continue purchasing stock.

The tax won't apply to stock contributed to retirement accounts, pensions and employee stock-ownership plans.

After surveying its analysts about the tax, RBC Capital Markets suggested that companies may grumble about it, but "it's unlikely to impact planning."

One thing is all but certain: With the new tax scheduled to take effect Jan. 1, companies have a deadline for buying back their stock tax-free. That means a flurry of buybacks could come in the months ahead.

Biden to sign massive climate and health care legislation

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

KIAWAH ISLAND, S.C. (AP) — President Joe Biden will sign Democrats' landmark climate change and health care bill on Tuesday, delivering what he has called the "final piece" of his pared-down domestic agenda, as he aims to boost his party's standing with voters less than three months before the midterm elections.

The legislation includes the most substantial federal investment in history to fight climate change — some \$375 billion over the decade — and would cap prescription drug costs at \$2,000 out-of-pocket annually for Medicare recipients. It also would help an estimated 13 million Americans pay for health care insurance by extending subsidies provided during the coronavirus pandemic.

The measure is paid for by new taxes on large companies and stepped-up IRS enforcement of wealthy individuals and entities, with additional funds going to reduce the federal deficit.

The House on Friday approved the measure on a party-line 220-207 vote. It passed the Senate days earlier with Vice President Kamala Harris breaking a 50-50 tie in that chamber.

Biden is set to sign the bill during a small ceremony in the State Dining Room of the White House, sandwiched between his return from a six-day beachside vacation in South Carolina and his departure for his home in Wilmington, Delaware. He plans to hold a larger "celebration" for the legislation on Sept. 6 once lawmakers return to Washington.

The signing caps a spurt of legislative productivity for Biden and Congress, who in three months have approved legislation on veterans' benefits, the semiconductor industry and gun checks for young buyers. The president and lawmakers have also responded to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and supported NATO membership for Sweden and Finland.

With Biden's approval rating lagging, Democrats are hoping that the string of successes will jump-start their chances of maintaining control in Washington in the November midterms. The 79-year-old president aims to restore his own standing with voters as he contemplates a reelection bid.

The White House announced Monday that it was going to deploy Biden and members of his Cabinet on a "Building a Better America Tour" to promote the recent victories, though the administration has yet to announce specific travel by the president.

"In the coming weeks, the President will host a Cabinet meeting focused on implementing the Inflation Reduction Act, will travel across the country to highlight how the bill will help the American people, and will host an event to celebrate the enactment of the bill at the White House on September 6th," the White House said in a statement.

Republicans say the legislation's new business taxes will increase prices, worsening the nation's bout with its highest inflation since 1981. Though Democrats have labeled the measure the Inflation Reduction Act, nonpartisan analysts say it will have a barely perceptible impact on prices.

The measure is a slimmed-down version of the more ambitious plan to supercharge environment and social programs that Biden and his party unveiled early last year.

Biden's initial 10-year, \$3.5 trillion proposal also envisioned free prekindergarten, paid family and medical leave, expanded Medicare benefits and eased immigration restrictions. That crashed after centrist Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., said it was too costly, using the leverage every Democrat has in the evenly divided

Senate.

Still, Biden and Democrats are hailing the legislation as a once-in-a-generation investment in addressing the long-term effects of climate change, as well as drought in the nation's West.

The bill will direct spending, tax credits and loans to 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.

Another \$64 billion would help 13 million people pay premiums over the next three years for privately bought health insurance under the Affordable Care Act. 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 annually starting in 2025, and beginning next year would pay no more than \$35 monthly for insulin, the costly diabetes drug.

Kenya calm a day after chaotic presidential declaration

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Kenya was calm on Tuesday, a day after Deputy President William Ruto was declared the winner of the narrow presidential election over longtime opposition figure Raila Odinga — a vote closely watched in the East African country that has been crucial to regional stability.

There were protests by Odinga supporters in some cities Monday night after chaos around the declaration as a majority of electoral commissioners alleged the process was "opaque." Those commissioners, appointed by President Uhuru Kenyatta last year, gave no details about their sudden objection after an election widely seen as the most transparent ever in Kenya.

The 77-year-old Odinga, who has pursued the presidency for a quarter-century, still has made no public statement or appearance. His campaign has signaled it might challenge the election result in court and has seven days after the declaration to do so. The Supreme Court would then have 14 days to make a ruling.

The electoral commission chairman said Ruto won with almost 50.5% of votes while Odinga received nearly 49%. On Tuesday, the local Elections Observation Group announced that its highly regarded parallel voting tally "corroborates the official results" in an important check on the process.

"We have made strides toward credible elections," the group said. It called the split in the electoral commission "unfortunate" but noted that the chairman is the one charged under the constitution with announcing the results.

Odinga's campaign had expected victory after the outgoing president in a political twist backed his former rival Odinga instead of his own deputy president. In the minutes before the declaration, shocked Kenyans watched shouting Odinga supporters, including newly elected members of Parliament, scuffle with electoral commission officials before police restored calm.

The 55-year-old Ruto appealed to Kenyans by making the election about economic differences and not the ethnic ones that have long marked the country's politics with sometimes deadly results. He portrayed himself as an outsider from humble beginnings defying the political dynasties of Kenyatta and Odinga, whose fathers were Kenya's first president and vice president.

Still, the turnout in last Tuesday's vote dipped to 65% as Kenyans across the country of 56 million expressed frustration and lack of confidence that the candidates would address the problems of rising prices, high unemployment and widespread corruption. The now-wealthy Ruto himself has faced and denied multiple allegations of land grabs and other graft.

In the quiet capital, Nairobi, on Tuesday, motorbike rider Distrious Mirimo saw some businesses remained closed. "Those who have closed are in fear but I urge them to open because there is nothing going on," he said. "The president has already been chosen and we must accept the results."

As a growing number of African leaders issued statements congratulating Ruto, Kenya's outgoing president remained silent.

Far-right Italian leader Meloni rides popular wave in polls

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By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — With a message that blends Christianity, motherhood and patriotism, Giorgia Meloni is riding a wave of popularity that next month could see her become Italy's first female prime minister and its first far-right leader since World War II.

Even though her Brothers of Italy party has neo-fascist roots, Meloni has sought to dispel concerns about its legacy, saying voters have grown tired of such discussions.

Still, there are nagging signs that such a legacy can't be shaken off so easily: Her party's symbol includes an image of a tricolored flame, borrowed from a neo-fascist party formed shortly after the end of the war.

If Brothers of Italy prevails at the polls on Sept. 25 and the 45-year-old Meloni becomes premier, it will come almost 100 years to the month after Benito Mussolini, Italy's fascist dictator, came to power in October 1922.

In 2019, Meloni proudly introduced Caio Giulio Cesare Mussolini, a great-grandson of the dictator, as one of her candidates for the European Parliament, although he eventually lost.

For most Italian voters, questions about anti-fascism and neo-fascism aren't "a key driver of whom to vote for," said Lorenzo Pregliasco, head of the YouTrend polling company. "They don't see that as part of the present. They see that as part of the past."

Still, Meloni is sensitive to international scrutiny about her possible premiership and prefers the term conservative instead of far right to describe her party.

She recently recorded video messages in English, French and Spanish that said the Italian right "has handed fascism over to history for decades now, unambiguously condemning the suppression of democracy and the ignominious anti-Jewish laws."

That was a reference to the 1938 laws banning Italy's small Jewish community from participating in business, education and other facets of everyday life. The laws paved the way for the deportation of many Italian Jews to Nazi death camps during the German occupation of Rome in the waning years of World War II.

Yet by keeping the tri-colored flame in her party's logo, "she is symbolically playing on that heritage," said David Art, a Tufts University political science professor who studies Europe's far right. "But then she wants to say, 'We're not racist.'"

Unlike Germany, which worked to come to terms with its devastating Nazi legacy, the fascist period is little scrutinized in Italian schools and universities, says Gastone Malaguti. Now 96, he fought as a teenager against Mussolini's forces. In his decades of visiting classrooms to talk about Italy's anti-fascist Resistance, he found many students "ignorant" of that history.

Only five years ago, Brothers of Italy — its name is inspired by the opening words of the national anthem — was viewed as a fringe force, winning 4.4% of the vote. Now, opinion polls indicate it could come in first place in September and capture as much as 24% support, just ahead of the center-left Democrat Party led by former Premier Enrico Letta.

Under Italy's complex, partially proportional electoral system, campaign coalitions are what propels party leaders into the premiership, not just votes. Right-wing politicians have done a far better job this year than the Democrats of forging wide-ranging electoral partnerships.

Meloni has allied with the right-wing League party led by Matteo Salvini, who, like her, favors crackdowns on illegal migration. Her other electoral ally is the center-right Forza Italia party of former Premier Silvio Berlusconi.

Last year, her party was the only major one to refuse to join Italy's national pandemic unity coalition led by Premier Mario Draghi, the former European Central Bank chief. Draghi's government collapsed last month, abruptly abandoned by Salvini, Berlusconi and 5-Star leader Giuseppe Conte, who are all preoccupied with their parties' slipping fortunes in opinion polls and local elections.

In opinion surveys, Meloni is "credited with a consistent and coherent approach to politics. She didn't compromise," Pregliasco said, adding that she also is perceived as "a leader who has clear ideas — not everyone agrees with those ideas, of course."

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She has apologized for the "tone" but not the content of a blistering speech she delivered in June in Spain to drum up support for far-right party Vox.

"They will say we are dangerous, extremists, racists, fascists, deniers and homophobes," Meloni thundered, in an apparent reference to Holocaust deniers. She ended with a crescendo of shouted slogans: "Yes to natural families! No to LGBT lobbies! Yes to sexual identity! No to gender ideology!"

Meloni slammed "bureaucrats in Brussels" and "climate fundamentalism." Meloni, who has a young daughter, claimed that "the most censured" phrase is "woman and motherhood."

Abortion hasn't emerged as a campaign issue in Italy, where it's legal. But Meloni has decried Italy's shrinking birth rate, which would be even lower without immigrant women having babies.

At a rally of right-wing supporters in Rome in 2019, Meloni drew roars of approval when she yelled in a staccato pace: "I am Giorgia! I am a woman. I am a mother. I am Italian, and I am Christian. And you cannot take that away from me!"

Within days, her proclamation became fodder for a rap song's lyrics. While some saw that as a parody, Meloni loved it and even sang a few bars on a state radio program.

According to her 2021 memoir "I am Giorgia," much of her identity was forged by growing up in Rome's working-class Garbatella neighborhood. At 15, she joined a youth branch of the Italian Social Movement, the neo-fascist party with the flame symbol, and plastered political posters in the capital.

When she was 31, Berlusconi made her the minister of youth in his third and last government. But she soon blazed her own path, co-founding Brothers of Italy in 2012.

Both Salvini and Meloni say they are safeguarding what they call Europe's Christian identity. Salvini kisses dangling rosaries and wears a large cross on his often-bared chest, while Meloni's tiny cross sometimes peeks out from her loose-fitting blouses.

Her party staunchly backed Draghi's moves to send weapons to Ukraine, even as Salvini and Berlusconi, open admirers of Russian President Vladimir Putin, issued only tepid support. Meloni also defends the NATO alliance anchored by the United States, a fellow Group of Seven country. But she often views European Union rules as an infringement on Italy's sovereignty.

If Meloni's far-right forces dominate Italy's next government, there's concern about the support Italy will give to right-wing governments in Hungary and Poland "for their deeply conservative agendas" amid fears about a "democratic backsliding" in the EU, Art said.

For her part, Meloni says she will "fiercely oppose any anti-democratic drift."

Iran submits a 'written response' in nuclear deal talks

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran said Tuesday it submitted a "written response" to what has been described as a final roadmap to restore its tattered nuclear deal with world powers.

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency offered no details on the substance of its response, but suggested that Tehran still wouldn't take the European Union-mediated proposal, despite warnings there would be no more negotiations.

"The differences are on three issues, in which the United States has expressed its verbal flexibility in two cases, but it should be included in the text," the IRNA report said. "The third issue is related to guaranteeing the continuation of (the deal), which depends on the realism of the United States."

Tehran under hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi has repeatedly tried to blame Washington for the delay in reaching an accord. Monday was reported to have been a deadline for Iran's response.

Nabila Massrali, a spokesperson for the EU on foreign affairs and security policy, told The Associated Press that the EU received Iran's response on Monday night.

"We are studying it and are consulting with the other JCPOA participants and the U.S. on the way ahead," she said, using an acronym for the formal name for the nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The EU has been the go-between in the indirect talks as Iran refused to negotiate directly with America since then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the accord in 2018.

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From Washington, State Department spokesman Ned Price said the U.S. would share its own response to the EU.

"We do agree, however, with (the EU's) fundamental point, and that is that what could be negotiated has been negotiated," Price said.

He added that Iran had been making "unacceptable demands" going beyond the text of the 2015 nuclear deal, which saw Iran drastically limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

"If Iran wants these sanctions lifted, they will need to alter their underlying conduct," Price said. "They will need to change the dangerous activities that gave rise to these sanctions in the first place."

As of the last public count, Iran has a stockpile of some 3,800 kilograms (8,370 pounds) of enriched uranium. Under the deal, Tehran could enrich uranium to 3.67% purity, while maintaining a stockpile of uranium of 300 kilograms (660 pounds) under constant scrutiny of surveillance cameras and international inspectors.

Iran now enriches uranium up to 60% purity — a level it never reached before and one that is a short, technical step away from 90%. Nonproliferation experts warn Iran now has enough 60%-enriched uranium to reprocess into fuel for at least one nuclear bomb. Meanwhile, the surveillance cameras have been turned off and other footage has been seized by Iran.

However, Iran still would need to design a bomb and a delivery system for it, likely a monthslong project. Tehran insists its program is peaceful, though the West and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Iran had an organized military nuclear program until 2003.

AP Top 25 Reality Check: Pouring caution on that optimism

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

Low expectations rarely disappoint.

That's not to say your favorite team will fail to live up to the promise that comes with landing a spot in The Associated Press preseason Top 25 college football poll presented by Regions Bank that was released Monday.

But numbers suggest it is best to sprinkle a healthy amount of caution on that optimism as you gear up for the 2022 season.

Lear year was especially volatile for the Top 25, with 14 teams that started the season ranked finishing unranked. From 2010-20, on average, 9.5 teams that appeared in the preseason Top 25 finished unranked — about 38% of the picks. During that time, the most was 12 in 2010.

In the preseason top 10 last year, three teams (Texas A&M, Iowa State and North Carolina) failed to make it into the final poll. That's double the average (1.5) from 2010-2020.

Time to temper expectations for the preseason Top 25 this season — except for Alabama.

No. 1 Alabama (13-2 last season)

Opener: vs. Utah State, Sept. 3.

Reality check: The surest bet in sports is the Crimson Tide, which has only missed the playoff once. Alabama has not finished outside the top 10 since 2007, coach Nick Saban's first season. No reason to think it's happening this season.

No. 2 Ohio State (11-2)

Opener: vs. No. 5 Notre Dame, Sept. 3.

Reality check: The Buckeyes hired former Oklahoma State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles to fix a defense that was badly exposed against their best opponents. QB C.J. Stroud, WR Jaxson Smith-Njigba and a potent offense probably make Ohio State flop-proof, though.

No. 3 Georgia (14-1)

Opener: vs. No. 11 Oregon in Atlanta, Sept. 3.

Reality check: Most of last season's all-time great defense is now in the NFL. The Bulldogs are too talented to take a big step backward, but assuming Alabama-level consistency from any team is a lot to ask.

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No. 4 Clemson (10-3)

Opener: vs. Georgia Tech in Atlanta, Sept. 5.

Reality check: Coming off their first non-ACC championship season in seven years, the Tigers are maybe the most intriguing team in the country. Clemson has two new coordinators and a former five-star quarterback (D.J. Uiagalelei) trying to recover from a puzzlingly poor season. Voters are leaning toward last season being a blip for Dabo Swinney's team and not the start of a trend.

No. 5 Notre Dame (11-2)

Opener: at No. 2 Ohio State, Sept. 3.

Reality check: The Fighting Irish have established lofty standards with five straight 10-win seasons, but coach Marcus Freeman's first season as Brian Kelly's replacement has a lot of transition-year vibes.

No. 6 Texas A&M (8-4)

Opener: vs. Sam Houston, Sept. 3.

Reality check: The Aggies won the offseason with the No. 1 recruiting class and coach Jimbo Fisher going off on his former boss, Saban. They are also a team relying heavily on sophomores and those five-star freshmen and one with no established starting quarterback or big-play receivers.

No. 7 Utah (10-4)

Opener: at Florida, Sept. 3.

Reality check: The Utes are coming off their first Pac-12 title and Rose Bowl appearance, and have enough pieces back to do it again. But repeating a magical season is difficult for the vast majority of programs that don't regularly sign top-10 recruiting classes.

No. 8 Michigan (12-2)

Opener: vs. Colorado State, Sept. 3.

Reality check: The Wolverines broke through for coach Jim Harbaugh with a Big Ten title and victory over Ohio State in 2021. Now, with two new coordinators and a defense replacing three first-round draft picks, a repeat seems unlikely. An experienced offense and accommodating schedule gives Michigan a high floor.

No. 9 Oklahoma (11-2)

Opener: vs. UTEP, Sept. 3.

Reality check: New coach (Brent Venables), new quarterback (Dillon Gabriel) and more uncertainty in Norman than there has been in years. The Sooners have been one of the most reliable teams in the country for two decades, finishing unranked only twice. But turnover often comes with volatility.

No. 10 Baylor (12-2)

Opener: vs. Albany, Sept. 3.

Reality check: Another one of 2021's surprise breakout teams, the defending Big 12 champions hope to keep it up with strong line play. Still, the Big 12 is all about winning close games and the difference between playing for the title and finishing fourth is thin.

No. 11 Oregon (10-4)

Opener: vs. No. 3 Georgia in Atlanta, Sept. 3.

Reality check: Another highly ranked team with a new coach and quarterback. Former Georgia DC Dan Lanning inherits the most talented roster in the Pac-12. Transfer Bo Nix will try to bring stability to the quarterback position, which was not really his thing at Auburn.

No. 12 Oklahoma State (12-2)

Opener: vs. Central Michigan, Sept. 1.

Reality check: The Cowboys, a team buoyed by super seniors — especially on defense — in 2022, will need to lean heavily on its experienced offense. QB Spencer Sanders has had a long career filled with peaks and valleys.

No. 13 North Carolina State (9-3)

Opener: at East Carolina, Sept. 3.

Reality check: The Wolfpack enter one of the most highly anticipated seasons for the program in recent history, with a loaded defense and star quarterback in Devin Leary. This is also program that has one

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double-digit victory season — ever.

No. 14 USC (5-7)

Opener: vs. Rice, Sept. 3.

Reality check: The star power at USC has not been this bright in a while with coach Lincoln Riley, QB Caleb Williams and WR Jordan Addison providing hope for an immediate turnaround. But the game is still about blocking and tackling and there are plenty of questions about the Trojans' ability to do either well.

No. 15 Michigan State (11-2)

Opener: vs. Western Michigan, Sept. 2.

Reality check: Coach Mel Tucker parlayed the Spartans' surprising surge last year into an enormous contract and the elevated expectations that go with it. Will regression come for the Spartans in 2022?

No. 16 Miami (7-5)

Opener: vs. Bethune-Cookman, Sept. 4.

Reality check: The U. brought back hometown hero Mario Cristobal to help build the program back to its powerhouse past. He's got a pro prospect in QB Tyler Van Dyke to work with, but this is a lot of optimism for a team that has only finished ranked once in the last four seasons.

No. 17 Pitt (11-3)

Opener: vs. West Virginia, Sept. 1.

Reality check: Coming off an ACC title, the Panthers are hoping USC transfer Kedon Slovis can replicate Kenny Pickett's stellar 2021. He will have to do it without the departed Jordan Addison. Pitt hasn't finished consecutive seasons ranked since 1983.

No. 18 Wisconsin (9-4)

Opener: vs. Illinois State, Sept. 3.

Reality check: In three of the last four seasons, the Badgers have started the season ranked and finished it unranked. The formula of star running back (Braelon Allen) and staunch defense appears to be in place again, but can QB Graham Mertz finally find his blue-chip form?

No. 19 Arkansas (9-4)

Opener: vs. No. 23 Cincinnati, Sept. 3.

Reality check: Life in the SEC West is hard. The Razorbacks were overachievers last year, but things can flip fast. Especially facing a schedule that also includes Cincinnati and No. 25 BYU with a rebuilt defense.

No. 20 Kentucky (10-3)

Opener: at Miami (Ohio), Sept. 3.

Reality check: Kentucky has found success in bullying teams up front. Turnover on both lines could make that tougher this season, even while QB Will Levis' NFL prospect status rises. The last time the Wildcats finished ranked in consecutive seasons: 1977.

No. 21 Mississippi (10-3)

Opener: vs. Troy, Sept. 3.

Reality check: After the first 10-win regular season in school history, Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin dived back into the transfer portal to rebuild his offense with QB Jaxson Dart, RB Zach Evans and OT Mason Brooks. Do the pieces come together again for the Portal King?

No. 22 Wake Forest (11-3)

Opener: vs. VMI, Sept. Sept. 1.

Reality check: The Demon Deacons have 13 starters returning from one of the best teams in school history. But as good as Wake was last year, the defense fell apart late and now the Deacs will have to make do for an indefinite stint without QB Sam Hartman.

No. 23 Cincinnati (13-1)

Opener: at No. 19 Arkansas, Sept. 3.

Reality check: Any remaining doubts about last year's Bearcats were buried on NFL draft night. Cincinnati had nine players selected, including five in the top 100. That's a mountain of difference-makers for any program not named Alabama to replace.

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No. 24 Houston (12-2)

Opener: at UTSA, Sept. 3.

Reality check: The Cougars filled the promise of the Dana Holgorsen hire last year by playing for the American Athletic Conference title and are poised to be this season's G5 King. They also face a tricky early schedule that includes Texas Tech, and have to replace two big-time playmakers in DB Marcus Jones and DL Logan Hall.

No. 25 BYU (10-3)

Opener: at USF, Sept. 3.

Reality check: The Cougars won 10 games with a young team last year, which bodes well for this season. But, oh that schedule. BYU's last season as an independent before joining the Big 12 includes games against No. 10 Baylor, No. 11 Oregon, No. 5 Notre Dame, No. 19 Arkansas, Boise State and Stanford.

Ukraine's Black Sea deal also helps Russian farmers, economy

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

With much fanfare, ship after ship loaded with grain has sailed from Ukraine after being stuck in the country's Black Sea ports for nearly six months. More quietly, a parallel wartime deal met Moscow's demands to clear the way for its wheat to get to the world, too, boosting an industry vital to Russia's economy that had been ensnared in wider sanctions.

While the U.S. and its European allies work to crush Russia's finances with a web of penalties for invading Ukraine, they have avoided sanctioning its grains and other goods that feed people worldwide.

Russian and Ukrainian wheat, barley, corn and sunflower oil are important to countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, where millions rely on subsidized bread for survival. As the war spiked food and energy prices, millions of people have been pushed into poverty or closer to the brink of starvation.

Two deals that the U.N. and Turkey brokered last month to unblock food supplies depend on each other: one protects ships exporting Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea and the other assures Russia that its food and fertilizer won't face sanctions, safeguarding one of the pillars of its economy and helping ease concerns from insurers and banks.

The agreement allowed a Western shipper to move two vessels of grain out of Russia in a matter of weeks. It used to take months because Western banks refused to transfer payments to Russia. Although U.S. and European Union sanctions don't directly target Russian agriculture, Western banks have been wary of running afoul, hindering buyers' and shippers' access to Russian grain.

"You have to invest time with the banks to make them understand this whole thing because the authority says, 'Go ahead there's no sanction,' but the banks self-sanction," said Gaurav Srivastava, whose company Harvest Commodities buys, ships and sells grains from the Black Sea region.

He called the process with banks a "labor intensive exercise."

What's changed in recent weeks, Srivastava said, is "the appearance ... of this being sort of a truce between all parties."

The deal mattered to Russia because it's the world's biggest exporter of wheat, accounting for almost a fifth of global shipments, and the country is expected to have one of its best-ever crop seasons this year. Agriculture accounts for around 4% of Russia's gross domestic product, according to the World Bank.

"What is more important is employment," said Russian economist Sergey Aleksashenko, referring to jobs created by agriculture. "It's like 7 to 8% of employment."

Farming provides 5-6 million Russian jobs, with some regions almost entirely dependent on it for their livelihood, he said.

Srivastava, whose company operates from Los Angeles and Geneva, hopes to be able to ship out 10-15 million tons of Russian grain over the coming year.

He also has been able to move out two chartered ships that were stuck at Ukrainian ports since the start of the war on Feb. 24. He said the company is aiming to pick up 1 million tons of grain from Ukraine under the four-month-long U.N. deal.

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"We are a commercial business, but we are trying to help the plight of farmers in both Russia and Ukraine," Srivastava said. "I'm very optimistic, especially in the last couple of weeks."

Russia's demands for the deal included public statements from the U.S. and EU that sanctions don't target Russian food and fertilizer. It also raised issues around financial transactions to the Russian Agricultural Bank, access for Russian-flagged vessels at ports and ammonia exports needed for fertilizer production.

A week before Russia signed the agreement, the U.S. Treasury Department issued statements with such assurances. It made clear that Washington hadn't imposed sanctions on the sale or transport of agricultural commodities or medicine from Russia.

Treasury also issued a broad license to authorize certain transactions related to agricultural commodities, saying the U.S. "strongly supports efforts by the United Nations to bring both Ukrainian and Russian grain to world markets and to reduce the impact of Russia's unprovoked war on Ukraine on global food supplies and prices."

The EU also reiterated that Russian agriculture hadn't been sanctioned and blamed the global spike in food prices on the war and the Kremlin's agricultural export caps meant to protect its domestic market. The 27-nation bloc said its sanctions provide exceptions, such as allowing EU countries to authorize access to ports for Russian-flagged vessels for trade in agricultural or food products.

Russia says it's still facing challenges.

The country's agriculture ministry says difficulty with the supply of imported farming equipment, which isn't directly sanctioned, also threatens the grain harvest. It said domestic needs would be met, but that exports might be affected.

Even after the deal was signed, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov chided Western assurances that agriculture was exempt from sanctions. During a diplomatic tour of Africa focused on food exports, he said a "half-truth is worse than a lie" while pointing to the chilling effect of sanctions.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres "committed himself to press the Western countries to lift those restrictions," Lavrov said. "We'll see whether he can succeed."

Meanwhile, Russian and Ukrainian grains are ever more critical to averting hunger in developing countries. S&P Global Commodity Insights said in a June report that 41 million tons of Russian wheat could be available for export this year.

But overall, the world is expected to produce 12.2 million tons less wheat and 19 million tons less corn for the 2022-2023 harvest compared with the previous year, International Grains Council Executive Director Arnaud Petit said. This is in part due to the war in Ukraine and drought in Europe, he said.

While a strong U.S. dollar and inflation may force some countries to ration food imports, Petit noted that some countries are imposing export controls that could impact the availability of grains in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

Cheney braces for loss as Trump tested in Wyoming and Alaska

By STEVE PEOPLES and MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, a leader in the Republican resistance to former President Donald Trump, is fighting to save her seat in the U.S. House on Tuesday as voters weigh in on the direction of the GOP.

Cheney's team is bracing for a loss against a Trump-backed challenger in the state in which he won by the largest of margins during the 2020 campaign.

Win or lose in deep-red Wyoming, the 56-year-old daughter of a vice president is vowing not to disappear from national politics as she contemplates a 2024 presidential bid. But in the short term, Cheney is facing a dire threat from Republican opponent Harriet Hageman, a Cheyenne ranching industry attorney who has harnessed the full fury of the Trump movement in her bid to expel Cheney from the House.

"I'm still hopeful that the polling numbers are wrong," said Landon Brown, a Wyoming state representative and vocal Cheney ally. "It'll be a crying shame really if she does lose. It shows just how much of a stranglehold that Donald Trump has on the Republican Party."

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Tuesday's contests in Wyoming and Alaska offer one of the final tests for Trump and his brand of hard-line politics ahead of the November general election. So far, the former president has largely dominated the fight to shape the GOP in his image, having helped install loyalists in key general election matchups from Arizona to Georgia to Pennsylvania.

This week's contests come just eight days after the FBI executed a search warrant at Trump's Florida estate, recovering 11 sets of classified records. Some were marked "sensitive compartmented information," a special category meant to protect the nation's most important secrets. The Republican Party initially rallied behind the former president, although the reaction turned somewhat mixed as more details emerged.

In Alaska, a recent change to state election law gives a periodic Trump critic, U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, an opportunity to survive the former president's wrath, even after she voted to convict him in his second impeachment trial.

The top four primary Senate candidates in Alaska, regardless of party, will advance to the November general election, where voters will rank them in order of preference.

In all, seven Republican senators and 10 Republican House members joined every Democrat in supporting Trump's impeachment in the days after his supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol as Congress tried to certify President Joe Biden's victory.

Just two of those 10 House members have won their GOP primaries this year. The rest have lost or declined to seek reelection. Cheney would be just the third to return to Congress if she defies expectations on Tuesday.

And Murkowski is the only pro-impeachment senator running for reelection this year.

She is facing 18 opponents — the most prominent of which is Republican Kelly Tshibaka, who has been endorsed by Trump — in her push to preserve a seat she has held for nearly 20 years. Trump railed against Murkowski on social media and in her home state of Alaska, where he hosted a rally with Tshibaka last month in Anchorage.

In contrast to vulnerable Republican candidates who cozied up to Trump in other states this summer, Murkowski continues to promote her bipartisan credentials.

"When you get the ideas from both sides coming together, little bit of compromise in the middle, this is what lasts beyond administrations, beyond changes in leadership," the Republican senator said in a video posted on social media over the weekend. "This is what allows for stability and certainty. And it comes through bipartisanship."

On the other side of the GOP's tent, Sarah Palin, the former Alaska governor and vice-presidential nominee, hopes to spark a political comeback on Tuesday.

Endorsed by Trump, she finished first among 48 candidates to qualify for a special election seeking to replace Rep. Don Young, who died in March at age 88, after 49 years as Alaska's lone House member. Palin is actually on Tuesday's ballot twice: once in a special election to complete Young's term and another for a full two-year House term starting in January. She's running against Republican Nick Begich and Democrat Mary Peltola in the special election and a larger field in the primary.

Ever an outsider, Palin spent recent days attacking Murkowski, a fellow Republican, and those who instituted the open primary and ranked-choice voting system in 2020.

"I've said all along that ranked-choice voting was designed to benefit Democrats and RINOs, specifically Sen. Lisa Murkowski (who stood no chance of winning a Republican nomination) along with other political dynasty family members in Alaska," Palin wrote in a recent statement calling for the law's repeal.

Back in Wyoming, Cheney's political survival may depend upon persuading enough Democrats to cast ballots in her Republican primary election. While some Democrats have rallied behind her, it's unclear whether there are enough in the state to make a difference. Biden earned just 26% of Wyoming's vote in 2020.

Many Republicans in the state — and in the country — have essentially excommunicated Cheney because of her outspoken criticism of Trump. The House GOP ousted her as the No. 3 House leader last year. And more recently, the Wyoming GOP and Republican National Committee censured her.

Anti-Trump groups such as U.S. Rep. Adam Kinzinger's Country First PAC and the Republican Account-

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ability Project have worked to encourage independents and Democrats to support Cheney in recent weeks. They are clearly disappointed by the expected outcome of Tuesday's election, although some are hopeful about her political future.

"What's remarkable is that in the face of almost certain defeat she's never once wavered," said Sarah Longwell, executive director of the Republican Accountability Project. "We've been watching a national American figure be forged. It's funny how small the election feels — the Wyoming election — because she feels bigger than it now."

Cheney has seemingly welcomed defeat by devoting almost every resource at her disposal to ending Trump's political career since the insurrection.

She emerged as a leader in the congressional committee investigating Trump's role in the Jan. 6 attack, giving the Democrat-led panel genuine bipartisan credibility. She has also devoted the vast majority of her time to the committee instead of the campaign trail back home, a decision that still fuels murmurs of disapproval among some Wyoming allies. And she has closed out the primary campaign with an unflinching anti-Trump message.

"In our nation's 246-year history, there has never been an individual who was a greater threat to our republic than Donald Trump," former Vice President Dick Cheney said in a recent ad produced by his daughter's campaign.

He continued, "There is nothing more important she will ever do than lead the effort to make sure Donald Trump is never again near the Oval Office."

Feds oppose unsealing affidavit for Mar-a-Lago warrant

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department on Monday rebuffed efforts to make public the affidavit supporting the search warrant for former President Donald Trump's estate in Florida, saying the investigation "implicates highly classified material" and the document contains sensitive information about witnesses.

The government's opposition came in response to court filings by several news organizations, including The Associated Press, seeking to unseal the underlying affidavit the Justice Department submitted when it asked for the warrant to search Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate earlier this month.

Trump, in a Truth Social post early Tuesday, called for the release of the unredacted affidavit in the interest of transparency.

The court filing — from Juan Antonio Gonzalez, the U.S. attorney in Miami, and Jay Bratt, a top Justice Department national security official — argues that making the affidavit public would "cause significant and irreparable damage to this ongoing criminal investigation."

The document, the prosecutors say, details "highly sensitive information about witnesses," including people who have been interviewed by the government, and contains confidential grand jury information.

The government told a federal magistrate judge that prosecutors believe some additional records, including the cover sheet for the warrant and the government's request to seal the documents, should now be made public.

A property receipt unsealed Friday showed the FBI seized 11 sets of classified documents, with some not only marked top secret but also "sensitive compartmented information," a special category meant to protect the nation's most important secrets that if revealed publicly could cause "exceptionally grave" damage to U.S. interests. The court records did not provide specific details about information the documents might contain.

The Justice Department acknowledged Monday that its ongoing criminal investigation "implicates highly classified material."

The search warrant, also unsealed Friday, said federal agents were investigating potential violations of three different federal laws, including one that governs gathering, transmitting or losing defense information under the Espionage Act. The other statutes address the concealment, mutilation or removal of records and the destruction, alteration or falsification of records in federal investigations.

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The Mar-a-Lago search warrant, carried out last Monday, was part of an ongoing Justice Department investigation into the discovery of classified White House records recovered from Trump's home 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.

It remains unclear whether the Justice Department moved forward with the warrant simply as a means to retrieve the records or as part of a wider criminal investigation or an attempt to prosecute the former president. Multiple federal laws govern the handling of classified information, with both criminal and civil penalties, as well as presidential records.

But the Justice Department, in its filing Monday, argued that its investigation is active and ongoing and that releasing additional information could not only compromise the probe but also subject witnesses to threats or deter others from coming forward to cooperate with prosecutors.

"If disclosed, the affidavit would serve as a roadmap to the government's ongoing investigation, providing specific details about its direction and likely course, in a manner that is highly likely to compromise future investigative steps," the government wrote in the court filing.

Colorado River cuts expected for Arizona, Nevada and Mexico

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM and SAM METZ Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The federal government on Tuesday is expected to announce water cuts to states that rely on the Colorado River as drought and climate change leave less water flowing through the river and deplete the reservoirs that store it.

The Colorado River provides water to 40 million people across seven states in the American West as well as Mexico and helps feed an agricultural industry valued at \$15 billion a year. Cities and farms across the region are anxiously awaiting official hydrology projections — estimates of future water levels in the river — that will determine the extent and scope of cuts to their water supply.

Water officials in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming are expecting federal officials to project Lake Mead — located on the Nevada-Arizona border and the largest manmade reservoir in the U.S. — to shrink to dangerously low levels that could disrupt water delivery and hydropower production and cut the amount of water allocated to Arizona and Nevada, as well as Mexico.

And that's not all: Officials from the states are also scrambling to meet a deadline imposed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to slash their water use by at least 15% in order to keep water levels at the river's storage reservoirs from dropping even more.

Together, the projections and the deadline for cuts are presenting Western states with unprecedented challenges and confronting them with difficult decisions about how to plan for a drier future.

While the Bureau of Reclamation is "very focused on just getting through this to next year," any cutbacks will likely need to be in place far longer, said University of Oxford hydrologist Kevin Wheeler.

"What contribution the science makes is, it's pretty clear that that these reductions just have to have to stay in place until the drought has ended or we realize they actually have to get worse and the cuts have to get deeper," he said.

The cuts expected to be announced Tuesday are based on a plan the seven states as well as Mexico signed in 2019 to help maintain reservoir levels. Under that plan, the amount of water allocated to states depends on the water levels at Lake Mead. Last year, the lake fell low enough for the federal government to declare a first-ever water shortage in the region, triggering mandatory cuts for Arizona and Nevada as well as Mexico in 2022.

Officials expect hydrologists will project the lake to fall further, triggering additional cuts to Nevada, Arizona and Mexico next year. States with higher priority water rights are not expected to see cuts.

Reservoir levels have been falling for years — and faster than experts predicted — due to 22 years of drought worsened by climate change and overuse of the river. Scorching temperatures and less melting snow in the spring have reduced the amount of water flowing from the Rocky Mountains, where the river originates before it snakes 1,450 miles (2,334 kilometers) southwest and into the Gulf of California.

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Already, extraordinary steps have been taken this year to keep water in Lake Powell, the other large Colorado River reservoir, which sits upstream of Lake Mead and straddles the Arizona-Utah border. Water from the lake runs through Glen Canyon Dam, which produces enough electricity to power between 1 million and 1.5 million homes each year.

After water levels at Lake Powell reached levels low enough to threaten hydropower production, federal officials said they would hold back an additional 480,000 acre-feet (more than 156 billion gallons or 592 million cubic meters) of water to ensure the dam could still produce energy. That water would normally course to Lake Mead.

Under Tuesday's reductions, Arizona is expected to lose slightly more water than it did this year, when 18% of its supply was cut. In 2023, it will lose an additional 3%, an aggregate 21% reduction from its initial allocation. Farmers in central Arizona will largely shoulder the cuts, as they did this year.

Mexico is expected to lose 7% of the 1.5 million acre-feet it receives each year from the river. Last year, it lost about 5%. The water is a lifeline for northern desert cities including Tijuana and a large farm industry in the Mexicali Valley, just south of the border from California's Imperial Valley.

Nevada is also set to lose water — about 8% of its supply — but most residents will not feel the effects because the state recycles the majority of its water used indoors and doesn't use its full allocation. Last year, the state lost 7%.

Columbia River's salmon are at the core of ancient religion

By DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

ALONG THE COLUMBIA RIVER (AP) — James Kiona stands on a rocky ledge overlooking Lyle Falls where the water froths and rushes through steep canyon walls just before merging with the Columbia River. His silvery ponytail flutters in the wind, and a string of eagle claws adorns his neck.

Kiona has fished for Chinook salmon for decades on his family's scaffold at the edge of the falls, using a dip net suspended from a 33-foot pole — like his father did before him, and his son will after.

"Fishing is an art and a spiritual practice," says Kiona, a Yakama Nation elder. "You feel exhilaration in your body when you dip that net in the water and feel the fish. Then, you're fighting the fish. The fish is fighting you, tearing holes in the net, jerking you off the scaffold."

He finds strength, sanctity, even salvation in that struggle. The river saved Kiona when he returned from the war in Vietnam. As he battled addiction, depression and trauma, the river gave him therapy no hospital could.

When he lies on the rocks by the rushing river and closes his eyes, he hears the songs and the voices of his ancestors. The water, he says, holds the history of the land and his people.

"It heals you."

From its headwaters in British Columbia where the Rocky Mountains crest, the Columbia River flows south into Washington state and then westward and into the Pacific Ocean at its mouth near Astoria, Oregon. Just below the confluence with the Snake River, the Columbia's largest tributary, the river turns through the Cascade Mountain Range, carving out the Columbia River Gorge.

It's a spectacular canyon, 80 miles long and up to 4,000 feet deep, with cliffs, ridges, streams and waterfalls. The landscape and colors change dramatically from the brown hills, shrubs and sagebrush at lower elevations to the lush greens of ponderosa pines, fir and larch trees higher up. Eagles and ospreys nest all along the river.

For thousands of years, Native tribes in this area have relied on Nch'i-Wána, or "the great river," for its salmon and steelhead trout, and its surrounding areas for the fields bearing edible roots, medicinal herbs and berry bushes as well as the deer and elk whose meat and hides are used for food and ritual. That reliance transcends the material realm into the spiritual, as the acts of gathering, consuming and respecting those foods are inextricably linked to the tribes' religious practice.

Yet the river is under threat. Warming waters linked to climate change endanger the salmon, which need

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cooler temperatures to survive. Hydroelectric dams on the Columbia and its tributaries have curtailed the river's flow, further imperiling salmon's migration from the Pacific upstream to their freshwater spawning grounds. Industrial pollution are also threats; testing by the Columbia Riverkeeper, a nonprofit that aims to protect water quality, shows that fish caught in the area are contaminated with flame retardants; polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs; and heavy metals.

Pollution and climate change are not only threatening the health of the river and its habitat, but also the millennia-old spiritual traditions that hold Native communities together.

"We are the salmon people or river people," says Aja DeCoteau, executive director of the Portland-based Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, which represents the interests of the four Columbia River treaty tribes — Yakama, Umatilla, Warm Springs and Nez Perce — in policy, advocacy and management of the basin. "Without water there are no fish, plants or herbs."

Each year the tribes honor the salmon, roots, berries, deer and elk — which they believe were originally placed in the land for their sustenance — with what are known as "first food ceremonies." When children catch fish, dig roots or pick berries for the first time, they are stood up before their elders in the longhouse and recognized as food gatherers.

Elders speak of how streams flow from the mountains sanctified by the prayers of ancestors who went there to commune with the spirits. These rivulets then flow down and merge with the Columbia. If Nch'i-Wána is the main artery of the land, those streams are like the veins that feed it. So even the smallest creek is vital and sacred.

At communal meals, tribe members typically begin and end with water — "You take a drink of water to purify yourself before you eat and you end the meal with water to show respect for what you've eaten," DeCouteau says.

Tribes also use the river's water and rocks for rituals such as sweat lodge purification ceremonies, held in low, dome-shaped structures where river rocks are heated along with herbal medicine.

"After you sweat and pray, there is also the practice of jumping in the river to cleanse yourself," DeCouteau says. "It's hard to continue practicing these rituals when the river is so contaminated."

Whether the day is 100 degrees or nine below zero, Terrie Brigham takes her fishing boat out every day before the crack of dawn. Her family, members of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla, owns Brigham Fish Market in Cascade Locks, a bucolic riverbank town of some 1,500 residents about an hour's drive east of Portland. Her grandfather erected the family's scaffolds in the 1950s.

On a cold June morning, Brigham watches proudly at the scaffolds as her 23-year-old nephew, Brigham Campbell, fights a large Chinook salmon thrashing about in his dip net. He secures the fish and holds it up with smile, and she lets out a loud whoop and captures the moment on her cellphone.

Fishing has been the family's life and livelihood for generations, but it's also a big part of her spiritual identity. Brigham speaks of her scaffold as if it were a temple, and her boat an altar.

"To me, the river is sacred. The water is sacred. The fish are sacred."

Each year when Brigham catches the first fish of the season, she utters, "Thank you, Creator." Then she puts a rope around its mouth so it can be used in the longhouse as part of the ceremony to welcome the fish back, known as the First Salmon Feast.

That first fish is always shared with others in the community, even if each person might get just a single bite.

Bill Yallup Jr. was 6 when Celilo Falls "drowned," as he puts it.

Known as Wyam to Native people, the thundering cascade was a sacred place where for 15,000 years Indigenous tribes netted salmon as the fish jumped upstream. It was also their economic nerve center, with the salmon trading for all manner of goods from feathers to copper to wampum, beads crafted from shells.

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Yallup's family came to Celilo Falls from Toppenish, Washington, when he was an infant.

"My mom cooked with water from the river," he says. "You could hear those falls for miles. It was sacred sound."

The falls fell silent in 1957 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers erected The Dalles Dam, flooding the area and creating the Celilo Lake reservoir. His father brought him to Lyle, Washington, when he was 17. He learned to fish there.

As a young man, Yallup dreamed of a career in Hollywood as a writer and actor. He played a tribal elder in the show "Northern Exposure," a 1990s CBS comedy-drama series about quirky residents of a fictional small town in Alaska that ran for five seasons.

But, the mighty river has an unfathomable pull, and it drew him back. It reminds him of who he really is, Yallup says: "I'm a fisherman."

In his deep baritone, he enjoys telling stories of the river that have been handed down over generations.

A tale he has told hundreds of times narrates how Coyote, one of the most important characters in tribal mythology, brought the salmon back to the big river. The fish had left after a legendary battle between Mount Hood and Mount Adams, both portrayed as women in the story, caused the salmon to drain into the ocean. The fish told Coyote they would come back, but only if they were respected.

Young salmon, or smolts, swim down the Columbia to the ocean, where they grow for between one and five years. Then they migrate back upstream to spawn. Some are caught and become a source of sustenance for the people, and others die and become one with the environment. The cycle repeats over and over.

"The sacredness of this river," Yallup says, "lies in the sacrifice the salmon make each time they fulfill their promise to come back."

The Whitefoots are a large family spread across the West Coast. The best-known member of the clan, Patricia "Patsy" Whitefoot, is an advocate for missing and murdered Indigenous women. A member of the Yakama Nation, she often travels along the river meeting family members and attending traditional tribal gatherings.

Her activism is as much a part of her Native identity as her religious practice is.

"If you are Indian, you'll be political all your life," she says.

On a recent afternoon, she visits cousins Debra and Sandy Whitefoot, who live near the Bonneville Dam in an "in-lieu fishing site," lands set aside by Congress to compensate tribes whose villages were inundated by dams.

Many families here live in trailers without restrooms, lights or drains, and Debra, as executive director of the nonprofit Nch'i-Wána Housing, works to provide homes for Native people living along the river.

"My mom saw the world go by at Celilo," she says, wiping away tears. "We have lost so much. We're experiencing intergenerational trauma. My hope is I can make a village or a few villages for my people so we can heal and move forward."

Sandy is smoking freshly caught salmon. She arranges the cleaned and cut-up pieces in trays and places them in a wooden smoking shed by the river. She has a job in a sandwich shop, but this, Sandy says, is "what I do."

The first fish she ever caught was a steelhead off her father's scaffold.

"It was one of the most exciting moments in my life," she says.

Debra's son, Aaron Paul, and his partner, Betty Jean Sutterlikt, live by the river as well. When their son, Bennie, finished high school last year, he had his graduation photo taken on the scaffold wearing a vest embroidered with an eagle carrying a salmon. He now attends Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Montana, and hopes to major in fisheries and wildlife.

Debra is proud of young people like her grandson, who grew up by the river doing homework under a streetlight, and are now going to college to learn about protecting their natural resources.

"They give me hope."

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It was worries over the spring salmon's disappearance from the river that inspired Elaine Harvey to get her bachelor's degree in aquatic and fishery science. She is also concerned for species like the Pacific lamprey, which has "been around since the dinosaurs" but today faces possible extinction.

Now a fish biologist for Yakama Fisheries, Harvey says what keeps her up at night is what she calls a "race to harness green energy" that has brought multinational corporations to the Columbia.

"Wind turbines and solar farms are impacting our archeological sites, cultural resource sites, wildlife and fish," she says, pointing to a sacred mountain near the John Day Dam that the Native people call Push-pum. "Our root fields are on that mountain. We could lose access to our food."

The tribes are also focused on preserving areas in tributaries such as the Klickitat and White Salmon, two glacial rivers that provide cold water for migrating salmon.

Harvey hopes to impart this knowledge and sense of stewardship to her children and grandchildren.

"We travel with kids to fishing stations, hunting grounds and root fields," she says. "We give them the experience of camping on our lands."

She connects to the land by sleeping on the ground and cooking on an open fire, just as her ancestors did when they were traveling these lands on horseback and by foot.

Harvey says she will never leave the river because that's what she was taught by her elders.

"We have a real, deep connection to all these places. Our blood line is here."

Harvey's cousin, Bronsco Jim Jr., was appointed mid-Columbia River chief when he was 21 and in that capacity performs longhouse services, first food ceremonies and funerals. He knows many sacred songs, one of which talks about the birth of the first salmon at a spot in the Columbia River.

"God's authoritative word comes down upon (the salmon's) body," Jim says. "He jumps out of the water in a circular movement, and in that one revolution, he was given life."

Sunlight streams into the longhouse during a recent ceremonial meal with elders at historic Celilo Village. Supported by tall wooden beams, the building has at its center the altar, a rectangle of earth that Jim cleanses with water before the service begins.

Jim is wearing shell earrings and a beaded necklace with the pendant of a horse's silhouette honoring his ancestors who rode them. His soft, measured speaking voice rises into song, echoing throughout the room. It has no words but is a deep, visceral, prayerful sound capable of evoking goosebumps or tears.

Tribal members seated around a table bearing the first foods — in order, salmon, roots, berries — join in softly, waving their right hands away from their bodies and then inward toward their chests. The gesture harnesses the light and energy around them and delivers it to their hearts, Jim explains. Tribal beliefs forbid capturing these solemn services in video or photographs because that would freeze the prayers in time and prevent their transmission to the Creator.

In Native families that inhabit the Columbia Basin, education about first foods begins at home and continues in these longhouses, accompanied by teaching and ceremony. Deeply held beliefs also dictate the rules of food gathering.

"You can't just casually go out to gather food," Jim says.

The ceremony for each of the foods is performed at a different time of year depending on when they become available. The salmon are the first to appear in the spring. The roots are ready to be dug in the summer and different berries are picked in the summer and the fall.

Community members are required to wait for that first feast to honor each food before they head out to harvest it. In the longhouse and out in the mountains, the food-gathering is accompanied by song.

"These songs and ceremonies are part of everything we do," Jim says. "We need the river and these foods in our lives."

Losing these irreplaceable foods and their sources could cost them their spiritual identity, he says.

"They feed our body and soul."

Palin, Murkowski highlight Alaska's 2 elections on Tuesday

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By BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — Alaska voters get their first shot at using ranked voting in a statewide race Tuesday in a special U.S. House election in which Sarah Palin seeks a return to elected office.

Also, Republican U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski faces 18 challengers in a primary in which the top four vote-getters will advance to November's general election.

The special election and regular primaries for U.S. Senate, U.S. House, governor and lieutenant governor and state legislative seats are on opposite sides of a two-sided ballot. It could take until Aug. 31 to know the winner of the special election.

The three candidates competing in that race are Republicans Palin and Nick Begich and Democrat Mary Peltola. The winner will serve the remainder of the late Rep. Don Young's term. Young, a Republican, held the state's only House seat for 49 years. He died in March.

Palin, the 2008 vice presidential nominee and a former Alaska governor, renewed her "drill, baby, drill" calls for increased oil production and said she would use her connections to the benefit of Alaska. She said the new, voter-approved election system creates confusion and should be changed.

In a recent interview with Steve Bannon, Palin described it as the "newfangled, weirdo voting system we have where it's mail in-only ballots" and ranked voting. The special election is a traditional election with in-person voting, and voters were able to request absentee ballots.

Begich, a businessman from a family of prominent Democrats, has come out hard against Palin, seeking to cast her as someone chasing fame and a quitter; Palin resigned during her term as governor in 2009. In one Begich ad, a woman says: "I'm voting for smart - not Sarah."

Palin "does not have a strong track record of effective advocacy for the state and that's not going to work for us," Begich said in an interview.

Palin, meanwhile, has questioned Begich's Republican credentials.

Peltola, a former lawmaker, most recently worked at a commission whose goal is to rebuild salmon resources on the Kuskokwim River. She has cast herself as a "regular Alaskan" and consensus builder. If successful, she would be the first Alaska Native woman elected to the House.

"Vote, vote, vote and vote for me twice, literally," Peltola told supporters in Juneau days before the election in urging them to turn out and to tell their friends to vote.

All three said they planned to pursue a full, two-year House term, regardless of how the special election turns out. They, along with Republican Tara Sweeney, who was an assistant secretary for Indian Affairs in the U.S. Interior Department during the Trump administration, were the most prominent candidates in a 22-person field in the U.S. House primary.

Sweeney also filed days before the special election as a write-in candidate for that race. Palin's campaign on Friday sent an email wrongly stating there were no official write-in candidates in the race.

Alaska's elections process, approved by voters in 2020 and used for the first time this year, pairs open primaries, in which all candidates in a race are on the ballot together, with ranked vote general elections. The four candidates with the most votes in each primary race advance to the November general election.

Bob Cruise left a Peltola fundraiser in Juneau Friday with a yard sign. He said his three granddaughters are of indigenous heritage. "It's important to me for them to see an indigenous woman go to Washington, D.C., as Alaska's representative. That would mean the world to me, especially one with the leadership abilities and all the wonderful qualities that Mary has," he said.

Murkowski, a moderate who has been in the Senate for nearly 20 years and has at times been at odds with her party, faces 18 challengers, including fellow Republican Kelly Tshibaka, who is backed by former President Donald Trump.

Trump has lashed out against Murkowski, who voted to convict him in his second impeachment trial after the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection. Trump was acquitted.

The most visible Democrat in the race is retired educator Pat Chesbro, who jumped in late and has struggled to gain fundraising traction. The other candidates in the field have had lower profiles.

Candidates for governor and lieutenant governor run as teams in the primary. Republican Gov. Mike

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Dunleavy is seeking reelection. He is running with Nancy Dahlstrom, who resigned as head of the state corrections department to join the ticket. Former Gov. Bill Walker, an independent, is running with Heidi Drygas, who was his labor department commissioner. Democrat Les Gara, a former lawmaker, is running with Jessica Cook, a teacher.

Other tickets include Republican state Rep. Christopher Kurka, running to the right of Dunleavy, with Paul Hueper, and Charlie Pierce, a Republican borough mayor, running with Edie Grunwald.

Fifty-nine of the Legislature's 60 seats are up for election, but just one primary race has more than four candidates.

Beth Kerttula, a Democratic former state legislator, said she is supporting Peltola, Walker and Murkowski. Kerttula, who was in the Legislature with Peltola and Murkowski, said for many Alaskans "what really matters is the person" versus the party.

"I mean, we all supported Ted Stevens, too," she said, referring to the late, longtime Republican U.S. senator. Alaska elections history includes periods when there were open primaries.

Rangers fire manager Chris Woodward short of his 500th game

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Baseball Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — The Texas Rangers fired fourth-year manager Chris Woodward on Monday, a move made in hopes of building momentum toward next year, when the team has long expected to win again after a seasons-long rebuilding effort.

The Rangers are on pace for their sixth consecutive losing season since their last AL West title in 2016. While better than last year's 102-loss team, they haven't made the desired progress this year, or even had a winning record at any point since spending a half-billion dollars last winter to sign shortstop Corey Seager and second baseman Marcus Semien.

"We did not come into this season thinking we had put together a championship roster. We thought we'd taken a major step forward in talent from where we were a year ago," said Jon Daniels, the team's president of baseball operations. "We've certainly had aspirations maybe to overachieve some and still do have those, but we were, and continue to be, realistic about where we are. ... That said, we did think that we'd be better than our record, and better than the way that we've played at times."

After peaking at 24-24 at the end of May, Texas lost its next three games and five of six. The Rangers, who were 6-24 in one-run games under Woodward, beat Oakland 2-1 on Monday night in third base coach Tony Beasley's first game as interim manager. Texas improved to 52-63 and has won three straight for the first time in two months.

Woodward, the fourth big league manager to be fired this season, was two games shy of managing his 500th game for the Rangers. He finished with a 211-287 record, which came during the extended rebuilding process that also included the pandemic-shortened 2020 season and the MLB lockout last winter after the Rangers had signed Seager and Semien.

Philadelphia's Joe Girardi was replaced by Rob Thomson on June 3, the Los Angeles Angels' Joe Maddon by Phil Nevin four days later and Toronto's Charlie Montoyo by John Schneider on July 13.

Daniels, who was the general manager when Woodward was hired, and current GM Chris Young both spoke about making the managerial change now to start addressing items such as how the team prepares and its style of play.

"I think it's just the overall structure, the environment. It's not necessarily the content of the preparation, but the way it's utilized," Young said. "The way we utilize meetings, the way we utilize different resources throughout the day, creating a structure that's really tailored towards winning a game every single day when we come in, and we felt like at times that got a little loose."

Woodward, who was the third base coach for the Los Angeles Dodgers before landing his first managerial job, was under contract through next season. The team held an option for 2024.

Seager spent his first seven big league seasons with the Dodgers, and was the National League rookie of the year in 2016, the first of Woodward's three seasons as the third base and infield coach in Los Angeles. Seager was reunited with Woodward after signing a \$325 million, 10-year contract last December.

"Obviously, he was a really important person in my career and in my life. He was around me at a really pivotal point in my career. And I don't have anything bad to say. I have the utmost respect for him," Seager said on the field before Monday's game. "It's one of those things I just wish we could have played a little better and maybe outcomes would be different. "

Along with Seager and Semien (\$175 million, seven years), the Rangers also last winter signed right-hander Jon Gray (four-year, \$56 million) to be at the top of their rotation. Gray was in his best stretch of the season before a left oblique injury earlier this month that could potentially sideline him the rest of the year.

Beasley is in his eighth season with the Rangers, and is the longest-tenured member of their big-league coaching staff. He previously was on the major league staffs with Washington (2006) and Pittsburgh (2008-10), and had a 590-472 record in eight seasons as a minor league manager in those organizations.

"He has all the attributes that we're looking for. He has the respect of the staff, the respect of the players," Daniels said. "He's an intelligent baseball veteran, who's won at the minor league level, performed in a variety of roles, both here and elsewhere. ... He's the right person for us as we move forward."

Rapper A\$AP Rocky charged with felony assault with a firearm

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rapper A\$AP Rocky was charged with two felonies Monday for pulling a gun on a former friend and firing in Hollywood last year, prosecutors said.

The Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office charged the 33-year-old New York native, whose legal name is Rakim Athelaston Mayers, with two counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm.

Prosecutors allege that during an argument on Nov. 6, 2021, Mayers pointed the handgun at the victim, then in a subsequent confrontation drew the gun again and fired twice in the direction of the man, who sustained a minor injury. His name has not been released.

Mayers has not entered a plea to the charges. He is scheduled to be arraigned Wednesday. An email seeking comment from representatives was not immediately returned.

"Discharging a gun in a public place is a serious offense that could have ended with tragic consequences not only for the person targeted but also for innocent bystanders visiting Hollywood," said District Attorney George Gascón said in a statement.

Mayers and two other men fled the scene after he fired the gun, police said. He was first arrested for the incident at Los Angeles International Airport on April 20, and was released on bail the same day.

A member of the Harlem hip hop collective A\$AP Mob, A\$AP Rocky first made his mark in music with the single "Peso" in 2011. His 2013 debut album, "Long. Live. A\$AP," went to No. 1 on the Billboard 200, as did its 2015 follow-up, "At. Long. Last. A\$AP." He has been nominated for two Grammy Awards.

He is in a relationship with Rihanna, and the two had a son in May.

Mayers released his last studio album four years ago, and like Rihanna has become as known for fashion trendsetting as he is for music.

He was the focus of international attention in 2019 after being detained for nearly a month in Sweden following a street brawl. He was found guilty of assault and given a "conditional sentence" that meant no additional time in jail.

Trump Org. CFO expected to plead guilty in NY tax case

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's longtime finance chief is expected to plead guilty as soon as Thursday in a tax evasion case that is the only criminal prosecution to arise from a long-running investigation into the former president's company, three people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press.

Trump Organization CFO Allen Weisselberg was scheduled to be tried in October on allegations he took more than \$1.7 million in off-the-books compensation from the company, including rent, car payments and school tuition.

Prosecutors in the Manhattan district attorney's office and Weisselberg's lawyers met Monday with the

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judge overseeing the case, Juan Manuel Merchan, according to court records. The judge then scheduled a hearing in the matter for 9 a.m. Thursday but did not specify the reason.

The people who spoke to the AP did so on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the case. They said the purpose of Thursday's hearing was for Weisselberg to enter a guilty plea, but cautioned that plea deals sometimes fall apart before they are finalized in court.

Weisselberg's lawyer, Nicholas Gravante Jr., told The New York Times on Monday that Weisselberg has been engaged in plea negotiations to resolve the case, but did not specify terms of a potential plea deal. Reached by the AP, Gravante declined to comment.

The Times, citing two people with knowledge of the matter, said Weisselberg was expected to receive a five-month jail sentence, which would make him eligible for release after about 100 days. The deal would not require Weisselberg to testify or cooperate in any way with an ongoing criminal investigation into Trump's business practices.

Trump's company, the Trump Organization, is also charged in the case but did not appear to be involved in the plea agreement talks. Weisselberg and the Trump Organization have pleaded not guilty.

The Manhattan district attorney's office declined comment. A message seeking comment was left with a lawyer for the Trump Organization.

News of Weisselberg's plea negotiations came days after the judge denied requests by his lawyers and the Trump Organization to throw out the case. The judge did drop one criminal tax fraud count against the company citing the statute of limitations, but more than a dozen other counts remain.

In seeking dismissal of the case, Weisselberg's lawyers argued prosecutors in the Democrat-led district attorney's office were punishing him because he wouldn't offer up damaging information against the former president.

The judge rejected that argument, saying that evidence presented to the grand jury was legally sufficient to support the charges.

Weisselberg, who turned 75 on Monday, is the only Trump executive charged in the yearslong criminal investigation started by former Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr., who went to the Supreme Court to secure Trump's tax records. Vance's successor, Alvin Bragg, is now overseeing the investigation. Several other Trump executives have been granted immunity to testify before a grand jury in the case.

Prosecutors alleged that Weisselberg and the Trump Organization schemed to give off-the-books compensation to senior executives, including Weisselberg, for 15 years. Weisselberg alone was accused of defrauding the federal government, state and city out of more than \$900,000 in unpaid taxes and underserved tax refunds.

The most serious charge against Weisselberg, grand larceny, carried a potential penalty of five to 15 years in prison. The tax fraud charges against the company are punishable by a fine of double the amount of unpaid taxes, or \$250,000, whichever is larger.

Trump has not been charged in the criminal probe, but prosecutors have noted that he signed some of the checks at the center of the case. Trump, who has decried the New York investigations as a "political witch hunt," has said his company's actions were standard practice in the real estate business and in no way a crime.

Last week, Trump sat for a deposition in New York Attorney General Letitia James' parallel civil investigation into allegations Trump's company misled lenders and tax authorities about asset values. Trump invoked his Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination more than 400 times.

In the months after Weisselberg's arrest, the criminal probe appeared to be progressing toward a possible criminal indictment of Trump himself, but the investigation slowed, a grand jury was disbanded and a top prosecutor left after Bragg took office in January — although he insists it is continuing.

Giuliani targeted in criminal probe of 2020 election

By KATE BRUMBACK and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Rudy Giuliani is a target of the criminal investigation into possible illegal attempts by

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then-President Donald Trump and others to interfere in the 2020 general election in Georgia, prosecutors informed attorneys for the former New York mayor on Monday.

The revelation that Giuliani, an outspoken Trump defender, could face criminal charges from the investigation by Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis edges the probe closer to the former president. Willis has said she is considering calling Trump himself to testify before the special grand jury, and the former president has hired a criminal defense attorney in Atlanta.

Law enforcement scrutiny of Trump has escalated dramatically. Last week, the FBI searched his Florida home as part of its investigation into whether he took classified records from the White House to Mar-a-Lago. He is also facing a civil investigation in New York over allegations that his company, the Trump Organization, misled banks and tax authorities about the value of his assets. And the Justice Department is investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters as well as efforts by him and his allies to overturn the election he falsely claimed was stolen.

Giuliani, who spread false claims of election fraud in Atlanta's Fulton County as he led election-challenging efforts in Georgia, is to testify Wednesday before a special grand jury that was impaneled at Willis' request. Giuliani's lawyer declined to say whether he would answer questions or decline.

Special prosecutor Nathan Wade alerted Giuliani's team in Atlanta that he was an investigation target, Giuliani attorney Robert Costello said Monday. News of the disclosure was first reported by The New York Times.

Speaking on a New York radio show Monday, Giuliani said he had been serving as Trump's attorney in Georgia.

"You do this to a lawyer, we don't have America anymore," he said.

Earlier Monday, a federal judge said U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham must testify before the special grand jury. Prosecutors have said they want to ask Graham about phone calls they say he made to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and his staff in the weeks following the election.

Willis's investigation was spurred by a phone call between Trump and Raffensperger. During that January 2021 conversation, Trump suggested that Raffensperger "find" the votes needed to reverse his narrow loss in the state.

Willis last month filed petitions seeking to compel testimony from seven Trump associates and advisers.

In seeking Giuliani's testimony, Willis identified him as both a personal attorney for Trump and a lead attorney for his campaign. She wrote that he and others appeared at a state Senate committee meeting and presented a video that Giuliani said showed election workers producing "suitcases" of unlawful ballots from unknown sources, outside the view of election poll watchers.

Within 24 hours of that Dec. 3, 2020, hearing, Raffensperger's office had debunked the video. But Giuliani continued to make statements to the public and in subsequent legislative hearings claiming widespread voter fraud using the debunked video, Willis wrote.

Evidence shows that Giuliani's hearing appearance and testimony were "part of a multi-state, coordinated plan by the Trump Campaign to influence the results of the November 2020 election in Georgia and elsewhere," her petition says.

Two of the election workers seen in the video, Ruby Freeman and Wandrea "Shaye" Moss, said they faced relentless harassment online and in person after it was shown at a Dec. 3 Georgia legislative hearing where Giuliani appeared. At another hearing a week later, Giuliani said the footage showed the women "surreptitiously passing around USB ports as if they are vials of heroin or cocaine." They actually were passing a piece of candy.

Willis also wrote in a petition seeking the testimony of attorney Kenneth Chesebro that he worked with Giuliani to coordinate and carry out a plan to have Georgia Republicans serve as fake electors. Those 16 people signed a certificate declaring falsely that Trump had won the 2020 presidential election and declaring themselves the state's "duly elected and qualified" electors even though Joe Biden had won the state and a slate of Democratic electors was certified.

All 16 of those fake electors have received letters saying they are targets of the investigation, Willis said

in a court filing last month.

As for Graham, attorneys for the South Carolina Republican have argued that his position as a U.S. senator provides him immunity from having to appear before the investigative panel. But U.S. District Judge Leigh Martin May wrote in an order Monday that immunities related to his role as a senator do not protect him from having to testify. Graham's subpoena instructs him to appear before the special grand jury on Aug. 23, but his office said Monday he plans to appeal.

May last month rejected a similar attempt by U.S. Rep. Jody Hice, R-Ga., to avoid testifying before the special grand jury.

Graham's office said in a statement Monday that the senator disagrees with the judge's interpretation of the provision of the Constitution he believes protects him from being questioned by a state official. His lawyers have said he was making inquiries that were part of his legislative duties, related to certification of the vote and to a proposal of election-related legislation.

But the judge wrote that that ignores "the fact that individuals on the calls have publicly suggested that Senator Graham was not simply engaged in legislative factfinding but was instead suggesting or implying that Georgia election officials change their processes or otherwise potentially alter the state's results."

In calls made shortly after the 2020 general election, Graham "questioned Raffensperger and his staff about reexamining certain absentee ballots cast in Georgia in order to explore the possibility of a more favorable outcome for former President Donald Trump," Willis wrote in a petition.

Graham also "made reference to allegations of widespread voter fraud in the November 2020 election in Georgia, consistent with public statements made by known affiliates of the Trump Campaign," she wrote.

Republican and Democratic state election officials across the country, courts and even Trump's attorney general have found there was no evidence of voter fraud sufficient to affect the outcome of his 2020 presidential election loss.

Trump-allied lawmakers were planning to challenge the tallies from several battleground states when Congress convened on Jan. 6, 2021, to certify the results under the Electoral Count Act, but after the Capitol attack that day Georgia's tally was never contested.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing and has described his call to Raffensperger as "perfect."

R. Kelly jury selection focuses on 2019 documentary

By MICHAEL TARM and DON BABWIN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Jury selection in R. Kelly's federal trial on charges that he rigged his 2008 state child pornography trial began Monday with the judge and attorneys quickly focusing on whether would-be jurors watched a 2019 documentary about sex abuse allegations against the R&B singer.

After denying a request from Kelly's attorney to automatically exclude anyone from the jury who watched the six-part documentary series, "Surviving R. Kelly," U.S. District Judge Harry Leinenweber quizzed potential jurors about how much they watched, what they could recall about it and whether they could be impartial if they were selected.

Jurors were asked whether they watched the documentary in a questionnaire they had already filled out. In one instance, a woman who had left her answer blank acknowledged that she had watched several episodes. She was not immediately excused from serving, however.

In all, the judge dismissed at least half of the some 60 would-be jurors he questioned Monday. Among those dismissed was an elementary school teacher who said he'd have difficulty being impartial given the subject matter of the trial, a man who said many of his closest friends were Chicago cops and a woman who said she once took martial arts classes with Kelly's kids.

Among those kept in the pool of possible jurors was a man with a post-graduate degree in classical music and several people who said they watched part of the documentary on Kelly but who assured the judge they could give the singer a fair trial.

Jury selection was expected to resume on Tuesday.

The trial centers on whether Kelly threatened and paid off a girl with whom he allegedly videotaped himself

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having sex when he was around 30 and she was no older than 14. Jurors in the 2008 child pornography trial acquitted Kelly, with some later explaining that they felt they had no choice because the girl did not testify. The woman, now in her 30s and referred to in filings only as "Minor 1," will be the government's star witness in the federal trial that's expected to last four weeks.

Kelly also faces multiple counts of producing and receiving child pornography.

Kelly, 55, already has been sentenced by a New York federal judge to a 30-year prison term for a 2021 conviction on charges that he used his fame to sexually abuse other young fans.

Wearing a light gray suit, yellow dress shirt, a tie and black-rimmed eyeglasses, Kelley gave potential jurors a quick wave as his attorney Jennifer Bonjean introduced him. Kelly also wore a surgical mask as part of COVID-19 protocols for everyone entering the courthouse.

Kelly, who rose from poverty on Chicago's South Side to become a star singer, songwriter and producer, faces multiple charges at the federal trial. They include four counts of enticement of minors for sex — one each for four other accusers. They, too, are slated to testify.

With the New York sentence alone, Kelly will be around 80 before qualifying for early release. Convictions in Chicago could add decades to Kelly's New York sentence, which he is appealing. A conviction for just one count of producing child pornography carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison.

Two Kelly associates, Derrel McDavid and Milton Brown, are co-defendants at the Chicago trial. McDavid is accused of helping Kelly fix the 2008 trial, while Brown is charged with receiving child pornography. Like Kelly, they also have denied wrongdoing.

Two state cases also are pending. One is a multiple count sex-abuse case out of Cook County Circuit Court in Chicago. The other is a solicitation case in Minnesota. No trial dates are set for either.

Minor 1 is expected to testify that she was on video having sex with Kelly. The recording was at the heart of the monthlong 2008 trial and was played for jurors almost every day.

Minor 1 first met Kelly in the late 1990s when she was in junior high school. She had tagged along to Kelly's Chicago recording studio with her aunt, a professional singer working with Kelly. Soon after, Minor 1 told her parents Kelly was going to become her godfather.

Prosecutors say Kelly later threatened and sought to pay off Minor 1 and her parents so they wouldn't testify in 2008. None of them did.

Double jeopardy rules bar the prosecution of someone for the same crimes they were acquitted of earlier. That doesn't apply to the federal trial because prosecutors are alleging different crimes related to Minor 1, including obstruction of justice.

No. 1 Alabama tops preseason AP Top 25; Ohio St, 'Dawgs next

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

With two of the best players in the country leading the way — and a championship game loss as motivation — Alabama is No. 1 in The Associated Press preseason college football poll for the second straight season and ninth time overall.

Heisman Trophy winner Bryce Young, national defensive player of year Will Anderson Jr. and the Crimson Tide received 54 of 63 first-place votes and 1,566 points in the Top 25 presented by Regions Bank released on Monday.

Ohio State is No. 2 with six first-place votes (1,506 points) from the media panel and defending national champion Georgia is third with three first-place votes (1,455 points). Clemson is No. 4. Notre Dame rounds out the top five, setting up a tantalizing opener at Ohio State on Sept. 3.

The Tide's preseason No. 1 ranking is the seventh in 15 years under coach Nick Saban. Since the preseason rankings started in 1950, only Oklahoma with 10 has been No. 1 in the initial poll more often than Alabama.

The Crimson Tide started last season No. 1 and finished ranked No. 2 after losing the national championship game to the Southeastern Conference rival Bulldogs.

"It wasn't our end goal that we wanted," Anderson said in the spring. "But I'm super proud of those

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guys, the way they fought. We were a young team. We had people go down. People had to step in that never been there before. So, I think that's just a learning experience."

Saban recently called 2021 a rebuilding season for his Tide dynasty, which has won six national titles over the last 13 years. He has a point.

Young was in his first season as a starter, playing behind an inexperienced offensive line. He was unfazed, throwing for 4,872 yards and 47 touchdowns.

Anderson was a force on the other side ball as Alabama broke in a back seven with mostly new starters. The sophomore led the nation in tackles for loss with 33 1/2, 11 1/2 more than No. 2 on the list.

Ohio State brings back a Heisman Trophy finalist at quarterback in C.J. Stroud while at Georgia, most of the key players from one of the best college defenses of the last 25 years are now in NFL. Still, quarterback Stetson Bennett and All-America tight end Brock Bowers return to a Bulldogs offense that could be even more explosive in 2022.

Texas A&M, which finished last season unranked despite handing Alabama its only regular-season loss, starts this season No. 6.

Defending Pac-12 champion Utah is seventh, the best preseason ranking in school history. Defending Big Ten champion Michigan is No. 8 after making the playoff for the first time last season.

No. 9 Oklahoma is the highest-ranked Big 12 school, one spot ahead of defending league champion Baylor.

POLL POINTS

Alabama has been in the preseason top five in each of last 14 seasons and in the preseason top three in 13 straight. The Tide's 31st preseason top-five ranking this year matches Ohio State for second-most in poll history behind Oklahoma's 37.

Turning preseason No. 1 into a national championship has proved tricky throughout history, even for Alabama.

The Crimson Tide have gone on to win the national championship after starting No. 1 just once under Saban and twice overall.

Since the AP preseason poll began in 1950, there have been 11 preseason No. 1 teams that also finished the season top ranked. Alabama was the last to do it (2017).

RARITIES AND STREAKS

— No. 13 North Carolina State is ranked in the preseason for the first time since 2003. The Wolfpack matched their best preseason ranking. They were also 13th in 1975.

— No. 17 Pitt is in the preseason rankings for the first time since 2010.

— No. 20 Kentucky is making its first preseason poll appearance since 1978.

— No. 22 Wake Forest made the preseason rankings for the first time since 2008.

— Ohio State is ranked in the preseason for the 34th straight season, breaking a tie with Nebraska (1970-2002) and Penn State (1968-2000) for the longest such streak in poll history.

— Texas A&M has the second-best preseason ranking for a team that finished the previous season unranked. Ohio State was No. 3 in the 1972 preseason poll after being unranked at the end of the 1971 season and Notre Dame also started No. 6 in 1983 after finishing unranked in 1982.

How did the seasons work out for those teams? Ohio State went 9-2 and finished the season No. 9. The Irish went 7-5 and unranked again.

NOTABLE OMISSIONS

— LSU with new coach Brian Kelly will start the season unranked for the first time 2000, Saban's first of five seasons as coach of the Tigers.

— Florida and Florida State are both unranked to start the season, which has not happened since 1974.

NEWBIES

Five schools ranked in the preseason poll have head coaches starting their first full seasons: Notre Dame (Marcus Freeman), Oklahoma (Brent Venables), No. 11 Oregon (Dan Lanning), No. 14 USC (Lincoln Riley) and No. 16 Miami (Mario Cristobal).

This is the second time in the last five seasons that five teams with new coaches were ranked in the

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preseason, according to Sportradar. It also happened in 2018, but before that season that type of representation in the preseason poll for teams with new coaches was a rarity.

You have to go all the way back to 1990 when six schools with coaches entering their first full season appeared in the preseason Top 25, according to Sportradar. That list includes some notable names: Gary Moeller, Michigan; Ken Hatfield, Clemson; Gene Stallings, Alabama; Jack Crowe, Arkansas; Paul Hackett, Pittsburgh; and John Jenkins, Houston.

CONFERENCE CALL

For the fourth straight season, the Southeastern Conference has three teams in the top six.

The Atlantic Coast Conference matched its best showing in the preseason poll with five teams. The ACC has reached that number four previous times.

SEC — 6 (Nos. 1, 3, 6, 19, 20, 21).

ACC — 5 (Nos. 4, 13, 16, 17, 22).

Big Ten — 4 (Nos. 2, 8, 15, 18).

Big 12 — 3 (Nos. 9, 10, 12).

Pac-12 — 3 (Nos. 7, 11, 14).

American — 2 (Nos. 23, 24).

Independents — 2 (Nos. 5, 25).

Ukrainian military says it repelled more than dozen attacks

By PAUL BYRNE Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The Ukrainian military said Monday that it had repelled more than a dozen Russian attacks in the country's east and north, including attempts to advance on key cities in the eastern industrial heartland known as the Donbas.

In its regular Facebook update, the military's general staff said Russian troops had attempted to push towards Kramatorsk, one of two major cities in the eastern Donetsk province that remain under Ukrainian control, but "they failed completely and chaotically retreated to their previous positions."

In the same post, the military said Russian forces had staged an unsuccessful assault on Bakhmut, a strategic town in the Donetsk region whose capture would pave the way for Russia to take Kramatorsk and the de facto Ukrainian administrative capital, Sloviansk.

The Donetsk region is one of two provinces that make up the Donbas, where the fighting has largely been focused in recent months, since Kremlin forces retreated from around the capital, Kyiv.

Russian officials announced the full capture of the Luhansk region, the second of the two, early last month, though its Ukrainian governor has repeatedly claimed that Kyiv's forces are holding out in a small area near the regional boundary.

In the same update, the military claimed that Russia had tried and failed to break through Ukrainian defense lines in the northern Kharkiv region, home to Ukraine's second-largest city, but were "met harshly and thrown back."

Meanwhile, the Russian FSB, the KGB's main successor agency, said that it had thwarted a "sabotage and terrorist attack" on an oil pipeline in Russia's southern Volgograd region, which it blamed on two Russian citizens colluding with Ukrainian security forces.

The claims could not be immediately verified.

Elsewhere, Russian and Ukrainian officials traded more accusations Monday about renewed shelling of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, with each side alleging that the other was responsible for the attacks that have raised fears of a catastrophe.

The press office of the Kremlin-backed administration in Enerhodar, the Russian-controlled city where the plant is located, told the Interfax agency that Ukrainian forces were carrying out "massive shelling" of the facility, as well as Enerhodar's residential and industrial areas.

According to the statement, the shelling came from nearby Nikopol, a Ukrainian-held city which faces the plant across the Dnieper River.

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City Conducts Adult Mosquito Control Saturday Night

The mayor of Nikopol later said that Russians were shelling Enerhodar themselves. Mayor Yevhen Yevchuk said that the city had been shelled by Russian troops stationed at the plant of shelling the city, knowing that Ukrainian forces there were unlikely to fire back.

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Last month too many

— The trial of five European men captured in eastern Ukraine got underway in a court administered by Kremlin-backed separatists, Russian media reported.

Three of the five — a Swede, a Croat and a Briton — could face the death penalty over charges of serving as mercenaries and "undergoing training in order to seize power" under the laws of the self-proclaimed, unrecognized Donetsk People's Republic, Russian state media reported.

The remaining two, both British, face prison terms.

— A British military reconnaissance plane violated Russia's airspace, the Russian defense ministry said. The ministry said in a statement that Russian air defense forces in Russia's Arctic northwest had spotted the plane heading towards the border from the direction of the Barents Sea. A Russian fighter identified the aircraft as a British Air Force RC-135 and forced it out of Russian territory, the ministry said.

— German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Berlin would not back several fellow European countries that have called for an EU-wide move to stop issuing tourist visas to Russian citizens.

The nations backing such a ban say that Russians should not be able to take vacations in Europe while Moscow wages war in Ukraine. Finland and Denmark want an EU decision and some EU countries border-



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"This is not the war of the Russian people. It is (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's war and we have to be very clear on that topic," Scholz said.

Safety concerns after deadly fire rips through Egypt church

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt was in mourning Monday over a blaze at a Coptic Orthodox church that killed 41 people, but many also raised questions about the emergency response, fire safety codes, and restrictions on building houses of worship for the country's Christian minority.

Neighborhood residents expressed shock over the fire Sunday, one of Egypt's deadliest in recent years, that killed 41 members of the congregation, including at least 15 children.

"The scene of dead children still haunts me," said Salah el-Sayed, a 43-year-old civil servant who lives next to the Martyr Abu Sefein church in the working-class Imbaba neighborhood, and was one of the first to arrive at the scene as thick smoke poured from the building.

"Bodies of children littered everywhere," he said.

The fire broke out during Sunday morning services, beginning on the second floor of the four-story building, which also housed a day care. Smoke quickly engulfed the upper floors.

Authorities blamed an electrical short-circuit in an air conditioner unit for the fire, but witnesses also pointed to a fault in a power generator which the church used during regular power outages. People also said ambulances were slow to arrive, which could have caused more deaths, although authorities said the first ambulance arrived within minutes after the fire was reported.

Witnesses speaking to The Associated Press recounted horrific scenes of people jumping out of windows, a stampede in the church's main hall and stairs, and children lying motionless amid fire and burned furniture.

El-Sayed, who with others rushed to the church to rescue trapped worshippers and carried bodies to waiting ambulances, said electricity was down for about half an hour that Sunday morning. He saw smoke rising minutes after the current returned.

The thick smoke made it difficult for them to get inside, and some rescuers jumped from the roof of an adjacent building. Others stormed the church front gate and made their way upstairs where the children were trapped on the fourth floor.

Ahmed Ibrahim, who lived nearby, said he saw a man trying to jump from a second floor window. He and others tried to save the man's life by holding out a blanket, but the man fell to the ground and died.

"Unfortunately he was heavy," Ibrahim said. "It was frustrating."

Mohammed Yahia was among those who ran to the church, heading immediately to the day care.

Of the 20 children inside the day care, he said all but five died, speaking to a local television station from a hospital bed. Yahia carried five bodies — one by one — to the ambulances, before he fell and broke his leg while helping an elderly person out of the building.

The dead children included siblings, twins aged 5 and a 3-year-old. Five-year-old triplets, their mother, grandmother and an aunt were also among those killed, according to Mousa Ibrahim, a spokesman for the Coptic Orthodox Church. Images of the dead children went viral on social media.

The church bishop, Abdul Masih Bakhit, was also among the dead.

The church is located on a narrow street in one of Cairo's most densely populated neighborhoods. It was an apartment building before it was turned into a church like many others across the country, according to neighbors. It looks like other buildings in the area, recognizable only by a sign above its front door, and an iron cross on its roof.

Coptic Christian Pope Tawadros II said Martyr Abu Sefein, like many others, is too small for the number of congregants it serves. In televised comments late Monday, he urged authorities to find solutions to build more churches.

Anba Angaelos, the archbishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in London, blamed restrictions on church construction that have forced Christians to convert residential buildings into places of worship.

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The tragedy "is a direct result of a painful time when Christian communities could not build purpose-designed churches, and would have to covertly use other buildings, not fit for the purpose and lacking the necessary health and safety features and escapes," he wrote Sunday on Twitter.

Church-building has for decades been one of the most sensitive sectarian issues in Egypt, where 10% of the population of 103 million are Christians, but where Muslim hard-liners sharply oppose anything they see as undermining what they call the country's "Islamic character."

In the past, local authorities had often refused to give building permits for new churches, fearing protests and riots by Muslim ultraconservatives. Amid such restrictions, Christians turned to building illegally or setting up churches in other buildings, such as the case of Martyr Abu Sefein.

Many similar churches lack licenses and are not up to safety code. In recent years, the government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi has sought to regulate church building. In 2016, the government issued the country's first law spelling out the rules for building a church, though critics argued that the legislation is in line with previous restrictions.

On Monday, a senior government official said authorities, in coordination with the Coptic Orthodox Church, would review all safety measures in churches across the country especially those in Cairo slums. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Some relatives of victims and witnesses said ambulances and firefighters took too long to arrive, but Health Minister Khaled Abdel-Ghaffar said that the first ambulance arrived at the site two minutes after the fire was reported.

The street where Martyr Abu Sefein church is located remained cordoned off Monday as construction workers worked to clear away debris.

EXPLAINER: Why US lawmakers' Taiwan trips keep riling China

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Taiwan is high on the summer travel list for U.S. members of Congress on their August recess this year, as U.S. lawmakers make a point of asserting American support for the self-governed island despite objections from China. The payoff photos from this week's five-member congressional visit, like that of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi less than two weeks earlier, are meant as a pointed message to China: newly arrived lawmakers disembarking on the tarmac of Taipei's international airport, greeted by beaming Taiwanese officials glad for the American support.

Sen. Ed Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat, on Monday was wrapping up the second U.S. congressional delegation there this month. Pelosi had been the most senior U.S. official in a quarter-century to visit Taiwan, underscoring the longstanding U.S. policy of solidarity with the island's democratically elected leaders.

China claims Taiwan as part of its territory. It views any visit by U.S. officials as a recognition of the island's sovereignty.

So far, China's response to Markey's delegation has been more restrained than that of two weeks ago, when Beijing launched days of intensive military maneuvers around Taiwan and froze some ties with the U.S. government over Pelosi's visit.

A look at some key questions about U.S. lawmakers' Taiwan trips, and why they matter.

WHY DID MORE LAWMAKERS TRAVEL TO TAIWAN THIS MONTH?

Partly, to show they can, and will. Pelosi framed her trip to Taiwan as part of an obligation by American leaders to stand up for the world's democratic movements against authoritarian governments. The mission itself is in many ways the message for lawmakers — demonstrating vividly that they will maintain U.S. ties with Taiwan despite threats from China, which under President Xi Jinping is growing ever more confrontational in making broad territorial claims in the region.

Taiwan and mainland China split during a civil war in 1949. But China claims the island as its own territory and has not ruled out using military force to take it.

The U.S. recognizes Beijing as the government of China but maintains informal diplomatic, defense and trade ties with democratic Taiwan.

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Markey, a congressional veteran of more than 40 years, was one of the signers of the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act. The law pledged ongoing U.S. relations with the Taiwanese.

Meeting with President Tsai Ing-wen on Sunday, Markey pledged "support for peace and stability in Taiwan as they face growing authoritarian pressure from Beijing," according to a statement from his office.

But Markey also expressed the U.S. desire to avoid unnecessary conflict in the region, and praised Taiwan for its restraint as tensions with China rose over Pelosi's trip.

HOW DID CHINA REACT?

China responded to news of Markey's five-member U.S. congressional delegation by announcing new drills in the seas and skies surrounding Taiwan.

It was not clear if the new drills had already started. Officials gave no details about where and when they would be conducted.

When Pelosi visited, Beijing fired missiles over the island and into the Taiwan Strait and sent warplanes and navy ships across the waterway's midline, long a buffer between the sides.

"China will take resolute and strong measures to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing Monday. "A handful of U.S. politicians, in collusion with the separatist forces of Taiwan independence, are trying to challenge the one-China principle, which is out of their depth and doomed to failure."

HOW HAS BIDEN RESPONDED?

President Joe Biden called China's unusually aggressive response to Pelosi's visit unwarranted, saying that the U.S. is sticking with its decades-old "one-China" policy. That includes no intention of recognizing Taiwan as independent, but also no support for any effort by China to change the status quo between Taipei and Beijing.

The latest congressional delegation traveled with far less attention than Pelosi's did, and the White House likewise has been quieter. It hasn't commented, but State Department spokesman Ned Price was asked about it Monday.

"Any response to a peaceful visit by members of Congress, any response that entails bellicose rhetoric or military maneuvers or provocative actions is totally unnecessary, and an absolute overreaction," Price said.

Kurt Campbell, Biden's coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs, underscored late last week the U.S. will keep taking steps of its own in the weeks and months ahead to demonstrate and deepen support for Taiwanese leaders.

That includes an upcoming announcement on Taiwan-US trade, and U.S. military movements through the Taiwan Strait.

ARE THE CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATIONS TO TAIWAN UNUSUAL?

Not at all. Price said there have been 10 this year alone. With one notable exception — Pelosi's — they take place with little public attention.

Administration officials had argued in the context of Pelosi's trip that congressional visits to Taiwan are normal and unremarkable, accusing Beijing of stirring up tensions with caustic rhetoric.

Several officials noted that the Chinese reaction to Markey's trip was far more subdued than to Pelosi's. They also suggested it might be a sign that China is reverting to its routine opposition to congressional travel to the island while cautioning that the continuing Chinese military drills in the Taiwan Strait remain a concern.

Iran denies involvement but justifies Salman Rushdie attack

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — An Iranian official Monday denied Tehran was involved in the stabbing of author Salman Rushdie, though he sought to justify the attack in the Islamic Republic's first public comments on the bloodshed.

The remarks by Nasser Kanaani, the spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry, came three days after Rushdie was wounded in New York state. The writer has been taken off a ventilator and is "on the road

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to recovery," according to his agent.

Rushdie, 75, has faced death threats for more than 30 years over his novel "The Satanic Verses," whose depiction of the Prophet Muhammad was seen by some Muslims as blasphemous.

In 1989, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa, or Islamic edict, demanding the author's death, and while Iran has not focused on Rushdie in recent years, the decree still stands.

Also, a semiofficial Iranian foundation had posted a bounty of over \$3 million for the killing of the author. It has not commented on the attack.

"Regarding the attack against Salman Rushdie in America, we don't consider anyone deserving reproach, blame or even condemnation, except for (Rushdie) himself and his supporters," Kanaani said.

"In this regard, no one can blame the Islamic Republic of Iran," he added. "We believe that the insults made and the support he received was an insult against followers of all religions."

Iran has denied carrying out other operations abroad against dissidents in the years since the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution, though prosecutors and Western governments have attributed such attacks to Tehran.

Rushdie was attacked Friday as he was about to give a lecture in western New York. He suffered a damaged liver and severed nerves in an arm and an eye, according to his agent, Andrew Wylie. Rushdie is likely to lose the eye, Wylie said.

His alleged assailant, Hadi Matar, pleaded not guilty to attempted murder and assault.

Matar, 24, was born in the U.S. to parents who emigrated from Yaroun in southern Lebanon near the Israeli border, according to the village's mayor.

Matar had lived in recent years in New Jersey with his mother, who told London's Daily Mail that her son became moody and more religious after a month-long trip to Lebanon in 2018.

"I was expecting him to come back motivated, to complete school, to get his degree and a job. But instead he locked himself in the basement. He had changed a lot, he didn't say anything to me or his sisters for months," Silvana Fardos said.

Village records in Yaroun show Matar holds Lebanese citizenship and is a Shiite, an official there said. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of security concerns, said Matar's father lives there but has been in seclusion since the attack.

Flags of the Iranian-backed Shiite militant group Hezbollah, along with portraits of Hezbollah and Iranian leaders, hang across the village. Israel has bombarded Hezbollah positions near there in the past.

Police in New York have offered no motive for the attack, though District Attorney Jason Schmidt alluded to the bounty on Rushdie in arguing against bail during a hearing over the weekend.

"Even if this court were to set a million dollars bail, we stand a risk that bail could be met," Schmidt said.

In his remarks Monday, Kanaani added that Iran did not "have any other information more than what the American media has reported." He also implied that Rushdie brought the attack on himself.

"Salman Rushdie exposed himself to popular anger and fury through insulting the sacredness of Islam and crossing the red lines of over 1.5 billion Muslims and also red lines of followers of all divine religions," Kanaani said.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, while not directly blaming Tehran for the attack on Rushdie, denounced Iran in a statement Monday praising the writer's support for freedom of expression and religion.

"Iranian state institutions have incited violence against Rushdie for generations, and state-affiliated media recently gloated about the attempt on his life," Blinken said. "This is despicable."

State Department spokesman Ned Price, speaking to reporters in Washington on Monday, condemned the Iranian government for blaming Rushdie for the attack. "It's despicable. It's disgusting. We condemn it," he said.

"We have heard Iranian officials seek to incite to violence over the years, of course, with the initial fatwa, but even more recently with the gloating that has taken place in the aftermath of this attack on his life. This is something that is absolutely outrageous."

While fatwas can be revoked, Iran's current supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who took over after Khomeini's death, has never done so. As recently as 2017, Khamenei said: "The decree is as Imam

Khomeini issued.”

Tensions between Iran and the West, particularly the U.S., have spiked since then-President Donald Trump pulled America out of Iran’s nuclear deal with world powers in 2018.

A Trump-ordered drone strike killed a top Iranian Revolutionary Guard general in 2020, heightening those tensions.

Last week, the U.S. charged a Guard member in absentia with plotting to kill one-time Trump adviser and Iran hawk John Bolton. Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and an aide are under 24-hour security over alleged threats from Iran.

U.S. prosecutors also say Iran tried in 2021 to kidnap an Iranian opposition activist and writer living in New York. In recent days, a man with an assault rifle was arrested near her home.

Clergy, social workers fear fallout from Okla. abortion laws

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press Writer

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Strict anti-abortion laws that took effect in Oklahoma this year led to the quick shuttering of every abortion facility in the state, but left questions for those who work directly with women who may seek their advice or help getting an abortion out of state.

Beyond the profound repercussions the abortion laws are having on medical care, especially reproductive medicine, clergy members, social workers and even librarians have raised concerns about being exposed to criminal or civil liability for just discussing the topic.

Those fears are well-founded, says Joseph Thai, a professor at the University of Oklahoma who teaches about constitutional law and the Supreme Court. He described Oklahoma’s new anti-abortion laws, which include both criminal and civil penalties, as the strictest in the nation so far and sweeping in both substance and scope.

The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in June to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and remove women’s constitutional right to abortion immediately triggered a 1910 Oklahoma law that makes it a felony, punishable by two to five years in prison, for every person who “advises” or provides any other means for a woman to procure an abortion. That law allows abortion only to save the mother’s life.

“That all-encompassing language can make anyone and everyone who helps a woman get an abortion or provides information about access to abortion — including a spouse, another family member, a friend, a classmate or co-worker, a librarian, or even an Uber driver — a felon,” Thai said. “Likewise, employers who have pledged to pay for their employees’ abortions as part of their reproductive health coverage and their insurance companies face criminal liability.”

Although Alabama, Arizona and Texas have laws prohibiting “aiding and abetting” a woman in getting an abortion, Oklahoma’s is the strictest and the only one currently in effect, said Elizabeth Nash, a state policy analyst for the abortion-rights supporting Guttmacher Institute.

While former providers in Oklahoma may have halted abortions, they haven’t stopped giving advice.

Emily Wales, CEO of Planned Parenthood Great Plains, said giving a pregnant woman information about abortion care is guarded under free speech protections in the Constitution.

“We’ve heard from providers who aren’t sure if they can make referrals, if they can even tell people to go to Planned Parenthood’s website or abortionfinder.com,” Wales said. “We don’t think there’s any controversy about being able to tell people what their options are and that they can access care in another state.”

Others, however, are more concerned. No charges have been filed in the seven weeks since the law against advising or helping a woman get an abortion went into effect and it’s not known whether anyone is being investigated. Messages left with several Oklahoma prosecutors about how they plan to enforce the anti-abortion laws were not returned, and the head of the state’s District Attorneys Council, Kathryn Boyle Brewer, said the issue hasn’t been formally discussed by prosecutors at its regular meetings.

Senate President Pro Tempore Greg Treat, an Oklahoma City Republican who wrote the trigger law, said he believes those who help a woman get an abortion should be prosecuted, although he said it’s unlikely prosecutors would go after a pregnant woman’s family members.

“Absolutely, if you’re going to aid and abet in a felony, you should be held responsible,” Treat said. “Where

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the bigger issue is where these corporations are offering to pay \$4,000 to help you kill an unborn life and knowingly go around Oklahoma's statutes.

"Since this has been in effect, there haven't been any prosecutions. The good news is people are not having abortions in Oklahoma, and thus far there has not been a case where someone is aiding and abetting in such a way that can be prosecuted."

A separate law passed by Oklahoma's Republican-controlled Legislature this year that was modeled on a Texas law allows anyone to sue "any person" who aids and abets a woman in getting an abortion and collect a minimum \$10,000 award plus attorney fees.

"Notably, none of these criminal or civil laws limit their language to abortions performed in Oklahoma," Thai added. "So anyone in Oklahoma who helps a woman get an abortion outside of Oklahoma, such as in neighboring Kansas, arguably could be prosecuted or sued under these sweeping laws."

The Rev. Lori Walke, senior minister at Mayflower Congregational Church in Oklahoma City, said that's left some religious leaders wondering about their potential legal exposure for helping women navigate abortion services.

"Among my colleagues the conversation has been: 'This is a risk we have to be willing to take because abortion bans are against our religion,' to put it directly," Walke said, adding that sometimes advocacy work by faith leaders includes the possibility of arrest and incarceration.

Similar concerns are being raised by social workers, many of whom believe a prohibition on advising women about abortion services conflicts with their code of ethics that requires them to respect a client's wishes, said Steven Pharris, head of Oklahoma's chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

"The changes in laws have kind of criminalized a big part of what we do, so it's changed our role with clients," Pharris said. "It's created a chilling effect on what we can and can't say."

At one point, librarians in Oklahoma City were warned not to even say the word "abortion," though that changed after the city library system's team reviewed the laws, said Larry White, the system's head.

White says staff has since been instructed to handle requests for information about abortion like any other reference question, where they provide factual, sourced information and answer questions about the subject. Some staffers remain uneasy, though.

"There are a lot of unknowns," White said. "We do not want to put our staff in any way in any danger of receiving civil liabilities under this law if we can prevent it. We also have an obligation to protect them and the organization from civil liability."

Kenya's Ruto declared president after last-minute chaos

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — In a chaotic announcement that could foreshadow a court challenge, Kenya's electoral commission chairman on Monday declared Deputy President William Ruto the winner of the country's close presidential race over five-time contender Raila Odinga.

The outcome was a triumph for a candidate who shook up the East African nation's politics by appealing to struggling Kenyans' economic concerns instead of their ethnic allegiances.

Ruto received about 50.5% of the vote to nearly 49% for Odinga in last Tuesday's balloting, the chairman said. But just before the declaration, four of the seven electoral commissioners told reporters they could not support the "opaque nature" of the final steps, without giving details.

Screams and scuffles broke out in the auditorium, the lectern was tossed from the stage, and police rushed in to restore order as a choir continued to sing.

Minutes later, commission chairman Wafula Chebukati announced the official results and said the two commissioners who stayed behind with him had been injured.

Odinga's campaign alleged that unspecified "electoral offenses" were committed and that a winner was illegally declared without a quorum of commissioners.

"It is not over until it is over," Odinga's running mate, Martha Karua, a former justice minister, tweeted.

Crowds of people across Kenya exploded in jubilation in some places, and in anger in others. Odinga

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supporters shouted "No Raila, no peace!" and burned tires in the crowded Nairobi neighborhood of Kibera as night fell. Religious leaders pleaded for calm.

Odinga's campaign has seven days to file a challenge in court, extending the uncertainty in Kenya, a country of 56 million people that is seen as crucial to regional stability. The Supreme Court will have 14 days to rule.

This is likely to be the final run for Odinga, a 77-year-old longtime opposition figure who had the backing of outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta. Kenyatta fell out with his deputy, Ruto, years ago.

Ruto told reporters that the divisions among the electoral commissioners were just a "sideshow" and "pose no threat at all to the legality of the declaration."

"What happened this evening is an unfortunate situation, I think an attempt by our competitors to roll back what we have achieved as a country," Ruto said. He praised a election that for many Kenyans represented a leap forward in transparency and peace, largely free from ethnic divisions that in the past played out with deadly results.

In his acceptance speech, Ruto promised a "transparent, open, democratic government" and said people who had acted against his campaign "have nothing to fear. ... There is no room for vengeance."

Those were important vows from a man once mentored by former President Daniel Arap Moi, who ran Kenya as a repressive one-party state for almost a decade.

The 55-year-old Ruto portrayed himself during the campaign as the brash outsider, playing up his chicken-selling days from childhood. He told voters the election was a contest between "hustlers" from modest backgrounds and the "dynasties" of Kenyatta and Odinga, whose fathers were Kenya's first president and vice president.

The message was popular among many Kenyans struggling with rising prices, few job opportunities and widespread corruption.

"These are people who don't even know the price of bread. They don't know the price of anything," Ruto supporter Francis Irungu said of the political elite.

Odinga, famous for his yearslong detention during his fight for multiparty democracy decades ago and for supporting Kenya's groundbreaking 2010 constitution, appeared to many Kenyans this time as part of the establishment.

Despite the last-minute chaos, the electoral commission improved its transparency in this election, practically inviting Kenyans to do the tallying themselves by posting online the more than 46,000 results forms from around the country. Tallies published by media organizations and others that took up the challenge echoed Monday's results.

As the people waited almost a week for the official announcement, both Odinga and Ruto appealed for peace.

Following the 2007 election, more than 1,000 people were killed after Odinga claimed victory had been stolen from him. Ruto, then Odinga's ally, was indicted by the International Criminal Court on crimes-against-humanity charges over his role in the violence, but the case was closed amid allegations of witness intimidation.

The country's 2017 election results were overturned by the high court because of irregularities, a first in Africa. Odinga boycotted the new vote, which was won by Kenyatta.

Kenyans hoped to see calm prevail this time.

"Leaders are there to come and go," Richard Osiolo, a resident of the western Nyanza region, said over the weekend. "I should stay alive and see you lead, bad or good, and then I have another chance to choose another leader."

Starbucks asks labor board to halt union votes temporarily

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Starbucks on Monday asked the National Labor Relations Board to temporarily suspend all union elections at its U.S. stores, citing allegations from a board employee that regional NLRB officials improperly

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coordinated with union organizers.

In a letter to the board chairman and other officials, Starbucks said the unnamed career NLRB employee informed the company about the activity, which happened in the board's St. Louis office in the spring while it was overseeing a union election at a Starbucks store in Overland Park, Kansas.

The store is one of 314 U.S. Starbucks locations where workers have petitioned the NLRB to hold union elections since late last year. More than 220 of those stores have voted to unionize. The company opposes the unionization effort.

The Seattle coffee giant alleges that St. Louis labor board officials made special arrangements for pro-union workers to vote in person at its office when they did not receive mail-in ballots, even though Starbucks and the union had agreed that store elections would be handled by mail-in ballot.

In its letter, Starbucks referred to memos the regional office sent confirming that workers were allowed to come to the office and vote in person after the union told the regional office that some workers had not received ballots in the mail. The memos, citing "board protocol," said the workers voted alone in an empty office, according to Starbucks.

"Because observers were not present, no one can be sure who appeared to vote, whether NLRB personnel had inappropriate communications with the voters, told them how to vote, showed them how to vote or engaged in other undisclosed conduct," Starbucks wrote in its letter.

Starbucks said regional board officials also disclosed confidential information to the union, including which workers' ballots had arrived in the mail to be counted.

Starbucks Workers United, the group seeking to unionize U.S. Starbucks stores, accused the company of trying to "distract attention away from their unprecedented anti-union campaign, including firing over 75 union leaders across the country, while simultaneously trying to halt all union elections."

"Ultimately, this is Starbucks' latest attempt to manipulate the legal process for their own means and prevent workers from exercising their fundamental right to organize," the group said in a statement.

A spokesperson for the NLRB said Monday the agency doesn't comment on open cases.

Press secretary Kayla Blado said the NLRB will "carefully and objectively" consider any challenges that Starbucks raises through "established channels." Starbucks can also seek expedited review in the case, Blado said.

Workers at the Overland Park store petitioned the NLRB to hold a vote in February. In April, workers voted 6-1 to unionize, but seven additional ballots were the subject of challenges from Starbucks or the union.

A hearing on those challenges was scheduled for Tuesday. Starbucks asked for that hearing to be delayed, but as of Monday afternoon, the board had not postponed it.

Risa L. Lieberwitz, a professor of labor law and academic director of the Worker Institute at Cornell University, said Starbucks' push to delay the hearing was curious. Lieberwitz said the hearing is the ideal place for Starbucks to present evidence about the Overland Park election and ask the board to investigate.

"This certainly seems to be a tactic to shift attention away from Starbucks' own conduct and try to put negative connotations or allegations against the board," Lieberwitz said.

In its letter, Starbucks said the evidence in this case indicates misconduct in other regions as well. The company wants the NLRB to investigate other Starbucks union elections and make public a report on its findings. The company said the board should also implement safeguards to prevent regional officials from coordinating with one party or another.

Starbucks also asked the NLRB to issue an order requiring all elections to be conducted in person with observers from both sides.

Starbucks has long opposed unionization, dating back to CEO Howard Schultz's acquisition of the company in the late 1980s. The current unionization effort has been riddled with accusations and lawsuits on both sides.

Starbucks Workers United has filed 284 unfair labor practice charges with the NLRB against Starbucks or one of its operators, according to the labor board. Starbucks has filed two charges against Workers United.

Earlier this month, the labor board dismissed one of the charges filed by Starbucks, saying the company failed to prove that pro-union workers blocked store entrances or intimidated customers during a spring rally.

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In June, the NLRB asked a federal court in western New York to order Starbucks to stop interfering with unionization efforts at its U.S. stores.

The NLRB's actions against Starbucks haven't always been successful. In June, a federal judge in Phoenix ruled that Starbucks didn't have to rehire three workers who claimed that the company had retaliated against them for organizing a union.

Unionization efforts at Starbucks, Amazon, Trader Joe's and elsewhere are gaining steam under President Joe Biden, who has vowed to be "the most pro-union president" in American history.

But Bill Gould, a former NLRB chairman who now teaches at Stanford Law School, said NLRB decisions issued under Biden have not been much different than those issued under Republican presidents.

"Starbucks doesn't like the message that workers are giving them, pretty uniformly, across the country," Gould said. "So they're trying to eliminate the messenger."

Starbucks isn't the only large company facing a unionization effort that has attacked the voting process.

Amazon has also levied accusations of improper conduct against the NLRB's regional office in Brooklyn in its attempt to re-do a historic labor win at a warehouse on Staten Island, New York. Among other allegations, Amazon said the agency tainted the voting process by seeking reinstatement of a fired Amazon worker in the weeks leading up to the March election.

Attorneys for the agency have pushed back. A regional director for an NLRB office in Phoenix is expected to issue a ruling on that case in the coming weeks.

Deadline looms for western states to cut Colorado River use

By SAM METZ and FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Banks along parts of the Colorado River where water once streamed are now just caked mud and rock as climate change makes the Western U.S. hotter and drier.

More than two decades of drought have done little to deter the region from diverting more water than flows through it, depleting key reservoirs to levels that now jeopardize water delivery and hydropower production.

Cities and farms in seven U.S. states are bracing for cuts this week as officials stare down a deadline to propose unprecedented reductions to their use of the water, setting up what's expected to be the most consequential week for Colorado River policy in years.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in June told the states — Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming — to determine how to use at least 15% less water next year, or have restrictions imposed on them. The bureau is also expected to publish hydrology projections that will trigger additional cuts already agreed to.

Tensions over the extent of the cuts and how to spread them equitably have flared, with states pointing fingers and stubbornly clinging to their water rights despite the looming crisis.

Representatives from the seven states convened in Denver last week for last minute negotiations behind closed doors. Those discussions have yet to produce concrete proposals, but officials party to them say the most likely targets for cuts are Arizona and California farmers. Agricultural districts in those states are asking to be paid generously to bear that burden.

The proposals under discussion, however, fall short of what the Bureau of Reclamation has demanded and, with negotiations stalling, state officials say they hope for more time to negotiate details.

"Despite the obvious urgency of the situation, the last sixty-two days produced exactly nothing in terms of meaningful collective action to help forestall the looming crisis," John Entsminger, the General Manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority wrote in a letter on Monday. He called the agricultural district demands "drought profiteering."

The Colorado River cascades from the Rocky Mountains into the arid deserts of the Southwest. It's the primary water supply for 40 million people. About 70% of its water goes toward irrigation, sustaining a \$15 billion-a-year agricultural industry that supplies 90% of the United States' winter vegetables.

Water from the river is divided among Mexico and the seven U.S. states under a series of agreements

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that date back a century, to a time when more flowed.

But climate change has transformed the river's hydrology, providing less snowmelt and causing hotter temperatures and more evaporation. As the river yielded less water, the states agreed to cuts tied to the levels of reservoirs that store its water.

Last year, federal officials for the first time declared a water shortage, triggering cuts to Nevada, Arizona and Mexico's share of the river to help prevent the two largest reservoirs — Lake Powell and Lake Mead — from dropping low enough to threaten hydropower production and stop water from flowing through their dams.

The proposals for supplemental cuts due this week have inflamed disagreement between upper basin states — Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming — and lower basin states — Arizona, California and Nevada — over how to spread the pain.

The lower basin states use most of the water and have thus far shouldered most of the cuts. The upper basin states have historically not used their full allocations but want to maintain water rights to plan for population growth.

Gene Shawcroft, the chairman of Utah's Colorado River Authority, believes the lower basin states should take most of the cuts because they use most of the water and their full allocations.

He said it was his job to protect Utah's allocation for growth projected for decades ahead: "The direction we've been given as water purveyors is to make sure we have water for the future."

In a letter last month, representatives from the upper basin states proposed a five-point conservation plan they said would save water, but argued most cuts needed to come from the lower basin. The plan didn't commit to any numbers.

"The focus is getting the tools in place and working with water users to get as much as we can rather than projecting a water number," Chuck Cullom, the executive director of the Upper Colorado River Commission, told The Associated Press.

That position, however, is unsatisfactory to many in lower basin states already facing cuts.

"It's going to come to a head particularly if the upper basin states continue their negotiating position, saying, 'We're not making any cuts,'" said Bruce Babbitt, who served as Interior secretary from 2003-2011.

Lower basin states have yet to go public with plans to contribute, but officials said last week that the states' tentative proposal under discussion fell slightly short of the federal government's request to cut 2 to 4 million acre-feet.

An acre-foot of water is enough to serve 2-3 households annually.

Bill Hasencamp, the Colorado River resource manager at Southern California's Metropolitan Water District, said all the districts in the state that draw from the river had agreed to contribute water or money to the plan, pending approval by their respective boards. Water districts, in particular Imperial Irrigation District, have been adamant that any voluntary cut must not curtail their high priority water rights.

Southern California cities will likely provide money that could fund following farmland in places like Imperial County and water managers are considering leaving water they've stored in Lake Mead as part of their contribution.

Arizona will probably be hit hard with reductions. The state over the past few years shouldered many of the cuts. With its growing population and robust agricultural industry, it has less wiggle room than its neighbors to take on more, said Arizona Department of Water Resources Director Tom Buschatzke. Some Native American tribes in Arizona have also contributed to propping up Lake Mead in the past, and could play an outsized role in any new proposal.

Irrigators around Yuma, Arizona, have proposed taking 925,000 acre-feet less of Colorado River water in 2023 and leaving it in Lake Mead if they're paid \$1.4 billion, or \$1,500 per acre-foot. The cost is far above the going rate, but irrigators defended their proposal as fair considering the cost to grow crops and get them to market.

Wade Noble, the coordinator for a coalition that represents Yuma water rights holders, said it was the only proposal put forth publicly that includes actual cuts, rather than theoretical cuts to what users are allocated on paper.

Some of the compensation-for-conservation funds could come from a \$4 billion in drought funding included in the Inflation Reduction Act under consideration in Washington, U.S. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona told the AP.

Sinema acknowledged that paying farmers to conserve is not a long-term solution: "In the short-term, however, in order to meet our day-to-day needs and year-to-year needs, ensuring that we're creating financial incentives for non-use will help us get through," she said.

Babbitt agreed that money in the legislation will not "miraculously solve the problem" and said prices for water must be reasonable to avoid gouging because most water users will take be impacted.

"There's no way that these cuts can all be paid for at a premium price for years and years," he said.

'Don't Say Gay' law confuses some Florida schools

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Some Florida schools have moved library books and debated changing textbooks in response to a law critics call "Don't Say Gay" — and some teachers have worried that family pictures on their desks could get them in trouble.

As students return from summer break, educators are cautiously adjusting and waiting to see how the new law governing lessons on gender and sexual orientation will be interpreted and enforced.

The new law, championed by Florida's GOP Gov. Ron DeSantis, bans lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade as well as material that is not deemed age-appropriate. Most educators do not expect a major change in lesson plans — one of the key reasons critics cited in saying the law was unnecessary was that teachers do not cover such subjects in early grades anyway.

But some worry it sets a tone that will leave LGBTQ teachers and kids feeling ostracized.

"The messaging of this law is horrible. It's toxic, it's discriminatory," said Gretchen Robinson, a lesbian high school teacher in Orange County. "It targets, very obviously, LGBTQ students, it 'others' them, and that is not OK."

Workshops about the law that her school district's legal team held over the summer caused confusion. Some staff said they were told teachers in kindergarten through third grade could not display pride flags or photos of their same-sex spouses. The district later said the law only applied to classroom instruction and that the photos were allowed. It apologized for offering bad guidance with a hypothetical discussion.

Robinson said schools in her area had given out rainbow-colored lanyards and inclusion stickers, but she was not sure whether teachers would continue to wear or display them. She also worried that some teachers will "err on the side of caution and leave stuff out" during lessons.

The law attracted widespread attention and condemnation earlier this year when it worked its way through the Republican-controlled Statehouse. Critics dubbed it "Don't Say Gay," though it contains no bans on specific phrases and doesn't bar material on sexual orientation considered age-appropriate for grades 4 and above.

Opponents say the law would stifle classroom discussion, arguing that it doesn't clarify what could be deemed inappropriate. It also establishes an enforcement mechanism that invites parents to file lawsuits against districts, potentially heightening tensions between conservatives and school officials.

The Florida debate reflects one that is playing out nationwide, with fights in school boards and state legislatures over what and how children learn about race, gender, sexual orientation and American history. DeSantis and other Republicans have argued parents should be the ones in control of teaching their children about sexual orientation and gender identity.

DeSantis recently addressed some of the concerns at an unrelated news conference, saying: "You know I hear some people say, 'Wow, school's coming up. But, you know, Florida, they have parent's rights in education, they banned CRT (critical race theory), all this stuff. People, how are they gonna know what to teach or whatever?'"

"And I'm just thinking to myself, you know, you teach reading, math, science, the basic stuff. And you don't teach gender ideology, CRT, the sexuality in the elementary schools. That's not very difficult to know

and that's not very difficult to understand," he said.

Educators say the state Department of Education has not yet explained clearly how the law will be enforced. In June the agency issued a memo on the law to school district superintendents, but it mostly contained a copy and paste of the legislative text. The agency did not immediately return an email seeking comment from AP.

"The guidance we're giving people is that it is confusing and we don't know how it's going to be interpreted. But what we can do is care for kids and provide the good learning environment that they deserve," said Andrew Spar, president of the Florida Education Association union.

The law has been at the heart of a discussion over sex education materials in Miami-Dade County, which has the state's largest school system. Some school board members said new textbooks showed pictures of condoms, diaphragms and intrauterine devices that were too graphic for middle school students.

When school officials sought the board's approval for the new textbooks in April, after the law had passed, administrators said they would remove chapters that cover gender identity and sexuality. The board members approved the online textbooks, but then reversed their decision last month after coming under public pressure. The board reversed itself again last week to adopt the textbooks without the chapters on gender identity and sexuality.

In Palm Beach County, school officials say they reviewed books and have moved only a handful to a separate section not accessible to children in third grade and younger.

In various school districts, teachers have said they are worried about parents filing complaints over perceived violations while there's still not much clarity around the new law.

Norma Schwartz, mother of a fifth grader and an eighth grader in Miami-Dade schools, said the law may cause some students, families and teachers to feel targeted.

"It goes against our mission and vision, to empower all children, not make them feel like they don't belong," said Schwartz, who is part of the Miami-Dade County Council PTA, which has opposed the law. "As far as parental rights, we are the PTA. We have been around for 100 years. We want parental engagement, we want to empower parents."

Urban combat and beyond: Ukrainian recruits get UK training

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

A BRITISH ARMY BASE, England (AP) — A few weeks ago, Serhiy was a business analyst at an IT company. Zakhar was a civil engineer. Now they are soldiers, training to liberate Ukraine from Russia's invasion — but doing it more than 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) away in Britain.

They are among several hundred Ukrainian recruits pounding through an intense form of infantry training at an army base in southeast England. One batch of the 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers that the British military has pledged to train within 120 days, they are spending several weeks learning skills including marksmanship, battlefield first aid and — crucially for their country's future — urban warfare.

As the Ukrainians practice house-clearing amid the rattle of gunfire and pall from smoke grenades on a mock-townscape where British soldiers once trained for operations in Northern Ireland, they think about driving Russian troops from the streets of their own cities.

"The most important part is urban training, because it's the most dangerous combat, in cities," said Serhiy, who like the other Ukrainians did not want his full name used because of security concerns. "The British instructors have a lot of experience, from Iraq, Afghanistan. We can adapt all this knowledge to the Ukrainian situation and use it to liberate our country from Russian invasion."

British trainers are putting the Ukrainian troops through a condensed version of the British Army's infantry training, covering weapons handling, first aid, patrol tactics and the law of conflict. The aim is to turn raw recruits into battle-ready soldiers in a matter of weeks. The first batch arrived last month and have already been sent back to replenish depleted Ukrainian units.

"We are running a basic infantry course, which takes Ukrainian recruits and teaches them to shoot well, to move and communicate well within any tactical environment, and to medicate well," said Maj. Craig

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Hutton, a Scots Guards officer helping to oversee the training.

Hutton says many of the Ukrainian troops have little military experience but "they are so motivated. They have a fantastic will to learn, and they just want to practice, practice and practice more."

More than 1,000 U.K. personnel are involved in the training mission, taking place at four bases around the U.K. Other countries are also sending trainers, including Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the Nordic nations.

Britain is sending the Ukrainians home with new uniforms, body armor, helmets and other gear, part of 2.3 billion pounds' (\$2.8 billion) worth of U.K. military aid to the country that also includes anti-tank missiles and sophisticated rocket-launch systems.

Zakhar, the former engineer, said it was hard to be away from Ukraine as fighting rages in the eastern Donbas region and in the south.

"I left my parents. I left my brothers and sisters, my relatives, to gain knowledge and experience that will help me ... free our territory from occupiers and invaders," he said through an interpreter.

Serhiy, the onetime IT worker, has been in uniform for less than a month and is equally determined.

"I know that Ukrainian soldiers are dying to protect our homes right now. So it's hard to know that I am not with them," he said. "But the Ukrainian army needs only professional soldiers, so I am ready to train as hard as possible to be ready for the battle ahead."

Brigadier Justin Stenhouse, who is in charge of the training as commander of the 11th Security Assistance Brigade, said seeing the motivation of the Ukrainians is "humbling."

But he acknowledged that preparing for the chaos of urban combat is "almost impossible to do in training." The goal of the mission, he said, is to "train them so they can adapt to survive in those early weeks of combat."

"They will learn more in the first weeks of combat than we can possibly give them here," he said.

Six Flags amusement park shooting near Chicago leaves 3 hurt

GURNEE, Ill. (AP) — Three people were injured in a shooting outside a Chicago-area amusement park's entrance that sent visitors scrambling for safety and prompted the park to close early, authorities said.

Officers responded about 7:50 p.m. Sunday after 911 calls reporting shots fired at Six Flags Great America, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of Chicago, the Gurnee Police Department said.

"The shooting ... was not a random act, and appeared to be a targeted incident that occurred outside the park," police said in a statement posted to Facebook.

According to an initial investigation, police said a white sedan entered the parking lot and drove toward the park's front entrance. People got out of the car and shot at another person in the parking lot before driving away, police said.

Additional details about the suspects, including the number of people who fired shots, wasn't immediately released. Police were investigating.

A 17-year-old boy from Aurora, Illinois, had a thigh wound and a 19-year-old woman from Appleton, Wisconsin, had a leg wound, police said. They were taken to a hospital and their wounds were described as non-life-threatening. A third victim had a shoulder injury and declined to be taken to a hospital.

Six Flags Great America said in a statement that park security responded immediately to the shooting along with Gurnee officers. Spokeswoman Rachel Kendziora said the park closed early Sunday evening, with guests and employees leaving the site under the direction of Gurnee police.

The park reopened as scheduled Monday morning, she said.

WGN News in Chicago spoke with Laurie Walker and her daughter, Grace, who were inside the park when the shooting occurred. Walker said they were waiting in line for an attraction around 7:50 p.m. when she noticed people running.

"There is an active shooter, get down, get down," Walker said she heard someone shouting. "We didn't know what was going on, so we get down."

Walker and her daughter climbed two fences to get where she could call her husband. Walker told WGN she was able to leave the park a short while later.

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Gurnee is in Lake County, about 5 miles south of the Wisconsin border. It's about 20 miles north of Highland Park, where seven people died in a mass shooting during a July Fourth parade.

New this week: 'House of the Dragon,' Lakers doc and Lovato

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's a collection curated by The Associated Press' entertainment journalists of what's arriving on TV, streaming services and music platforms this week.

MOVIES

— In the almost 25 years since Princess Diana died, there has never been any shortage of content examining the enormous impact and intrigue of her short life. But a new documentary from director Ed Perkins, "The Princess," which debuted earlier this year at the Sundance Film Festival and is available on HBO (and HBO Max), turns the lens back on us. The film doesn't have any talking heads or voiceover, but instead uses only archival footage to tell a different kind of story. It is a meditative, transportive experience that is surprisingly effective.

— Two of this summer's most delightful theatrical releases "Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris" and "Mr. Malcolm's List" are quietly now available to rent on demand and watch from home. The former is a grounded fantasy adorned with mid-century designer lore, featuring Lesley Manville as a post-WWII British housekeeper and widow. She dreams of owning a Christian Dior gown and must travel to Paris to get one (and her middle-age Sabrina moment). "Mr. Malcolm's List," meanwhile, is an ode to Jane Austen — a Regency-era romance full of gossip, intrigue and high society hijinks starring Freida Pinto, Zawe Ashton and Şöpe Dirisù as the titular Mr. Malcolm.

— On the other streamers, Lili Reinhart, of "Riverdale" fame, leads a Netflix pic "Look Both Ways" about a college senior whose life splits into parallel realities on graduation night. In one, she gets pregnant and has to move home to Texas. In another, she heads to Los Angeles to start her career. Co-starring "Top Gun: Maverick's" Danny Ramierz, "Look Both Ways" hits Netflix on Wednesday. And for those looking for a scare, Paramount+ is debuting "Orphan: First Kill" on Friday. The film is a prequel to Jaime Collet-Serra's 2009 horror "Orphan" and follows Esther as she escapes from an Estonian psychiatric facility and makes her way to America.

— AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr

MUSIC

— Demi Lovato's next album flirts with NSFW. "Holy Fvck" is both a track and the title of the 16-song album, out Friday. "I felt like it was a great, eye-catching title track for the rest of the album," the pop star told SiriusXM. "And especially because there's songs on the album that have, like, kind of religious undertones, there's songs on the album that have this dichotomy of good and bad, and that song kind of represented both." The album's first punky single "Skin of My Teeth," is about Lovato's struggles with sobriety. "The reaper knocks on my door/'Cause I'm addicted to more," she sings.

— What did you accomplish during the pandemic? The indie rock band the Mountain Goats released three new studio albums with a fourth on the horizon. That newest album, "Bleed Out," is set to come out on Friday and is described as "a cinematic experience inspired by action films from the '60s, '70s, and '80s." The first single, "Training Montage," comes with a video that is all manner of silly, with the band doing pushups, running down stairs and riding skateboards. Oh, and while you wait for the album, frontman John Darnielle also managed to release the true-crime novel, "Devil House," earlier this year.

— Don't panic, Brendon Urie is back. His band Panic! At The Disco offers the album "Viva Las Vengeance" on Friday, led by the sugary single "Middle of a Breakup" and the high-energy title track. "'Viva Las Vengeance' is a look back at who I was 17 years ago and who I am now with the fondness I didn't have before. I didn't realize I was making an album and there was something about the tape machine that kept me honest," Urie says. It's Panic's first music since the 2018 release of "Pray for the Wicked." You can also catch the band at this year's MTV VMAs on Aug. 28.

— AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

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TELEVISION

— The high-stakes drama is off the court in “Legacy: The True Story of the LA Lakers,” a 10-part docu-series debuting Monday on Hulu. The series promises to detail how real estate magnate Jerry Buss’ 1979 acquisition of the team led to its transformation into a championship, multibillion-dollar franchise — business and family conflict included. There’s a Buss connection to the series: Jeanie Buss, his daughter and the Lakers CEO and controlling owner, is an executive producer. Filmmaker Antoine Fuqua (“Training Day”) directed, with Shaquille O’Neal, Magic Johnson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar among those interviewed.

— Tatiana Maslany won a lead actress Emmy in 2016 for playing some half-dozen characters in “Orphan Black.” A nine-episode Disney+ comedy series set in the Marvel universe gives her two sides of one coin to work with. “She-Hulk: Attorney at Law,” Jennifer Lewis’ career takes a turn after a transfusion from her cousin Bruce Banner, aka the Hulk, makes her a very reluctant superhero and courtroom advocate for her peers. Familiar Marvel faces in the series debuting Thursday, include Mark Ruffalo as Smart Hulk, Tim Roth as Emil Blonsky-the Abomination, and Benedict Wong as Wong.

— It’s been three years-plus since “Game of Thrones” called it a wrap, but who’s counting? The fans who’ve awaited its prequel, “House of the Dragon,” finally arriving Sunday, on HBO. The story of the House of Targaryen, set two centuries before “Game of Thrones,” is based on George R.R. Martin’s “Fire & Blood.” The cast includes Paddy Considine as King Viserys Targaryen, whom the lords of Westeros picked to succeed his grandfather, and Matt Smith as Prince Daemon Targaryen, his younger brother with “the true blood of the dragon.” Could there possibly be trouble brewing?

WNBA’s Brittney Griner appeals her Russian prison sentence

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Lawyers for American basketball star Brittney Griner have filed an appeal of her nine-year Russian prison sentence for drug possession, Russian news agencies reported Monday, amid talks between the U.S. and Russia that could lead to a high-profile prisoner swap.

Griner, an eight-time all-star center with the WNBA’s Phoenix Mercury and two-time Olympic gold medalist, was convicted Aug. 4 after police said they found vape canisters containing cannabis oil in her luggage at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo Airport.

Griner admitted that she had the canisters in her luggage, but said she had inadvertently packed them in haste and that she had no criminal intent. Her defense team presented written statements that she had been prescribed cannabis to treat pain.

Her February arrest came at a time of heightened tensions between Moscow and Washington, just days before Russia sent troops into Ukraine. At the time, Griner, recognized as one of the greatest players in WNBA history, was returning to Russia, where she plays during the U.S. league’s offseason.

Lawyer Maria Blagovolina was quoted by Russian news agencies on Monday as saying the appeal was filed, as was expected, but the grounds for it weren’t immediately clear.

The nine-year sentence was close to the maximum of 10 years, and Blagovolina and co-counsel Alexander Boykov said after the conviction that the punishment was excessive. They said that in similar cases defendants have received an average sentence of about five years, with about a third of them granted parole.

Before her conviction, the U.S. State Department declared Griner to be “wrongfully detained” — a charge that Russia has sharply rejected.

Reflecting the growing pressure on the Biden administration to do more to bring Griner home, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken took the unusual step of revealing publicly in July that Washington had made a “substantial proposal” to get Griner home, along with Paul Whelan, an American serving a 16-year sentence in Russia for espionage.

Blinken didn’t elaborate, but The Associated Press and other news organizations have reported that Washington has offered to free Viktor Bout, a Russian arms dealer who is serving a 25-year sentence in the U.S. and once earned the nickname the “Merchant of Death.”

On Sunday, a senior Russian diplomat said talks about an exchange have been conducted.

“This quite sensitive issue of the swap of convicted Russian and U.S. citizens is being discussed through

the channels defined by our presidents," Alexander Darchiev, head of the Foreign Ministry's North America department, told state news agency Tass. "These individuals are, indeed, being discussed. The Russian side has long been seeking the release of Viktor Bout. The details should be left to professionals."

Cheney and Murkowski: Trump critics facing divergent futures

By BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — They hail from their states' most prominent Republican families. They have been among the GOP's sharpest critics of former President Donald Trump. And after the Jan. 6 insurrection, they supported his impeachment.

But for all their similarities, the political fortunes of U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming are poised to diverge on Tuesday when they're each on the ballot in closely watched primary elections.

Cheney faces daunting prospects in her effort to fend off the Trump-backed Harriet Hageman, increasingly looking at a life beyond Capitol Hill that could include a possible presidential campaign. Murkowski, however, is expected to advance from her primary and is already planning to compete in the November general election.

The anticipated outcomes at least partially stem from the nuanced politics of each state. Wyoming is a Republican stronghold, delivering Trump his strongest victory of any state in the 2020 campaign. Alaska, meanwhile, has a history of rewarding candidates with an independent streak.

But Murkowski enjoys an additional advantage in the way elections are being conducted in Alaska this year. Winner-take-all party primaries, like the one Cheney is facing, have been replaced by a voter-approved process in which all candidates are listed together. The four who get the most votes, regardless of party affiliation, advance to the general election in which ranked voting will be used.

Murkowski benefits from avoiding a Republican primary, "which she would have had a zero percent — I mean zero percent — chance of winning," said Alaska pollster Ivan Moore.

Murkowski has 18 challengers in her primary, the most prominent being Republican Kelly Tshibaka, whom Trump has endorsed. The Alaska Democratic Party, meanwhile, has endorsed Pat Chesbro, a retired educator.

In an interview, Murkowski insisted she would be among the candidates advancing from the primary and said her success requires, in part, coalition building.

"That's kind of my strong suit, that's what I do," she said.

For his part, Trump has been harsh in his assessment of Murkowski. At a rally in Anchorage last month with Tshibaka and Sarah Palin, whom he's endorsed for Alaska's only House seat, he called Murkowski "the worst. I rate her No. 1 bad."

Trump participated in a telerally for Tshibaka on Thursday while Murkowski mingled with supporters at a campaign office opening in Juneau, which boasted a spread that included moose chili and smoked salmon dip. Murkowski said Trump isn't a factor in the campaign she's running.

"He is going to do what he's going to do," she said. But she told supporters the campaign will be challenging.

Murkowski was censured by Alaska Republican Party leaders last year over numerous grievances, including the impeachment vote and speaking critically of Trump and her support of Interior Secretary Deb Haaland's nomination.

Tuckerman Babcock, a former state Republican Party chair who is running for state Senate, said Murkowski has lost the support of many Alaska Republicans, which he called a "political reality over a record of many years."

Republicans in Alaska are "almost unanimous in their opposition to Lisa Murkowski," he said. "Are they divided on other issues? Of course."

Babcock said the new elections system lets candidates "self-identify" with a party and is not an improvement over the old party primary process.

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Chuck Kopp, a Republican former state legislator, is hopeful about the new system. Kopp lost his 2020 Republican primary after being part of a bipartisan state House majority composed largely of Democrats.

"It's only the fringe that is clinging like a death grip on a failed paradigm, and that paradigm is extreme partisanship at all costs," he said. "I think Alaska is going to take a leadership role in moving away from that. That's what I'm hoping for."

Kopp said that while he has not always supported Murkowski, she has been "fearless when it counts for this country."

"I think she has shown that personality cults aren't conservative, conspiracy theories aren't conservative and treating politics like a religion is not conservative," Kopp said. He said he thinks Murkowski has more support throughout Alaska than party activists give her credit for.

The Senate seat has been held by a Murkowski since 1981; before Lisa Murkowski, it was her father, Republican Frank Murkowski. He appointed his daughter to succeed him in 2002 after he became governor. Murkowski won the seat in her own right in 2004.

Murkowski has not cracked 50% of the vote in a Senate general election, and needing to build a coalition of support is nothing new to her. She won a write-in campaign in 2010 after losing that year's Republican primary to tea party favorite Joe Miller.

Murkowski overwhelmingly won her Republican primary against little-known opponents in 2016, the year Trump was elected.

Rosita Worl, an Alaska Native leader, referred to the 2010 primary as "the debacle" and said Alaska Natives rallied around Murkowski and her write-in bid. Worl, who attended Murkowski's Juneau campaign event, said she is not a Republican herself but sees Murkowski as an Alaskan and said the senator has "always supported our issues."

State Rep. Zack Fields, a Democrat seeking reelection to an Anchorage legislative seat, said there are yards in his district with signs for him and Murkowski. He said he doesn't agree with Murkowski on the "majority of votes that she's cast over her career."

"But she has shown that she believes in democracy and will work with people to accomplish things that are the right thing for citizens. That actually is at risk right now," he said.

Fields called the insurrection "horrifying."

"But what was even frankly more terrifying than that is that so many elected officials and high-ranking so-called leaders would excuse it, justify it and otherwise embolden those who threaten democracy," he said.

Cheney is the vice chair of the House select committee investigating the Capitol riot. The insurrection was a big issue during a June debate between Cheney and Republican challengers, including Hageman. Hageman said the committee was "not focused on things that are important to the people of Wyoming."

Entering the final stretch of her primary campaign, Cheney hasn't backed down. She released a video on Thursday with a closing message reinforcing her criticism of Trump.

"The lie that the 2020 presidential election was stolen is insidious," Cheney said. "It preys on those who love their country. It is a door Donald Trump opened to manipulate Americans to abandon their principles, to sacrifice their freedom, to justify violence, to ignore the rulings of our courts and the rule of law."

She added, "This is Donald Trump's legacy, but it cannot be the future of our nation."

In the interview, Murkowski said Cheney has shown courage.

"I think she has looked at this and said, this is not about Liz Cheney," Murkowski said. "This is about ... the difference between right and wrong. And she is doing her job under very challenging circumstances. But I think she's doing it because she believes she has to."

PM Modi pledges to make India developed country in 25 years

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged to raise millions out of poverty and turn India into a developed country in the next quarter-century as he marked 75 years since independence from

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British rule.

Wearing a flowing, cream-colored turban printed with small stripes of orange, white and green, the colors of the country's flag, Modi addressed the country Monday from New Delhi's 17th-century Mughal-era Red Fort, saying the world was looking toward India to help resolve global issues.

Modi said the journey of the past 75 years had seen ups and downs with India battling against all odds with resilience and perseverance. He asked people to remove any trace of colonial mindset.

Modi said India will be guided by the ideals of self-reliance and the spirit of international partnership to attain excellence in science and technology, establish industries, and attain food and energy security. He said billions of dollars in investment were flowing into the country, turning it into a manufacturing hub.

India's efforts have already launched the country of 1.4 billion people into the ranks of leading countries in information technology, pharmaceuticals, space science and civil nuclear energy.

Modi said millions of people across the country were commemorating the 75th anniversary of independence by hoisting national flags at their homes and businesses for three days as part of a government campaign "of awakening the spirit of patriotism in every heart." India's Parliament, the presidential palace, national monuments and other government offices blazed with multi-colored lighting.

The main opposition Congress party accused the Modi government of leaving opposition parties out of the celebrations.

"There were special functions in Parliament's historic Central Hall to mark the 25th, 50th and 60th anniversary of India's independence," said Jairam Ramesh, an India National Congress party spokesperson. "Sadly, nothing like that has been organized for the 75th anniversary, which has been reduced to an occasion to glorify the Sarvagyaani," a term meaning "a person who knows all" in reference to Modi.

U.S. President Joe Biden, in a statement celebrating Indian Independence Day, said the two countries are indispensable partners grounded in a shared commitment to the rule of law and the promotion of human freedom and dignity.

Biden said he was confident that "the two countries will continue to stand together to defend the rules-based order; foster greater peace, prosperity and security for our people; advance a free and open Indo-Pacific; and together address the challenges we face around the world."

India and the United States have been expanding their security partnership, underscoring their mutual concerns over China's growing influence in the region. They are both part of the regional Quad alliance that also includes Japan and Australia and focuses on China's growing economic and military strength. China has called the Quad an attempt to contain its ambitions.

In his 80-minute speech, Modi made no reference to India's tense ties with immediate neighbors Pakistan and China, or any steps to improve relations.

He called for unity to move forward but didn't respond to experts and critics who 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.

Modi pledged to fight political corruption and nepotism, which he said were acting as termites eating away the gains of development.

Today in History: August 16, Elvis Presley dies at 42

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, Aug. 16, the 228th day of 2022. There are 137 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 16, 1977, Elvis Presley died at his Graceland estate in Memphis, Tennessee, at age 42.

On this date:

In 1777, American forces won the Battle of Bennington in what was considered a turning point of the Revolutionary War.

In 1812, Detroit fell to British and Native American forces in the War of 1812.

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In 1861, President Abraham Lincoln issued Proclamation 86, which prohibited the states of the Union from engaging in commercial trade with states that were in rebellion — i.e., the Confederacy.

In 1948, baseball legend Babe Ruth died in New York at age 53.

In 1962, the Beatles fired their original drummer, Pete Best, replacing him with Ringo Starr.

In 1978, James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., told a Capitol Hill hearing he did not commit the crime, saying he'd been set up by a mysterious man called "Raoul."

In 1987, people worldwide began a two-day celebration of the "harmonic convergence," which heralded what believers called the start of a new, purer age of humankind.

In 2002, terrorist mastermind Abu Nidal reportedly was found shot to death in Baghdad, Iraq; he was 65.

In 2003, Idi Amin, the former dictator of Uganda, died in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia; he was believed to have been about 80.

In 2014, Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, where police and protesters repeatedly clashed in the week since a Black 18-year-old, Michael Brown, was shot to death by a white police officer.

In 2018, Aretha Franklin, the undisputed "Queen of Soul," died of pancreatic cancer at the age of 76.

In 2020, California's Death Valley recorded a temperature of 130 degrees amid a blistering heat wave, the third-highest temperature ever measured.

Ten years ago: Republican presidential contender Mitt Romney declared he had paid at least 13 percent of his income in federal taxes every year for the previous decade; President Barack Obama's campaign shot back: "Prove it." A U.S. military helicopter crashed during a firefight with insurgents in southern Afghanistan, killing seven Americans and four Afghans. Ecuador decided to identify WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange as a refugee and give him asylum in its London embassy.

Five years ago: The University of Florida denied a request by white supremacist Richard Spencer to rent space on the campus for a September event. (The university later allowed Spencer to appear in October, saying it was legally obligated to allow the expression of many viewpoints.) President Donald Trump disbanded two White House business councils, amid criticism from CEOs for his remarks on the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, where a woman was killed during a protest against a white nationalist rally.

One year ago: Afghans desperate to escape the Taliban takeover of their country clung to the side of a departing U.S. military jet as it rolled down the tarmac at the Kabul airport, and some apparently fell to their death as the aircraft gained altitude; U.S. officials said at least seven people died during the chaotic evacuation at the airport. Witnesses said hundreds of people were trapped between American forces trying to push them out of the airport and Taliban forces trying to keep them in. The Country Music Association announced that R&B legend Ray Charles and the Grammy-winning duo The Judds would be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ann Blyth is 94. Actor Gary Clarke is 89. Actor Julie Newmar is 89. Actor-singer Ketty Lester is 88. Actor John Standing is 88. Actor Anita Gillette is 86. Movie director Bruce Beresford is 82. Actor Bob Balaban is 77. Ballerina Suzanne Farrell is 77. Actor Lesley Ann Warren is 76. Rock singer-musician Joey Spampinato is 74. Actor Marshall Manesh is 72. Actor Reginald VelJohnson is 70. Former TV host Kathie Lee Gifford is 69. R&B singer J.T. Taylor is 69. Movie director James Cameron is 68. Actor Jeff Perry is 67. Rock musician Tim Farriss (INXS) is 65. Actor Laura Innes is 65. Singer Madonna is 64. Actor Angela Bassett is 64. Actor Timothy Hutton is 62. Actor Steve Carell (kuh-REHL') is 60. Former tennis player Jimmy Arias is 58. Actor-singer Donovan Leitch is 55. Actor Andy Milder is 54. Actor Seth Peterson is 52. Country singer Emily Strayer (The Chicks) is 50. Actor George Stults is 47. Singer Vanessa Carlton is 42. Actor Cam Gigandet is 40. Actor Agnes Bruckner is 37. Singer-musician Taylor Goldsmith (Dawes) is 37. Actor Cristin Milioti is 37. San Diego Padres pitcher Yu Darvish is 36. Actor Shawn Pyfrom is 36. Country singer Ashton Shepherd is 36. Actor Okieriete Onaodowan is 35. Country singer Dan Smyers (Dan & Shay) is 35. NHL goalie Carey Price is 35. Actor Kevin G. Schmidt is 34. Actor Rumer Willis is 34. Actor Parker Young is 34. Rapper Young Thug is 31. Actor Cameron Monaghan is 29. U.S. Olympic swimming gold-medalist Caeleb Dressel is 26. Singer-pianist Greyson Chance is 25.