

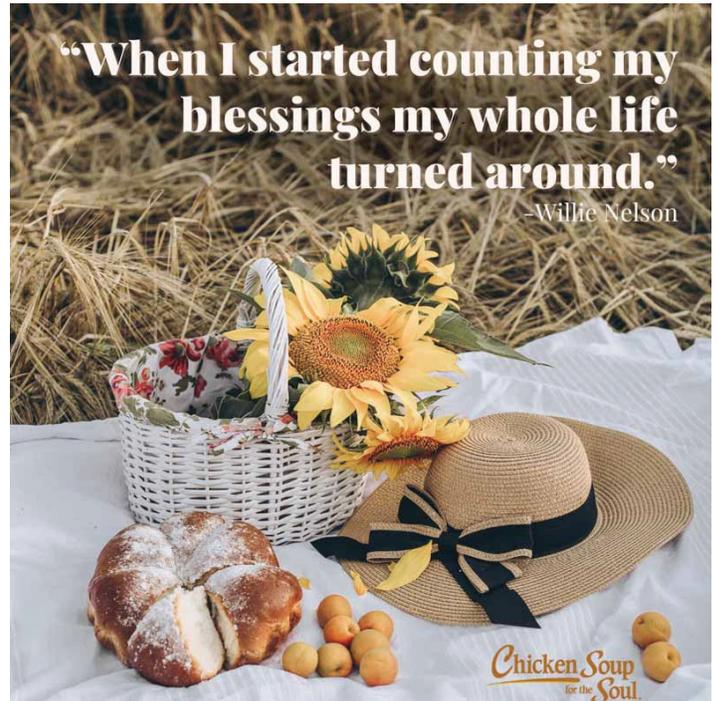
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SABER SHRED HELP WANTED

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



The Groton Area Girls Soccer Team defeated Belle Fourche yesterday, 5-2. They are now 2-0 on the season and face St. Thomas More today.

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

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

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Groton Area opened its 2022 football season Friday night at Dacotah Bank Stadium on the campus of Northern State University, Aberdeen. The Tigers took on the Aberdeen Roncalli Cavaliers (also co-oped with Aberdeen Christian). Roncalli won the game, 38-0. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM with Mike Nehls, Jeslyn Kosel, Paper Paul and Tom Woods with the halftime stats and comments). The following sponsored the game on GDILIVE.COM:

**Bahr Spray Foam
John Sieh Agency
Bary Keith at Harr Motors
Locke Electric
Dacotah Bank
SD Army National Guard
Milbrandt Enterprises Inc
S & S Lumber
Groton Dairy Queen
MJ's Sinclair
Mike-N-Jo's
Basekamp Lodge
Doug Abeln Seed co
Karma Salon
Blocker Construction**

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The Groton Area Football Cheerleaders. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



A short lived monsoon dumped rain at 6:45 p.m., resulting in a half hour delay in the start of the game. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

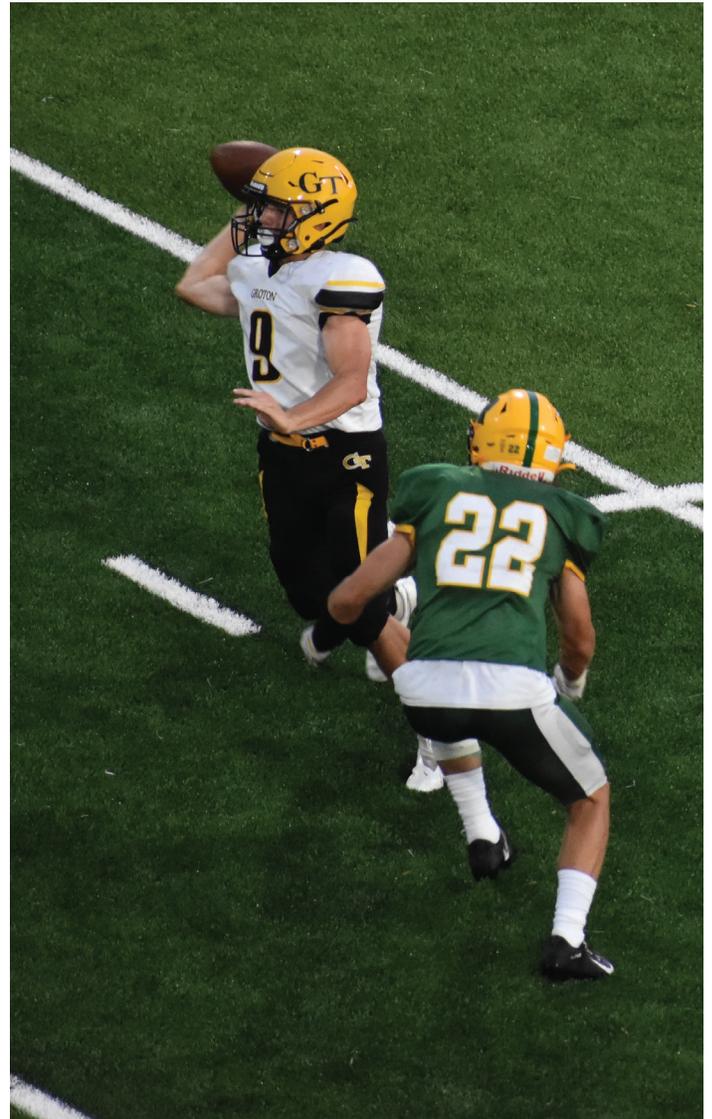
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Keegen Tracy brought down Abe Kretchman.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Sophomore Korbin Kucker stepped up as quarterback as Lane Tietz had a medical issue and was not able to play. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The team captains met at midfield for the coin toss and instructions. Groton Area captains are Andrew Marzahn, Caleb Hanten, Kaleb Antonsen and Ethan Gengerke. For Roncalli, they are Maddox May, Jackson Isakson, Phillip Zens and Brenden Livermont. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Tigers drop season opener

Aberdeen Roncalli had 288 yards offense and 14 first downs and held Groton Area to 45 yards offense and four first downs to post a 38-0 win in the season opener. The game was played Friday at Dacotah Bank Stadium on the campus of Northern State University.

Roncalli held a 6-0 lead after the first quarter, 20-0 at half time and 23-0 after three quarters.

Keegan Tracy led the Tigers offense with 26 yards rushing, had one interception for a return of 13 yards and six tackles. Tate Larson had 10 yards receiving. Korbin Kucker had eight yards rushing, completed four of 12 passes for 15 yards with one interception, had four tackles and one sack. Teylor Diegel had five yards receiving and seven tackles. Christian Ehresmann led the Tiger defense with 14 tackles. Colby Dunker had six tackles and one sack and Andrew Marzahn had six tackles.

Maddox May led the Cavaliers with 149 yards rushing and one touchdown, had nine yards receiving and one touchdown, and had four tackles. Aiden Fisher led the receivers with 26 yards.

- Paul Kosel

Andrew Marzahn tries to gain some yards for the Tigers. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

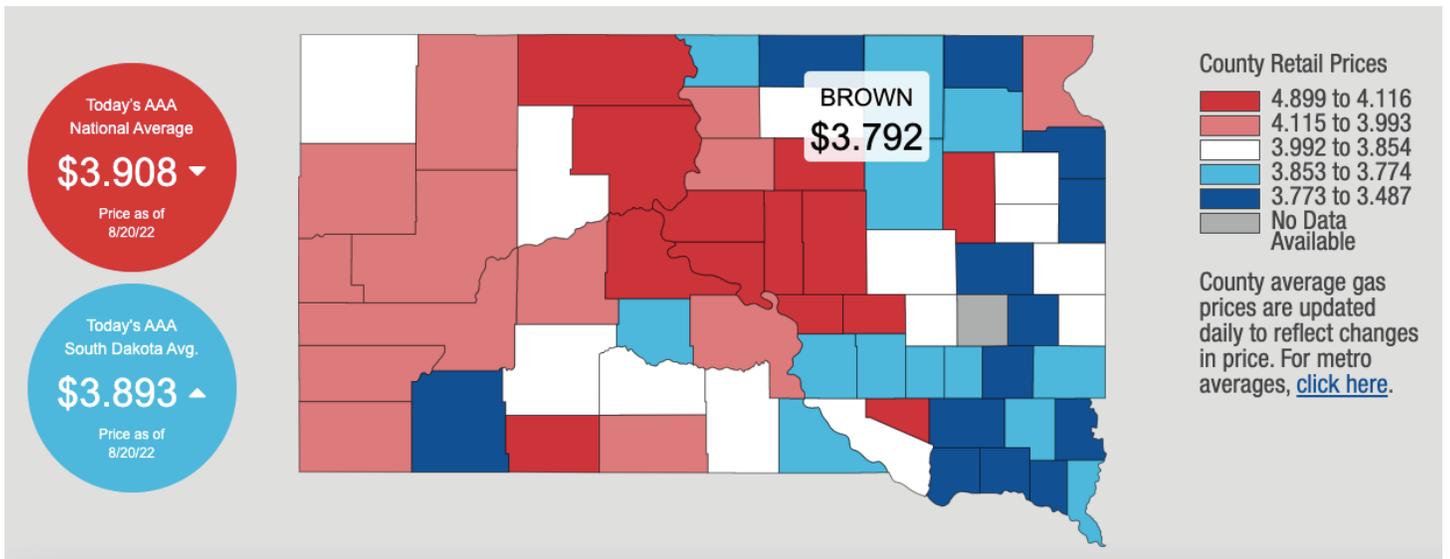
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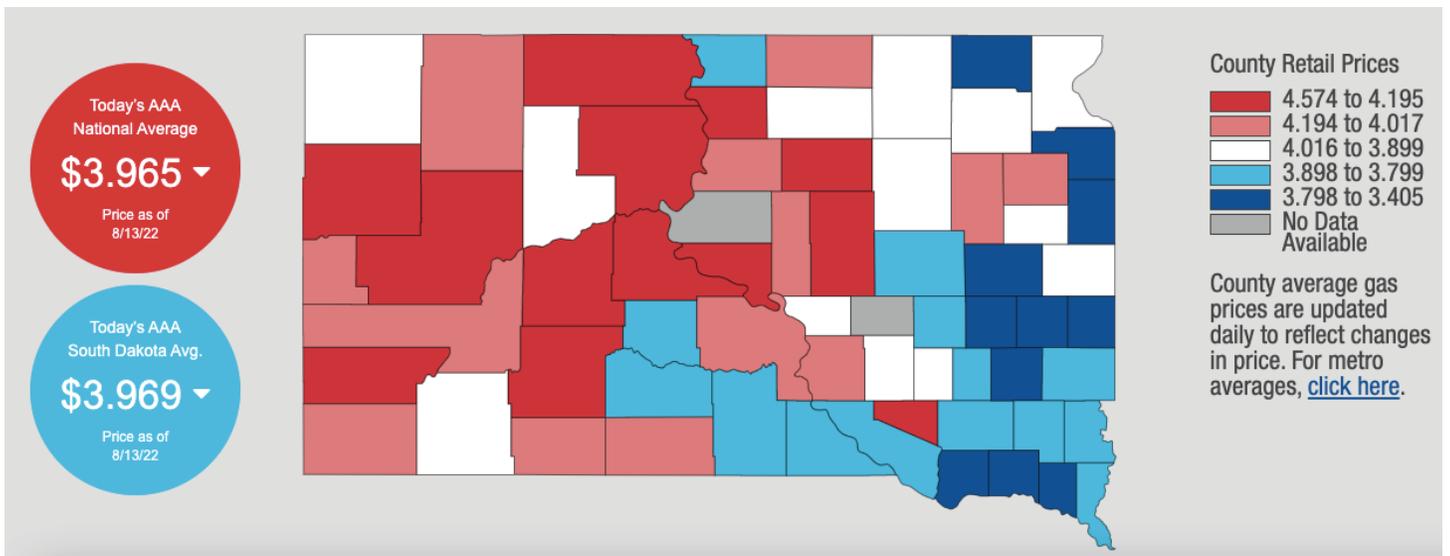
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

Current Avg.	\$3.893	\$4.073	\$4.548	\$4.790
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.890	\$4.081	\$4.566	\$4.792
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.969	\$4.141	\$4.621	\$4.851
Month Ago Avg.	\$4.516	\$4.670	\$5.181	\$5.271
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.172	\$3.278	\$3.658	\$3.266

This Week



Last Week



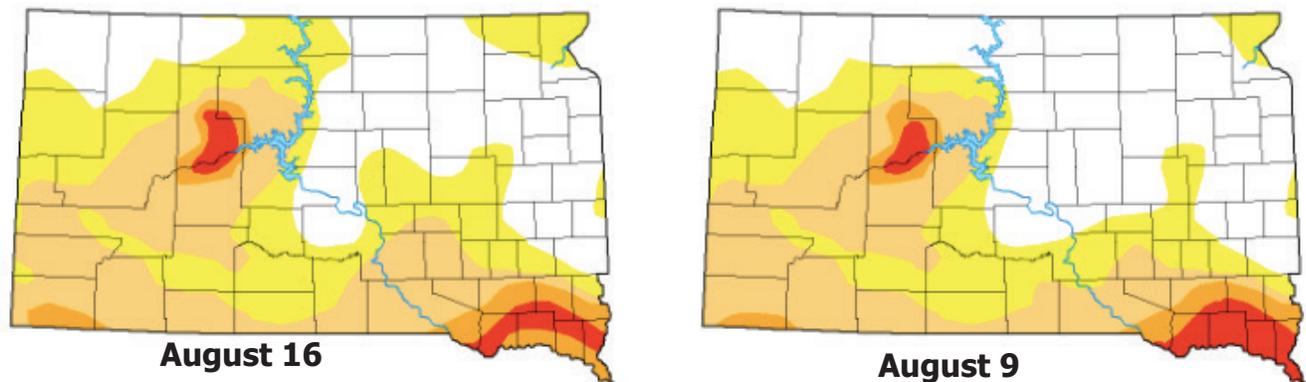
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor

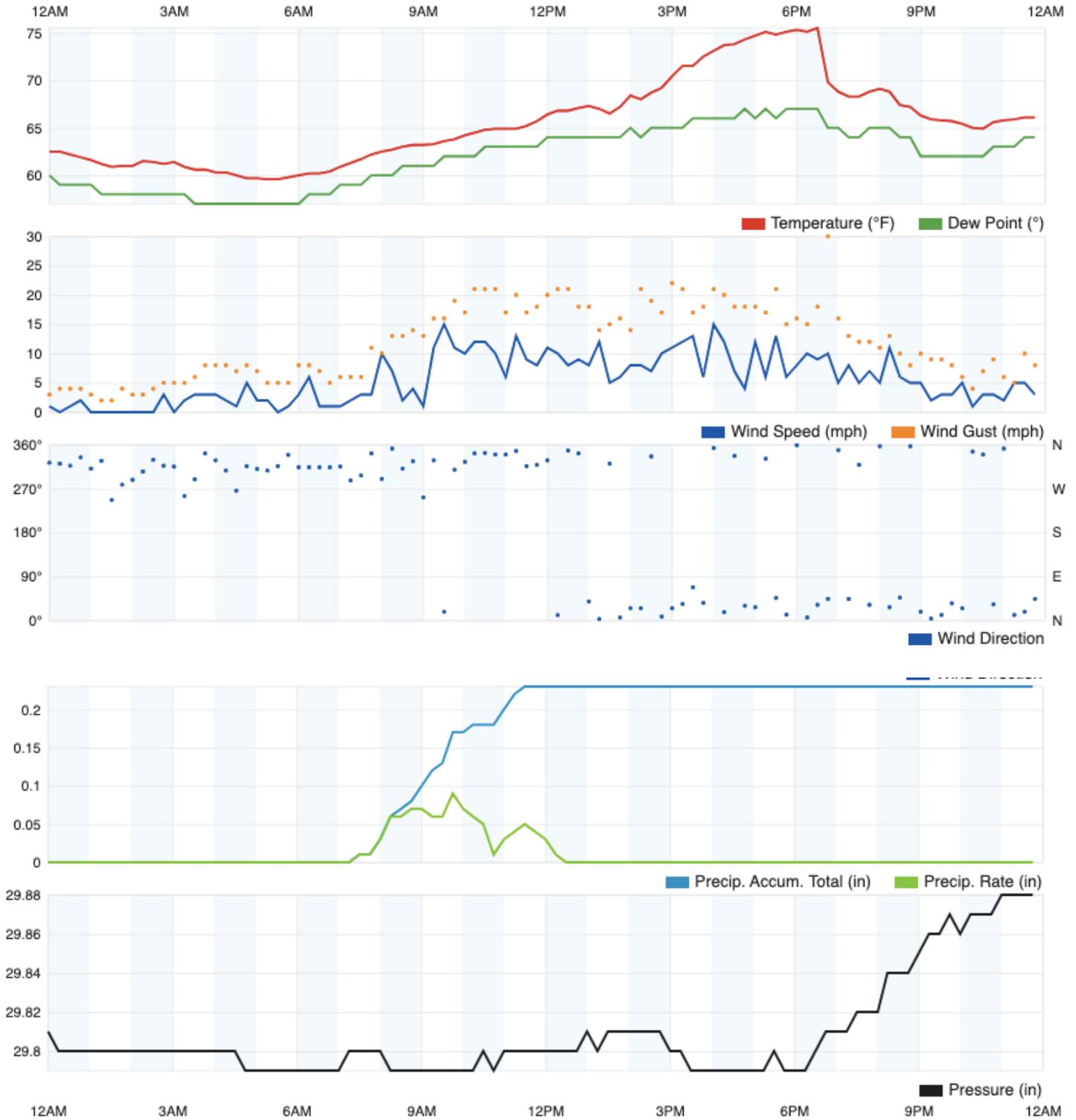


Light rainfall at best fell on Kansas and farther north across the Dakotas. In contrast, heavy precipitation augmented by intrusions of monsoonal moisture covered large areas from Colorado and Wyoming eastward into western Nebraska. Dryness and drought eased in these areas, with improvement most widespread across the southern half of Wyoming and in the Colorado High Plains. Precipitation in these areas generally exceeded an inch, with 2 to 4 inches falling on several areas from southeastern Wyoming into northwestern Nebraska. Outside of the band of heavy precipitation that brought some improvement to Nebraska and adjacent areas, little or no rain fell on central and southern Kansas, and across most of the Dakotas, with South Dakota recording less rainfall than areas to the north. As a result, dryness persisted or intensified in these areas. Most of the Dakotas and the eastern tier of the Region measured near or below half of normal for the last 30 days, with several patches across the central Dakotas and southeastern Kansas receiving 25 percent of normal or less. In sharp contrast, most areas from central Wyoming through eastern Colorado and western Nebraska reported 150 to locally over 300 percent of normal since mid-July.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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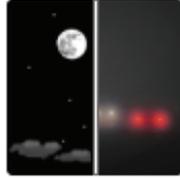
**This
Afternoon**



Mostly Sunny

High: 78 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear
then Patchy
Fog

Low: 55 °F

Sunday



Patchy Fog
then Sunny

High: 83 °F

**Sunday
Night**



Mostly Clear

Low: 60 °F

Monday



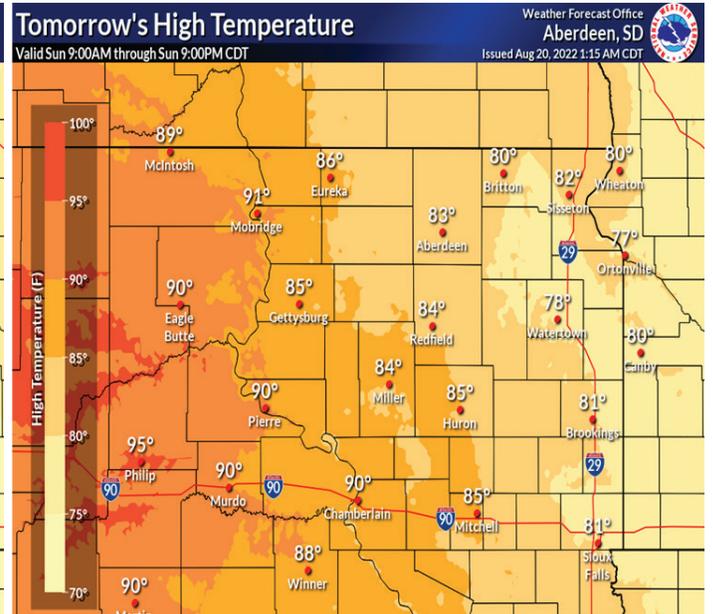
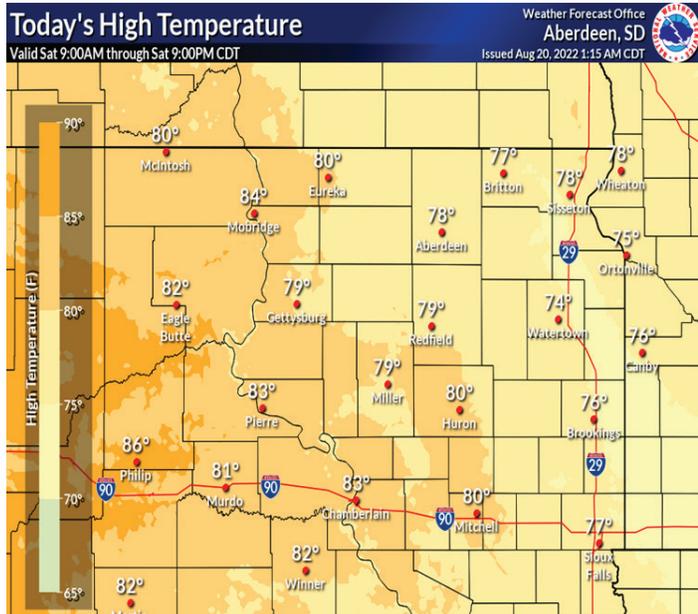
Mostly Sunny

High: 86 °F



Weekend High Temperatures

August 20, 2022
1:34 AM



**National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration**
U.S. Department of Commerce

**National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD**

Mild and dry today, getting warmer for Sunday. #sdwx #mnwx

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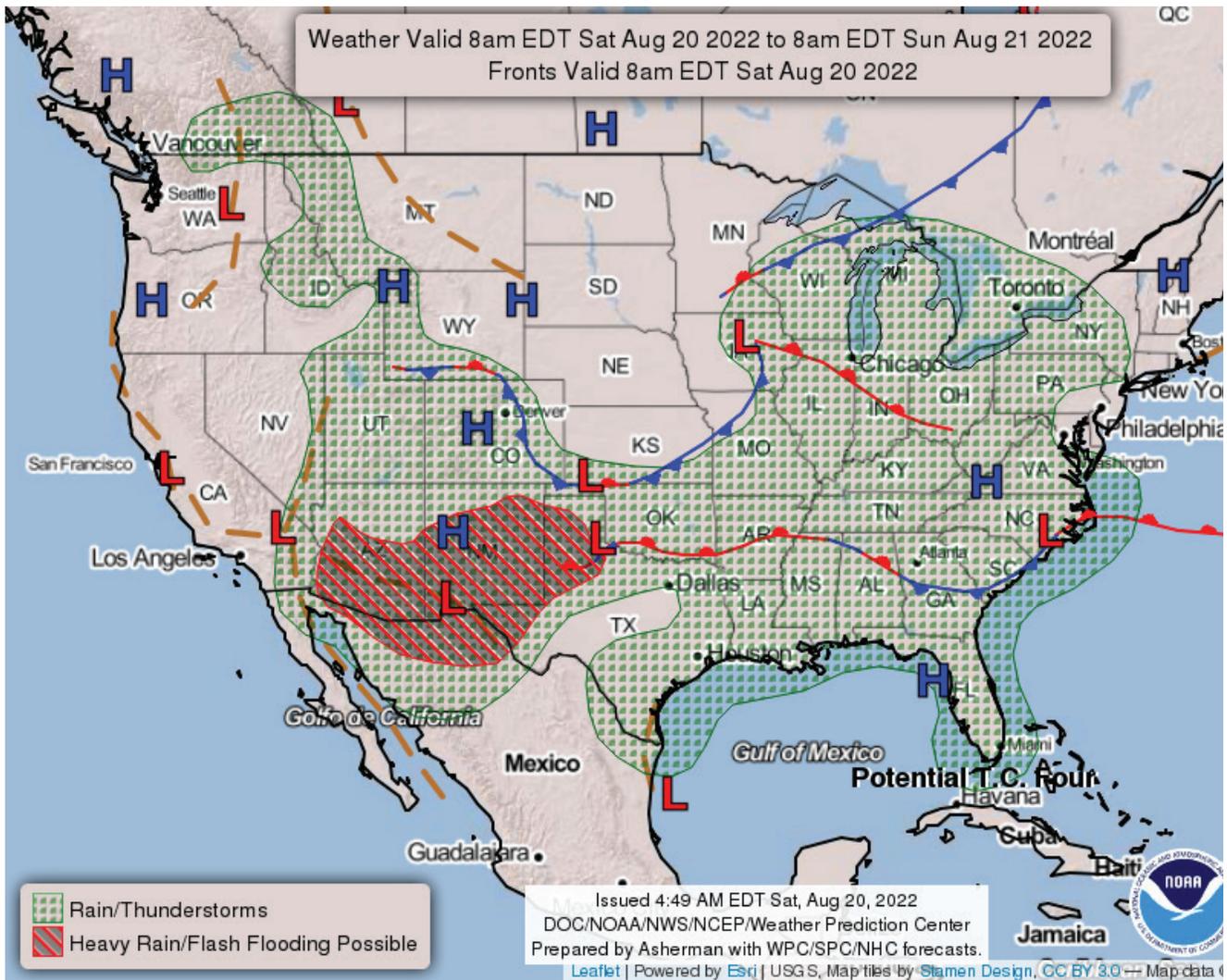
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 76 °F at 5:54 PM
Low Temp: 60 °F at 4:54 AM
Wind: 30 mph at 6:37 PM
Precip: : 0.24

Day length: 13 hours, 55 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 103 in 1976
Record Low: 33 in 1950
Average High: 82°F
Average Low: 56°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 1.44
Precip to date in Aug.: 1.04
Average Precip to date: 15.54
Precip Year to Date: 15.58
Sunset Tonight: 8:33:19 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:39:21 AM



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Today in Weather History

August 20, 1904: A destructive, estimated F4 tornado moved ESE from 7 miles WNW of Willow Lake, through the town, and on into Bryant in Hamlin County, South Dakota. Most of the damaged occurred in those two towns. All buildings on at least three farms were blown away. One woman died in Bryant as the tornado swept across the residential west side of town. Another man was killed just west of Willow Lake, as his farm house was scattered for miles.

1886: The 1886 Indianola Hurricane destroyed the town of Indianola, Texas and as such had a significant impact on the history and economic development of Texas. The storm ended the rivalry between Galveston and Indianola as the chief port of Texas. With the abandonment of Indianola and the unwillingness of the former residents to rebuild close to shore, Galveston became the essential Texan port until the 1900 Galveston Hurricane led to the rise of Houston as a major port. It was the fifth hurricane of the 1886 Atlantic hurricane season and one of the most intense hurricanes ever to hit the United States.

1910: The Great Fire of 1910 finally came to an end in Idaho. A record dry August fueled 1736 fires that burned three million acres destroying six billion board feet of timber. The fires claimed the lives of 85 persons, 78 of which were firefighters, and consumed the entire town of Wallace. The smoke spread a third of the way around the world producing some dark days in the U.S. and Canada. The forest fires prompted federal fire protection laws.

1928: A tornado estimated at F4 intensity initially touched down in Winnebago County, Iowa, moved to Freeborn County, Minnesota, and hit the south side of Austin, MN. Five of the six deaths were in Austin with 60 injuries.

1987 - Half a dozen cities in the Central Plains Region reported record high temperatures for the date, including Pueblo CO with a reading of 102 degrees, and Goodland KS with a high of 104 degrees. Hill City KS reached 106 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Sheridan, WY, reported a record hot temperature reading of 100 degrees. Evening thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail near Fortuna ND, and wind gusts to 70 mph near Webster SD. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Early morning thunderstorms produced heavy rain in southeast Kansas and northeastern Oklahoma, with up to six inches reported around Tulsa OK. Some roads in the Tulsa area were closed by water 10 to 12 feet deep. Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in northern Oklahoma and southern Kansas. Thunderstorms produced winds gusts to 75 mph in Major County OK, and hail two inches in diameter at Jennings KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



Radiant Drifters

Scripture: Philippians 3:10–21 (NIV)

10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Following Paul's Example

15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body..

Insight By: Bill Crowder

When Paul received the Macedonian vision (Acts 16:6–10), he and his colleagues found passage from Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) and traveled to Philippi. There, they searched out a prayer meeting where they shared the message of the love of Christ, resulting in the first converts in Europe. Later, however, Paul and Silas were arrested and beaten severely. This suffering led to the conversion of the jailer and his family—further strengthening the fledgling assembly of believers. The commitment to go and reach out and the determination not to be deterred by suffering were key elements to the Philippian church's birth..

Comment By: Xochitl Dixon

Under the night sky in the spring of 2020, surfers rode bioluminescent waves along the coast of San Diego. These lightshows were caused by microscopic organisms called phytoplankton, a name derived from a Greek word meaning "wanderer" or "drifter." During the day, the living organisms create red tides and capture sunlight that converts into chemical energy. When disturbed in the darkness, they produce an electric blue light.

Believers in Jesus are citizens of heaven who, much like the red-tide algae, live like wanderers or drifters on earth. When difficult circumstances disturb our well-laid plans, the Holy Spirit empowers us to respond like Jesus—the Light of the World—so we can reflect His radiant character in the darkness. According to Paul the apostle, nothing is more valuable than our intimacy with Christ and the righteousness that comes through our faith in Him (Philippians 3:8–9). His life proved that knowing Jesus and the power of His resurrection changes us, impacting the way we live and the way we respond when trials disrupt our lives (vv. 10–16).

When we spend time with God's Son daily, the Holy Spirit equips us with the truth we need—enabling us to face every challenge on this earth in ways that reflect Christ's character (vv. 17–21). We can be beacons of God's love and hope, cutting through the darkness until the day He calls us home or comes again..

Reflect and Prayer: How has your perspective on life's challenges changed as you've considered what Christ has done for you? What can you do to become radiant with the character of Christ?

Merciful Jesus, when difficult circumstances come, please shine through me and help me point others to You.

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2022-23 Community Events

- 07/21/2022: Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/22/2022: Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
07/24/2022: Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
07/27/2022: Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm
08/05/2022: Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
08/12/2022: GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
No Date Set: Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot
09/10/2022: Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
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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- Colored \$42.60/6 months
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News from the Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 38, Groton Area 0

Alcester-Hudson 48, Centerville 8

Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 44, Baltic 0

Canistota 43, Irene-Wakonda 28

Castlewood 20, DeSmet 14

Chester 34, Garretson 17

Dell Rapids St. Mary 52, Waverly-South Shore 20

Deubrook 50, Estelline/Hendricks 0

Deuel 14, Clark/Willow Lake 0

Elk Point-Jefferson 51, Parker 0

Hamlin 42, Florence/Henry 6

Howard 20, Hanson 12

Leola/Frederick 50, Langford 0

McCook Central/Montrose 20, Flandreau 7

Miller/Highmore-Harrold 23, Wagner 14

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 37, Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central 8

Parkston 36, Kimball/White Lake 8

Potter County 54, Newell 28

Rapid City Christian 36, Lead-Deadwood 30, 30T

Sully Buttes 16, Stanley County 6

Timber Lake 23, Lemmon/McIntosh 0

Warner 50, North Central Co-Op 0

Winner 48, Tri-Valley 12

Wolsey-Wessington 66, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 14

Some high school football scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

12-18-24-46-65, Mega Ball: 3, Megaplier: 4

(twelve, eighteen, twenty-four, forty-six, sixty-five; Mega Ball: three; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$116,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 80,000,000

Gunmen storm hotel in Somali capital, leave 20 dead

By OMAR FARUK Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — Islamic militants have stormed a hotel in Somalia's capital, engaging in an hours-long exchange of fire with the security forces that left at least 20 people dead, according to police and witnesses.

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In addition, at least 40 people were wounded in the late Friday night attack and security forces rescued many others, including children, from the scene at Mogadishu's popular Hayat Hotel, they said Saturday.

The attack started with explosions outside the hotel before the gunmen entered the building.

Somali forces were still trying to end the siege of the hotel almost 24 hours after the attack started. Gunfire could still be heard Saturday evening as security forces tried to contain the last gunmen thought to be holed up on the hotel's top floor.

The Islamic extremist group al-Shabab, which has ties with al-Qaida, claimed responsibility for the attack, the latest of its frequent attempts to strike places visited by government officials. The attack on the hotel is the first major terror incident in Mogadishu since Somalia's new leader, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, took over in May.

In a Twitter post, the U.S. Embassy in Somalia said it "strongly condemns" the attack on the Hayat.

"We extend condolences to the families of loved ones killed, wish a full recovery to the injured, & pledge continued support for #Somalia to hold murderers accountable & build when others destroy," it said.

There was no immediate word on the identities of the victims, but many are believed to be civilians.

Mohamed Abdirahman, director of Mogadishu's Madina Hospital, told the AP that 40 people were admitted there with wounds or injuries from the attack. While nine were sent home after getting treatment, five are in critical condition in the ICU, he said.

"We were having tea near the hotel lobby when we heard the first blast, followed by gunfire. I immediately rushed toward hotel rooms on the ground floor and I locked the door," witness Abdullahi Hussein said by phone. "The militants went straight upstairs and started shooting. I was inside the room until the security forces arrived and rescued me."

He said on his way to safety he saw "several bodies lying on the ground outside hotel reception."

Al-Shabab remains the most lethal Islamic extremist group in Africa.

The group has seized even more territory in recent years, taking advantage of rifts among Somali security personnel as well as disagreements between the government seat in Mogadishu and regional states. It remains the biggest threat to political stability in the volatile Horn of Africa nation.

Forced to retreat from Mogadishu in 2011, al-Shabab is slowly making a comeback from the rural areas to which it retreated, defying the presence of African Union peacekeepers as well as U.S. drone strikes targeting its fighters.

The militants in early May attacked a military base for AU peacekeepers outside Mogadishu, killing many Burundian troops. The attack came just days before the presidential vote that returned Mohamud to power five years after he had been voted out.

Russians down Ukrainian drones in Crimea as war broadens

By PAUL BYRNE and JOANNA KOZLOWSKA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian authorities on Saturday reported shooting down Ukrainian drones in Crimea, while Ukrainian officials said Russian forces pressed ahead with efforts to seize one of the few cities in eastern Ukraine not already under their control and kept up their strikes on communities in the north and south.

In Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, Russian authorities said local air defenses shot down a drone above the headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. It was the second drone incident at the headquarters in three weeks and followed explosions at a Russian airfield and ammunition depot on the peninsula this month.

An aide to Crimea's governor, Oleg Kryuchkov, also said Saturday that "attacks by small drones" triggered air-defense systems in western Crimea. He did not elaborate. Russia considers Crimea to be Russian territory now, especially after building a huge bridge to the peninsula from the Russian mainland, but Ukrainian officials have never accepted its annexation by Russia.

Mikhail Razvozhaev, the governor of Sevastopol, the Crimean city where Russia's Black Sea Fleet is based, said the drone that was shot down there fell on the roof of the fleet headquarters and did not

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cause casualties or major damage.

But the incident underlined Russian forces' vulnerability in Crimea. A drone attack on the Black Sea headquarters on July 31 injured five people and forced the cancellation of observances of Russia's Navy Day.

This week, a Russian ammunition depot in Crimea was hit by an explosion. Last week, nine Russian warplanes were reported destroyed at an airbase on Crimea.

Ukrainian authorities have stopped short of publicly claiming responsibility. But President Volodymyr Zelenskyy alluded to Ukrainian attacks behind enemy lines after the blasts in Crimea, which Russia has blamed on "sabotage."

Meanwhile, fighting in southern Ukrainian areas just north of Crimea has stepped up in recent weeks as Ukrainian forces try to drive Russian forces out of cities they have occupied since early in the six-month-old war.

Russian shelling injured at least nine people and damaged houses and an apartment block in the town of Voznesensk in the Mykolaiv region, the region's governor Vitaliy Kim said Saturday.

A Ukrainian airstrike hit targets in Melitopol, the largest Russian-controlled city in the Zaporizhzhia region, 100 kilometers (65 miles) north of Crimea, according to Ukrainian and Russia-installed local officials.

Ukraine's military General Staff said Saturday that intensified combat took place around Bakhmut, a small city whose capture would enable Russia to threaten the two largest remaining Ukrainian-held cities in the eastern Donbas region.

Bakhmut for weeks has been a key target of Moscow's eastern offensive as the Russian military tries to complete a months-long campaign to conquer all of the Donbas, where pro-Moscow separatists have proclaimed two republics that Russia recognized as sovereign states at the beginning of the war.

A local Ukrainian official reported sustained fighting Saturday near four settlements on the border of Luhansk and Donetsk provinces, which together make up the contested Donbas region. Luhansk Gov. Serhii Haidai did not name the settlements. Russian forces overran nearly all of Luhansk last month and since then have focused on capturing Ukrainian-held areas of Donetsk.

Russian shelling killed seven civilians Friday in Donetsk province, including four in Bakhmut, Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko wrote Saturday on Telegram. Taking Bakhmut would give the Russians room to advance on the province's main Ukrainian-held cities, Kramatorsk and Sloviansk.

Ukraine's General Staff said Sloviansk and Kramatorsk were targeted Friday, along with the Kharkiv region to the north, home to Ukraine's second-largest city.

Neither Moscow nor Kyiv commented on the Melitopol airstrike, but the head of the Russia-installed administration in Melitopol, Galina Danilchenko, confirmed Saturday that the city had come under Ukrainian fire.

The Ukrainian mayor of Melitopol, Ivan Ferodov, said local Ukrainian authorities were gathering information on the strike.

"Tonight, there were powerful explosions in Melitopol, which the whole city heard," Ferodov said. "According to preliminary data, (it was) a precise hit on one of the Russian military bases, which the Russian fascists are trying to restore for the umpteenth time in the airfield area."

Ukrainian officials have indicated plans for a counteroffensive to win back occupied areas in the south while Russia had most of its focus on the east.

Local authorities reported renewed Russian shelling overnight along a broad front, including of the northern Kharkiv and Sumy regions, which border Russia, as well as of the eastern Dnipropetrovsk region and Mykolaiv.

Germany, US note 'courage' of jailed Russia critic Navalny

BERLIN (AP) — On the second anniversary of the poisoning attack on Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny, Germany and the United States hailed the determination of the Kremlin critic who is still imprisoned in Russia on charges those nations consider politically motivated.

"He barely survived the assassination attempt. He was able to recover in Germany," German Chancellor

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Olaf Scholz said in a video message released Saturday, praising the Russian dissident's bravery for going back to his homeland.

"I spoke with him during this time and got to know a courageous man who returned to Russia because he wanted to fight for democracy, freedom and the rule of law," the chancellor added. "We should think about that now."

The U.S. State Department called for the immediate release of Navalny and condemned the Russian government's crackdown on opposition figures and independent media. Navalny is Russian President Vladimir Putin's most well-known critic and has detailed huge incidents of corruption by his regime.

"It is no coincidence that the Kremlin's aggression in Ukraine has been accompanied by intensified repression at home," U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

"The Kremlin seeks to prevent the people of Russia from knowing about the atrocities its forces are inflicting on Ukrainian civilians, and also from learning about the needless Russian military casualties for the sake of this unjust war," he added, referring to Russia's six-month brutal war in Ukraine.

Navalny himself tweeted Saturday that "this is the second time I celebrate my second birthday. The day they tried to kill me, but for some reason I didn't die."

He also wrote that his case "has exposed both Putin himself and his system to such an extent that it has shown not only the criminality, but also the dysfunctionality and failure of his regime."

Navalny was arrested in Russia in January 2021 upon returning from Germany, where he had been recuperating from nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. He was handed a 2½-year sentence for a parole violation.

In March, Navalny was sentenced to nine years in prison on charges of fraud and contempt of court, which he rejected as politically motivated and an attempt by the authorities to keep him behind bars for as long as possible.

Earlier this week, Navalny says prison officials ordered him to serve at least three days in solitary confinement, citing a minor infraction, in retaliation for his activism behind bars.

Military families' housing benefits lag as rents explode

R.J. RICO undefined

Associated Press (AP) — When Kristin Martin found out her husband was being transferred to Naval Base San Diego, securing housing for their family of five quickly took over her life.

On-base housing wasn't an option — the waitlist for a four-bedroom home in the neighborhoods they qualified for was 14 to 16 months.

Neither were the military-only hotels near base where new arrivals can pay low rates as they get their bearings — those were full, too.

So Martin, whose husband is a lieutenant, cast a wide net across San Diego and started applying for rental homes, all sight unseen.

"I was waking up and the first thing I was doing was looking at properties," Martin said. "I was looking at it mid-day, before I went to bed. I had alerts set. It became a full-time job."

More than 30 rental applications later and hundreds of dollars in application fees down the drain, the Martins finally found a home.

But there were caveats. They'd have to start paying rent a month before they actually moved. And, at \$4,200 per month, their rent was nearly \$700 more than the monthly basic allowance for housing, known as the BAH, that her husband receives.

"We'll probably be here two or three years, so that could be \$20,000 that we're paying out of pocket above BAH just for rent," Martin said last month.

"It's affecting us personally but then I think about how we were a junior enlisted family at one point. I cannot imagine the struggles (they) are going through."

Housing has long been a major benefit for service members, a subsidy to salaries that trail the private sector. But amid record-breaking spikes in rent, the Department of Defense has neglected its commit-

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ment to help military families find affordable places to live, service members and housing activists say. That's forced many to settle for substandard homes, deal with extremely long commutes or pay thousands out of pocket they hadn't budgeted for.

"We have families coming to us that are on exorbitantly lengthy waiting lists and sitting in homes that they can't afford, like an Airbnb rental, or they're at a hotel or camping in tents or living in RVs," said Kate Needham, a veteran who co-founded the nonprofit Armed Forces Housing Advocates in May 2021.

"I don't think civilians really understand — they might think we're living in free housing and just having a great time, making lots of money. And that's not the case at all."

Reports of the housing squeeze that military families are feeling has alarmed members of Congress who are pushing legislation that would force the Department of Defense to rethink how it handles housing.

A common complaint is that with rents soaring nationwide, housing allowances, which vary by rank and are recalculated annually, haven't kept pace with rental markets, even though they're supposed to cover 95% of rental costs for the approximately two-thirds of active-duty personnel who live off base.

According to a data analysis by The Associated Press of five of the most populous military bases in the U.S., housing allowances across all ranks have risen an average of 18.7% since January 2018. In that span, according to real estate company Zillow, rents have skyrocketed 43.9% in those markets: Carlsbad, California; Colorado Springs, Colorado; El Paso, Texas; Killeen, Texas, and Tacoma, Washington.

And because of how tough off-base markets are, on-base housing has become a hot commodity, with many bases having long waitlists.

Needham argues the discrepancy between military housing allowances and the current market should alarm officials who are already struggling to recruit the next generation.

"If you can't afford your job, why the hell would you stay in the job?" Needham said.

The Department of Defense did not comment on whether housing issues have become a retention concern. But defense officials said military housing offices monitor markets and offer tools to help families find "suitable, affordable housing, whether on or off-base."

"The Department of Defense is committed to ensuring that service members and their families have access to affordable, quality housing within a reasonable commute of their assigned duty station," it said.

At MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, housing allowances used to be in line with the local market. In January 2020, a senior airman without dependents received a monthly housing stipend of \$1,560, compared to the typical Tampa-area rent price of \$1,457, according to Zillow. But since then rent prices have exploded to \$2,118 per month on average in July, while a senior airman's housing allowance is currently \$1,647.

With such a discrepancy and those living off-base facing notoriously long commutes, it's no wonder that nearly all of MacDill's 572 homes are full.

Tampa real estate agent Renee Thompson said it's common for service members to rent homes that are an hour's drive away from base.

"No homes in today's market will even come close to the service member's BAH," said Thompson, who served in the Army. "It's really disheartening."

Frustrated by what she called the Defense Department's lack of transparency into housing allowance calculations, U.S. Rep. Marilyn Strickland, D-Wash., has introduced a measure that would give the department one year to reexamine its process and report on how accurate the current system is.

BAH is like an "algorithm that needs updating on a regular basis," said Strickland, whose district includes the massive Joint Base Lewis-McChord near Tacoma, where many military families struggle to find affordable homes.

"The vast majority of people live off post, so this is incredibly urgent," she said.

Military families' housing benefits lag as rents explode

By R.J. RICO Associated Press

When Kristin Martin found out her husband was being transferred to Naval Base San Diego, securing

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Neither were the military-only hotels near base where new arrivals can pay low rates as they get their bearings — those were full, too.

So Martin cast a wide net across San Diego and started applying for rental homes, all sight unseen.

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But there were caveats. They'd have to start paying rent a month before they actually moved. And, at \$4,200 per month, their rent was nearly \$700 more than the monthly basic allowance for housing, known as the BAH, that her husband, a lieutenant, receives.

"We'll probably be here two or three years, so that could be \$20,000 that we're paying out of pocket above BAH just for rent," Martin said after completing her family's fourth move in 15 years last month.

"It's affecting us personally but then I think about how we were a junior enlisted family at one point. I cannot imagine the struggles (they) are going through."

Housing has long been a major benefit for service members, a subsidy to salaries that trail the private sector. But, amid record-breaking spikes in rent, the Department of Defense has neglected its commitment to help military families find affordable places to live, service members and housing activists say.

That's forced many to settle for substandard homes, deal with extremely long commutes or pay thousands out of pocket they hadn't budgeted for.

"We have families coming to us that are on exorbitantly lengthy waiting lists and sitting in homes that they can't afford, like an Airbnb rental, or they're at a hotel or camping in tents or living in RVs," said Kate Needham, a veteran who co-founded the nonprofit Armed Forces Housing Advocates in May 2021.

"I don't think civilians really understand — they might think we're living in free housing and just having a great time, making lots of money. And that's not the case at all."

Needham's group supplies microgrants to military families in need, some of whom have resorted to food banks because their salaries do not cover such basics.

Reports of the housing squeeze military families face has alarmed members of Congress, who are pushing legislation that would force the Department of Defense to rethink how it handles housing.

A common complaint is that with rents soaring nationwide, the housing allowances, which vary by rank and are recalculated annually, haven't kept pace with rental markets, even though they're supposed to cover 95% of rental costs for the approximately two-thirds of active-duty personnel who, like the Martins, have to live off base.

According to a data analysis by The Associated Press of five of the most populous military bases in the U.S., housing allowances across all ranks have risen an average of 18.7% since January 2018. In that span, according to real estate company Zillow, rents have skyrocketed 43.9% in those markets: Carlsbad, California; Colorado Springs, Colorado; El Paso, Texas; Killeen, Texas, and Tacoma, Washington.

And because of how tough off-base markets are, on-base housing has become a hot commodity, with many bases having long waitlists.

Needham argues that the discrepancy between military housing allowances and the current market should alarm officials who are already struggling to recruit the next generation.

"If you can't afford your job, why the hell would you stay in the job?" Needham said. "People are feeling abused by the military in so many different areas — the sexual assault issues, the lack of attention to medical care, the lack of attention to mental health. This is just another tick in the box that's like, 'Why would I join the military?' And if you don't have enough numbers, that's a long-term national security problem."

The Department of Defense did not comment on whether housing issues have become a retention concern. But defense officials said military housing offices monitor markets and offer tools to assist families, including referral services to help find "suitable, affordable housing, whether on or off-base."

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"The Department of Defense is committed to ensuring that service members and their families have access to affordable, quality housing within a reasonable commute of their assigned duty station," it said.

At MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, housing allowances used to be in line with the local market. In January 2020, a senior airman without dependents received a monthly housing stipend of \$1,560, compared to the typical Tampa-area rent price of \$1,457, according to Zillow. But since then rent prices have exploded to \$2,118 per month in July, while a senior airman's housing allowance is currently \$1,647.

With such a discrepancy and those living off-base facing notoriously long commutes, it's no wonder that nearly all of MacDill's 572 homes are full. As of last week, the base was at 95% capacity with a waitlist of 548 families, according to 2nd Lt. Kristin Nielsen, a MacDill public affairs officer.

"We are woefully underhoused," said Stephanie Poynor, a Tampa property manager and wife of a retired serviceman. "The DoD needs to recognize how much our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coasties are really suffering in this market."

Tampa real estate agent Renee Thompson, a relocation specialist, said it's common for service members to rent homes that are an hour's drive away from base.

"No homes in today's market will even come close to the service member's BAH," said Thompson, who served in the Army. "It's really disheartening."

Nielsen said the annual housing allowance calculation takes six to nine months, making it a "lagging indicator of the current dynamic housing market."

Officials are looking into adding on-base and off-base housing for MacDill, which has about 18,500 active-duty service members, she said. But because of the need for congressional budgetary approval, such long-term solutions are years away.

Even at rural Idaho's Mountain Home Air Force Base, housing is extremely hard to come by, hampered by its location about 50 miles (80 kilometers) outside of Boise, one of the country's hottest markets.

Col. Jamaal Mays, the 366th Fighter Wing commander for support, said housing allowances have increased, but not enough to keep pace with the spiking prices.

Brand new airmen are normally housed in dorms on base for about 36 months, but because demand for on-base housing is so high, they often only spend 18 to 20 months.

"They're being pushed out on the local economy before they're ready," Mays said.

With few options, Mays said some airmen have started living in RV parks or moving much further away, including to Twin Falls, where they face commutes of up to two hours on sometimes snowy roads, hardly ideal if they have to respond to a base emergency, not to mention the fuel costs, he said.

Last fall, defense officials issued temporary BAH increases for October to December 2021 in 56 housing markets — including Mountain Home and Tampa. Yet even though rents have continued to rise, there's no indication a similar bump is coming this fall.

Even if housing allowances do see a bump in January, that could end up taking away food-stamp eligibility for some military families who are struggling with food insecurity. That's because the Agriculture Department counts BAH as income when determining a family's eligibility for the SNAP government assistance program.

Frustrated by what she called the Defense Department's lack of transparency into housing allowance calculations, U.S. Rep. Marilyn Strickland, D-Wash., has introduced a measure that would give the department one year to reexamine its process and report on how accurate the current system is.

BAH is like an "algorithm that needs updating on a regular basis," said Strickland, whose district includes the massive Joint Base Lewis-McChord near Tacoma, where many military families struggle to find affordable homes. Her proposal is part of the national defense bill that passed the House in July and is awaiting Senate approval.

"The vast majority of people live off post, so this is incredibly urgent," she said.

Hawaii seeks end to strife over astronomy on sacred mountain

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

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HONOLULU (AP) — For more than 50 years, telescopes and the needs of astronomers have dominated the summit of Mauna Kea, a mountain sacred to Native Hawaiians that's also one of the finest places in the world to study the night sky.

That's now changing with a new state law saying Mauna Kea must be protected for future generations and that science must be balanced with culture and the environment. Native Hawaiian cultural experts will have voting seats on a new governing body, instead of merely advising the summit's managers as they do now.

The shift comes after thousands of protesters camped on the mountain three years ago to block the construction of a state-of-the-art observatory, jolting policymakers and astronomers into realizing the status quo had to change.

There's a lot at stake: Native Hawaiian advocates want to protect a site of great spiritual importance. Astronomers hope they'll be able to renew leases for state land underneath their observatories, due to expire in 11 years, and continue making revolutionary scientific discoveries for decades to come. Business and political leaders are eager for astronomy to support well-paying jobs in a state that has long struggled to diversify its tourism-dependent economy.

To top it off, the new authority may offer a first-in-the-world test case for whether astronomers can find a way to respectfully and responsibly study the universe from Indigenous and culturally significant lands.

"We've been here for centuries. We are not gone; we are still here. And we have knowledge that would produce a feasible management solution that would be more inclusive," said Shane Palacat-Nelson, a Native Hawaiian who helped draft a report that laid the foundation for the new law.

At issue is the summit of Mauna Kea, which sits 13,803 feet (4,207 meters) above sea level. In 1968, the state gave the University of Hawaii a 65-year lease for land that the school subleases to leading global research institutions in exchange for a share of observation time.

Astronomers like Mauna Kea's summit because its clear skies, dry air and limited light pollution make it the best place to study space from the Northern Hemisphere. Its dozen huge telescopes have played key roles in advancing humanity's understanding of the universe, including making some of the first images of planets outside our solar system. Astronomer Andrea Ghez used one to prove the existence of a supermassive black hole at the center of our galaxy, for which she shared the 2020 Nobel Prize in physics.

But the telescopes have also changed the summit landscape and have increasingly upset Native Hawaiians who view the place as sacred. The 2019 protests by people calling themselves "kia'i," or protectors of the mountain, were aimed at stopping the construction of the biggest and most advanced observatory yet: the \$2.65 billion Thirty Meter Telescope, or TMT, backed by the University of California and other institutions.

Law enforcement arrested 38 elders, mostly Native Hawaiians, which only attracted more protesters. Police withdrew months later after TMT said it wouldn't move forward with construction right away. Protesters stayed put but closed camp in March 2020 amid concerns about COVID-19.

The episode pushed lawmakers to seek a new approach.

The result is the new governing body, the Mauna Kea Stewardship and Oversight Authority, which will have a board of 11 voting members. The governor will appoint eight. Gov. David Ige hasn't set a date for announcing his nominees, who will go before the state Senate for confirmation. He said more than 30 have applied.

Palacat-Nelsen said traditional Native Hawaiian knowledge could help the authority determine how large a footprint manmade structures like telescopes should have at the summit.

"Do we take heavy steps? Do we take light steps? When do we take steps? What seasons do we take steps?" Palacat-Nelsen said. "All that type of knowledge is embedded in the majority of our stories, our traditional stories that were handed down."

The board will have this expertise because one member of the authority must be a recognized practitioner of Native Hawaiian culture and another a direct descendant of a Native Hawaiian practitioner of Mauna Kea traditions.

Central to the Native Hawaiian view of Mauna Kea is the idea that the summit is where gods dwell and

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humans aren't allowed to live. A centuries-old chant says the mountain is the oldest child of Wakea and Papawalinu'u, the male and female sources of all life. To this day, the mountain draws clouds and rainfall that feeds forests and fresh water to communities on Hawaii's Big Island.

Lawmakers drafted the law after a working group of Native Hawaiian cultural experts, protesters, observatory workers and state officials met to discuss Mauna Kea. Their report, which dedicated a large chunk to the historical and cultural significance of the mountain, formed the foundation of the new law.

Several kia'i who served on that working group support the authority. The House speaker has nominated one kia'i leader for the board.

But some longtime telescope opponents are critical, creating questions about how broad the authority's community support will be.

Kealoha Pisciotta, who has been part of legal challenges against TMT and other observatory proposals since 1998, said Native Hawaiians should at minimum have an equal standing on the board.

"You don't have a real say. It's designed to create an illusion of having consent and representation in a situation where we really don't," said Pisciotta, a spokesperson for the groups Mauna Kea Hui and Mauna Kea Aina Hou.

Lawmakers said the pressure to address Hawaii's telescope standoff isn't just coming from within the state but also from the U.S. astronomy community.

State Rep. David Tarnas pointed to a report by a committee of astronomers from across the country declaring there's a need to develop a new model of collaborative decision-making together with Indigenous and local communities.

"This is not just the Big Island issue, it's not just a state issue, but I believe it's a global issue," said state Sen. Donna Mercado Kim. "I believe that the world is watching to see how we deal with this."

The TMT matter, meanwhile, remains unresolved: Its backers still want to build on Mauna Kea, though they have selected a site in Spain's Canary Islands as a backup.

The head of the University of Hawaii's astronomy program said the authority could help his own institution if it "stabilizes the whole situation" for Mauna Kea astronomy.

But Doug Simons said he's worried the authority might not get up and running in time to renew the summit master lease and subleases.

The master lease requires that all existing telescopes be decommissioned and their sites restored to their original state by 2033 if the state doesn't authorize an extension.

Simons said it will take at least five or six years to dismantle the telescopes and associated infrastructure. That means new lease arrangements must be ready by 2027 or the observatories will have to begin winding down.

"There's no obvious way around this," Simons said. He said he's pressing for the authority to be established as soon as possible to maximize time for negotiations and inevitable legal challenges.

Rich Matsuda, who works for W.M. Keck Observatory and served on the working group, urged the eventual board members to avoid being "stakeholders with narrow interests just trying to ensure that they get their piece of the pie."

Tensions over telescope construction, he said, caused people to lock down and avoid discussing difficult issues surrounding Mauna Kea. The new law's prioritization of the mountain's well being may alter that, he said.

"My hope is that this gives us a chance, if we do it right, to change that dynamic," Matsuda said.

Finland asks: Does a prime minister have a right to party?

By KOSTYA MANENKOV and KARL RITTER Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — In a leaked video, Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin is seen dancing and singing with friends at a private party. The 36-year-old leader poses for the camera. She sits on her knees, hands behind her head. She's entangled in a group hug. She's having a good time.

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Countless similar videos are shared daily on social media by young and not-so-young people partying in Finland and all over the world. But the leak has triggered a debate among Finns about what level of reveling is appropriate for a prime minister, especially considering neighboring Russia's attack on Ukraine, which prompted long-neutral Finland and Sweden to apply for NATO membership.

Marin, who leads the center-left Social Democratic Party, has faced a barrage of questions about the party: Were there drugs? Alcohol? Was she working or on summer vacation? Was the prime minister sober enough to handle an emergency had one arisen?

The video, clearly shot by someone at the party, was leaked on social media and caught the attention of Finnish media this week. Marin said she attended the party in recent weeks, but refused to say exactly where and when.

She also acknowledged that she and her friends celebrated in a "boisterous way" and that alcohol — but, to her knowledge, no drugs — was involved. She said Friday that she took a drug test to put an end to speculation about illegal substances.

"I hope that in the year 2022 it's accepted that even decision-makers dance, sing and go to parties," Marin told reporters. "I didn't wish for any images to be spread, but it's up to the voters to decide what they think about it."

The prime minister, who is married and has a 4-year-old daughter, has often insisted that even though she's the head of Finland's government, she's just like anyone else her age who likes a good time with friends and family in their leisure time.

In Helsinki on Friday afternoon, opinions were split.

Josua Fagerholm, who works in marketing, said the episode was potentially damaging to Finland's reputation and to the public's confidence in Finnish politicians.

"I think it's important for our politicians to be respectable and enjoy the trust of the public. So I don't think it's a good look," he said.

Mintuu Kylliainen, a student in Helsinki, disagreed. She said everyone was entitled to their opinion, but she felt the leaked video was getting too much attention.

"It's normal to, like, party," Kylliainen said. "She should have fun, too, in her life."

Some supporters say the criticism against the prime minister smacks of sexism.

Marin became Finland's youngest prime minister in 2019 at age 34. Even in the egalitarian Nordic country, Marin felt her gender and age sometimes received too much emphasis. She told Vogue magazine in 2020 that "in every position I've ever been in, my gender has always been the starting point - that I am a young woman."

Anu Koivonen, a professor of gender studies at Finland's University of Turku, said she didn't think gender was a decisive factor in the uproar over the leaked video. She said the partying itself was not a big issue, but the fact the video leaked could be viewed as a judgment lapse by the prime minister in terms of the people she surrounded herself with.

"That she didn't restrain herself in a company where she cannot trust everyone in the room," Koivonen said. "I think that's the main issue."

In another twist, the video was posted online a day after Finland decided to about halve the number of visas issued to Russians beginning Sept. 1. Finland, Estonia and other EU countries bordering Russia have been pushing for an EU-wide ban on Russian tourists but that has been resisted by Germany and other EU nations.

Jarno Linnell, a cybersecurity expert and politician for Finland's conservative National Coalition Party, said the partying incident was problematic from a security standpoint, noting that Finland's top leaders are of interest to foreign security services.

"Information is gathered from a variety of sources, and even seemingly trivial pieces of information can be significant to a foreign power," Linnell told Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat. "Top decision-makers are under close watch during the NATO ratification process."

It's not the first time that Marin's partying has made headlines. In December, she apologized after going out clubbing until 4 a.m. and missing a text message advising her to avoid social contacts due to her

proximity to someone infected with COVID-19. Marin said she didn't see the message because she had left her phone at home. She tested negative for the virus.

Even in a progressive society like Finland's, Marin breaks the mold of a typical politician. She grew up with a single mother who was in a relationship with another woman. Many Finns are proud of her modern approach to the office, including her casual attire. Marin set social media abuzz in April when she showed up to a press conference with her Swedish counterpart wearing a black leather jacket.

Marin and her female-majority Cabinet have also won praise in Finland and internationally for guiding the country steadfastly through the COVID-19 pandemic and the NATO application process.

"Our prime minister is super," said Jori Korkman, a retiree in Helsinki. "She has taken her very difficult job during a very difficult time, and she has made a first-class job. What she's doing in her free time is not our business."

Pence says he didn't leave office with classified material

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Former Vice President Mike Pence said Friday that he didn't take any classified information with him when he left office.

The disclosure — which would typically be unremarkable for a former vice president — is notable given that FBI agents seized classified and top secret information from his former boss's Florida estate on Aug. 8 while investigating potential violations of three different federal laws. Former President Donald Trump has claimed that the documents seized by agents were "all declassified."

Pence, asked directly if he had retained any classified information upon leaving office, told The Associated Press in an interview, "No, not to my knowledge."

Despite the inclusion of material marked "top secret" in the government's list of items recovered from Mar-a-Lago, Pence said, "I honestly don't want to prejudge it before until we know all the facts."

Pence was in Iowa on Friday as part of a two day-trip to the state, which hosts the leadoff Republican presidential caucuses. It comes as the former vice president has made stops in other early voting states as he takes steps toward mounting a 2024 White House campaign.

Pence also weighed in on Republican U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney's primary defeat earlier in the week to a rival backed by Trump. Cheney, who is arguably Trump's most prominent Republican critic, has called the former president "a very grave threat and risk to our republic" and further raised his ire through her role as vice chair of the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

"My reaction was, the people of Wyoming have spoken," said Pence, who was targeted at the Capitol that day by angry rioters, including some who chanted, "Hang Mike Pence!" "And, you know, I accept their judgment about the kind of representation they want on Capitol Hill."

Pence said he has "great respect" for Cheney's father, former Vice President Dick Cheney, who served two terms under President George W. Bush.

"And I appreciate the conservative stance Congresswoman Cheney has taken over the years," Pence continued. "But I've been disappointed in the partisan taint of the Jan. 6 committee from early on."

Pence's aides said the committee contacted his legal team months ago to see if he would be willing to testify. Although Pence has said he would give "due consideration" to cooperating, he was adamant that the historic nature of such participation must be warranted and agreed upon.

"Beyond my concerns about the partisan nature of the Jan. 6 committee, there are profound constitutional issues that have to be considered," he said. "No vice president has ever been summoned to testify before the Congress of the United States."

Speaking further about the search of Mar-a-Lago, the former vice president raised the possibility, as he has previously, that the investigation was politically motivated and called on Attorney General Merrick Garland to disclose more details on what led authorities to conduct the search.

"The concern that millions of Americans felt is only going to be resolved with daylight," Pence said Friday. "I know that's not customary in an investigation. But this is unprecedented action by the Justice

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Department, and I think it merits an unprecedented transparency.”

The Jan. 6 insurrection marked the first in a number of public breaks between Trump and his once devout No. 2. But Pence has been careful not to alienate Republicans who have supported Trump but might be looking for another candidate in the 2024 election. Despite his reluctance to criticize the former president, Pence has occasionally spoken out against Trump, criticizing the attack at the U.S. Capitol and more recently urging his fellow Republicans to stop lashing out at the FBI over the search of Mar-a-Lago.

“The Republican Party is the party of law and order,” Pence said Wednesday at a political breakfast in New Hampshire. “Our party stands with the men and women who stand on the thin blue line at the federal and state and local level, and these attacks on the FBI must stop.”

Pence said Friday that he would make a decision early next year about whether to run for the White House, a move that his aides have said will be independent of what Trump decides to do.

Having visited the Iowa State Fair on Friday afternoon, Pence also headlined a fundraiser earlier in the day for Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley and was scheduled to speak to a Christian conservative group and a northern Iowa county Republican Party fundraiser before leaving Saturday.

Wendy’s pulls lettuce from sandwiches amid E. coli outbreak

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — The fast-food chain Wendy’s says it is pulling lettuce from sandwiches in its restaurants in Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania after people eating them there reported falling ill.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday it is trying to determine whether romaine lettuce is the source of an E. coli outbreak that has sickened at least 37 people and whether romaine used at Wendy’s was also served or sold at other businesses.

The CDC said one person was also sickened in Indiana. A message was left with Wendy’s about lettuce on sandwiches in that state.

The CDC said there is no evidence that romaine sold in grocery stores is linked to the E. coli outbreak. The agency also said it is not advising people to stop eating at Wendy’s or not to eat romaine lettuce.

Wendy’s says lettuce used in its salads is different and not affected by its decision to pull the lettuce from sandwiches. The company said it is cooperating with the CDC.

“As a company, we are committed to upholding our high standards of food safety and quality,” Wendy’s said in a statement.

Pro-Trump wins in blue states threaten GOP hopes in November

By SUSAN HAIGH Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Republicans have found success in Democratic strongholds like Maryland and Massachusetts when they have fielded moderate candidates who could appeal to voters in both parties. With Democrats facing headwinds this year, Republicans had hoped that strategy could pay off yet again.

But Republican voters have nominated loyalists of former President Donald Trump in several Democratic states, including Maryland and Connecticut, making the GOP’s odds of winning those general election races even longer. Massachusetts will face its own test next month as GOP voters decide between a Trump-backed conservative and a more moderate Republican for the party’s gubernatorial nominee.

“It can’t continue,” said former Connecticut U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays, a moderate Republican and Trump critic, referring to the GOP choosing pro-Trump candidates. “One of the things that will happen is that a lot of the Trump candidates who won the primary will lose the general election. And there are a lot of unhappy Republicans who hold office now who believe that the Senate now is in jeopardy of staying Democratic.”

Trump’s influence was on full display earlier this month when his last-minute endorsement helped propel Leora Levy, a member of the Republican National Committee who opposes abortion rights, to victory in a Republican U.S. Senate primary in Connecticut over the party’s endorsed candidate, former House Minority Leader Themis Klarides. Klarides supports abortion rights and said she didn’t vote for Trump in 2020.

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"Sad day for CT ...," tweeted Brenda Kupchick, the Republican first selectwoman of Fairfield and a former state representative, after the Aug. 9 race was called for Levy. Days earlier, after Trump endorsed Levy on speakerphone at a GOP picnic, Kupchick tweeted, "How is that helpful in the general election in CT?"

Kupchick's tweets sparked criticism in both GOP camps. Trump supporters accused Klarides of not being a "true conservative." Moderate Republicans predicted that Levy's nomination ensured Democratic U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal would sail to victory in November, despite a Quinnipiac poll in May registering his lowest job approval since he took office in 2011.

The last Republican to represent Connecticut in the U.S. Senate was Lowell P. Weicker Jr., who served from 1971 to 1989, though Connecticut has elected a moderate Republican governor as recently as 2006, with M. Jodi Rell.

Levy, who has never before served in elective office, contends her message of controlling high inflation and energy prices, stopping "government intrusion between parent and child" and addressing crime will resonate with a wide range of voters.

A similar dynamic has unfolded in liberal Maryland, where Dan Cox, a far-right state legislator endorsed by Trump, won the Republican primary for governor over a moderate rival backed by outgoing Republican Gov. Larry Hogan, a Trump critic. And in heavily Democratic Massachusetts, Republican voters casting ballots in the state's Sept. 6 gubernatorial primary will choose between Geoff Diehl, a Trump-backed former state representative, and Chris Doughty, a businessman with moderate views. Centrist Republican Gov. Charlie Baker, a Trump critic, decided against seeking a third term.

The Democratic nominees in Maryland and Massachusetts are viewed as strong favorites to flip the governor's mansions in those states.

Trump's backing has propelled his candidates to victory in top races in battleground states, too, boosting Democrats' optimism of winning the general election. In Arizona, former TV news anchor Kari Lake, who has said she would not have certified President Joe Biden's 2020 victory, defeated lawyer and businesswoman Karrin Taylor Robson, who had been endorsed by former Vice President Mike Pence and outgoing GOP Gov. Doug Ducey. In Wisconsin, Trump-backed businessman Tim Michels beat former Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, who had been endorsed by Pence and the state party. Both Michels and Kleefisch, however, falsely claimed the 2020 presidential election was rigged.

In Connecticut, Levy's nomination is already being used as a rallying cry for Democrats, who contend she's out of the mainstream for a state where Republicans are outnumbered by unaffiliated voters and by Democrats. Aside from opposing abortion rights — reversing her position years ago of supporting abortion rights — Levy has spoken out against job-related COVID-19 vaccine requirements and transgender rights. Levy effusively thanked the former president during her acceptance speech, promising, "I will not let you down."

A day after the primary, Blumenthal's campaign sent out a fundraising message that warned, "The primary results are in, and I'm officially facing off against Trump's hand-picked candidate in the general election — a radical Republican who will be nothing but a rubber stamp on Mitch McConnell's disastrous agenda."

Levy, in turn, has tied Blumenthal to Biden, casting him as a "rubber stamp" for the Democratic president's "failed policies" as president and blaming Blumenthal for playing a "a key role in creating virtually every challenge our country faces today."

"Dick Blumenthal wants this election to be a referendum on a President. Donald Trump is not on the ballot in November, but Joe Biden is," she said in a news release issued after the primary.

Shays, who now lives in Maryland, said he believes an endorsement by Trump is disqualifying. He said he contributed to the campaign of Wes Moore, the Democrat running against Cox in Maryland, and would vote for Blumenthal if he still lived in Connecticut.

"I will vote against anyone who seeks the support of Donald Trump because that tells me so much about their character and what they intend to do if elected. That's the bottom line to me," Shays said.

Ben Proto, chair of the Connecticut Republicans, dismissed any suggestion that the primary victory by

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Levy signaled a political evolution within the state GOP. Rather, he said, the party this year has "candidates across the board who hold different opinions on particular issues."

But what they have in common, he said, is the goal of getting inflation under control, making Connecticut more affordable, addressing crime and allowing parents to be the "primary stakeholder" in their children's lives.

"At the end of the day, the issues that are important to the people of the state of Connecticut, we're pretty solid on," he said.

UN: US buying big Ukraine grain shipment for hungry regions

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

BULLA HAGAR, Kenya (AP) — The United States is stepping up to buy about 150,000 metric tons of grain from Ukraine in the next few weeks for an upcoming shipment of food aid from ports no longer blockaded by war, the World Food Program chief has told The Associated Press.

The final destinations for the grain are not confirmed and discussions continue, David Beasley said. But the planned shipment, one of several the U.N. agency that fights hunger is pursuing, is more than six times the amount of grain that the first WFP-arranged ship from Ukraine is now carrying toward people in the Horn of Africa at risk of starvation.

Beasley spoke Friday from northern Kenya, which is deep in a drought that is withering the Horn of Africa region. He sat under a thorn tree among local women who told the AP that the last time it rained was in 2019.

Their bone-dry communities face yet another failed rainy season within weeks that could tip parts of the region, especially neighboring Somalia, into famine. Already, thousands of people have died. The World Food Program says 22 million people are hungry.

"I think there's a high probability we'll have a declaration of famine" in the coming weeks, Beasley said.

He called the situation facing the Horn of Africa a "perfect storm on top of a perfect storm, a tsunami on top of a tsunami" as the drought-prone region struggles to cope amid high food and fuel prices driven partly by the war in Ukraine.

The keenly awaited first aid ship from Ukraine is carrying 23,000 metric tons of grain, enough to feed 1.5 million people on full rations for a month, Beasley said. It is expected to dock in Djibouti on Aug. 26 or 27, and the wheat is supposed to be shipped overland to northern Ethiopia, where millions of people in the Tigray, Afar and Amhara regions have faced not only drought but deadly conflict.

Ukraine was the source of half the grain that WFP bought last year to feed 130 million hungry people. Russia and Ukraine signed agreements with the U.N. and the Turkish government last month to enable exports of Ukrainian grain for the first time since Russia's invasion in February.

But the slow reopening of Ukraine's ports and the cautious movement of cargo ships across the mined Black Sea won't solve the global food security crisis, Beasley said. He warned that richer countries must do much more to keep grain and other assistance flowing to the hungriest parts of the world, and he named names.

"With oil profits being so high right now — record-breaking profits, billions of dollars every week — ... the Gulf states need to help, need to step up and do it now," Beasley said. "It's inexcusable not to. Particularly since these are their neighbors, these are their brothers, their family."

He asserted the World Food Program could save "millions of lives" with just one day of Gulf countries' oil profits.

China needs to help as well, Beasley said.

"China's the second-largest economy in the world, and we get diddly-squat from China," or very little, he added.

Despite grain leaving Ukraine and hopes rising of global markets beginning to stabilize, the world's most vulnerable people face a long, difficult recovery, the WFP chief said.

"Even if this drought ends, we're talking about a global food crisis at least for another 12 months,"

Beasley said. "But in terms of the poorest of the poor, it's gonna take several years to come out of this."

Some of the world's poorest people without enough food are in northern Kenya, where animal carcasses are slowly stripped to the bone beneath an ungenerous sky. Millions of livestock, the source of families' wealth and nutrition, have died in the drought. Many water pumps have gone dry. More and more thousands of children are malnourished.

"Don't forget us," resident Hasan Mohamud told Beasley. "Even the camels have disappeared. Even the donkeys have succumbed."

With so many in need, aid that does arrive can disappear like a raindrop in the sand. Local women who qualified for WFP cash handouts described taking the 6,500 shillings (about \$54) and sharing it among their neighbors — in one case, 10 households.

"The most interesting thing we hear is people saying, 'We're not the only ones,'" WFP program officer Felix Okech told the AP. "We're the ones who have been selected (for handouts), but there are many more like us.' So that is very humbling to hear."

In a small crowd that had gathered to listen to stories of children too weak to stand and milk gone dry, one woman at the edge of the woven plastic mat spoke up. Sahara Abdilleh, 50, said she makes perhaps 1,000 shillings (\$8.30) a week from gathering firewood, scouring a landscape that gives less and less back every day. Like Beasley, she was thinking globally.

"Is there any country, like Afghanistan or Ukraine, that is worse off than us?" she asked.

Finland, Sweden offer NATO an edge as rivalry warms up north

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The first surprise, for the Finnish conscripts and officers taking part in a NATO-hosted military exercise in the Arctic this spring: the sudden roar of a U.S. Marine helicopter assault force, touching down in a field right next to the Finns' well-hidden command post.

The second surprise: Spilling out of their field headquarters, the Finnish Signal Corps communications workers and others inside routed the U.S. Marines — the Finns' designated adversary in the NATO exercise and members of America's professional and premier expeditionary force — in the mock firefight that followed.

Finnish camouflage for the Arctic snow, scrub and scree likely had kept the Americans from even realizing the command post was there when they landed, Finnish commander Lt. Col. Mikko Kuoka suspected. "For those who years from now will doubt it," Kuoka, modestly stunned by the outcome of the random skirmish, wrote in an infantry-focused blog recording the outcome, of an episode he later confirmed for The Associated Press. "That actually happened."

As the exercise made clear, NATO's addition of Finland and Sweden — what President Joe Biden calls "our allies of the high north" — would bring military and territorial advantages to the Western defense alliance. That's especially so as the rapid melting of the Arctic from climate change awakens strategic rivalries at the top of the world.

In contrast to the NATO expansion of former Soviet states that needed big boosts in the decades after the Cold War, the alliance would be bringing in two sophisticated militaries and, in Finland's case, a country with a remarkable tradition of national defense. Both Finland and Sweden are in a region on one of Europe's front lines and meeting places with Russia.

Finland, defending against Soviet Russia's invasion on the eve of World War II, relied on fighters on snowshoes and skis, expert snow and forest camouflage, and reindeers transporting weapons.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine in late February, along with his pointed reminder about the Kremlin's nuclear arsenal and his repeated invocation of broad territorial claims stemming from the days of the Russian Empire, have galvanized current NATO nations into strengthening their collective defenses and bringing on board new members.

Finland — until 1917 a grand duchy in that empire — and Sweden abandoned longtime national policies of military nonalignment. They applied to come under NATO's nuclear and conventional umbrella and

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join what is now 30 other member states in a powerful mutual defense pact, stipulating that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

Putin justified his invasion of West-looking Ukraine as pushing back against NATO and the West as, he said, they encroached ever closer on Russia. A NATO that includes Finland and Sweden would come as an ultimate rebuke for Putin's war, empowering the defensive alliance in a strategically important region, surrounding Russia in the Baltic Sea and Arctic Ocean, and crowding NATO up against Russia's western border for more than 800 additional miles (1,300 kilometers).

"I spent four years, my term, trying to persuade Sweden and Finland to join NATO," former NATO secretary-general Lord George Robertson said this summer. "Vladimir Putin managed it in four weeks."

Biden has been part of bipartisan U.S. and international cheerleading for the two countries' candidacies. Reservations expressed by Turkey and Hungary keep NATO approval from being a lock.

Russia in recent years has been "rearming up in the north, with advanced nuclear weapons, hypersonic missiles and multiple bases," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said this month. "Russia's threats, and Russia's military build-up, mean that NATO is strengthening its presence in the north."

Finland and Sweden would bring a lot to that mix. But they're not without flaws.

Both countries downsized their militaries, cut defense funding and closed bases after the collapse of the Soviet Union lulled Cold War-era fears. As of just five years ago, Sweden's entire tiny national defense force could fit into one of Stockholm's soccer stadiums, a critic noted.

But as Putin grew more confrontational, Sweden reinstated conscription and otherwise moved to rebuild its military. Sweden has a capable navy and a high-tech air force. Like Finland, Sweden has a valued home-grown defense industry; Sweden is one of the smallest countries in the world to build its own fighter jets.

Finland's defense force, meanwhile, is the stuff of legend.

In 1939 and 1940, Finland's tiny, miserably equipped forces, fighting alone in what became known as the Winter War, made the nation one of few to survive a full-on assault by the Soviet Union with independence intact. Over the course of an exceptionally, deathly cold winter, Finnish fighters, sometimes cloaked in white bedsheets for camouflage and typically moving unseen on foot, snowshoes and skis, lost some territory to Russia but forced out the invaders.

Finns were responsible for up to 200,000 fatalities among invading forces versus an estimated 25,000 Finns lost, recounted Iskander Rehman, a fellow at Johns Hopkins' Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs..

It helped fuel a Finnish national credo of "sisu," or grit. Finnish Winter War veterans were recruited for the U.S. Army's winter warfare training, Rehman noted.

Finland's constitution makes rallying to the national defense an obligation of every citizen. Finland says it can muster a 280,000-strong fighting force, built on near-universal male conscription and a large, well-trained reserve, equipped with modern artillery, warplanes and tanks, much of it U.S.

The U.S. and NATO are likely to increase their presence around the Baltic and Arctic with the accession of the two Scandinavian countries.

"Just looking at the map, if you add in Finland and Sweden, you essentially turn the entire Baltic Sea into a NATO lake," with just two smaller bits of Russia lining it, said Zachary Selden, a former director of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's defense and security committee who is now a national security expert at the University of Florida.

Likewise, Russia will become the only non-NATO member among countries with claims to Arctic territory, and the only non-NATO member of the Atlantic Council, an eight-member international forum created for Arctic issues.

Selden predicts a greater NATO presence in the Baltics as a result, perhaps with a new NATO regional command, along with U.S. military rotations, although likely not any permanent base.

Russia sees its military presence in the Arctic as vital to its European strategy, including ballistic missile submarines that give it second-strike capability in any conflict with NATO, analysts say.

The Arctic is warming much faster under climate change than the Earth as a whole, opening up com-

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petition for Arctic resources and access as Arctic ice vanishes.

Russia has been building its fleet of nuclear-powered icebreakers, aiming to escort expected future commercial shipping traffic through the melting Arctic, "as a way to create this toll road for transit," said Sherri Goodman, a former U.S. first deputy undersecretary of defense, now at the Wilson Center's Polar Institute and at the Center for Climate & Security.

Goodman points to future threats NATO will need to be able to deal with as the melting Arctic opens up, such as the kind of shadowy, unofficial forces Russia has used in Crimea and in Africa and elsewhere, and the increased risk of a hard-to-handle Russian nuclear maritime accident.

NATO strategy increasingly will incorporate the strategic advantage Finland and Sweden would bring to such scenarios, analysts said.

Kuoka's U.S. counterpart in NATO's Arctic exercise this spring, Marine Lt. Col. Ryan Gordinier wrote in an email provided through Marine spokespeople that he and his Marines were "impressed" by the Finnish infantry's ability to reach otherwise unreachable positions by foot, snowshoe and ski, and to move undetected over snow.

It "made us pause" — and likely would any real adversary as well, Gordinier wrote.

For Republican governors, all economic success is local

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Gov. Greg Abbott, R-Texas, often knocks President Joe Biden for high inflation and a looming recession — a standard GOP argument going into the November elections.

But inflation is even worse in major Texas cities than across the nation as a whole. Government figures show inflation is 10.2% in the Houston area and 9.4% around Dallas, higher than the latest national average of 8.5%.

Abbott and other GOP leaders are making a paradoxical argument that the U.S. economy has slumped into a recession, but Republican-led parts of the country are still booming. Those officials are blaming Biden's policies for sky-high gasoline and food prices, while taking credit for the job gains those same policies helped spur.

The Texas governor tweeted on July 28: "The U.S. economy is in a recession under Biden. Meanwhile, Texas was #1 in the nation for job growth in June & more Texans have jobs today than ever before in our state's history."

The Associated Press found a familiar pattern in 15 Republican-led states in which governors on Twitter would praise job growth in their states, while senators would simultaneously say the national economy as a whole was crashing. These seemingly conflicting claims were also repeated in public remarks.

GOP leaders say state policies such as low tax rates and keeping business open during the pandemic helped to fuel hiring and investment. But their claims tend to ignore how job growth was also boosted by a historic injection of federal money that began in March 2020 and continued under Biden with last year's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package.

Biden and his fellow Democrats have acknowledged the pain caused by inflation that hit a 40-year high this summer. But the president has stressed that the United States has avoided a recession because of the low 3.5% unemployment rate. He argues that global factors such as the pandemic, fragile supply chains and Russia's invasion of Ukraine caused prices to jump — and that he's meeting the public's needs with the economic and climate package signed into law on Tuesday.

"Too often we hand the biggest microphone to the critics and the cynics who delight in declaring failure while those committed to making real progress do the hard work of governing," Biden said in a swipe at the GOP.

Multiple surveys do show that voters have a sense of foreboding about the economy and that most people fault the president. Researchers said there's not a lot of academic analyses to show why many voters seem willing to blame inflation on White House policies and give a pass to statehouses, as inflation had been low in recent decades and less of a factor in elections than jobs.

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Andrew Reeves, a political science professor at Washington University in St. Louis, said most voters likely judge the local and national economies by different standards. When it comes to state and local officials, voters form opinions through what they observe in their daily lives. But they often gauge the national economy through hard numbers and political ideologies.

"The 'national economy' is this nebulous thing that none of us actually experiences," Reeves said. "It's an abstract concept. We may be more willing to let our partisanship shade how we see what is going on nationally. Joe Biden is well into his term, so the honeymoon is over and he owns this economy — whether his policies are directly responsible for it or not."

Republican governors such as Florida's Ron DeSantis and Georgia's Brian Kemp are largely unscathed on inflation, even though consumer prices are significantly above the national average in both of those states. Inflation is 10.6% in the Miami area, 11.2% in Tampa and 11.5% in Atlanta.

What many voters in Republican states are hearing is an economic argument similar to what Biden has attempted on a national scale — that job growth and government finances are strong enough to insulate people from a downturn.

DeSantis dismissed Biden's claims that the U.S. economy remains healthy, calling that "Orwellian double-speak." The governor said at Florida's Airports Council conference on Aug. 1 that his state's budget surplus could insulate it from a downturn.

"We're not immune to the inflation, we're not immune to the energy prices," DeSantis said. "Because Florida has been open, because Florida has excelled economically, we're in the position where we're going to be able to meet those needs of the state regardless of what Uncle Joe throws at us from Washington, D.C."

Job growth has been broad across the country. Data released Friday by the Bureau of Statistics found that employment increased in 43 states and was essentially unchanged in seven states over the past 12 months.

But the bipartisan research group EIG analyzed job growth in the three major Republican states (Texas, Arizona and Florida) and the three major Democratic ones (California, Illinois and New York). It found that the GOP areas have fully recovered and exceeded their pandemic job totals, while the recovery has been slower in Democratic states.

What seems to be the much more overarching priority among voters is not jobs but inflation, said John Lettieri, EIG's president and CEO. At a time of political polarization, it's striking to him how fears about prices are crossing generational, class, regional and partisan lines.

"There is strong unanimity that the economy is an issue, inflation is the No. 1 problem and Biden is to blame," Lettieri said. "This cuts across all the divides. All those different ways we slice up the electorate, they're all responding to this to one degree or another in strong ways."

Inflation appears to be an inescapable challenge for Biden, even as other issues such as abortion rights appear to be rallying Democratic voters. Republicans are able to promote job gains to say why they would be better at leading the economy, without having to list, as Biden has stressed in speeches, their own policies for reducing consumer prices.

Gabriel Lenz, a political science professor at the University of California Los Angeles, said the "best measure of what voters are personally experiencing" is a metric known as real disposable personal income. That figure looks at how much money people have after adjusting for taxes and inflation. Its changes over the past two years mirror those of Democratic political fortunes.

When Biden signed pandemic relief into law in March 2021, people's real disposable income climbed 28.7% from a year ago. The aid helped the economy recover while some notable economists warned it could also be inflationary. As prices rose over the past year and much of the aid expired, real disposable income has tumbled 3.5% over the past 12 months as a result.

Based on that number, Lenz concluded: "It's no surprise that people are gloomy."

Chinese farmers struggle as scorching drought wilts crops

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By MARK SCHIEFELBEIN Associated Press

LONGQUAN, China (AP) — Hundreds of persimmon trees that should be loaded with yellow fruit lie wilted in Gan Bingdong's greenhouse in southwestern China, adding to mounting farm losses in a scorching summer that is the country's driest in six decades.

Gan's farm south of the industrial metropolis of Chongqing lost half its vegetable crop in heat as high as 41 degrees Celsius (106 Fahrenheit) and a drought that has shrunk the giant Yangtze River and wilted crops across central China.

Gan's surviving eggplants are no bigger than strawberries. A reservoir beside his farm has run dry, forcing him to pump groundwater.

"This year's high temperatures are very annoying," Gan said.

Drought conditions across a swath of China from the densely populated east across central farming provinces into eastern Tibet have "significantly increased," the national weather agency said Saturday.

The forecast called for high temperatures and no rain for at least three more days from Jiangsu and Anhui provinces northwest of Shanghai, through Chongqing and Sichuan provinces to the east of Tibet.

Local authorities were ordered to "use all available water sources" to supply households and livestock, the weather agency said.

The biggest impact is in Sichuan, where factories have been shut down and offices and shopping malls told to turn off air-conditioning after reservoirs to generate hydropower fell to half their normal levels.

The province of 94 million people gets 80% of its electricity from hydropower dams.

Factories that make processor chips for smartphones, auto components, solar panels and other industrial goods were shut down for at least six days through Saturday. Some say output will be depressed while others say supplies to customers are unaffected.

The shutdowns add to challenges for the ruling Communist Party as President Xi Jinping, the country's most powerful leader in decades, prepares to try to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as leader at a meeting in October or November.

Growth in factory output and retail sales weakened in July, setting back China's economic recovery after Shanghai and other industrial centers were shut down starting in late March to fight virus outbreaks.

The economy grew by just 2.5% over a year earlier in the first half of 2022, less than half the official annual goal of 5.5%.

State-run utilities are shifting power to Sichuan from other provinces. Authorities used fire trucks to deliver water to two dry villages near Chongqing.

In Hubei province, east of Chongqing, 220,000 people needed drinking water, while 6.9 million hectares (17 million acres) of crops were damaged, the provincial government said Saturday. It declared a drought emergency and released disaster aid.

In Sichuan, 47,000 hectares (116,000 acres) of crops have been lost and 433,000 hectares (1.1 million acres) damaged, the provincial disaster committee said Saturday. It said 819,000 people faced a shortage of drinking water.

Authorities in Chongqing say an estimated 1 million people in rural areas will face drinking water shortages, the Shanghai news outlet The Paper reported.

Gan, the farmer south of Chongqing, said he has lost one-third of his persimmon plants.

Farmers in the area usually harvest rice in late August or September but plan to finish at least two weeks early before plants die, according to Gan.

A community reservoir beside Gan's farm is nearly empty, leaving a pool surrounded by cracked earth. After supply canals ran dry, it sprang a leak and heat accelerated evaporation. Gan is pumping underground water for irrigation.

"If the high temperature comes every year, we will have to find a solution such as to build up nets, daily irrigation or to install a spray system to reduce the loss," Gan said.

Meanwhile, other areas have suffered deadly flash floods.

Flooding in the northwestern province of Qinghai killed at least 23 people and left eight missing, the

official Xinhua News Agency reported, citing local authorities.

Mudslides and overflowing rivers late Thursday hit six villages in Qinghai's Datong county, the report said. Some 1,500 people were forced out of their homes.

Statue honors once-enslaved woman who won freedom in court

By MARK PRATT Associated Press

The story of the enslaved woman who went to court to win her freedom more than 80 years before the Emancipation Proclamation has been pushed to the fringes of history.

A group of civic leaders, activists and historians hope that ends Sunday in the quiet Massachusetts town of Sheffield with the unveiling of a bronze statue of the woman who chose the name Elizabeth Freeman when she shed the chains of slavery 241 years ago to the day.

Her story, while remarkable, remains relatively obscure.

State Rep. William "Smitty" Pignatelli grew up not far from Sheffield in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts yet didn't hear her story until about 20 years ago. He found that many of his colleagues in the Statehouse were also largely in the dark about the significance of her case, which set the legal precedent that essentially ended slavery in Massachusetts.

"She's clearly a hidden figure in American history, and I really believe Black history is American history," said Pignatelli, a Democrat. "But unfortunately, Black history is what we haven't been told and taught."

The enslaved woman, known as Bett, could not read or write, but she listened.

And what she heard did not make sense.

While she toiled in bondage in the household of Col. John Ashley, he and other prominent citizens of Sheffield met to discuss their grievances about British tyranny. In 1773, they wrote in what are known as the Sheffield Resolves that "Mankind in a state of nature are equal, free, and independent of each other."

Those words were echoed in Article 1 of the Massachusetts Constitution in 1780, which begins "All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights."

It is believed that Bett, after hearing a public reading of the constitution, walked roughly 5 miles from the Ashley household to the home of attorney Theodore Sedgwick, one of the citizens who drafted the Sheffield Resolves, and asked him to represent her in her legal quest for freedom, said Paul O'Brien, president of the Sheffield Historical Society.

Sedgwick and another attorney, Tapping Reeve, took the case.

Women had limited legal rights in Massachusetts courts at the time, so a male slave in the Ashley household named Brom was added to the case.

The jury agreed with the attorneys, freeing Bett and Brom on Aug. 21, 1781.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, and his wife, Diane, are residents of the Berkshires and have been instrumental in fundraising and organizational efforts. They are leading Sunday's ceremony.

"What I love about the story is that this remarkable woman, enslaved, sometimes brutalized, unable to read, listened carefully to the conversation around the table as the men she was serving discussed the concepts of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as 'inalienable rights,'" Patrick, the state's first Black governor, said in an email. "I love that this powerless woman could imagine these powerful ideas as her own, and could persuade others to test that question. And I love that the Massachusetts courts had the integrity of purpose to take her question seriously."

Pignatelli was inspired to raise a statue of Freeman last year when he attended the unveiling of a statue of Susan B. Anthony in Adams, the Berkshire County community where the suffragist was born.

He brought together stakeholders and raised about \$280,000, enough money for the roughly 8-foot statue, as well as a scholarship fund in Freeman's honor for area high school students.

Gwendolyn VanSant, the CEO of BRIDGE, an area nonprofit that fosters racial understanding and equity, is overseeing the scholarships.

She called Freeman an icon and a trailblazer. "For me as an African American woman, it's amazing to be walking in her footsteps," she said.

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After the court case, Ashley asked Freeman to return to his household as a paid servant, but she refused and instead went to work for Sedgwick, where she helped raise his children and was known by the affectionate name, Mumbet.

She was a healer, a nurse and a midwife, who bought her own property in nearby Stockbridge, VanSant said.

The Sedgwicks had such a deep respect for Mumbet that when she died in 1829 at about the age of 85 she was buried with them, the only non-family member in the family plot. Much of what historians know about her was written by one of Theodore Sedgwick's daughters, the novelist Catharine Maria Sedgwick, O'Brien said.

The statue, cast by renowned sculptor Brian Hanlon, is being placed on the property of the First Congregational Church in Sheffield, not far from the Sedgwick home.

"We don't know if Elizabeth Freeman went to the church, but we know Ashley did, and it was common for enslavers to bring enslaved people to look after their children at church," said O'Brien.

Although some 200 people are expected to attend Sunday's unveiling, the culmination of three days of celebrations, organizers have been unable to find any of Freeman's descendants.

VanSant hopes a permanent memorial will spur interest into Freeman's story. "Maybe her descendants will find us," she said.

Chemical tanker, cargo ship crash near southwestern Japan

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A Japanese chemical tanker ship crashed into a cargo ship off the coast of southwestern Japan, the coast guard said Saturday.

No one was injured among the six Japanese crew members aboard the tanker Ryoshinmaru and 14 Chinese crew members aboard the Belize-registered cargo ship Xin Hai 99.

The crash early Saturday was under investigation and both ships were anchored in the area, about 3.5 kilometers (2.2 miles) off the coast of Wakayama prefecture, according to a Kushimoto Coast Guard official.

Some oil leaked from the engine area of the cargo ship, which initially started to sink, but it was brought under control, the official said.

The tanker had left Kobe port to pick up chemicals from another Japanese port and did not have any chemicals on board at the time of the accident.

Divers were sent to the scene and GPS records pursued to determine the cause of the accident. The Chinese crew told the coast guard the tanker had suddenly veered toward them, the official said.

African migratory birds threatened by hot, dry weather

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

MOMBASA, Kenya (AP) — Africa's migratory birds are threatened by changing weather patterns in the center and east of the continent that have depleted natural water systems and caused a devastating drought.

Hotter and drier conditions due to climate change make it difficult for traveling species who are losing their water sources and breeding grounds, with many now endangered or forced to alter their migration patterns entirely by settling in cooler northern areas.

Roughly 10% of Africa's more than 2,000 bird species, including dozens of migratory birds, are threatened, with 28 species — such as the Madagascar fish eagle, the Taita falcon and hooded vultures — classed as "critically endangered." Over one-third of them are especially vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather, an analysis by environmental group BirdLife International said.

"Birds are being affected by climate change just like any other species," BirdLife policy coordinator Ken Mwathe said. "Migratory birds are affected more than other groups of birds because they must keep on moving," which makes it more likely that a site they rely on during their journey has degraded in some way.

The African-Eurasian flyway, the flight corridor for birds that travel south through the Mediterranean

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Sea and Sahara Desert for the winter, harbors over 2,600 sites for migrating birds. An estimated 87% of African sites are at risk from climate change, a greater proportion than in Europe or Asia, a study by the United Nations environment agency and conservation group Wetlands International found.

Africa is more vulnerable to climate change because it is less able to adapt, said Evans Mukolwe, a retired meteorologist and science director at the World Meteorological Organization.

"Poverty, biodiversity degradation, extreme weather events, lack of capital and access to new technologies" make it more difficult for the continent to protect habitats for wild species, Mukolwe said.

Hotter temperatures due to human-caused climate change and less rainfall shrink key wetland areas and water sources, which birds rely on during migratory journeys.

"Lake Chad is an example," Mwathe said. "Before birds cross the Sahara, they stop by Lake Chad, and then move to the Northern or Southern hemisphere. But Lake Chad has been shrinking over the years," which compromises its ability to support birds, he said.

Parched birds means tougher journeys, which has an impact on their ability to breed, said Paul Matiku, executive director of Nature Kenya.

Flamingoes, for example, which normally breed in Lake Natron in Tanzania are unlikely to be able to "if the migration journey is too rough," Matiku said.

He added that "not having water in those wetlands means breeding will not take place" since flamingoes need water to create mud nests that keep their eggs away from the intense heat of dry ground.

Non-migratory birds are also struggling with the changing climate. African fish eagles, found throughout sub-Saharan Africa, are now forced to travel further in search of food. The number of South African Cape Rockjumpers and Protea canaries is severely declining.

Bird species living in the hottest and driest areas, like in the Kalahari Desert that spans Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, are approaching their "physiological limits," the most recent assessment by the U.N.'s expert climate panel said. It added that birds are less able to find food and are losing body mass, causing large-scale deaths for those living in extreme heat.

"Forest habitats get hotter with climate change and ... dryland habitats get drier and savannah birds lack food because grass never seeds, flowers never fruit, and insects never emerge as they do when it rains," Matiku said.

Other threats, such as the illegal wildlife trade, agriculture, the growth of urban areas and pollution are also stunting bird populations like African fish eagles and vultures, he said.

Better land management projects that help restore degraded wetlands and forests and protect areas from infrastructure, poaching or logging will help preserve the most vulnerable species, the U.N. environmental agency said.

Birds and other species would benefit from concerted efforts to improve water access and food security, especially as sea level rise and extreme weather events are set to continue, said Amos Makarau, the Africa regional director of the U.N. weather agency.

Scientists say that curbing emissions of planet-warming gasses, especially in high-emitting nations, could also limit future weather-related catastrophes.

On Chile rivers, Native spirituality and development clash

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

MELIPEUCO, Chile (AP) — Mist suddenly arose from the Triful Triful River as it flowed below the snow-covered Llaima volcano, and Victor Curin smiled at the sun-dappled water spray.

A leader in one of the Indigenous communities by the river's shores in the Chilean Andes, Curin took it as a sign that the waterfall's ngen — its owner and protector spirit — approved of his visit and prayer that mid-July morning.

"Nature always tells you something, always answers," said Curin, who works as a park ranger in Conguillio National Park, at the river's headwaters. "Human beings feel superior to the space where they go, but for us Mapuche, I belong to the earth, the earth doesn't belong to me."

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In the worldview of the Mapuche, Chile's largest Indigenous group and more than 10% of its population, a pristine river is home to a spiritual force to revere, not a natural resource to exploit.

That has led many Mapuche across Chile's water-rich south to fight hydroelectric plants and other projects they see as desecrating nature and depriving Indigenous communities of essential energies that keep them from getting sick.

"Being part of nature, we cannot destroy part of ourselves," said Lientur Ayenao, a machi or healer and spiritual guide who draws water from the Truful Truful for his ceremonies. "You have to keep the balance, and this is broken when one intervenes in natural spaces for a selfish purpose."

Some 200 miles to the south, another machi, Millaray Huichalaf, has led a sometimes-violent battle against hydroelectric plants on the Pilmaiquen River, which flows through rolling pastures from a lake in the Andes' foothills.

After her resistance and cultural consultations with Indigenous communities, an energy company froze plans for a plant by a riverside sacred site and said it would return ownership of the land to the Mapuche.

But construction is continuing on another plant, so the fight isn't over — just as it isn't on the Truful Truful, where a proposed plant is under review.

"I am the river too, we're as sacred as the river," Huichalaf said as a thunderstorm pounded her wooden cabin. "At the same time as we're fighting for the river, we're in the process of territorial recovery and spiritual reconstruction."

It's on the question of rights over Indigenous land, a volatile issue in Chile's politics, that spirituality gets entangled with ideology. Several Mapuche leaders say spirits appearing in dreams encourage the fight against capitalism in their ancestral territory.

Next month, Chileans will vote on a new and controversial constitution spotlighting Indigenous rights and land restitution. But they're also dealing with growing violent attacks against agricultural, logging and energy industries, particularly in the Araucania region, including by some groups claiming Mapuche ancestral lands that were never fully conquered by the Spanish empire and only fell to the Chilean state at the end of the 19th century.

For most Mapuche, such violence further destabilizes the desired balance between people, the natural space they belong to and the spirits that inhabit it. A first step against it is to ensure non-Natives understand how nature matters to the Mapuche, Indigenous leader and mediator Andrés Antivil Álvarez said.

"The world is not loot. Everything that's outside is also inside ourselves," he said, sitting by the fire in his ruka, a traditional building outside his house near Araucania's capital, a two-hour drive from the Truful Truful. "You have to understand that the spirit of this fire, present here, is as sacred as the Christ in a church."

And trampling a crucifix — as some protesters did in 2019 mass uprisings — is as painful and evil as damming a river, he said. He cited as an example construction in the early 2000s of the Ralco dam, which flooded sacred compounds and generated an uproar that prevented similar massive projects and energized cultural resistance to smaller ones.

Mapuche community members' reverence is evident when they walk alongside rivers like the Truful Truful, whose name means "from waterfall to waterfall" in the Mapudungun language.

On a chilly afternoon, Ayenao approached the river's largest waterfall, the proposed site of a new hydroelectric plant, with a bag of seeds in his pocket. That would be a reciprocity offering for the river's ngen should Ayenao decide to draw water to treat his patients' physical and spiritual ailments.

"Ngen existed before us and it's they who allow us to live in a place. And there are some predominant ngen to whom we need to pray" like the Truful Truful's, he said.

Failure to ask the ngen's permission to approach the water, or to explain the need to do so, means transgressing on the space, alienating the spirits protecting it and making you, your family and even your animals sick.

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But if the ngen permits it, then Ayenao can use the falling water's distinctive "energy power" for healing purposes, either in riverside ceremonies or by taking large soda bottles full of it back to his house.

Relocated to Temuco when he was 6, Ayenao eventually moved to Santiago, Chile's capital, to study and there got so sick he couldn't walk or talk. His family realized the only remedy was to accept that the spirit of his great-grandmother, also a healer, was asking to come back in him.

He apprenticed for three years and returned to practice traditional medicine on a tiny plot of land in the broad valley downstream from the village of Melipueco, named for the union of the Triful Triful and three other waterways.

Now the spirit of a nearby river where a fish farm is planned has been asking in dreams for Ayenao's help. "The ngen asks me and demands of me that I need to protect it, and thus contribute to health," said Ayenao, 28. "We as human beings ... are the messengers of the ngen mapu to stop" the extraction and sale of natural resources.

More spiritual guides like Ayenao are needed to remedy the loss of environmental, medicinal and linguistic knowledge caused by enforced assimilation policies in the past, when many Indigenous people grew up alienated from their roots in marginalized big-city settlements, said Artemio Huenupi, a Mapuche elder.

"Our wisdom is entirely based on the territory of nature. We live in this space to take care of it. It's other cultures that say that they own the land," he added, speaking in the small museum of Mapuche culture he curates in Melipeuco.

At a July nighttime village concert to raise funds for Ayenao's thatched-roof gathering space, community members recounted how they have banded together to oppose a hydroelectric plant on the Triful Triful.

After nearly a decade of multiple environmental and cultural evaluations, as well as legal appeals, the plant has been temporarily blocked in court, said Claudio Melillan, a Melipeuco city councilor who recently returned to his ancestral lands for what he called "a stage of reconstruction" of his Mapuche identity.

The community hopes a final ruling will definitively scuttle the project, which threatens to harm the waterfall that's considered a crucial source of spiritual energy, said Sergio Millaman, the attorney who won the latest appeal.

But some human impact is already evident, from an increase in tourism to the diminished flow compared with the powerful river many remember from their childhood.

Despite this winter's abundant rain and snowfall, Chile is facing a worrisome climate change-driven drought, which has compounded tensions over water use, said Juan Pablo Herane, a hydrology expert with the Global Change Center at Santiago's Catholic University.

In April, after more than a decade's legal wrangling, the country's water code was updated to better protect various rights including the use of water at its source for conservation or ancestral customs, said Juan José Crocco, an attorney specializing in water regulation and management.

It's unclear, however, if a new constitution might alter that and how the code will be implemented in the case of hydroelectric plants that technically don't extract water but reroute it to create energy, said Benjamín Bulnes, a water rights attorney who worked on the new code and has fished on the Pilmaiquen River.

The first hydroelectric plant on the Pilmaiquen, built in the mid-20th century, sits across the road from a Mapuche-administered botanical garden spotlighting native trees.

A bitter battle under Huichalaf's leadership started a decade ago to stop three other plants several miles downstream. Like Ayenao, she got seriously ill as a child in the nearby city of Osorno until her family realized it was an ancestor's spirit wanting to come back in her as a healer.

During years of training to assume that role, she started having dreams about Kintuantü, a ngen living by a broad bend of the Pilmaiquen.

"I am a medium of energy. Through dreams and visions in trance, Kintuantü told me that I had to speak for him because he was dying," Huichalaf said.

A plant would have raised the river right to the cliffside caves where the ngen lives. Atop the cliff is a

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Mapuche ceremonial compound, including a cemetery, from where souls are believed to travel via underground water flows through the caves, into the Pilmaiquen and on to eventual reincarnation.

Huichalaf led an occupation there. A private home burned down, and protesters clashed with police. More protests and lawsuits followed, dividing the Indigenous communities around the river.

Huichalaf was jailed for several months. But she said she doesn't fear prison because she managed to save the site, where she gathers medicinal herbs and performs sacred ceremonies: "The ngen is still there."

Statkraft, the Norwegian state-owned energy company that bought the Pilmaiquen projects, is working with the Chilean government to return ownership of the ceremonial compound. Construction was stopped after the company realized the proposed plant's cultural impact was "unacceptable," said Statkraft's Chile manager, María Teresa González.

González said the company learned the importance of understanding the Indigenous worldview and engaging different communities from the start, and it's doing just that with another plant being constructed on the Pilmaiquen.

But she condemned ongoing violence such as the recent burning of a truck carrying a half-dozen workers. Nobody has been charged in the late June attack.

For Huichalaf, the fight continues: "Our big goal is that the companies on the river will leave."

Back on the black volcanic field crossed by the Truful Truful, as a snowstorm approached a nearby peak with thousand-year-old araucaria trees, Curin defined his people's goal in more essential terms.

"What does the Mapuche world fight for? What does the Mapuche world protect? Not a world of money," he said. "Mapuche culture is very spiritual, very much of the heart. It's not random that we're still here."

Then he knelt to sip from the river's water and got back to his park ranger post.

IMF fees on war-torn countries closer to elimination

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The International Monetary Fund is facing pressure to reevaluate how it imposes fees on loans it disperses to needy countries like war-torn Ukraine — which is one of the fund's biggest borrowers.

The move comes as more countries will need to turn to the IMF, as food prices and inflation internationally continues to rise.

Surcharges are added fees on loans imposed on countries that are heavily indebted to the IMF.

Treasury Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo said in Aspen last month that finance ministers of several countries realize they have to pay a price for Russia's war in Ukraine, especially with food prices going up.

"They're going to have to go to the IMF, they're going to need to find assistance," Adeyemo said.

However, the IMF fee system could change through U.S. legislation. An amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act, otherwise known as the defense spending bill, would suspend IMF surcharges while their effectiveness and burden on indebted countries is studied.

That was passed by the U.S. House in July. The Senate is expected to vote on its defense bill in September. A representative of the Senate Armed Services Committee said an amendment may be offered in the next few weeks or even on the Senate floor.

As the largest IMF shareholder and member of the Fund's executive board, the U.S. can push for policy decisions and unilaterally veto some board decisions.

Citing worsening financial crises in Sri Lanka and Pakistan as examples, some accuse China of engaging in debt trap diplomacy — or having countries fall so deeply in debt to that they are beholden to it on international issues.

Advocates and civil rights organizations lodge the same complaint against the Fund, who claim the organization undercuts its core lender-of-last-resort role with countries in vulnerable positions to pay back debt.

With an ever-worsening risk of a global debt crisis and rising interest rates, the issue has become more pressing for countries looking to reduce their deficits.

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However, some economists and representatives of the fund say the surcharges amount to responsible lending behavior, as they provide an incentive for members with large outstanding balances to repay their loans promptly. This applies especially for countries that may otherwise may not be able to obtain financing from private lenders.

Maurice Obstfeld, a Berkeley economics professor and former IMF research department director said as a lender of last resort, the Fund's ability to lend is important as low and middle income countries face rising interest rates.

"The Fund's staff is small and in a crisis, its efforts are better deployed serving member countries' needs," he said in an email to The Associated Press. "Surcharges could be relaxed temporarily in the face of intense pressures on borrowing countries, but at the expense of the Fund's ability to serve its membership in the longer term."

Illinois Congressman Jesús "Chuy" García, who offered the defense spending amendment, told The Associated Press "it is unfair for the IMF to require countries like Ukraine that are already deep in debt to pay surcharge fees. These surcharges increase poverty and hold back our global economic recovery."

Ukraine's projected real GDP is expected to decline by 35 percent, due in large part to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, according to IMF data.

The country, engaged in a war with no projected end, has an outstanding balance of 7.5 billion SDRs — an IMF accounting unit valued at around \$9.8 billion according to Ukrainian central bankers. The latest figures estimate that Ukraine will owe the IMF \$360 million in surcharges between 2021 and 2023.

Economists Joseph Stiglitz at Columbia University and Kevin P. Gallagher at Boston University wrote earlier this year that "forcing excessive repayments lowers the productive potential of the borrowing country, but also harms creditors" and requires borrowers "to pay more at exactly the moment when they are most squeezed from market access in any other form."

Serhiy Nikolaychuk, Deputy Chairman of the National Bank of Ukraine, said Ukraine is continuing to pay its debts "despite Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine."

"Our country will pay its debt and surcharges under previous programs and fulfill its obligations to the IMF," Nikolaychuk said. "It will be difficult, but we will pay."

For years, lawmakers, economists and civil rights organizations have called on the IMF, which has for decades loaned billions to low-income countries, to end its surcharge policy.

In January, 18 left-leaning lawmakers wrote to Treasury calling for the surcharge policy to be eliminated. And in April, a group of 150 civil society groups and individuals signed an open letter to the IMF, asking for the same, calling surcharges "regressive."

A spokesperson for the fund says the surcharges are designed to discourage large and prolonged use of IMF resources.

"They only apply to countries with particularly large outstanding loans," Mayada Ghazala said in an emailed statement, adding that poorest countries are exempt from the surcharges.

The fund's executive board met in December 2021 and discussed the role of surcharges —it ultimately decided not to make a change to the fees, but said they would review them again in the future.

The IMF was created in 1944 at the United Nations Bretton Woods Conference — one of its missions is lending to maintain the financial stability of countries. Among its 190 countries, it lends around \$1 trillion, according to the organization's website.

An April review of the fund's financial health for fiscal year 2022 and 2023 states that lending income excluding surcharges "remain strong and are expected to exceed expenses in FY 2023–2024."

Andrés Arauz, a senior research fellow at the liberal Center for Economic and Policy Research says the IMF's financial position shows "the surcharges are not necessary for sound finances."

"There is no excuse for the IMF to be punishing countries under debt stress with surcharges," he said. "There is also no logic to it, the amount of money that the IMF raises from surcharges is trivial relative to its income and capacity."

Garcia said "I'm proud the House passed my amendment to support a pause and review of surcharges

at the IMF, and I will keep up the fight until the President signs it into law.”

Separately, the U.S. has sent roughly \$7.3 billion in aid to Ukraine since the war began in late February, including a new \$775 million defense aid package announced Friday.

Nicaraguan police detain bishop, other priests in raid

By GABRIELA SELSER and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Nicaraguan police on Friday raided the residence of a Roman Catholic bishop critical of President Daniel Ortega’s administration, detaining him and several other priests in a dramatic escalation of tensions between the church and a government increasingly intolerant of dissent.

The pre-dawn raid came after Nicaraguan authorities had accused Matagalpa Bishop Rolando Álvarez of “organizing violent groups” and inciting them “to carry out acts of hate against the population.”

President Daniel Ortega’s government has moved systematically against voices of dissent, arresting dozens of opposition leaders last year, including seven potential candidates to challenge him for the presidency. They were sentenced to prison this year in quick trials closed to the public.

The congress, dominated by Ortega’s Sandinista National Liberation Front, has ordered the closure of more than 1,000 nongovernmental organizations, including Mother Teresa’s charity.

Early Friday, the Matagalpa diocese posted on social media, “#SOS #Urgente. At this time the National Police have entered the Episcopal rectory of our Matagalpa diocese.”

The National Police confirmed the detentions in a statement later, saying that the operation was carried out to allow “the citizenry and families of Matagalpa to recover normalcy.”

“For several days a positive communication from the Matagalpa diocese was awaited with a lot of patience, prudence and sense of responsibility, that never materialized,” the statement said. “With the continuation of the destabilizing and provocative activities, the aforementioned public order operation became necessary.”

It did not mention specific charges.

Álvarez was being held under guard at a house in Managua, where he had been allowed to meet with relatives and Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes, the police statement said.

The others who were taken with Álvarez -- they did not specify who or how many -- were still being processed, police said.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights condemned the detentions and called for the immediate release of those held.

Edwin Román, a Nicaraguan parish priest exiled in the United States said via Twitter: “MY GOD! How outrageous, they have taken Monsignor Rolando Alvarez, with the priests who were with him.”

Streets around the cathedral in Matagalpa were relatively empty Friday. A few parishioners prayed inside, where a picture of Álvarez had been pinned to the robe of a Jesus Christ figure.

María Lacayo said she felt “very sad because we know that our bishop is innocent and an excellent man.”

“We all love him very much because he is there for all of us and it’s a tremendous injustice what is being done to him. But as Catholics we leave everything in God’s hands,” she added.

Álvarez has been a key religious voice in discussions of Nicaragua’s future since 2018, when a wave of protests against Ortega’s government led to a sweeping crackdown on opponents.

“We hope there would be a series of electoral reforms, structural changes to the electoral authority — free, just and transparent elections, international observation without conditions,” Álvarez said a month after the protests broke out. “Effectively the democratization of the country.”

At the time, a priest in Álvarez’s diocese had been wounded in the arm by shrapnel while trying to separate protesters and police in Matagalpa.

Álvarez has kept up such calls for democracy for the past four years, infuriating Ortega and Murillo.

Manuel Orozco, an expert on Nicaragua at the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, said that Álvarez posed a threat as an obstacle and a symbol to Ortega.

“Nicaraguans are very loyal to the church,” he said. “In a survey I did last year, 70% of Nicaraguans

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say that to them, the political opinion of the religious authority at the national or the parochial level was important in shaping their political views."

"(Alvarez's) narrative, it's based on the religious script, the biblical script about opposing the oppressor," Orozco said. "And he makes allusions not to incite violence or to call for resistance, but he does say there is oppression."

Orozco said the government is betting its pressure on the church won't bring a "proportional response" by the international community. "And so they continue to push the envelope because they don't see that short of a military invasion, there is not going to be anything that can stop them."

Friday's arrests follow weeks of elevated tensions between the church and Ortega's government, which has had a complicated relationship with Nicaragua's predominant religion and its leaders for more than four decades.

The former Marxist guerrilla infuriated the Vatican in the 1980s, but gradually forged an alliance with the church as he moved to regain the presidency in 2007 after a long period out of power. Now he appears to once again see political benefit in direct confrontation.

Ortega initially invited the church to mediate talks with protesters in 2018, but has since taken a more aggressive position.

Days before last year's presidential elections, which he won for a fourth consecutive term with his strongest opponents jailed, he accused the bishops of having drafted a political proposal in 2018 on behalf "of the terrorists, at the service of the Yankees. ... These bishops are also terrorists."

In March, Nicaragua expelled the papal nuncio, the Vatican's top diplomat in Nicaragua.

The government had previously shut down eight radio stations and one television channel in Matagalpa province, north of Managua. Seven of the radio stations were run by the church.

The Aug. 5 announcement that Álvarez was under investigation came just hours after first lady and Vice President Rosario Murillo criticized "sins against spirituality" and "the exhibition of hate" in an apparent reference to Álvarez.

The Archdiocese of Managua had earlier expressed support for Álvarez. The conference of Latin American Catholic bishops decried what it called a "siege" of priests and bishops, the expulsion of members of religious communities and "constant harassment" targeting the Nicaraguan people and the church.

The Vatican remained silent about the investigation of Álvarez for nearly two weeks, drawing criticism from some Latin American human rights activists and intellectuals.

That silence was broken last Friday when Monsignor Juan Antonio Cruz, the Vatican's permanent observer to the Organization of American States, expressed concern about the situation and asked both parties to "seek ways of understanding."

The Vatican again offered no comment Friday and didn't report the news immediately on its in-house media portal. While staying mum, apparently in hopes of not inflaming tensions, the Vatican has been publishing regular expressions of solidarity from Latin American bishops in recent days on its Vatican News site.

The president of Nicaragua's Episcopal Conference did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The huge street protests across Nicaragua in 2018 called for Ortega to step down. Ortega maintained the protests were a coup attempt carried out with foreign backing and the support of the church.

Witness about R. Kelly: I didn't want to 'carry his lies'

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — A woman who says she was sexually abused hundreds of times by R. Kelly as a minor testified Friday that she agonized several years ago about whether to cooperate with federal investigators who were looking into child abuse allegations involving the singer, but she ultimately did because she didn't want to "carry his lies."

Hours before jurors got their first glimpse of sexually explicit videos at the heart of the prosecution's bid to prove Kelly produced child pornography and successfully rigged his 2008 child porn trial, the woman,

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who is now 37 and going by the pseudonym "Jane" during the current trial, conceded that even after she began cooperating, she lied when she told agents she wasn't sure if Kelly had abused minors other than her. She said she lied because she didn't want to get others in trouble.

Jane testified for over four hours Thursday, saying it was she and Kelly in a videotape that was the focus of the 2008 trial, at which he was acquitted. She also said Kelly sexually abused her hundreds of times from the late 1990s before she turned 18. Kelly, 55, was around 30 years old at the time.

While cross-examining her Friday, Kelly's lead attorney, Jennifer Bonjean, sought to cast the R&B singer in a more favorable light after Jane testified the day before about how Kelly pursued her sexually starting when she was around 14 years old.

Kelly has been trailed for decades by allegations about his sexual behavior. The scrutiny intensified during the #MeToo era and following the 2019 release of the Lifetime television docuseries "Surviving R. Kelly."

Under questioning, Jane said her relationship with Kelly lasted 12 years and continued for two years after his 2008 trial, until she was 26. Bonjean asked if, "after you broke up, you cared about him and he cared about you?" Jane said that was true.

As "Surviving R. Kelly" was coming out, Jane said she was concerned for Kelly and reached out to him. In one text to him, she wrote, "I love you. Don't let the devil win."

She said she repeatedly tried to contact him in 2019 for advice as she pondered whether to speak to authorities at length about Kelly for the first time. She told jurors: "I felt comfortable enough to reach out to him because I was afraid."

She decided shortly thereafter to speak to investigators.

"I no longer wanted to carry his lies," she said.

Kelly, who denies any wrongdoing, was given a 30-year prison sentence by a federal judge in New York earlier this year for a 2021 conviction for using his fame to sexually abuse fans. For the duration of the current trial, he is being held in a federal jail in Chicago, his hometown.

Prosecutors say Kelly intimidated and paid off the girl — Jane — to ensure she didn't testify at the 2008 trial to identify herself and Kelly in the critical video, which the government says Kelly made in a log cabin-themed room at his North Side Chicago home around 2000. Jane testified Thursday that she was the girl, then 14, in the video and that Kelly was the man in it.

It was one of three videos that prosecutors played excerpts of on Friday that they said showed Kelly sexually abusing an underage Jane. Before the videos were played on monitors in front of each juror's chair, court officials set up high opaque screens around the jury that blocked journalists and spectators from seeing the videos and jurors' reactions to them.

The sound was audible throughout the courtroom, though, and in one video the girl is heard repeatedly calling the man "daddy." At one point she asks, "Daddy, do you still love me?" The man is also heard giving her sexually explicit instructions.

Earlier, prosecutors suggested that any viewing of the videos by the public could run afoul of child pornography laws, and they asked Judge Harry Leinenweber to send reporters and spectators out of the courtroom while jurors watched them. The judge rejected the request.

After the acquittal in the 2008 trial, some jurors said afterward that they had no choice but to acquit Kelly because the girl — by then an adult — didn't testify. On the stand Thursday, Jane conceded that she lied to a grand jury in 2002 when she said it wasn't her in the video.

Jane has testified that she met Kelly through an aunt who worked with him, and that she asked Kelly to be her godfather when she was 13. She told jurors she was 15 when they first had intercourse.

Kelly, who rose from poverty on Chicago's South Side to become a star singer, songwriter and producer, knew a conviction in 2008 would effectively end his life as he knew it, and so prosecutors say he conspired to fix that trial.

Graham effort to delay testimony in election probe rejected

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

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ATLANTA (AP) — A federal judge on Friday said Sen. Lindsey Graham's appearance before a special grand jury investigating whether then-President Donald Trump and others illegally tried to influence the 2020 election in Georgia should not be delayed to allow him to continue to challenge it in court.

Earlier this week, U.S. District Judge Leigh Martin May ordered Graham to honor his subpoena for the special grand jury. Graham's attorneys appealed that order to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and asked May to stay her ruling and prohibit the special grand jury from questioning him while that appeal plays out. May declined that request in her order on Friday.

"Under the circumstances, further delay of Senator Graham's testimony would greatly compound the overall delay in carrying out the grand jury's investigation," May wrote. "Further delay thus poses a significant risk of overall hindrance to the grand jury's investigation, and the Court therefore finds that granting a stay would almost certainly result in material injury to the grand jury and its investigation."

Graham is currently scheduled to testify on Tuesday. But he still has another motion to stay May's ruling pending before the 11th Circuit.

Representatives for Graham did not immediately respond to messages on Friday seeking comment.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis opened the investigation early last year and in July filed petitions seeking to compel testimony from seven Trump advisers and associates, including Graham.

Former New York mayor and Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani, who's been told he's a target of the investigation, testified before the special grand jury for nearly six hours on Wednesday. Two other lawyers who advised Trump, John Eastman and Jenna Ellis, were ordered this week to appear before the panel later this month. Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp filed a motion Wednesday seeking to quash a subpoena for his testimony.

The investigation, originally prompted by a Jan. 2, 2021, phone call between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, is one of several pending legal threats Trump faces. Willis has said she's considering seeking to compel the former president himself to testify before the special grand jury.

Attorneys for Graham, a South Carolina Republican, have argued that a provision of the U.S. Constitution provides absolute protection against a senator being questioned about legislative acts. But the judge found there are "considerable areas of potential grand jury inquiry" that fall outside that provision's scope. The judge also rejected Graham's argument that the principle of "sovereign immunity" protects a U.S. senator from being summoned by a state prosecutor.

Graham also argued that Willis, a Democrat, had not demonstrated extraordinary circumstances necessary to compel testimony from a high-ranking official. But the judge disagreed, finding that Willis had shown "extraordinary circumstances and a special need" for Graham's testimony on issues related to an alleged attempt to influence or disrupt the election in Georgia.

Willis and her team have said they want to ask Graham about two phone calls they say he made to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and his staff shortly after the 2020 general election. During those calls, Graham asked 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 found there was no evidence of voter fraud sufficient to affect the outcome of the election.

In asking May to stay her decision, Graham's lawyers argued that his rights to immunity would be violated the moment he was questioned.

Willis' team responded that delaying Graham's testimony would harm the investigation. In addition to facts he knows, he's also expected to shed light on other sources of information that the special grand jury may want to pursue, they wrote. So waiting to talk to him "could ultimately delay" the entire investigation.

In the separate motion for a stay filed with the 11th Circuit, Graham's attorneys argue that on Wednesday Chief Senior Assistant District Attorney Donald Wakeford agreed to postpone the scheduled testimony pending the outcome of the appeal. They included a voicemail Wakeford left for Graham attorney Brian Lea.

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Lea says in a declaration filed with the motion that later that same afternoon Wakeford confirmed Graham's grand jury appearance wouldn't move forward until the appeal was resolved. But then Wakeford sent an email 20 minutes later "stating that he did not want to characterize the contents of our response before it is written," Lea wrote.

Lea said he reached out to Wakeford several more times by phone and email but got no response until Wakeford sent an email at 4:40 a.m. Friday saying the district attorney's office intended to oppose the stay and would argue that Graham should appear before the special grand jury as planned.

Large fire consumes boats, buildings, vehicles at boatyard

MATTAPOISETT, Mass. (AP) — A huge fire at a Massachusetts marina turned several boats, buildings and vehicles into burned-out shells Friday, producing a plume of black smoke so thick it was picked up by weather radar.

Aerial video taken by WCVB-TV showed much of the boatyard in Mattapoisett engulfed in flames, with the fire apparently limited to buildings and boats on land. A firefighting vessel could be seen pulled up to the dock, getting as close as possible as it sprayed a jet of water onto one of the smoldering sailboats.

"A boat caught fire in one of the sheds, and it went up very, very fast," Tim Price, a mechanic at the boatyard, told WJAR-TV. "Everything went up. I think we lost everything."

Price said he knew of one person who was injured, but did not elaborate.

The cause of blaze is under investigation, and officials at the Mattapoisett fire and police departments said no one was available to comment. Firefighters from around the region responded to the blaze, including from as far as Providence, Rhode Island, about 30 miles away.

Drought conditions and high winds Friday in the Mattapoisett area had prompted the National Weather Service to issue a warning of elevated fire risk. The blaze at the marina sent dense black smoke over southeastern Massachusetts that could be seen for miles.

The Weather Service said on Twitter that its radar had detected "what is most likely a smoke plume" in Mattapoisett.

Mattapoisett resident Richard Walker, 72, was heading out on a motorcycle ride when he spotted the cloud of smoke. He said he could see it 5 miles (8 kilometers) away as he continued on his ride.

"There were flames and billowing black smoke. So much of it," Walker said. "Thankfully, it looks like a lot of people had their boats out in the harbor. There didn't seem to be too many in the yard."

Pamela Fleming saw the fire from the back deck of her summer home. She said the fire knocked out power to the area and forced the closure of a road to a popular beach and lighthouse just beyond the marina.

"The popping sounds of all the fuel and other combustibles exploding was very eerie," Fleming said. "The smoke was aggressively billowing from the area. As soon as it rose, there was more black heavy rolling smoke to take its place."

Several other people posted images and video of the fire and smoke on social media.

The Mattapoisett Boatyard's website says it's been a family-owned marina since 1962, catering primarily to recreational boaters, and has the capacity to store up to 150 vessels during the summer that aren't in use or are for sale.

Russia, Ukraine spar over fighting near nuclear facility

By PAUL BYRNE Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A fire at a munitions depot inside Russia forced the evacuation of two villages near the border with Ukraine, an official said Friday, while two civilians were reported wounded by Russian shelling near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant as both sides traded accusations about fighting near the facility in southern Ukraine.

The fire late Thursday struck the munitions storage building near the village of Timonovo in Russia's Belgorod region on Ukraine's northeastern border. About 1,100 people live in Timonovo and Soloti, about 15

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miles (25 kilometers) from the border. No one was hurt, said Belgorod regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov. The fire came days after another ammunition depot exploded on the Crimean Peninsula, a Russian-occupied territory on the Black Sea that was annexed by Moscow in 2014.

Last week, nine Russian warplanes were reported destroyed at an airbase on Crimea, demonstrating both the Russians' vulnerability and the Ukrainians' capacity to strike deep behind enemy lines.

Ukrainian authorities have stopped short of publicly claiming responsibility. But President Volodymyr Zelenskyy alluded to Ukrainian attacks behind enemy lines after the blasts in Crimea, which Russia has blamed on "sabotage."

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said in televised remarks Friday that statements from Ukrainian officials about striking facilities in Crimea mark "an escalation of the conflict openly encouraged by the United States and its NATO allies."

Ryabkov said Russian officials had warned the U.S. against such actions in phone calls with high-level members of the Biden administration, adding that "deep and open U.S. involvement" in the war in Ukraine "effectively puts the U.S. on the brink of becoming a party to the conflict."

In spite of the latest incidents, a Western official said the war is at a "near operational standstill," with neither side able to launch major offensives.

"The whole tempo of the campaign has slowed down, partly because both sides have become more conscious that this is a marathon not a sprint and that expenditure rates and conserving their munitions is important," said official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he's not authorized to discuss intelligence matters publicly.

Later Friday, a Ukrainian official said two civilians were wounded by Russian shelling of Ukrainian communities neighboring the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, the latest in a long string of such shelling accusations over the past weeks.

"A new enemy attack on the Nikopol district. Five shells fired by Russian cannon artillery flew into the residential areas of Marhanets," Valentyn Reznichenko, the regional governor, said on Telegram. Both Nikopol and Marhanets are Ukrainian-controlled towns which face the nuclear plant across the Dnieper River.

"According to preliminary reports, two people have been wounded: an 18-year-old girl and a 40-year-old man. Both are in hospital," Reznichenko added.

Kyiv and Moscow continued to accuse each other for the shelling near Europe's largest nuclear power plant.

A senior official at the Ukrainian presidential office told reporters "the threat of an environmental catastrophe on a global scale" remains due to the "periodic shelling" of the plant by the Russian army.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the presidential office, said at the same briefing that Russian shelling had destroyed "more than 3,700 infrastructure objects" in the vicinity of the plant, including heating, electricity, gas and water supply facilities.

Zelenskyy also stressed the situation around the Zaporizhzhia plant in his Friday evening address.

"If Russia's radiation blackmail continues, this summer may go down in the history of various European countries as one of the most tragic of all time. Because not a single instruction at any nuclear power plant in the world provides a procedure in case a terrorist state turns a nuclear power plant into a target," he said.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin said that Russian President Vladimir Putin told French counterpart Emmanuel Macron in their first phone conversation since May 28 that Ukrainian shelling around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant "raised the threat of a large-scale catastrophe that could lead to radioactive contamination of large territories."

The Zaporizhzhia nuclear facility in Ukraine's south has been controlled by Russian forces since shortly after the invasion began on Feb. 24. Ukraine has accused Russia of storing troops and weapons at the plant and using its grounds to launch strikes against Ukrainian-controlled territory. Ukrainian officials and military analysts say Moscow's forces have cynically employed the plant as a shield, knowing that the Ukrainians would be hesitant to fire back.

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Russia has denied the accusations and, in turn, accused Ukrainian forces of repeatedly shelling the plant. The French presidency said in a statement that Macron "underlined his concerns" regarding the situation at the Zaporizhzhia plant and expressed his support for the deployment of an International Atomic Energy Agency mission to the site "as soon as possible."

Putin agreed to the mission's deployment under the discussed terms, according to the French statement. The Kremlin said that "the Russian side reaffirmed its readiness to offer the necessary assistance to the agency's experts."

Yevgeny Balitsky, the Moscow-backed chief of temporary administration for the Russia-controlled part of the Zaporizhzhia region, said Friday that an IAEA mission could approach the plant from Ukrainian-held territory, a shift in Moscow's position which previously had suggested that the mission should travel to the plant from Crimea.

"I believe they may also come from the side of Ukraine," Balitsky said in televised remarks. "We can safely bring them to the plant and show where the fire is coming from and who is shooting."

Mikhail Ulyanov, the Russian envoy to international organizations in Vienna where the IAEA is based, said he believes a visit by the agency could realistically take place in early September.

IN OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

— The state-owned energy company Gazprom announced that a key Russian natural gas pipeline will shut down for three days of maintenance at the end of this month, raising economic pressure on Germany and other European countries that depend on the fuel to power industry, generate electricity and heat homes. The latest shutdown will come a month after Gazprom restored natural gas supply through the pipeline to only a fifth of its capacity after a previous shutoff for maintenance. Russia has blamed the reductions through the pipeline on technical problems but Germany has called the shutoffs a political move by the Kremlin to sow uncertainty and push up prices amid the conflict in Ukraine.

— U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres visited a port in the coastal Ukrainian city of Odesa, where he praised ongoing efforts to maintain a shipping corridor on the Black Sea allowing for the export of vital Ukrainian grain shipments. Guterres said that 25 ships have departed from Odesa and other Ukrainian ports since Russia and Ukraine signed a four-month grain export deal in July. Those ships have carried over 600,000 tons of grain and other food supplies like wheat, corn, sunflower oil and soy beans, Guterres said.

— Responding to a report that Russia is planning to divert the electricity from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant to the Russian grid, the U.N. chief said the U.N. supports demilitarizing the plant, saying if this is done the problem will be solved. "And obviously, the electricity from Zaporizhzhia is Ukrainian electricity, and it's necessary, especially during the winter for the Ukrainian people, and this principle must be fully respected," Guterres said.

— At least five people were killed and 10 others wounded by the Russian shelling of towns and villages in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, according to regional authorities. Russian shelling of the city of Kharkiv also killed at least one civilian early Friday. Russian missiles again struck port facilities and a university building in the southern port city of Mykolaiv.

— The Ukrainian military said it had thwarted over a dozen Russian attempts to advance in the eastern Donetsk region, at the forefront of Moscow's offensive. In its regular social media update, the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces also reported that Russia continued to shell towns and villages across Ukraine's south and east.

— The Russian-installed governor of Crimea's largest city said that a drone had been shot down there. "The air defense system is functioning in Sevastopol," Mikhail Razvozhayev said on Telegram. "According to preliminary data, UAVs. The targets were shot down," he said. On Thursday, Razvozhayev reported that a drone had been shot down near Sevastopol's local airport. His claims could not be immediately verified.

Kobe Bryant's widow says crash photos turned grief to horror

By ANDREW DALTON Associated Press

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LOS ANGELES (AP) — Vanessa Bryant testified Friday that she was only beginning to grieve the loss of her husband, basketball star Kobe Bryant, and their 13-year-old daughter Gianna when she was faced with the fresh horror of learning that sheriff's deputies and firefighters had shot and shared photos of their bodies at the site of the helicopter crash that killed them.

"I felt like I wanted to run, run down the block and scream," she said, her tears turning to sobs and her voice quickening. "It was like the feeling of wanting to run down a pier and jump into the water. The problem is I can't escape. I can't escape my body."

During her three hours on the witness stand in a Los Angeles federal court, where she is suing LA County for invasion of privacy over the pictures, Bryant said she had fought to get through both public and private memorials for her loved ones and seven others who were killed Jan. 26, 2020, and thought she was ready to really begin the grieving process about a month later. She was with friends and her surviving daughters, and holding her 7-month-old baby, when she received a call about a Los Angeles Times story on the crash-site photos.

"I bolted out of the house and around to the side so my girls wouldn't see," she said. "I was blindsided again, devastated, hurt. I trusted them. I trusted them not to do these things."

Evidence presented at trial showed that a sheriff's deputy showed a photo of Bryant's body to a bartender as he drank, spurring an official complaint from another man drinking nearby, and that firefighters shared them with each other at an awards banquet. Others shared them with spouses. An attorney for the county said the photos had been taken only because they were essential for assessing the site moments after the crash, and that when LA County Sheriff Alex Villanueva learned they were being shared, he demanded they all be deleted.

No photos emerged publicly, but Vanessa Bryant said she has constant worry that some still might.

"I live in fear every day of being on social media and these popping up," she testified. "I live in fear of my daughters being on social media and these popping up."

She said the thought keeps her awake at night as she lies next to her 3-year-old and her 5-year-old, and sometimes leads to panic attacks in which she can't breathe.

Under cross-examination from J. Mira Hashmall, the lawyer representing LA County at the trial, Bryant testified that she had not received any medical diagnosis of having had panic attacks, or any mental health disorder, nor had she taken any medications for them.

She said she had talked to a therapist for about 18 months after the crash, but had not since.

"I feel like sometimes it helps," Bryant said, "but sometimes it's completely draining."

Hashmall spent much of her 90-minute cross-examination going through the business roles Bryant now plays, including acting as president of her husband's multimedia company, Granity Studios, overseeing the publication of one book he wrote and helping to finish and publish another, heading the foundation started for Kobe and Gianna, and establishing several other companies.

Hashmall suggested that Bryant's ability to do all of this meant she was functioning well and was not overcome with fear and anxiety.

"It sounds like on top of everything else you're juggling a business empire," Hashmall said at one point.

"For me, it's a labor of love," said Bryant, who remained calm and composed during cross-examination.

She cried frequently, and laughed occasionally, during the questioning of her attorney Luis Li, who had her describe her life with her "proud girl-dad" husband and their daughters.

"He was just such a beautiful and devoted father," she said.

Bryant chronicled the day of the crash, her anguish, and her frustration at trying to learn whether her husband and daughter were still alive after she initially heard from an assistant that there were five survivors.

She described Sheriff Villanueva coming into a room where she waited at Lost Hills sheriff's station and confirming that her husband and daughter had been killed. He asked if there was anything he could do for her.

"I told him, if you can't bring my babies back, then please secure the area," Bryant said. "I'm concerned about paparazzi."

"Did the sheriff tell you one of his deputies had already gone to the hill to take close-up pictures of crash victims?" Li asked.

"No," Bryant responded.

During cross-examination, Hashmall said the deputy, Doug Johnson, who hiked through tough terrain into the hills in northern Los Angeles County to the crash site and shot the photos that were later shared, was only trying to use them to assess the situation.

"You can understand why he would want the same information you did," Hashmall said.

"I don't think you need to take close-up photos of people to determine how many people are on an aircraft," Bryant replied. "I think he could have just counted."

Bryant's side rested its case after her testimony, which came on the eighth day of the trial.

Walmart expands abortion coverage for employees

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Walmart, the nation's largest employer, is expanding its abortion coverage for employees after staying largely mum on the issue following the Supreme Court ruling that scrapped a nationwide right to abortion.

In a memo sent to employees on Friday, the company said its health care plans will now cover abortion for employees "when there is a health risk to the mother, rape or incest, ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage or lack of fetal viability."

Previously, the company's benefits plan had covered abortion only in cases "when the health of the mother would be in danger if the fetus were carried to term, the fetus could not survive the birthing process, or death would be imminent after birth," according to a copy of the policy viewed by The Associated Press but not confirmed by Walmart.

Donna Morris, the retailer's chief people officer, said in the memo to staff that the new policy will also offer "travel support" for workers seeking abortions covered under its health care plans — as well as their dependents — so they can access services that are not available within 100 miles of their locations.

Walmart employs nearly 1.6 million people in the U.S. In Arkansas, where the company is based, abortion is banned under all circumstances unless the procedure is needed to protect the life of the mother in a medical emergency. There are no exceptions for rape or incest. That means under the revised policy, Walmart employees can travel out of the state — or any other state that bans abortion for rape and incest — to obtain the procedure through the retailer's health plans.

Several companies — including Meta, American Express and Bank of America — have said they will cover travel costs for their employees in the aftermath of the high court ruling that tossed out *Roe v. Wade*, including elective abortions. But a Walmart spokesperson did not immediately reply for a request for comment on whether any of the company's revised policy will cover elective abortions as well.

"It's a step in the right direction, but it's simply not far enough for a company that employs that many women," said Bianca Agustin, director of corporate accountability program for United for Respect, a group that advocates for Walmart workers. She said the organization will be incorporating "safe abortions" for employees in their list of demands pressing the company for better pay and benefits.

Meanwhile, many other corporations, and organizations that represent some of the nation's most powerful companies, have continued to stay quiet on the issue.

The careful expansion of Walmart's abortion policy shows it is attempting to balance different pressures and opinions from employees, investors and other stakeholders, said Vanessa Burbano, a professor at Columbia University's business school who researches how companies take social stances.

"It's much trickier than a lot of people initially think it is," Burbano said. "It's not like all of their stakeholders are of the same opinion on any of these issues, which is what makes it so challenging. They're trying to figure out how to thread that needle."

In the memo sent Friday, the company said it will also launch a center that provides fertility services to employees, such as in vitro fertilization. Additionally, it vowed to add surrogacy support and increase its

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financial aid for adoptions from \$5,000 to \$20,000. In June, Walmart said it would expand its offering of doulas — or people who assist women during pregnancies — to address racial disparities in maternal care.

Buttigieg warns airlines to help travelers or face new rules

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg has warned airlines that his department could draft new rules around passenger rights if the carriers don't give more help to travelers trapped by flight cancellations and delays.

Buttigieg is asking airline CEOs to, at a minimum, provide lodging for passengers stranded overnight at an airport and give out meal vouchers for delays of three hours or longer when the disruption is caused by something in the airline's control.

The Transportation Department on Friday released a copy of the letters, which it said were sent to CEOs of 10 U.S. airlines including the major ones, their regional affiliates, and budget carriers.

A spokeswoman for Airlines for America, a trade group whose members include American, United, Delta and Southwest, said airlines "strive to provide the highest level of customer service." She said the airlines are committed to overcoming challenges including a tight labor market.

Buttigieg's agency recently proposed rules around refunds for passengers whose flights are canceled or rescheduled. He told the CEOs the department is considering additional rules "that would further expand the rights of airline passengers who experience disruptions."

Buttigieg has been sparring with the airlines since late spring over high numbers of canceled and delayed flights. In his latest salvo, he told airline CEOs he appreciates that airlines have stepped up hiring and trimmed schedules to better match the number of flights they can handle.

"Still, the level of disruption Americans have experienced this summer is unacceptable," he wrote.

The head of another airline trade group took issue with Buttigieg's praise of schedule cuts. Faye Malarkey Black, president of the Regional Airline Association, said those cutbacks are being driven by a pilot shortage and are especially harmful to people who use smaller airports.

"There is a lot of responsibility to go around in this crisis and solving (the pilot shortage) means solving it for the long term, not just trimming back capacity until the only people with air service are those traveling between the large urban centers," Black said.

So far this year, airlines have canceled about 146,000 flights, or 2.6%, and nearly 1.3 million flights have been delayed, according to tracking service FlightAware. The rate of cancellations is up about one-third from the same period in 2019, before the pandemic, and the rate of delays is up nearly one-fourth.

Federal officials have blamed many of the disruptions on understaffing at airlines, which encouraged employees to quit after the pandemic started. The airlines have countered by blaming staffing problems at the Federal Aviation Administration, which hires air traffic controllers.

Authors and friends rally and read for Salman Rushdie

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Friends and fellow authors spoke out on Salman Rushdie's behalf during a rally Friday on the steps of the main branch of the New York Public Library, one week after he was attacked onstage in the western part of the state and hospitalized with stab wounds.

Rushdie's condition has improved, and, according to his literary agent, he has been removed from a ventilator.

Jeffrey Eugenides, Tina Brown and Kiran Desai were among those who shared wishes for a full recovery, told stories of Rushdie as an inspiration and defender of free expression, and read passages from his books, essays and speeches, including from "The Satanic Verses," the 1988 novel that was condemned by some Muslims as blasphemous.

Rushdie spent years in hiding after Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a 1989 edict, a fatwa, calling for his death, but had traveled freely over the past two decades.

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The hourlong "Stand With Salman" gathering was presented in part by the library, by Rushdie's publisher, Penguin Random House, and by the literary and human rights organization PEN America. Hundreds were in attendance, many affiliated with PEN, of which the 75-year-old Rushdie is a former president.

"He's been a constant, indefatigable champion of words and of writers attacked for the purported crime of their work," said the day's first speaker, PEN CEO Suzanne Nossel. "Today, we will celebrate Salman for what he has endured, but even more importantly, because of what he has engendered — the stories, characters, metaphors and images he has given to the world."

The rally did not include any new words from Rushdie, but Nossel said he was aware of the event and even made suggestions for what to read. Rushdie's son Zafar Rushdie, who has been with his father, tweeted that "it was great to see a crowd gathered" outside the library.

"Stand With Salman" took place the day after a judge in Mayville, New York, denied bail to 24-year-old Hadi Matar, who has pleaded not guilty to attempted murder and assault. While in jail, Matar told the New York Post that he disdained Rushdie as anti-Muslim and expressed admiration for the Ayatollah.

On Friday, other readers included the author and journalist Gay Talese, author and former PEN president Andrew Solomon, and the poet, lawyer and activist Reginald Dwayne Betts. Actor Aasif Mandvi read from Rushdie's upcoming novel, "Victory City," which he completed before the attack and includes the passage "I myself am nothing now. All that remains is the city of words. Words are the only victors."

Eugenides, whose novels include the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Middlesex," remembered traveling to London in the early 1980s. Eugenides was 20 and Rushdie's breakthrough novel "Midnight's Children" had recently been published. He knew Rushdie lived there and decided he wanted to meet him. It was years before "The Satanic Verses," and Eugenides found his name and address in the phone book.

"I took the tube out to his house. As it turned out, Salman wasn't at home; he was in Italy, vacationing," said Eugenides, who was greeted by Rushdie's then-mother-in-law and left a note for the author.

"That was the world we used to live in," Eugenides added.

Islamic State 'Beatle' gets life term for US hostage deaths

By MATTHEW BARAKAT Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — El Shafee Elsheikh, who was formally sentenced to life in prison Friday for a leading role in the beheading deaths of American hostages, had a somewhat whimsical nickname as a so-called "Beatle" that belied the viciousness of his conduct.

In fact, he is the most notorious and highest-ranking member of the Islamic State group to ever be convicted in a U.S. court, prosecutors said at his sentencing hearing in U.S. District Court in Alexandria.

Elsheikh and British counterparts Alexandra Kotey and Mohammed Emwazi led an Islamic State hostage-taking scheme that took roughly two dozen Westerners captive a decade ago. The hostages dubbed them Beatles because of their accents. Their appearance, always in masks, invoked dread among the hostages for the sadism they displayed.

"This prosecution unmasked the barbaric and sadistic ISIS Beatles," said First Assistant U.S. Attorney Raj Parekh.

The life sentence was a foregone conclusion after a jury convicted him of hostage taking resulting in death and other crimes earlier this year.

The convictions carried a mandatory life sentence. The U.S. agreed not to pursue a death sentence as part of a deal that ensured extradition of Elsheikh and his friend, Kotey, who has already been sentenced to life. Emwazi was killed in a drone strike.

The convictions revolved around the deaths of four American hostages: James Foley, Steven Sotloff, Peter Kassig, and Kayla Mueller. All but Mueller were executed in videotaped beheadings circulated online. Mueller was forced into slavery and raped multiple times by Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi before she was killed.

They were among 26 hostages taken captive between 2012 and 2015, when the Islamic State group controlled large swaths of Iraq and Syria.

Parekh said it was difficult to convey the brutality of Elsheikh's actions. "We lack the vocabulary of such

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pain," he said, paraphrasing Dante's Inferno.

Still, victims of Elsheikh and the Beatles testified at Friday's hearing and gave voice to what they experienced. Danish photographer Daniel Rye Ottosen, who was released after a ransom was paid, said the worst moments were times of silence during and after captivity when he was alone with his thoughts.

He said when Elsheikh and the Beatles beat him up, it was almost a relief.

"I knew I could only concentrate on my pain, which is much easier than being alone with your thoughts," he said.

Ottosen was particularly close to Foley, and memorized a goodbye letter that Foley wrote to his family so he could dictate it to Foley's parents when he was released.

Foley's mother, Diane Foley, said holding Elsheikh accountable at trial sends a message of deterrence to other would-be hostage takers.

"Hatred truly overwhelmed your humanity," she told Elsheikh on Friday, which was the eighth anniversary of James Foley's beheading.

At trial, surviving hostages testified that they dreaded the Beatles' appearance at the various prisons to which they were constantly shuttled and relocated. Elsheikh and the other Beatles played a key role in the hostage negotiations, getting hostages to email their families with demands for payments.

They also routinely beat and tortured the hostages, forcing them to fight each other to the point of passing out, threatening them with waterboarding and forcing them view images of slain hostages.

Elsheikh, 34, did not speak during Friday's hearing. His lawyer, Zachary Deubler, said Elsheikh will appeal his conviction. Elsheikh's lawyers had argued that his confessions should have been ruled inadmissible because of alleged mistreatment after he was captured by Kurdish-led Syrian Defense Forces in 2018.

At Friday's hearing, Deubler confined his arguments to a request that Elsheikh not be sent to the supermax prison facility in Florence, Colorado, where he would face solitary confinement for the rest of his life. Deubler said a designation to Florence is almost a certainty unless the judge recommends otherwise.

Judge T.S. Ellis III declined to make any recommendation to the Bureau of Prisons.

"The behavior of this defendant and his co-defendant can only be described as horrific, barbaric, brutal, callous and, of course, criminal," Ellis said.

Outside court, Mueller's parents said they are still seeking information about her death and to recover her remains. Carl Mueller said he could not help but reflect on the disparate outcomes for European hostages — who were released after ransoms were paid — and American hostages who were killed because the U.S. refuses to pay ransom.

"Hopefully our government in the future will do like so many others do, and get them home, not leave them," he said.

The Muellers and Diane Foley both said they have been able to meet with Kotey, whose guilty plea requires him to meet with interested families. Marsha Mueller declined to comment on her conversation.

Dian Foley said she met with Kotey three different times, and it was beneficial to her.

"I was able to share some of who Jim was and he was able to share some of why he felt it was a war situation and his excuses," Foley said. "But he did articulate some remorse and I was grateful for that."

Foot found in Yellowstone hot spring linked to July death

By AMY BETH HANSON and THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Part of a human foot found in a shoe floating in a hot spring in Yellowstone National Park earlier this week is believed to be linked to the death of a person last month, park officials said Friday.

The July 31 death is being investigated but officials do not suspect foul play, park officials said in a statement. The statement did not disclose details about how the death is believed to have happened, identify the person who died or say why officials do not suspect foul play.

The shoe was recovered from the park's Abyss Pool on Tuesday after an employee spotted it, park officials said.

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News of that discovery led a man from Maryland to contact the National Park Service to report that he and his family had spotted a shoe, floating sole up, in the hot spring on the morning of Aug. 11.

Chris Quinn of Pasadena, Maryland, said in an interview that he sent a photo of the shoe to the park service.

Park spokesperson Linda Veress said in an email that officials could not confirm whether the shoe that was found was the same type of shoe in Quinn's photo.

Abyss Pool, west of the West Thumb area of Yellowstone Lake, is 53 feet (16 meters) deep and the temperature is about 140 degrees Fahrenheit (60 Celsius), park officials said.

Park visitors are warned to stay on the boardwalks and trails in thermal areas, where some of the pools and springs have a thin, breakable crust covering the scalding and sometimes acidic water.

At least 22 people are known to have died from hot spring-related injuries in and around the 3,471-square-mile (9,000 square kilometer) national park since 1890, park officials have said.

The most recent death happened in June 2016 when a man from Portland, Oregon, left a boardwalk in the the park's Norris Geyser Basin, slipped on gravel and fell into a boiling, acidic spring. No significant human remains were recovered.

The nation's first national park has drawn more than 4 million visitors annually in recent years, with the exception of 2020, when it was briefly closed due to the pandemic.

Historic flooding forced the closure of the entire park for part of June. The park's northern and north-eastern entrances are still closed to vehicles.

Judge: Prosecutors cannot enforce Michigan's abortion ban

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press/Report for America

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — A Michigan judge on Friday blocked county prosecutors from enforcing the state's 1931 ban on abortion for the foreseeable future, after two days of witness testimony from abortion experts, providers and the state's chief medical officer.

The ruling follows a state Court of Appeals ruling this month that county prosecutors were not covered by a May order and could enforce the prohibition following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling overturning Roe v. Wade.

"The harm to the body of women and people capable of pregnancy in not issuing the injunction could not be more real, clear, present and dangerous to the court," Oakland County Judge Jacob Cunningham said during his ruling Friday.

David Kallman, an attorney for two Republican county prosecutors, said an appeal is planned.

"The judge ignored all of the clear legal errors and problems in this case, it appears to me, simply because the issue is abortion," Kallman told The Associated Press following the hearing.

Cunningham filed a restraining order against county prosecutors hours after the Aug. 1 appeals court decision and following a request from attorneys representing Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

Although a majority of prosecutors in counties where there are abortion clinics have said they will not enforce the ban, Republican prosecutors in Kent, Jackson and Macomb counties have said they should be able to enforce the 1931 law. Macomb, which is just north of Detroit, and Kent, in western Michigan, are the state's third- and fourth-most populated counties, respectively.

Cunningham listened to arguments Wednesday and Thursday in Pontiac before granting the preliminary injunction, which is expected to keep abortion legal throughout the state until the Michigan Supreme Court or voters could decide in the fall.

In his ruling, Cunningham found all three of the state's witnesses "extremely credible" while dismissing testimony from the defense witnesses as "unhelpful and biased."

The 1931 law in Michigan, which was triggered after the U.S. Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, bans abortion in all instances except the life of the mother. The dormant ban was retroactively blocked from going into effect in May when Judge Elizabeth Gleicher issued a preliminary injunction.

The state Court of Appeals later said that the preliminary injunction only applied to the attorney general's

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office, meaning that providers could get charged with a felony by some county prosecutors.

While Kallman said during closing arguments Thursday that granting a preliminary injunction isn't how laws should be changed, attorneys representing Whitmer argued that allowing county prosecutors to decide whether to enforce the 1931 ban would cause confusion.

"I'm relieved that everyone in this state knows that it doesn't matter what county you live in now, you are not as a provider going to be prosecuted," Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald said following the ruling. Oakland is the second-most populated Michigan county. The prosecutor for Wayne County, which includes Detroit and is the state's most populous, had also said she would not pursue such cases.

A ballot initiative seeking to enshrine abortion rights into the state's constitution turned in 753,759 signatures in July and is expected to ultimately decide the status abortion access in Michigan. The amendment awaits final approval for the November ballot by the state's Board of Canvassers.

"This court finds it is overwhelmingly in the public's best interest to let the people of the great state of Michigan decide this matter at the ballot box," Cunningham said Friday.

The status of abortion in Michigan is expected to drastically impact the battleground state's November general election, where Whitmer and Attorney General Dana Nessel, also a Democrat, have made abortion rights a centerpiece of their reelection campaigns.

"Absent this preliminary injunction, physicians face a very real threat of prosecution depending on where they practice," Nessel said in a statement issued following Friday's ruling.

'I lost everything': Algeria reels from deadly wildfires

Firefighters in Algeria have extinguished all but one of over 50 wildfires that ravaged the country this week, leaving at least 37 people dead and consuming farms, crops and cork forests, authorities said Friday.

Visibly anguished, farmer Ali Gharsi walked past dead animals through a fire-devastated area in the El Tarf region near Algeria's Mediterranean Sea coast and the Tunisian border.

"My livestock is lost as is the food for it," he said. "I lost everything, really I have nothing left."

Four people have been arrested on suspicion of setting fire to crops in El Tarf, the epicenter of the latest wildfires, according to the official news agency APS.

Algerian Prime Minister Aïme Benabderrahmane, visiting the scene Thursday, said the larger problem was the exceptional heat and winds fanning the flames across the North African region. Similar fires and extreme weather linked to climate change have hit countries around Europe this month.

"Today, around 4:00 a.m., we managed to put an end to all the outbreaks of fires across the country," except for one in Skikda that is contained but not fully out, Farouk Achour, the communications director at Algeria's civil protection service, said Friday on national radio. He listed more than 50 scattered fires.

In El Tarf, residents still in shock took stock of the damage.

"People died and nobody came," said Hakim Bouachiha, a security worker at the Berabtia Zoo, describing a three-hour wait for emergency crews.

The death toll included a family of five found in their home, tourists visiting the coast and eight people on a public bus that was surprised by flames in a mountainous region.

El Tarf resident Mohamed Gefaïfia described seeing a woman next to the bus "who had protected her children by covering them with her body, but she ended up dying, poor thing."

Forensic experts are working to identify the dead and combing fire-afflicted areas to check if there are any more victims, civil protection officials said.

Friday's weather was cooler but special end-of-summer concerts and cultural activities have been canceled because of the fires.

Algerians from elsewhere sent trucks loaded with food, medicines, blankets and clothes to El Tarf, and world leaders called Algeria's president to offer their support.

The Justice Ministry has set up a commission to investigate the source of the fires.

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

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By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

IRS special agent job ad misrepresented online

CLAIM: An online job ad shows that all new employees that the IRS intends to hire after a funding boost in the Inflation Reduction Act will be required to carry a firearm and use deadly force if necessary.

THE FACTS: The job description does not apply to most potential new employees that the IRS will hire in the coming years, and the vast majority of IRS workers are not armed. A legitimate job ad for special agents within the small law enforcement division of the IRS that works on criminal investigations was misrepresented online following the passage this month of a \$740 billion economic package that includes nearly \$80 billion for the IRS. Many posts in recent days shared a screenshot that features the IRS logo and the text, "Major Duties." The listed duties on the image include being able to "carry a firearm and be willing to use deadly force, if necessary." Social media users claimed that the image was a job ad for thousands of new IRS employees that will be hired as a result of the bill. "The IRS is looking to fill 87,000 positions," one Facebook user who shared the image wrote. "Requirements include working min '50 hours per week, which may include irregular hours, and be on-call 24/7, including holidays and weekends' and 'Carry a firearm and be willing to use deadly force, if necessary.'" Another Twitter user wrote: "Want to be one of the new 87,000 IRS agents? Are you willing to carry a firearm and use DEADLY FORCE? This is not at all concerning." These social media users are falsely depicting a legitimate job ad for a special agent with IRS Criminal Investigation as a generic ad for all new positions. While that language does not currently appear on the IRS web page advertising the special agent role, a search of the Internet Archive shows that the same language can be found on the page as recently as Aug. 11. Justin Cole, a spokesperson for IRS Criminal Investigation, told the AP that the screenshots circulating online appear to show the special agent web page and confirmed that the language had been on the site but was removed. He said it was removed in error amid the spate of misinformation about IRS employees carrying weapons, but the language will be added back to the web page. Special agents with IRS Criminal Investigation, who investigate criminal tax violations and other related financial crimes, are the only IRS employees who carry firearms, according to Anny Pachner, a spokesperson for the division. Special agents compose a small sliver of the IRS workforce. There are about 2,000 special agents within the agency, which has roughly 80,000 total employees. The division dates back to 1919 and has always employed armed agents. The agency is currently hiring 300 special agents, according to the online job posting. Among the agents' duties are executing search and arrest warrants, as well as seizures, per the posting. This is very different from the work of other IRS employees. For instance, revenue agents work on complex audits of corporations, while customer service representatives answer tax-related questions, according to the IRS. Neither roles are law enforcement positions. The claim that the IRS is going to hire 87,000 new agents in general due to the Inflation Reduction Act is also misleading, as the AP has previously reported. The figure comes from a prior Treasury Department proposal to hire roughly that many IRS employees over the next decade, but there is no explicit mandate for such a workforce in the act, officials and experts say. Many new IRS hires will replace employees who are expected to retire or quit, and not all of them will be auditors, nor will a majority of them be gun-carrying agents.

— Associated Press writer Josh Kelety in Phoenix contributed this report.

Post falsely claims NYC tap water contaminated with polio

CLAIM: Polio has been found in New York City tap water.

THE FACTS: The virus that causes polio has been detected in New York sewage samples, not tap water. After the New York City and New York state health departments announced last week that poliovirus has been found in city sewage samples, a post claiming that polio had been found in the city's tap water began

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spreading on social media. "Under Biden, they are now finding Polio in tap water," reads the post, which received more than 112,000 likes on Instagram. It includes a screenshot of a tweet featuring a promotional video in which Mayor Eric Adams touts the city's tap water. The tweet captions the Adams video: "Do you all remember that time when Mayor Adam's told everyone in New York City to drink the tap water? Anyways, they found Polio in the New York City water." But poliovirus was found in sewage samples, not tap water, and people cannot contract polio by drinking the city's tap water, multiple city and state officials said. "New Yorkers should know that wastewater is not the same as drinking water, and it cannot be a source of infection or transmission," Samantha Fuld, a spokesperson for the New York State Department of Health, told the AP in an email. Wastewater — used water from toilets, sinks, showers and household appliances — does not come in contact with the city's drinking water, she said, adding there are no plans to test tap water for poliovirus. Edward Timbers, director of communications for the city's Department of Environmental Protection, confirmed to the AP in an email that the city's wastewater cannot end up in its tap water and that the presence of poliovirus in sewage samples does not imply that the virus is also in drinking water. "There are two separate systems in NYC," he said. New York City drinking water is treated with purifying agents to ensure that it is safe to consume and free of pathogens, according to the city's 2021 Drinking Water Supply and Quality Report. Polio can be spread through water contaminated with feces from an infected person, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, though it typically spreads through person-to-person contact. The state Department of Health began monitoring wastewater for signs of poliovirus through repeated sampling after a Rockland County, New York, resident developed paralysis as a result of poliovirus earlier this summer, Fuld said. According to the state agency, the CDC has confirmed the presence of poliovirus in sewage samples from New York City, Rockland County and New York's Orange County. Dr. Kimberly Thompson, a polio expert and president of health nonprofit Kid Risk, Inc., explained that repeated samples of poliovirus found in wastewater are indicators that the virus is spreading, since it can be transmitted through an infected person's feces. A similar false claim purporting monkeypox was found in Georgia drinking water also spread on social media this month.

— Associated Press writer Melissa Goldin in New York contributed this report.

Posts misrepresent failed attempt to recall Los Angeles District Attorney

CLAIM: Los Angeles County disqualified nearly 30% of recall ballots or ballot signatures in the attempted recall of the county's progressive District Attorney George Gascón.

THE FACTS: The county didn't disqualify ballots or ballot signatures. It disqualified nearly 200,000 of about 716,000 signatures on petitions calling for a vote to recall Gascón. Los Angeles County election officials on Monday said that a proposal to recall the county's progressive DA had failed after recall organizers did not gather enough valid petition signatures to schedule an election. Recall organizers needed to gather nearly 570,000 valid petition signatures to schedule an election, but county officials found only about 520,000 were valid after disqualifying nearly 200,000 signatures turned in. That news was misrepresented online this week when Donald Trump Jr. and others falsely claimed that the county had disqualified "ballots" or "ballot signatures." The former president's son made both claims, one on Twitter and one on his father's Truth Social platform. "So in Los Angeles they just disqualified almost 30% of ballot signatures BUT they expect you to believe that LESS THAN 1% of Ballots were faulty in the 2020 Presidential Election!" Trump Jr. tweeted Monday, misspelling Los Angeles. The petition signatures that the county deemed invalid were collected in the community to try to demonstrate voter support for scheduling a recall election. A Monday news release from the county said the signatures were found to be invalid for various reasons, including signers not being registered to vote, signing more than once, listing different addresses than their voter registrations, using signatures that didn't match their voter registration signatures, and living outside the county. The recall committee said it would review rejected signatures and the verification process and "seek to ensure no voter was disenfranchised." Joshua Spivak, an expert on recall elections and a senior fellow at the Hugh L. Carey Institute at Wagner College, said the signature rejection rate was "within the range" of past California recalls. He pointed out that most of the rejections happened not because of the signatures themselves, but because the signers were not registered voters or signed multiple times. A

representative for the Trump Organization did not respond to a request for comment.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report. ____

Denmark didn't 'ban' COVID-19 vaccines for children

CLAIM: Denmark has banned COVID-19 vaccines for children.

THE FACTS: Danish residents under the age of 18 will no longer be automatically eligible for COVID-19 vaccines, but there is no overall ban for that age group, as minors who are at high risk will still be able to get the shots after a medical assessment. Social media users are misrepresenting changes to the Danish Health Authority's fall and winter vaccine program for those under 18 as a "ban." "Denmark coming clean that kids shouldn't be vaccinated with a TOTAL BAN on Covid vax for kids," a Twitter user falsely claimed. But Denmark's guidance around COVID-19 vaccines for children is only being modified. The agency's vaccine program states that since children and young people "very rarely become seriously ill" from the COVID-19 omicron variant, those under the age of 18 will no longer receive the first dose beginning July 1. Starting Sept. 1, youths will no longer get the second dose, although those who are at risk of developing serious illness can still get the vaccine after a medical assessment. "The Danish Health Authority does not currently plan on recommending vaccination to persons under the age of 18 as a group," Lotte Bælum, a spokesperson for the agency, told the AP in an email. "Children and young people who are at increased risk of a serious course of covid-19 will continue to have the option of vaccination after individual assessment." The country will begin the fall and winter COVID-19 vaccination program in October. Around 81% of Denmark's population of 5.8 million has received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine and nearly 62% have received a booster, according to the Danish Ministry of Health. In April, the AP reported that due to Denmark's high vaccine coverage, the country was ending broad vaccination efforts, but people over the age of 50 or older will receive invitations to receive a vaccine. The Danish Health Authority still recommends that people who are completely unvaccinated receive primary vaccination.

CDC confirms Nebraska child died of brain-eating amoeba

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Federal health officials confirmed Friday that a Nebraska child died from a rare infection caused by a brain-eating amoeba after swimming in a river near Omaha.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed the presence of the naegleria fowleri amoeba in the child, according to the Douglas County Department of Health in Omaha.

Health officials believe the child became infected while swimming Sunday in the Elkhorn River, a few miles west of Omaha. Authorities have not released the child's name.

People are usually infected when water containing the amoeba enters the body through the nose while swimming in or diving into lakes and rivers. Other sources have been documented, including tainted tap water in a Houston-area city in 2020.

It is the second death in the Midwest this summer from primary amebic meningoencephalitis, an infection caused by the amoeba that has proved fatal in 97% of reported cases. A Missouri resident died of the infection in July after swimming at Lake of Three Fires in southwestern Iowa, health officials have said.

Symptoms of the infection include fever, headache, nausea or vomiting, progressing to a stiff neck, loss of balance, hallucinations and seizures.

The CDC says naegleria fowleri infections are rare, with about three cases in the United States every year. There were 154 cases reported between 1962 and 2021 in the U.S., with only four survivors. Only about 430 cases have ever been documented globally.

In the U.S., infections from the amoeba typically occur in southern states because the amoeba thrives in waters that are warmer than 86 degrees Fahrenheit (30 Celsius). But infections have migrated north in recent years, including two cases in Minnesota since 2010.

Winds drive major wildfire in Spain; Portugal goes on alert

The Associated Press undefined

MADRID (AP) — A wildfire burning out of control in Spain's eastern province of Valencia has become

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one of the country's biggest fires this year, and 35 aircraft were deployed to fight it as the blaze entered its fifth day, authorities said Friday.

The wildfire has already scorched more than 19,000 hectares (47,000 acres) along a 137-kilometer (85-mile) perimeter. Efforts to bring it under control Thursday failed and strong winds have made the fire "very aggressive," the Valencian regional government said.

In neighboring Portugal, the government on Friday announced a nationwide three-day state of alert beginning Sunday. Portugal is in the grip of a severe drought and has also seen devastating wildfires this summer.

The measure, which grants authorities special, temporary powers such as barring people from woodlands, is a response to forecasts of inland temps above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) beginning Sunday in what could be the country's third heat wave this summer.

Portuguese Interior Minister José Luís Carneiro said the armed forces would provide extra forest patrols on those days. He also announced that the Civil Protection Agency will get additional funding to hire another 500 firefighters.

In Spain's Valencia, meanwhile, four people were still hospitalized after suffering severe burns Wednesday when several passengers tried to jump off a train that had stopped and tried to go back amid surrounding flames. The train had inadvertently headed into the fast-spreading wildfire.

Regional government head Ximo Puig has requested a report from the firefighting services to clarify why the train was allowed to proceed through an area that was burning.

Spain has been hit harder than any other European country by forest fires this year, according to the European Commission's Copernicus Earth observation program. This year, wildfires in Spain have burned four times more land than they did during the last decade.

Up to early August, 43 large wildfires — those affecting at least 500 hectares (1,235 acres) — were recorded in the Mediterranean country, while the average in previous years was 11.

The European Forest Fire Information System estimates Spain has seen 284,764 hectares (704,000 acres) burn this year — four times higher than the average since records began in 2006.

See it? Squish it! Fighting the invasive spotted lanternfly

By MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

When Stephen Nixon recently noticed a "beautiful" spotted lanternfly by his bag as he skateboarded in Brooklyn, he heeded the request of city officials.

He stomped on it.

"I don't like killing things. Not many people do. I'll catch and release cockroaches if I find them in my apartment," Nixon said. But he said it "seems like something worse" if the insect's population explodes.

Kill-on-sight requests in New York City and elsewhere are a part of public campaigns to fight an invasive insect now massing and feeding on plants around much of the eastern United States. Pretty with red wing markings, the spotted lanternfly is nonetheless a nuisance and a threat — the sort of insect that inspires people to post about squishing and stomping them on social media.

In cities, it swarms outside buildings and lands on pedestrians. It excretes a sticky substance called honeydew that can collect on outdoor furniture. The sap-sucking insect also poses a danger to grapes and other agricultural crops, which is raising alarms this summer in New York state wine country.

Across mid-Atlantic states, officials are asking people to help them track and slow its spread, even if they have to put their foot down.

"Be vigilant," said Chris Logue of New York's Department of Agriculture.

A native of Asia, the spotted lanternfly was first identified in the United States in 2014, northwest of Philadelphia. It's likely that insect eggs came over with a load of landscaping stones. Eight years later, there are reported infestations in thirteen states, mostly on the East Coast, according to the New York State Integrated Pest Management program at Cornell University. Individual insects have been spotted in more states, with two turning up in Iowa this summer.

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The insect has been able to spread so far, so fast because it is a stealthy hitchhiker. Drivers this time of year unwittingly give lifts to adults, which look like moths, perched inside trunks, on wheel wells or on bumpers.

"Check your vehicle," warned Logue. "What you're really after is anything that maybe is alive, that is kind of hunkered down in there and is not going to get blown off the vehicle during the trip. Really, really important."

People also unknowingly transport spotted lanternfly eggs, which are laid later in the season. Females leave masses of 30 or more eggs on all sorts of surfaces, from tree trunks to patio furniture. Eggs laid on portable surfaces, like camping trailers and train cars, can hatch in the spring many miles away.

Spotted lanternfly fighters are doing everything from applying pesticides to cutting down trees of heaven, another invasive species that is a favored host of the spotted lanternfly. But public involvement is front and center.

In Pennsylvania, residents in quarantined counties are asked to check for the pests on dozens of items — ranging from their vehicles, to camping gear to lumber and shrubs — before heading to non-quarantined destinations.

Around the East, people are being asked to report sightings to help track the spread.

And if you see one? Show no mercy.

"Kill it! Squash it, smash it ... just get rid of it," reads a post by Pennsylvania agricultural officials.

New York City parks officials agree, advising: "please squish and dispose."

"Join Jersey's Stomp Team," read billboards in New Jersey showing a shoe about to stomp out an insect.

Heide Estes did just that after seeing a spotted lanternfly on a Sunday walk in Long Branch, New Jersey this month.

"I came back and I said to my partner, 'You know, I saw a spotted lanternfly,'" Estes said, "and she was like, 'Oh, I'm sure there's more. Let's go look.'"

There were more.

Her partner, an entomologist, put four in a plastic bottle to show co-workers on campus what they look like. They killed at least a dozen more. Many were massed on trees of heaven.

"Clearly, the whole spot was infested," she said.

Infestations in New York state had been concentrated in the metropolitan area, but have spread close to the state's wine-growing vineyards. Agricultural officials are concerned about the fate of vineyards in the Finger Lakes, the Hudson Valley and Long Island if infestations spread. Sen. Chuck Schumer said Sunday the insect could cost the state millions.

"The spotted lanternfly sucks the sap out of the vines," said Brian Eshenaur, an expert with the Cornell pest program. "And it makes them less hardy for the winter, so vines can be lost over the growing season."

Eshenaur said they're more likely to spread into vineyards later in the season, when trees of heaven enter dormancy. Though vineyards around New York are already on the lookout.

At Sheldrake Point Winery in the Finger Lakes, vineyard manager David Wiemann said workers in the rows already know to be on guard.

"We've talked about how detrimental it would be to the vineyards," Wiemann said. "So if they see one, they would let me know."

EU regulator OKs plan to increase monkeypox vaccine supplies

LONDON (AP) — A smaller dose of the monkeypox vaccine appears to still be effective and can be used to stretch the current supply by five times, the European Medicines Agency said Friday, echoing a recommendation made earlier this month by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

The EU drug regulator said in a statement that injecting people with just one fifth the regular dose of the smallpox vaccine made by Bavarian Nordic appeared to produce similar levels of antibodies against monkeypox as a full dose.

The approach calls for administering Bavarian Nordic's vaccine with an injection just under the skin rather than into deeper tissue, a practice that may stimulate a better immune response. People still need

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to get two doses, about four weeks apart.

The EMA said national authorities could decide, "as a temporary measure" to use smaller doses of the vaccine to protect vulnerable people during the ongoing monkeypox outbreak.

EU health commissioner Stella Kyriakides said the decision would allow the vaccination of five times as many people with the continent's current supply.

"This ensures greater access to vaccination for citizens at risk and healthcare workers," she said in a statement.

Earlier this month, the U.S. FDA authorized a similar plan to extend the country's monkeypox vaccine stocks. The technique has previously been used to stretch supplies of vaccines during other outbreaks, including yellow fever and polio.

The unusual recommendations from both regulators acknowledge the extremely limited global supplies of the Jynneos vaccine, originally developed against smallpox. Bavarian Nordic is the only company that makes it and it expects to have about 16 million doses available this year. On Thursday, the U.S. also announced a new agreement with a Michigan manufacturer to help speed production of 5.5 million vaccine vials recently ordered by the government.

The EMA authorized the vaccine in July based on experimental data that suggested it would work; the World Health Organization has estimated the shot is about 85% effective at preventing monkeypox.

Globally, there are more than 40,000 cases of monkeypox, of which about half are in Europe. Earlier this week, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said there has been a 20% increase in cases reported in the last two weeks and that nearly all infections have been reported in men who are gay, bisexual or have sex with other men.

Tedros said WHO was in talks with vaccine manufacturers and countries to see if any might be willing to share doses. Africa has reported the highest number of suspected monkeypox deaths and although the disease has been endemic in parts of central and west Africa for decades, it has only a small supply of vaccines being used as part of a research study.

About 98% of monkeypox cases beyond Africa have been reported in men who are gay, bisexual or have sex with other men. WHO said there is no sign of sustained transmission beyond men who have sex with men, although a small number of women and children have also been sickened by the disease.

Monkeypox spreads when people have close, physical contact with an infected person's lesions, their clothing or bedsheets. Most people recover without needing treatment, but the lesions can be extremely painful and more severe cases can result in complications including brain inflammation and death.

In the U.K., which at one point had the biggest outbreak outside Africa, officials said earlier this week they have seen signs the outbreak is slowing down.

Apple warns of security flaw for iPhones, iPads and Macs

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Apple disclosed serious security vulnerabilities for iPhones, iPads and Macs that could potentially allow attackers to take complete control of these devices.

Apple released two security reports about the issue on Wednesday, although they didn't receive wide attention outside of tech publications.

Apple's explanation of the vulnerability means a hacker could get "full admin access" to the device. That would allow intruders to impersonate the device's owner and subsequently run any software in their name, said Rachel Tobac, CEO of SocialProof Security.

Security experts have advised users to update affected devices — the iPhone6S and later models; several models of the iPad, including the 5th generation and later, all iPad Pro models and the iPad Air 2; and Mac computers running MacOS Monterey. The flaw also affects some iPod models.

Apple did not say in the reports how, where or by whom the vulnerabilities were discovered. In all cases, it cited an anonymous researcher.

Commercial spyware companies such as Israel's NSO Group are known for identifying and taking advantage of such flaws, exploiting them in malware that surreptitiously infects targets' smartphones, siphons

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their contents and surveils the targets in real time.

NSO Group has been blacklisted by the U.S. Commerce Department. Its spyware is known to have been used in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America against journalists, dissidents and human rights activists.

Security researcher Will Strafach said he had seen no technical analysis of the vulnerabilities that Apple has just patched. The company has previously acknowledged similarly serious flaws and, in what Strafach estimated to be perhaps a dozen occasions, has noted that it was aware of reports that such security holes had been exploited.

Today in History: August 20, deadly post office rampage

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Aug. 20, the 232nd day of 2022. There are 133 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 20, 1986, postal employee Patrick Henry Sherrill went on a deadly rampage at a post office in Edmond, Oklahoma, shooting 14 fellow workers to death before killing himself.

On this date:

In 1862, the New York Tribune published an open letter by editor Horace Greeley calling on President Abraham Lincoln to take more aggressive measures to free the slaves and end the South's rebellion.

In 1866, President Andrew Johnson formally declared the Civil War over, months after fighting had stopped.

In 1882, Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture" had its premiere in Moscow.

In 1910, a series of forest fires swept through parts of Idaho, Montana and Washington, killing at least 85 people and burning some 3 million acres.

In 1940, exiled Communist revolutionary Leon Trotsky was assassinated in Coyoacan, Mexico by Ramon Mercader. (Trotsky died the next day.)

In 1953, the Soviet Union publicly acknowledged it had tested a hydrogen bomb.

In 1955, hundreds of people were killed in anti-French rioting in Morocco and Algeria.

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act, a nearly \$1 billion anti-poverty measure.

In 1968, the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact nations began invading Czechoslovakia to crush the "Prague Spring" liberalization drive.

In 1988, a cease-fire in the war between Iraq and Iran went into effect.

In 1989, fifty-one people died when a pleasure boat sank in the River Thames (tehms) in London after colliding with a dredger.

In 2020, accepting the Democratic presidential nomination, Joe Biden vowed to move the nation past the chaos of Donald Trump's tenure and return it to its leadership role in the world; capping a virtual convention amid the pandemic, Biden spoke to a largely empty arena in Delaware. Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny became ill on a flight to Moscow from Siberia and was hospitalized in a coma. (Navalny would spend five months in Germany recovering from a nerve agent poisoning that he blamed on the Kremlin; he was arrested after his return to Russia.)

Ten years ago: In a historic change at one of the world's most exclusive golf clubs, Georgia's Augusta National invited former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and South Carolina financier Darla Moore to become the first female members; both accepted. Comedian Phyllis Diller, 95, died at her Los Angeles home.

Five years ago: Actor, comic and longtime telethon host Jerry Lewis died of heart disease in Las Vegas at the age of 91.

One year ago: President Joe Biden pledged to bring all Americans home from Afghanistan, along with all Afghans who aided the U.S. war effort there; his promise came as thousands more Americans and others seeking to escape the Taliban struggled to get past crushing crowds and Taliban checkpoints at the

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airport. San Francisco became the first major city in the nation to require proof of full vaccination against COVID-19 for people dining inside restaurants, working out in gyms or attending indoor concerts. China changed its Population and Family Planning Law to allow couples to legally have a third child; the change came just six years after the law was changed to allow a second child amid a plummeting birthrate. Tom T. Hall, the singer-songwriter who composed "Harper Valley P.T.A." and sang about life's simple joys as country music's consummate blue collar bard, died at his Tennessee home at 85.

Today's Birthdays: Boxing promoter Don King is 91. Former Sen. George Mitchell, D-Maine, is 89. Former U.S. Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas, is 87. Former MLB All-Star Graig Nettles is 78. Broadcast journalist Connie Chung is 76. Musician Jimmy Pankow (Chicago) is 75. Actor Ray Wise is 75. Actor John Noble is 74. Rock singer Robert Plant (Led Zeppelin) is 74. Country singer Rudy Gatlin is 70. Singer-songwriter John Hiatt is 70. Actor-director Peter Horton is 69. TV weatherman Al Roker is 68. Actor Jay Acovone is 67. Actor Joan Allen is 66. Movie director David O. Russell is 64. TV personality Asha Blake is 61. Actor James Marsters is 60. Rapper KRS-One is 57. Actor Colin Cunningham is 56. Actor Billy Gardell is 53. Rock singer Fred Durst (Limp Bizkit) is 52. Actor Jonathan Ke Quan is 52. Actor Misha Collins is 48. Rock singer Monique Powell (Save Ferris) is 47. Jazz/pop singer-pianist Jamie Cullum is 43. Actor Ben Barnes is 41. Actor Meghan Ory is 40. Actor Andrew Garfield is 39. Actor Brant Daugherty is 37. Actor-singer Demi Lovato is 30. Actor Christopher Paul Richards is 19.