

Groton Daily Independent

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Thurs., Aug. 25

School Breakfast: Stuffed Bagels
School Lunch: Chicken Sandwich, Fries
Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes and ham, peas, mandarin orange salad, whole wheat bread.
Volleyball at Hamlin. 8th grade at 4 p.m., 7th/C matches at 5 p.m. followed by JV at 6 p.m. and then varsity.

Fri., Aug. 26

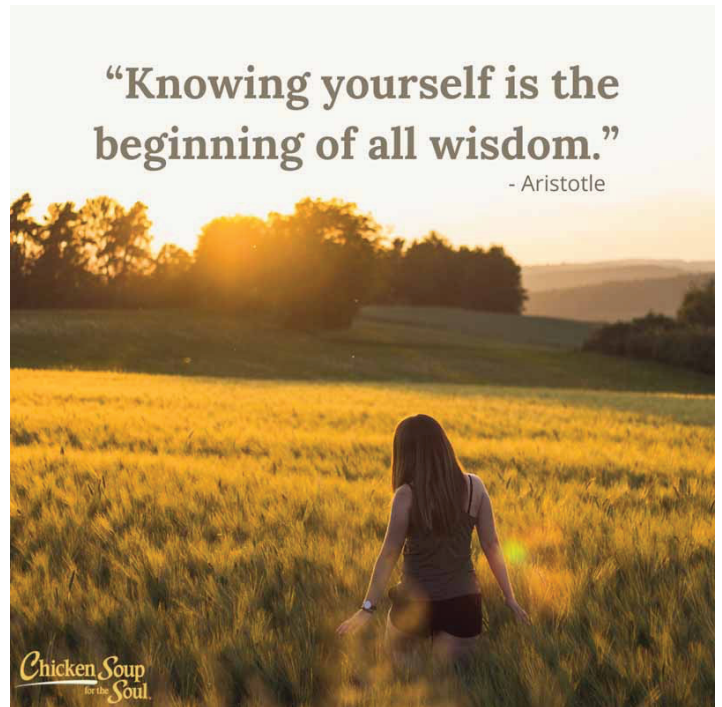
School Breakfast: Biscuits and Gravy
School Lunch: Pizza Cruncher, Green Beans
Senior Menu: Roast beef, potatoes/carrots/onions, gravy, fruit, whole wheat bread.
7 p.m.: Football hosts Redfield

Sat., Aug. 27

SEAS Confession: 3:45-4:15 p.m., SEAS Mass: 4:30 p.m.
10 a.m.: 3/4 and 5/6 football at Sisseton
1 p.m.: Girls soccer hosts Vermillion

Sun., Aug. 28

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.



St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study 8:00 am. Worship (St. John's 9:00 am, Zion 11:00 am)
Emmanuel: 9 am Worship, 1-4pm 9th grade Confirmation Retreat
Methodist: 8:30am Conde Worship, 9:30am Coffee Hour. 10:30am Groton Worship

Mon., Aug. 29

School Breakfast: Egg Bake
School Lunch: Chicken Nuggets, Tater Tots
Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, dill potato, seven layer salad, fruited Jell-O with topping, whole wheat bread.
Volleyball at Aberdeen Christian (7th/8th at 4 p.m., JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity)
Emmanuel: 6:30 am Bible Study
The Pantry open at the Groton Community Center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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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New Staff at Groton Area by Dorene Nelson

Six new teachers are working at the Groton Area Public Schools this fall. In addition to the new employees, two have changes in their previous assignments. Alexa Schuring, formerly teaching kindergarten / junior kindergarten, will now be the Title I Math instructor. Desiree Yeigh's music responsibilities change to include all instrumental students in grades five through twelve.

Ashley Brudvig JK/Kindergarten



Ashley Brudvig, originally from Wallace, SD, is the new junior kindergarten/kindergarten teacher for this coming school year.

"I graduated from Webster High School and attended college at South Dakota State University," Brudvig said. "I recently received my Master of Education in Reading Degree from Black Hills State University, so was seeking a job where I could use this training."

"Before coming to Groton, I taught at Lake Preston for four years and at Roncalli Primary for two," she listed. "I really wanted to stay in early childhood since I prefer teaching that age group."

"I teach reading and math to half of the kindergarten students in the morning," Brudvig explained. "My afternoons are devoted to all junior kindergarten children."

"I will be working with the two kindergarten teachers to help plan and prepare lessons and projects," she stated. "Half of the kindergarten children from each teacher come to me on alternating weeks."

"There are twenty-one students in junior kindergarten and about twenty in each kindergarten section," Brudvig explained. "I'll be really busy all day long with all of that energy in my classroom!"

"There is a paraprofessional to help with the junior kindergarten students in the afternoon," she smiled. "Otherwise it could be rather overwhelming with so many little ones at once!"

Brudvig, her husband, and their young son live in Aberdeen.

Heather Rowen Third Grade



Heather Rowen, the new 3rd grade teacher in Groton, is beginning her eighteenth year of teaching. She graduated from Faulkton High School and received her Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in early childhood and elementary education at Northern State University.

"Most of my teaching experience, both in kindergarten and in the fourth grade, was in the Aberdeen school system, but we wanted our children to be in a smaller school," Rowen explained. "Our two oldest, a 7th grader and a 4th grader, are already very involved in a variety of activities!"

"Third grade is divided into two separate sections, each with 24 students." "I love to connect with my students and 'see the light bulb go on' when they truly understand a new idea or lesson," Rowen smiled. "That is the best part of any teacher's day!"

"I find it truly satisfying and rewarding that I can really make a difference in these children's lives and education," she admitted. "Being in a smaller school district aids in making this student-teacher connection easier."

Over the 18 years Mrs. Rowen has been teaching she has had many experiences including being named the 2018 South Dakota Elementary VFW Teacher of the Year as well as being a recipient of the 2020 Avera Teachers that Go Above and Beyond Award.

"My classroom is ready, and I'm eager to meet my new students and start the new year," she said. "I'm very excited to be here!"

"My husband and I with our three children live in the country by Bath," she explained, "and our youngest will attend a pre-school in Aberdeen."

Jordan Carson High School Math



Jordan Carson is the new math teacher at Groton High School. He graduated from Langford High School and received his Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics and Math Education from Northern State University.

"Before coming here to Groton, I taught two years in Adams, MN," Carson said. "Adams is a small town of about 800 residents and is located on the Minnesota-Iowa border."

"When I saw the math opening in Groton, I decided to apply since it's a larger school and close to my hometown and my family," he admitted. "My dad is the business teacher in Langford while my mother teaches fifth grade."

"I have no extra-curricular assignments this year but have coached baseball and basketball," Carson explained. "I live in Langford and enjoy being in a larger school and closer to my family."

"I will be teaching pre-algebra, geometry, and informal geometry," Carson listed. "Pre-algebra is mainly for freshmen with the sophomores normally taking geometry. Informal geometry is available to either freshmen or sophomores."

"I'm looking forward to a new school, new students, and all of the excitement of a new school year!" he admitted.

Rose Long-Buechler Sixth Grade



Rose Long-Buechler is the new 6th grade teacher for the Groton Area School District. She has previously worked in the Groton school district.

"In 2009-2010 I was a student teacher for Mrs. Stacy Mogan and assisted Mrs. Kristen Gonsoir with debate," Buechler listed. "Then I returned to college to get an elementary education degree."

"In 2012 I came back to Groton to do my student teaching in the third grade with Kristi Anderson," she said. "From 2012-2015 I was an education assistant and the OST coordinator at Groton elementary. I also worked with RTI."

"In 2012, I received a Bachelor's Degree in elementary education," Buechler explained. "My experience in various areas of education made me aware of my preference for younger children."

"This is my first experience teaching in junior high," she admitted. "I will be teaching two sections of 6th grade, each with 21 students," she said. "I will be teaching social studies, reading, and language arts while science, math, and music are taught by other instructors."

"My husband and I live in Aberdeen with our seven-year-old daughter," Buechler stated. "My daughter will be coming here to Groton with me and will be in the second grade."

Boys finished 2nd place at NEC tournament

Roncalli won 1st place in the team and Groton placed 2nd and Milbank 3rd. Brevin Flieds finished 4th with a 85, Logan Pearson finished 12th with a 91, Carter Simon finished 13th with a 91 and Cole Simon finished 14th with a 91. Jace Johnson scored a 101 along with Jayden Schwan with a 101.

Reilly Fuhrman Special Education



Reilly Fuhrman, the new special education high school teacher in Groton High School for freshmen and sophomores, is originally from Warner, SD.

"I received my Bachelor's degree in elementary and special education at Northern State University," Fuhrman said. "I'll also be the 8th grade volley ball coach."

"Last year I taught in the Herreid Public School District but decided to move closer to my family," she explained. "I expect to have sixteen students to help in various subjects that they may be having trouble with and will need my assistance."

"I have my own individual classroom with a large room next to mine for individual and small group work," Fuhrman stated. "Having a quiet space to work and concentrate is very important, especially when a student finds the material to be challenging."

"There are three special education teachers in the high school, each with our own individual assignments," she said. "I also have a paraprofessional to help in my classroom."

"I'm very happy to have this job here in Groton," Fuhrman smiled, "since it is the size of school I wanted to work in."

Scott Glodt Vocal Instructor



Scott Glodt, originally from Hoven, SD, is the new K-12 vocal teacher for the Groton Area Public Schools. This will be his second year of teaching.

"I started my teaching career at Aberdeen Christian where I taught history for grades 7-12," Glodt said. "I did my student teaching there too, so when they needed a history teacher, I applied."

"I received my Bachelor's Degree in music education at Northern State University and have almost completed a history minor," he explained. "I prefer teaching music, but there was no job available in that field last year."

"Teaching social studies is very different from teaching music," Glodt admitted. "There is more preparation for music classes since I will be teaching all grade levels from elementary though high school!"

"I start and end each day at the elementary with about twenty students in each of my classes," he stated. "I intend to use various musical 'toys' in my teaching that had been introduced by Cody Swanson, a former vocal instructor here in Groton."

"When the opening here was announced, I was very excited because of the recommendations given by the music staff at NSU," Glodt said. "I am very excited about getting started here and becoming acquainted with my new students."

"In addition to my teaching responsibilities, I will also be giving voice lessons and helping with the music for show choir," he stated.

SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's Column – Serving Those Who Served

One of my favorite Abraham Lincoln quotes is "Honor to the soldier, and sailor everywhere, who bravely bears his country's cause. Honor, also, to the citizen who cares for his brother in the field and serves, as he best can, the same cause."

Our veterans have shouldered the burden of our defense. They have displayed extraordinary strength and resilience in the face of adversity to protect the freedoms we, as Americans, enjoy every day.

When our men and women return home after their tour of duty, we have the opportunity to show our gratitude by serving them. They must know that there are resources to help them. Veterans service officers provide a service, at no cost, to assist veterans in applying for benefits.

There has been a lot in the news lately about the Camp Lejeune lawsuit. We encourage all veterans to work with an accredited service officer when determining how to proceed with claims based upon exposure to hazards at Camp Lejeune. A final determination has not been made regarding lawsuits related to the Camp Lejeune Water Act and how this will impact veterans' abilities to receive care at the VA and receive payments for disabilities related to these toxic exposures.

Additionally, the Honoring our Pact Act of 2022 expands VA compensation and healthcare benefits to veterans exposed to Agent Orange, burn pits, and other toxic exposures.

I'm proud of the resources that the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and our partners; the county and tribal veterans service officers, provide at no cost.

This team of experts have worn the boots, walked the trenches, conducted maneuvers, commanded troops, sustained missions, and protected our freedoms. They are veterans that have borne the battle and are committed to ensure that our heroes receive the highest quality of services possible. Again, there is no charge for the services they provide our veterans in obtaining their benefits.

To reach our SDDVA team, please call 605.333.6869. To locate a county or tribal veterans service officer, please visit: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteransserviceofficers/locatevso.aspx>.

The SDDVA and our partners put our veterans first, serving those who have given so much to this nation. We consider it an honor and a privilege and are committed to assisting our veterans with their questions on the Pact Act and Camp Lejeune.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

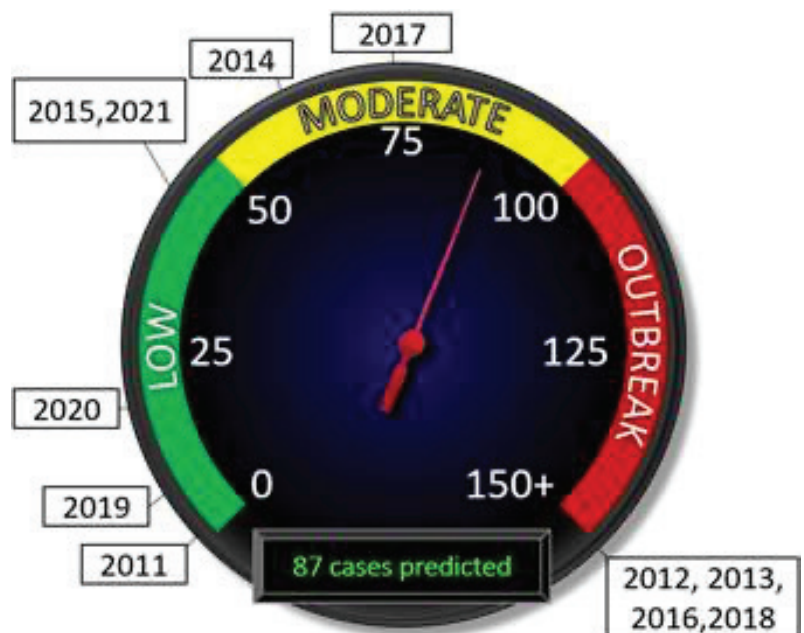
West Nile Update – South Dakota, August 24, 2022

SD WNV (as of August 24):

- 12 human cases reported (Brookings, Brown, Clark, Day, Edmunds, Kingsbury, McCook, Sully, Turner, Union, Walworth)
- 4 human viremic blood donors (Minnehaha, Potter, Spink)
- 7 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of August 23): 98 cases (AL, AZ, CA, CO, GA, IA, LA, MN, MS, MO, NE, NY, NC, ND, OH, PA, SD, TX) and 6 deaths

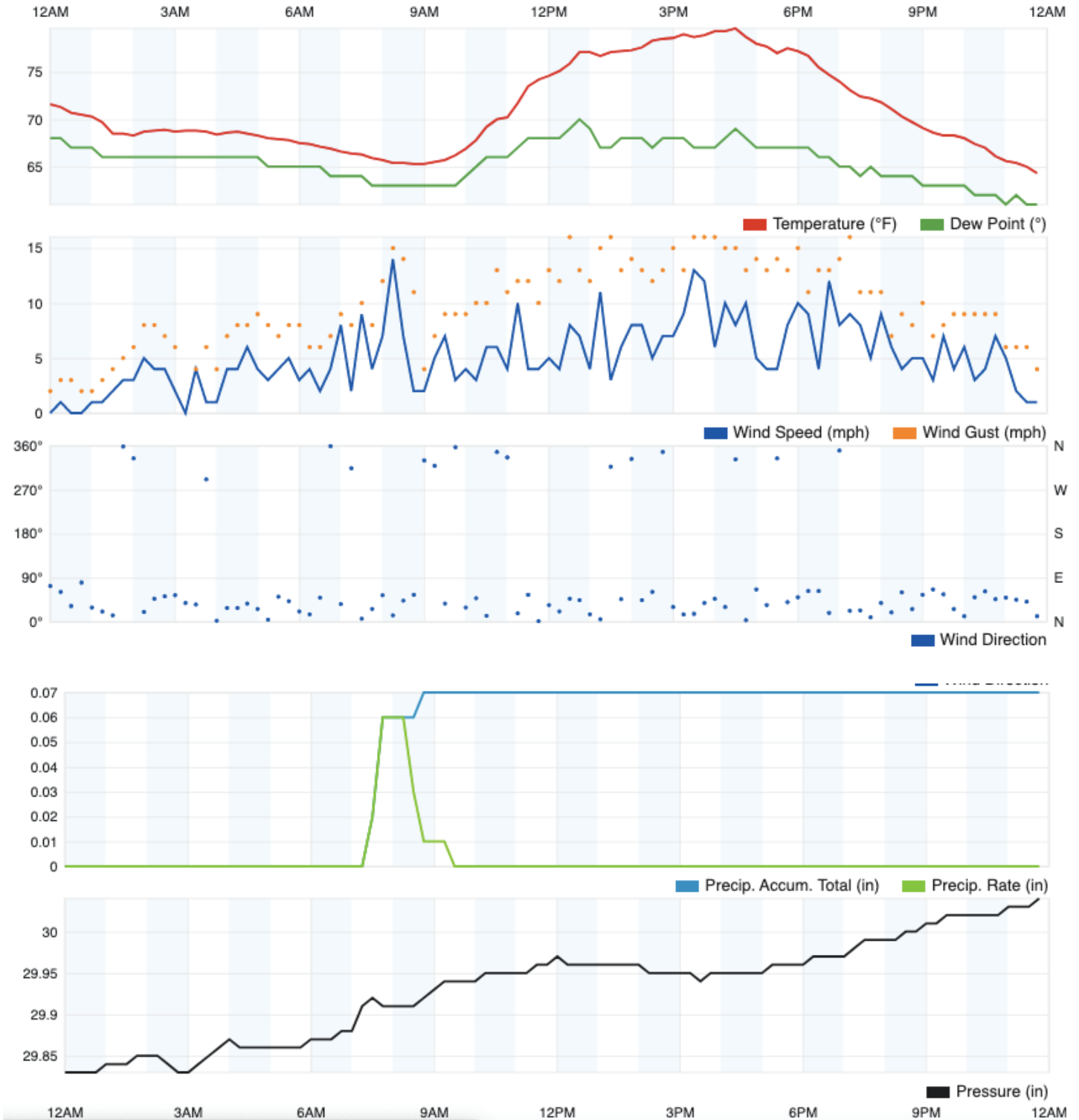
WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2022, South Dakota (as of August 24)



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Sunny	Mostly Clear	Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms
High: 76 °F	Low: 52 °F	High: 78 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 85 °F



Late Week Forecast

August 25, 2022
2:22 AM



- **Today**
Mild and Dry. Highs 70s east, 80s west
- **Tonight**
Chance of showers/storms central SD. Lows 50s to around 60°
- **Friday**
Chance showers/storms. Highs near 80° north, 90° south

Other than a few early morning showers out west, today will be mild and dry. But more chances for rain enter the picture for tonight and Friday. #sdwx #mnwx

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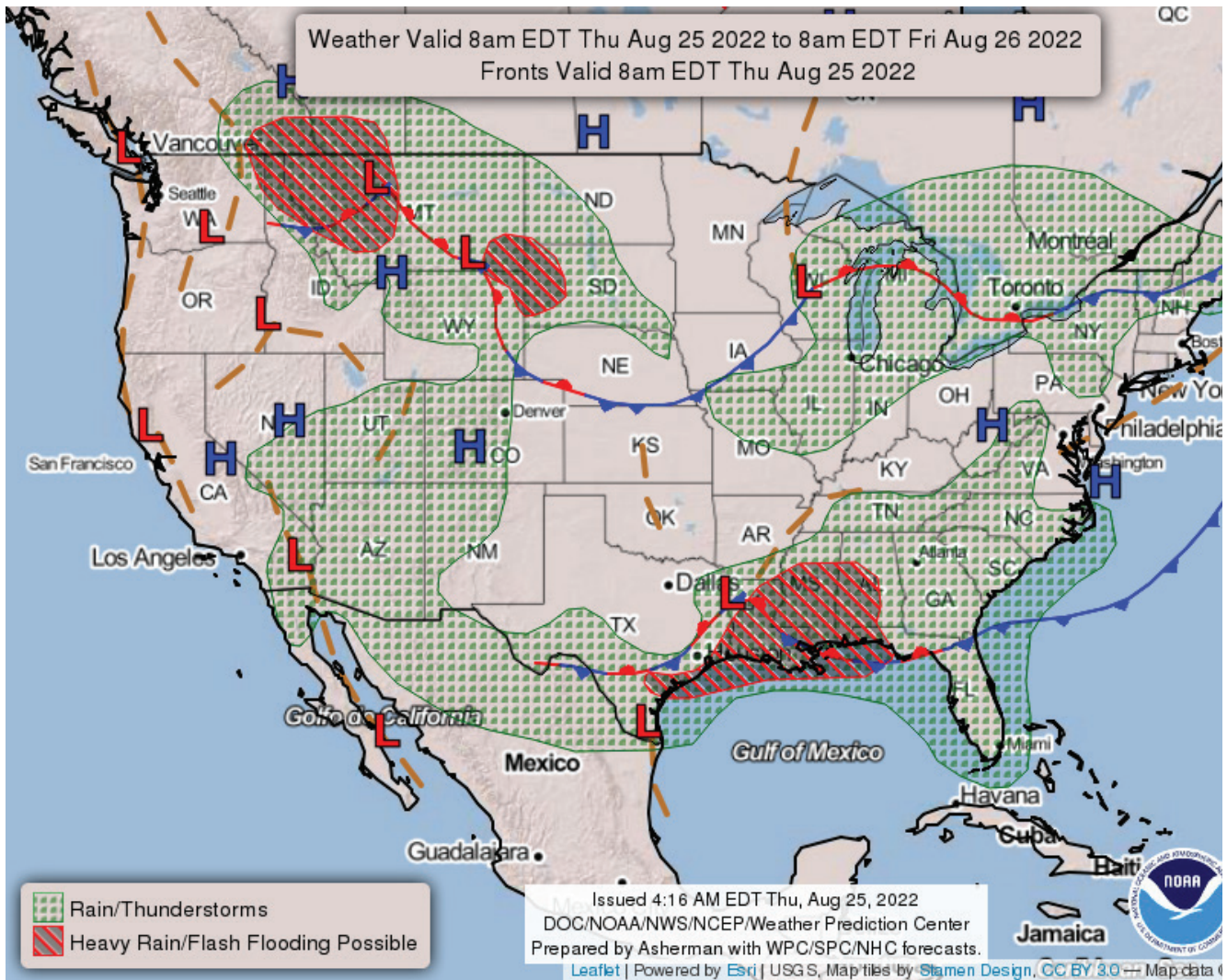
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 80 °F at 4:29 PM
Low Temp: 63 °F at 11:58 PM
Wind: 17 mph at 2:18 PM
Precip: : 0.07

Day length: 13 hours, 40 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 101 in 1926
Record Low: 38 in 1896
Average High: 82°F
Average Low: 54°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 1.81
Precip to date in Aug.: 1.11
Average Precip to date: 15.91
Precip Year to Date: 15.65
Sunset Tonight: 8:24:36 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:45:27 AM



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Today in Weather History

August 25, 1990: Severe thunderstorms moved across central and northeastern South Dakota produce golf ball size hail and wind gusts exceeding 60 mph. One storm produced a weak F0 tornado between Bowdle and Roscoe in Edmunds County.

1814: In the early afternoon, a strong tornado struck northwest Washington D.C. and downtown. The severe tornadic storm arrived the day after the British Troops had set fire to the Capitol, the White House, and other public buildings. The storm's rains would douse those flames. The tornado did major structural damage to the residential section of the city. The tornado's flying debris killed more British soldiers than by the guns of the American resistance. The storm blew off roofs and carried them high up into the air, knocked down chimneys and fences and damaged numerous homes. Some homes were destroyed. It lifted two pieces of cannon and deposited them several yards away. At least 30 Americans were killed or injured in the heavily damaged buildings, and an unknown number of British killed and wounded.

1885 - A severe hurricane struck South Carolina causing 1.3 million dollars damage at Charleston. (David Ludlum)

1940 - New Jersey experienced its coldest August morning of record, with lows of 32 degrees at Layton and Charlotteburg. (The Weather Channel)

1948: One of the worst tornadoes to strike New Zealand occurred at Hamilton on this day. This estimated F2tornado killed three people, injuring dozens, and destroying or severely damaging almost 150 houses and 50 business premises in Hamilton and Franklin.

1987 - Morning thunderstorms produced heavy rain in eastern Nebraska and southwestern Iowa. Stanton IA reported 10.50 inches of rain. Water was reported up to the handle of automobiles west of Greenwood NE. Rainfall totals for a two day period ranged from 7 to 14 inches across southwestern Iowa. Crop damage was in the millions for both states. Subsequent flooding of streams in Iowa the last week of August caused millions of dollars damage to crops, as some streams crested ten feet above flood stage. (Storm Data)

1988 - Seven cities in California reported record high temperatures for the date, including Sacramento with an afternoon reading of 104 degrees. Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in Arizona. Chino Valley was drenched with 2.50 inches of rain in just thirty minutes washing out a couple of streets in town. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Morning thunderstorms drenched Spencer, IN, with 4.10 inches of rain in three hours causing extensive street flooding. Evening thunderstorms in eastern Kansas produced up to six inches of rain around Emporia, and four inches of rain in just forty-five minutes near Parsons, and also produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Lake Melvern. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - Katrina becomes a hurricane just before landfall in south Florida between Hallandale Beach and North Miami Beach. Maximum sustained winds at the time of landfall were near 80 mph. There were eleven fatalities in South Florida, including four by falling trees. More than 1.3 million customers lost electrical services, and preliminary insured loss estimates ranged from \$600 million to \$2 billion in the state of Florida (Associated Press).



When You Need Help

Scripture: Psalm 121 (NIV)

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from?
- 2 My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber;
- 4 indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
- 5 The Lord watches over you— the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
- 6 the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.
- 7 The Lord will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life;
- 8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore..

Insight By: Bill Crowder

As one of the Songs of Ascents (see the superscription), Psalm 121 was designated as a song of pilgrimage as the people traveled to Jerusalem for the three high feasts each year. Though there were more feasts, these three had been set aside for annual pilgrimage. Notice Deuteronomy 16:16 in Moses' final instructions to Israel prior to his death: "Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles. No one should appear before the Lord empty-handed." The Feast of Unleavened Bread was also known as Passover (Pesach) while the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot) was also known as Firstfruits or Pentecost. Both of these were spring feasts, while the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) was a fall feast that remembered the people's time dwelling in tents in the wilderness..

Comment by Bill Crowder

It was a Monday morning, but my friend Chia-ming wasn't in the office. He was at home, cleaning the bathroom. A month unemployed, he thought, and no job leads. His firm had shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic and worries about the future filled Chia-ming with fear. I need to support my family, he thought. Where can I go for help?

In Psalm 121:1, the pilgrims to Jerusalem asked a similar question about where to find help. The journey to the Holy City on Mount Zion was long and potentially dangerous, with travelers enduring an arduous climb. The challenges they faced may seem like the difficult journeys we face in life today—trudging the path of illness, relationship problems, bereavement, stress at work or, as in the case of Chia-ming, financial difficulty and unemployment.

But we can take heart in the truth that the Maker of heaven and earth Himself helps us (v. 2). He watches over our lives (vv. 3, 5, 7–8) and He knows what we need. Shamar, the Hebrew word for "watches over," means "to guard." The Creator of the universe is our guardian. We're in His safekeeping. "God took care of me and my family," Chia-ming shared recently. "And at the right time, He provided a teaching job."

As we trust and obey God, we can look ahead with hope, knowing we're within the protective boundaries of His wisdom and love. .

Reflect and Prayer: What kind of help do you need from God today? How does knowing He's the Maker of heaven and earth encourage you?

Father, thank You for being my source of help on my life's journey.

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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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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

03-04-13-18-22

(three, four, thirteen, eighteen, twenty-two)

Estimated jackpot: \$35,000

Lotto America

20-22-26-27-49, Star Ball: 4, ASB: 3

(twenty, twenty-two, twenty-six, twenty-seven, forty-nine; Star Ball: four; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,220,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 135,000,000

Powerball

06-24-35-37-44, Powerball: 22, Power Play: 4

(six, twenty-four, thirty-five, thirty-seven, forty-four; Powerball: twenty-two; Power Play: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$115,000,000

SD Gov. Kristi Noem weighs response to ethics complaints

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota ethics board's finding that Gov. Kristi Noem may have engaged in misconduct by intervening in her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license isn't likely the last word on the matter. But exactly how much more comes out on the episode may be up to the Republican governor herself.

The state's Government Accountability Board appears to be letting Noem decide whether to defend herself in a public hearing or simply accept an "appropriate action" that the board hasn't detailed. It presents Noem with a choice: Stick to her defense that she has done nothing wrong and fight the allegations in a public hearing or let the matter quietly die while accepting the board's action.

How Noem handles the matter may not dent her prospects for reelection this year in a race where she's heavily favored to win a second term. But it may be important down the road for a politician who has methodically positioned herself to move up in national politics, including for a potential 2024 presidential run.

So far, Noem has chosen to fight — at least in the public sphere. Her reelection campaign spokesman, Ian Fury, lashed out at the board after it moved against her Monday, calling the board's action "illegal" and portraying the complaints against her as the work of an embittered political enemy. They were filed last year by Jason Ravensborg, the former Republican attorney general, as he faced pressure from Noem to resign after he struck and killed a pedestrian with his car in 2020.

But neither her office nor her campaign has answered questions on whether she will fight the allegations through a contested case hearing before the board, which was created in 2017 and has never handled a case like Noem's. Such a proceeding would allow the board's three retired judges to publicly scrutinize how she took a hands-on role in a state agency while it was evaluating her daughter's application for an appraiser's license.

As first reported by The Associated Press, Noem held a meeting in July 2020 that included her daughter, Cassidy Peters, and key decision-makers in Peters' licensure just days after the agency had moved to deny a license. After the meeting, Peters got another opportunity to demonstrate she could meet federal standards and was ultimately awarded the license.

By accepting the board's action, Noem could avoid a public hearing over an episode that has drawn

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condemnation from government ethics experts, her political rivals and even some Republican lawmakers. Ravensborg has said that it was concern from lawmakers that prompted him to send the complaint to the board.

"We'll have to wait until the governor's office makes a decision," said Gene Kean, a current member of the Government Accountability Board who was appointed after serving more than two decades as a state circuit court judge and chairing the state Judges Association. "That's sort of a linchpin in this thing."

But giving up the fight also could have political fallout for Noem, said Alex Conant, a GOP strategist who previously worked as the communications director for Marco Rubio's 2016 presidential campaign.

"If she doesn't have a good explanation or is unable to pivot, it could be something that follows her," Conant said.

The board hasn't publicly said what action it may take against the governor. Its options in state law allow for a reprimand, a directive to do community service or coursework, as well as other "informal" resolutions that the governor would have to agree to. Statutes don't describe what the community service or "coursework" might be.

John Pelissero, a scholar at the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, said it's "unusual" for an ethics board not to publicly announce the action it takes against an accused official.

"It lacks transparency if they do not announce the level of accountability," he said. "That has the potential to undermine the public's confidence in the accountability board and in state government generally."

Meanwhile, the ethics board took another action Monday that holds the potential of not just a finding of ethical misconduct, but illegality. The board asked the state's attorney general to investigate Noem's practice of flying on state airplanes to gatherings hosted by political groups like the Republican Jewish Coalition and the National Rifle Association. State law bars the aircraft from being used for anything other than state business, though Noem has said she was acting as an ambassador for the state.

Noem's gubernatorial challenger, Democratic state Rep. Jamie Smith, pounced on the issue Tuesday and called for Attorney General Mark Vargo to recuse himself and appoint a special prosecutor.

Vargo played a prominent role in the conflict between Noem and Ravensborg earlier this year by leading the impeachment prosecution against Ravensborg in the Senate over his actions and accounting of the 2020 crash that killed a pedestrian. After senators convicted Ravensborg on charges including one that alleged he misled investigators, and removed him from office, Noem — who had pressed for impeachment — named Vargo as interim attorney general.

Vargo said this week he hadn't made the decision on whether to recuse himself from the state airplanes probe, even as he issued a statement saying any investigation would remain confidential.

Pelissero, the ethics expert, agreed, saying that there was already a perception of a clear conflict of interest. And David Cleveland, a professor at the University of Minnesota Law School who specializes in legal ethics, referred to rules of professional conduct that ban lawyers from cases where they have a conflict of interest or stand to gain personally.

Even some Republican lawmakers said Vargo should recuse himself.

"I personally think it's only appropriate for him to immediately recuse himself and appoint a special counsel," said Republican Rep. Scott Odenback. "So that there's a continued faith and trust in the process that you are held accountable no matter who you are."

Jackley readies to take AG's office, looking for top deputy

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Former South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley will spend this campaign season searching for the next director of the Division of Criminal Investigation to join him in the attorney general's office after no other candidate has emerged to challenge his bid to take his old job back.

Jackley, a Republican, on Wednesday announced a search committee comprised of 14 current and former law enforcement officers and prosecutors to evaluate prospects for the next leader of the state's Division of Criminal Investigation.

"Their task is simple — go find the best candidates to lead the Division of Criminal Investigation that will work with other law enforcement agencies to best protect our communities," he said in a statement.

The announcement showed Jackley is already working closely with the attorney general's office. The committee includes Mark Vargo, who is serving as interim attorney general, and the application process will be posted on the attorney general's website.

Jackley will return to his former post as the state's top law enforcement officer next year. He served as attorney general from 2009 to 2019, winning reelection twice. He ran for governor in 2018, losing in the GOP primary to Kristi Noem, who went on to win the general election.

ACLU SD joins case in support of Indian Child Welfare Act

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota is joining other states in filing an amicus brief in defense of the Indian Child Welfare Act.

The 'friend of the court' brief involves the U.S. Supreme Court case *Brackeen v. Haaland* which challenges the act that establishes federal standards for placement of Native American children in foster or adoptive homes. The act seeks to give the child's family and tribe the opportunity to be involved in decisions that previously may have been excluded from, including placement and services.

Arguments in the case are scheduled before the high court this November.

Stephanie Amiotte, legal director for the South Dakota ACLU said if the court overturns the law it could be devastating for tribes.

"ICWA was enacted by Congress to address a situation where disproportionate numbers of Indian children were being removed from their homes, and eventually a disproportionate number of them were being adopted into white families," Amiotte tells South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

The act's opponents say the race-based policy is unconstitutional.

Amiotte said keeping Indigenous children connected to their culture, improves outcomes.

"Native American Children have been essentially invisible within the American society," Amiotte said. "Their cultural identity and their ethnic pride results in greater school success, lower alcohol and drug use, higher social functioning and assists them in overall success and achievement in life."

Twelve state ACLU affiliates are included in the brief, including North Dakota.

Rohingya mark 5th anniversary of exodus to Bangladesh

By JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees on Thursday marked the fifth anniversary of their exodus from Myanmar to Bangladesh, while the United States, European Union and other Western nations pledged to continue supporting the refugees' pursuit of justice in international courts.

In a major development on Thursday, the United Kingdom announced a further round of sanctions targeting military-linked businesses in Myanmar.

A statement by the U.K. government said those being sanctioned include Star Sapphire Group of Companies, International Gateways Group, and Sky One Construction in an effort to limit the military's access to arms and revenue.

Amanda Milling, minister for Asia, also confirmed the U.K.'s intention to intervene in the November 2019 case against Myanmar initiated by The Gambia, seeking justice in The Hague-based International Court of Justice, which is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. The case will determine whether Myanmar has violated its obligations under the Genocide Convention in relation to the military's acts against the Rohingya in 2016 and 2017.

Bangladesh is hosting more than 1 million Rohingya refugees who fled from Myanmar over decades, including some 740,000 who crossed the border in August 2017 after the Myanmar military launched a "clearance operation" against them following attacks by a rebel group. The safety situation in Myanmar has worsened since a military takeover last year, and attempts to send them back failed.

In March, the United States said the oppression of Rohingya in Myanmar amounts to genocide after

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authorities confirmed accounts of mass atrocities against civilians by Myanmar's military in a widespread and systematic campaign against the ethnic minority. Muslim Rohingya face widespread discrimination in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, where most are denied citizenship and many other rights.

Bangladeshi officials have expressed frustration over the repatriation of the refugees to Myanmar after at least two attempts to send them back failed since 2017, but Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that their repatriation to their own land is the only solution to the crisis.

On the eve of the anniversary, Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said in a statement that his country wants the refugees to return to Myanmar safely.

"Bangladesh wants to ensure that the Rohingya can return home to safe conditions in Myanmar where they will no longer be persecuted and will finally receive citizenship," he said.

"We urge the international community to work alongside us to provide support to the Rohingya people, by asserting pressure on Myanmar to stop the mass persecution and allow Rohingya safe repatriation to their homes," Khan said.

The issue of the Rohingya crisis has gone to international courts where Myanmar denied charges of any wrongdoing. But global powers are not satisfied with Myanmar's position.

In a statement, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday that the U.S. remained "committed to advancing justice and accountability" for Rohingya and all people of Myanmar.

"We continue to support the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, the case under the Genocide Convention that The Gambia has brought against Burma before the International Court of Justice, and credible courts around the world that have jurisdiction in cases involving Burmese military's atrocity crimes," Blinken said.

Separately, a joint statement by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union, and the foreign ministers of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States said they remained concerned by the U.N. fact-finding mission's establishment of consistent patterns of serious human rights violations and abuses, of which many amount to grave crimes under international law.

"We also recognize other initiatives to hold perpetrators accountable, including The Gambia's efforts before the International Court of Justice, which is currently examining whether the atrocities committed by the Myanmar military against Rohingya amounted also to genocide," the statement reads.

"We reiterate that Myanmar must comply with the International Court of Justice's provisional measures order," it said.

Human rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch also urged action.

In a statement, Human Rights Watch said the anniversary should prompt concerned governments to do more to hold the Myanmar military to account and secure justice and safety for the Rohingya in Bangladesh, Myanmar and across the region.

"Governments should mark the five-year anniversary of the devastating campaign against the Rohingya with a coordinated international strategy for accountability and justice that draws on Rohingya input," said Elaine Pearson, acting Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a bilateral agreement in November 2017, brokered by China, for repatriation of the refugees. Bangladesh earlier this month sought China's assistance to help repatriate Rohingya to Myanmar during a visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

Black August uplifted as alternative Black History Month

By ALMAZ ABEDJE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For Jonathan Peter Jackson, a direct relative of two prominent members of the Black Panther Party, revolutionary thought and family history have always been intertwined, particularly in August.

That's the month in 1971 when his uncle, the famed Panther George Jackson, was killed during an uprising at San Quentin State Prison in California. A revolutionary whose words resonated inside and out of the prison walls, he was a published author, activist and radical thought leader.

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To many, February is the month dedicated to celebrating Black Americans' contributions to a country where they were once enslaved. But Black History Month has an alternative: It's called Black August.

First celebrated in 1979, Black August was created to commemorate Jackson's fight for Black liberation. Fifty-one years since his death, Black August is now a monthlong awareness campaign and celebration dedicated to Black freedom fighters, revolutionaries, radicals and political prisoners, both living and deceased.

The annual commemorations have been embraced by activists in the global Black Lives Matter movement, many of whom draw inspiration from freedom fighters like Jackson and his contemporaries.

"It's important to do this now because a lot of people who were on the radical scene during that time period, relatives and non-relatives, who are like blood relatives, are entering their golden years," said Jonathan Jackson, 51, of Fair Hill, Maryland.

George Jackson was 18 when he was arrested for robbing a gas station in Los Angeles in 1960. He was convicted and given an indeterminate sentence of one year to life and spent the next decade at California's Soledad and San Quentin prisons, much of it in solitary confinement.

While incarcerated, Jackson began studying the words of revolutionary theoreticians such as Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, who advocated class awareness, challenging institutions and overturning capitalism through revolution. Founding leaders of the Panthers, including Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, were also inspired by Marx, Lenin and Chinese Communist leader Mao Tse-tung.

Jackson became a leader in the prisoner rights movement. His letters from prison to loved ones and supporters were compiled in the bestselling books "Soledad Brother" and "Blood in My Eye."

Inspired by his words and frustrated with his situation, George's younger brother, Jonathan, initiated a takeover at the Marin County Superior Court in California in 1970. He freed three inmates and held several courthouse staff hostage, in an attempt to demand the release of his brother and two other inmates, known as the Soledad Brothers, who were accused of killing a correctional officer. Jonathan was killed as he tried to escape, although it's disputed whether he was killed in a courtroom shootout or fatally shot while driving away with hostages.

George was killed on Aug. 21, 1971, during a prison uprising. Inmates at San Quentin prison began formally commemorating his death in 1979, and from there, Black August was born.

"I certainly wish that more people knew about George's writings (and) knew about my father's sacrifice on that fateful day in August," said Jonathan Jackson, who wrote the foreword to "Soledad Brother" in the early '90s, shortly after graduating from college.

Monifa Bandele, a leader in the Movement for Black Lives, a national coalition of BLM groups, says Black August is about learning the vast history of Black revolutionary leaders. That includes figures such as Nat Turner, who is famous for leading a slave rebellion on a southern Virginia plantation in August 1831, and Marcus Garvey, the leader of the Pan-Africanism movement and born in August 1887. It includes events such as the Haitian Revolution in 1791 and the March on Washington in 1963, both taking place in the month of August.

"This idea that there was this one narrow way that Black people resisted oppression is really a myth that is dispelled by Black August," said Bandele, who is also a member of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, a group that raises awareness of political prisoners.

"And what we saw happen after the 1970s is that it grew outside of the (prison) walls because, as people who were incarcerated came home to their families and communities, they began to do community celebrations of Black August," she added.

The ways of honoring this month also come in various forms and have evolved over the years. Some take part in fasting, while others use this time to study the ways of their predecessors. Weekly event series are also common during Black August, from reading groups to open mic nights.

Sankofa, a Black-owned cultural center and coffee shop in Washington that has served the D.C. community for nearly 25 years, wraps up a weekly open mic night in honor of Black August on Friday. The event has drawn local residents of all ages, many who have shared stories, read poetry and performed

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songs with the theme of rebellion.

"This month is all about resistance and celebrating our political prisoners and using all of the faculties that we have to free people who are in prison, let me say, unjustly," emcee Ayinde Sekou said to the crowd during a recent event at Sankofa.

Jonathan Jackson, George's nephew, also believes that there are largely systemic reasons as to why Black August, and his family history specifically, are not widely taught.

"It's difficult sometimes for radicals who were not assassinated, per se, to enter into the popular discourse," he said. "George and Jonathan were never victims. They took action, and they were killed taking that action, and sometimes that's very difficult to understand for people who will accept a political assassination."

Jackson hopes to honor his father's and uncle's legacy through documenting the knowledge of elders from that era, as a means of continuing the fight.

"We need to get those testimonies. ... We need to understand what happened, so that we can improve on what they did. I think now is as good a time as any to get that done," he said.

Death toll from train station attack in Ukraine rises to 25

By INNA VARENYTSIA Associated Press

POKROVSK, Ukraine (AP) — The death toll from a Russian rocket attack as Ukraine observed its Independence Day has risen to 25, including an 11-year-old boy found under the rubble of a house and a 6-year-old killed in a car fire near a train station that took a hit, a Ukrainian official said Thursday.

The deputy head of the Ukrainian presidential office, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, provided the updated casualty figures from Wednesday's attack. A total of 31 people sustained injuries, he said.

The strike served as a brutally painful reminder that Russia is capable of employing military force that causes civilians to suffer the most and tests Ukraine's resilience after six months of a grinding war.

In Geneva on Thursday, the U.N.'s human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, decried the time since Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops into the neighboring country as "unimaginably horrifying." She called on Putin "to halt armed attacks against Ukraine."

The lethal train station strike took place in Chaplyne, a town of about 3,500 people in the central Dnipropetrovsk region. It came after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Moscow might attempt "something particularly cruel" this week as Ukraine marked both its 1991 declaration of independence from the Soviet Union and the six-month point of Russia's invasion on Wednesday.

Hours before the train station attack, Russia insisted it was doing its best to spare civilians, even at a cost of slowing down its offensive in Ukraine.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, speaking Wednesday at a meeting of his counterparts from a security organization dominated by Russia and China, said Russia was carrying out strikes with precision weapons against Ukrainian military targets, and "everything is done to avoid civilian casualties."

"Undoubtedly, it slows down the pace of the offensive, but we do it deliberately," he said.

It was the second time Shoigu has made such a claim; he said the same thing in late May.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, three people were killed in the eastern region of Donetsk on Wednesday and one more was wounded, Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said on Telegram.

Nikopol, a city across the river from the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, came under more Russian shelling overnight, Valentyn Reznichenko, the governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region, said.

Japan police chief to resign over Abe shooting death

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's national police chief said Thursday he will resign to take responsibility over the fatal shooting of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at a campaign speech last month.

National Police Agency Chief Itaru Nakamura's announcement came as his agency released a report blaming flaws in police protection — from planning to guarding at the scene — that led to Abe's assas-

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sination July 8 in Nara in western Japan.

Nakamura said he took the former prime minister's death seriously and that he submitted his resignation to the National Public Safety Commission earlier Thursday.

"In order to fundamentally reexamine guarding and never to let this happen, we need to have a new system," Nakamura told a news conference as he announced his intention to step down.

Nakamura did not say when his resignation would be official. Japanese media reported that his resignation is expected to be approved at Friday's Cabinet meeting.

The alleged gunman, Tetsuya Yamagami, was arrested at the scene and is currently under mental evaluation until late November. Yamagami told police that he targeted Abe because of the former leader's link to the Unification Church, which he hated.

Abe sent a video message last year to a group affiliated with the church, which experts say may have infuriated the shooting suspect.

In a 54-page investigative report released Thursday, the National Police Agency concluded that the protection plan for Abe neglected potential danger coming from behind him and merely focused on risks during his movement from the site of his speech to his vehicle.

Inadequacies in the command system, communication among several key police officials, as well as their attention in areas behind Abe at the campaign site led to their lack of attention on the suspect's movement until it was too late.

None of the officers assigned to immediate protection of Abe caught the suspect until he was already 7 meters (yards) behind him where he took out his homemade double-barrel gun, which resembled a camera with a long lens, to blast his first shot that narrowly missed Abe. Up to that moment, none of the officers was aware of the suspect's presence, the report said.

In just over two seconds, the suspect was only 5.3 meters (yards) behind Abe to fire the second shot.

The report said the prefectural police's Abe protection plan lacked a thorough safety evaluation. It called for significant strengthening in both training and staffing of Japan's dignitary protection, as well as revising police protection guidelines for the first time in about 30 years.

The national police called for doubling dignitary protection staff, greater supervisory role for the national police over prefectural staff, and use of digital technology and drones to bolster surveillance from above ground.

Abe's family paid tribute to him in a private Buddhist ritual Thursday marking the 49th day since his assassination.

In Nara, prefectural police chief Tomoaki Onizuka also expressed his intention to step down over Abe's assassination.

The church, which was founded in South Korea in 1954 and came to Japan a decade later, has built close ties with a host of conservative lawmakers, many of them members of Abe's Liberal Democratic Party on their shared interests of anti-communism.

Since the 1980s, the church has faced accusations of problematic recruiting and religious sales in Japan, and the governing party's church ties have sent support ratings of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's Cabinet into a nosedive even after its recent shuffle.

UK energy bills are skyrocketing. Why is it happening?

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A deepening cost-of-living crisis in Britain is about to get worse, with millions of people expected to pay about 80% more a year on their household energy bills starting in October.

The U.K. energy regulator on Friday is set to announce the latest price cap, which is the maximum amount that gas suppliers can charge customers per unit of energy. It could mean people pay up to 3,600 pounds (\$4,240) a year for heating and electricity, according to analysts' forecasts.

Scores are already struggling to make ends meet as inflation soared to 10.1% last month — the highest in 40 years — and the rapidly spiraling costs of energy and food are certain to hit the poorest the hardest.

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The government is facing widespread calls to do more to offer relief, but no new measures are expected before the Conservative Party chooses a new prime minister to replace Boris Johnson.

Here's a look at the rising energy costs in the United Kingdom:

HOW STEEP IS THE RISE?

Annual energy bills for the average household paying by direct debit have already risen by a record 54% so far this year. Now, bills are capped at 1,971 pounds (\$2,320) a year, compared with about 1,200 pounds last winter.

Under the revised price cap Friday, average household energy bills are expected to jump to around 3,600 pounds a year starting in October. They will go still higher when the price cap is updated again in January, expected to exceed 4,000 pounds.

U.S. bank Citi forecast that the huge energy cost increases could drive U.K. inflation to 18% next year. The Bank of England predicts a recession starting later this year.

Charities and public health leaders warn that the rocketing bills will be a "catastrophe" for poorer people heading into winter, as growing numbers are forced to make impossible choices between heating their homes and putting food on the table.

The energy regulator, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, said the quarterly update is meant to mitigate volatility in the energy market, allowing energy suppliers to better manage their risks so there's no sudden cost hikes for consumers.

WHY ARE ENERGY PRICES RISING?

Global oil and gas prices have been rising sharply since last year as economies worldwide recovered from the coronavirus pandemic and demand for energy surged. Russia's war in Ukraine created an full-on energy crisis as Moscow reduced or cut off natural gas flows to European countries that rely on the fuel to power industry, generate electricity and heat and cool homes.

Shrinking supplies, higher demand and fears of a complete Russian cutoff have driven natural gas prices to record highs, further fueling inflation that has squeezed people's ability to spend and raised the risk of a recession in Europe and the U.K.

"The market shows no sign of finding a new equilibrium," Rystad Energy analyst Lu Ming Pang said. "Market sentiment is a mixture of price record fatigue with quiet acceptance that this new normal is here to stay."

Although Britain only imports a small percentage of its gas from Russia, the U.K. relies more on gas than its European neighbors because it has less nuclear and renewable energy. It also does not have as much capacity to store gas, forcing it to buy on the short-term spot market that sees greater volatility in prices.

WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING ABOUT RISING ENERGY PRICES?

Officials say they have set aside a package of support worth 37 billion pounds to help with the cost of living. All households will receive 400 pounds off their energy bills this winter, and millions of low-income people will get a further 650 pounds.

The measures have been widely criticized as inadequate, but no new policy is expected until after Sept. 5, when the Conservatives announce who they have chosen for a new leader.

Some, including the opposition Labour Party, have called for officials to significantly increase financial support for people and to freeze the energy price cap. Labour proposed to pay for it by extending the government's temporary tax on the windfall profits of oil and gas companies.

Neither Liz Truss nor Rishi Sunak, the two politicians vying to become the next prime minister, appear to back such a plan.

Some critics say the U.K.'s fully privatized energy market — which can be traced back to Margaret Thatcher's liberalization drive in the 1980s — is partly to blame for the crisis.

Giovanna Speciale, chief executive of the Southeast London Community Energy group, which helps people in need with their household bills, said the energy market is "fundamentally broken."

Receiving "400 pounds, or 1,200 pounds in government support is not going to help very much — these are just sticking plasters," Speciale said. "What we need to address is systemic problems. Because the system is entirely private, there's very little that the government can do to intervene in this."

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HOW DOES THE UK COMPARE WITH EU NEIGHBORS?

Energy prices are rising in other European countries, too, but people in some countries have not seen the same level of rocketing bills as the U.K.

In France, gas prices are frozen at October 2021 levels, and the freeze has been extended until the end of the year following a government decree announced in June. Low- and middle-income households also receive 100 euros to buy gas and electricity.

In Germany, average electricity prices for households rose up to 38% over the past year. A new levy to prop up energy companies buying more expensive natural gas would add several hundred euros for an average household per year. But the government is temporarily lowering taxes on natural gas from 19% to 7% to offset those costs and has approved one-off cash subsidies.

Italy also has seen increasing calls for an energy price cap amid parliamentary election campaigns. This month, the government earmarked 8.4 billion euros to help low-income households and businesses offset the increase in energy costs, following relief it previously approved.

Tropical Storm Ma-on makes landfall in southern China

By KATIE TAM Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Tropical Storm Ma-on made landfall in southern China's Guangdong province on Thursday after bringing rain and stiff winds to Hong Kong, where the stock market was closed for the morning session due to the storm.

Residents of coastal areas around the city of Maoming were urged to stay away from the shore Thursday morning as the typhoon arrived at 10:30 a.m. (0230 GMT).

Ma-on was packing sustained winds of 118 kilometers (73 miles) per hour and moving slowly northwest at about 25 kilometers (15 miles) per hour, the Guangdong Meteorological Public Service Center said. It noted the storm made landfall as a typhoon but was steadily weakening.

The storm was estimated to be about 380 kilometers (236 miles) west of Hong Kong as of 2:00 p.m. (0600 GMT), according to the Hong Kong Observatory.

Ma-on is expected to weaken as it moves inland toward the Guangxi region, Yunnan province and northern Vietnam.

The Hong Kong government said that one person had been injured and reports of flooding and a fallen tree had been received. About 140 people had sought refuge in temporary shelters set up in the city, a government news release said. Schools were closed for at least the morning.

On Thursday morning, the Hong Kong Observatory lowered its No. 8 typhoon warning signal to a No. 3 signal, warning of strong winds between 41 and 62 kph (25.4 and 38.5 mph).

Hong Kong Exchanges & Clearing Ltd., the operator of the city's stock exchange, said in a statement that it delayed the trading of stocks and derivatives during the morning session. Trading resumed at 1 p.m.

In Guangdong, several cities suspended high-speed rail and ferry service and evacuated workers on offshore projects. The airport in Shenzhen, a Chinese tech center that borders Hong Kong, canceled all flights from 3 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thursday.

Authorities in the Philippines reported at least three deaths and four injured, mostly after being hit by falling trees, after the storm swept across the northern part of the country earlier this week.

More than 10,000 people were displaced, and public schools and government offices were closed for two days in Manila and several outlying provinces because of gusty wind and heavy rain.

Ma-on, which means horse saddle in Chinese, is hitting China as many areas face severe drought brought on by record-breaking temperatures that have withered crops and reduced electricity and drinking water supplies.

One year on, Afghans at risk await evacuation, relocation

By RENATA BRITO Associated Press

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BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — More than a year after the Taliban takeover that saw thousands of Afghans rushing to Kabul's international airport amid the chaotic U.S. withdrawal, Afghans at risk who failed to get on evacuation flights say they are still struggling to find safe and legal ways out of the country.

Among those left behind is a 49-year-old interpreter who worked for a NATO contractor in 2010 accompanying convoys in Kandahar. Only six days after the Taliban reached the capital last August, they came looking for him.

"They come to my house and they threatened my son and my wife (when) I was not at home. They (then) destroy my office," he told AP via WhatsApp referring to the place where he taught English. He asked that his name not be revealed for security reasons.

This month, he was interrogated by the Taliban again for more than two hours.

During the chaotic days of the U.S. pullout, he had tried several times to reach Kabul Airport but, like many, failed to get through massive crowds made even more dangerous by attacks around the airport that killed dozens. He then tried to leave Afghanistan by crossing the land border with Pakistan but was stopped by the Taliban who demanded \$700 per person to cross — money he did not have. To make matters worse, his passport is no longer valid.

Like millions of Afghans, he's also been impacted by the country's economic freefall, caused in part by international sanctions and vanishing foreign aid.

"We eat once a day," the interpreter said. Still, he continues hoping he and his family will leave Afghanistan at some point.

"I never give up because of my future and my children future," he said.

Since their return to rule, the Taliban have been trying to transition from insurgency and war to governing, with the hard-liners increasingly at odds with the pragmatists on how to run a country in the midst of a humanitarian and economic crisis. But a year on they have so far failed to gain international recognition. Initial promises to allow girls to return to school and women to continue working have been broken.

Those who have failed to evacuate include interpreters and drivers but also women journalists, activists and athletes who say they cannot live freely under a Taliban-led government.

The U.S., together with other Western nations, hastily evacuated more than 120,000 people, both foreign nationals and Afghan citizens, in August last year.

Some 46,000 Afghans who remained in the country after Aug. 31 have since applied for U.S. humanitarian parole, according to the Migration Policy Institute. But only 297 have been approved so far.

Because there is no longer a U.S. consulate in Afghanistan, asylum-seekers must make their way to other countries with consular services for in-person interviews.

The list of obstacles to getting out of Afghanistan is extensive, starting with the difficulty in obtaining passports as offices repeatedly close due to technical problems.

"Today, the vast majority of Afghans don't have access to legal identity, meaning if they need tomorrow to be able to get to safety legally, they can't," said Nassim Majidi, co-founder and executive director of Samuel Hall, an independent think tank that conducts research on migration and displacement. Majidi was speaking at a seminar organized by the Migration Policy Institute looking at the situation of Afghans in Afghanistan and abroad a year after the withdrawal.

Around 2,000 Afghans and their families who worked with NATO, its agencies, and member countries were among those evacuated from Kabul according to the military alliance. But the evacuations were organized by individual member countries. NATO, as an organization, had no repatriation plan.

Evacuations from third countries are still happening, although sporadically. Earlier this month a plane carrying nearly 300 Afghans who had collaborated with the Spanish government landed in Madrid. Germany and France also have continued to work on evacuation cases, Majidi said.

But thousands of Afghans are still living in limbo in third countries including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kosovo and Albania while they wait for their applications to be processed for resettlement to the United States and Canada.

Though life-saving for many, the evacuations also fractured families. Among them is that of an Afghan journalist who asked to remain anonymous, fearing for the safety of her relatives in Kabul.

"It was really difficult to leave everything behind in an hour," she told the Associated Press in a phone interview from her new home in Nijmegen, in the Netherlands, which she moved into after months of living in a temporary refugee shelter.

The government of the Netherlands had called her on Aug. 26 offering a single spot on an evacuation flight. Her relatives told her she needed to save herself first if she wanted to help them.

A year later, three of her family members have recently managed to get evacuated to France, she said. But despite repeated family reunification requests to the Netherlands and other European countries, the majority of her siblings remain in Kabul, living across the street from a police station now in Taliban hands.

On June 17 one of her older brothers was allegedly beaten to death by Taliban forces on the street after he was found carrying a photo of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the leader of the Northern Alliance that fought the Taliban, she said.

Days later, she said, the men showed up at the family's home and forced them to sign a death certificate that stated he had died of "natural causes." The AP was unable to independently verify her claims.

With most of her family still in Afghanistan and many bureaucratic hurdles to face in the Netherlands, it has been difficult to start a new life, she said.

"Until now it is just darkness."

Ukrainian fears run high over fighting near nuclear plant

By FRANK JORDANS and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

NIKOPOL, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainians are once again anxious and alarmed about the fate of a nuclear power plant in a land that was home to the world's worst atomic accident in 1986 at Chernobyl.

The Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, Europe's largest, has been occupied by Russian forces since the early days of the war, and continued fighting near the facility has heightened fears of a catastrophe that could affect nearby towns in southern Ukraine — or potentially an even wider region.

The government in Kyiv alleges Russia is essentially holding the Soviet-era nuclear plant hostage, storing weapons there and launching attacks from around it, while Moscow accuses Ukraine of recklessly firing on the facility, which is located in the city of Enerhodar.

"Anybody who understands nuclear safety issues has been trembling for the last six months," said Mycle Schneider, an independent policy consultant and coordinator of the World Nuclear Industry Status Report.

Ukraine cannot simply shut down its nuclear plants during the war because it is heavily reliant on them, and its 15 reactors at four stations provide about half of its electricity. Still, an ongoing conflict near a working atomic plant is troubling for many experts who fear that a damaged facility could lead to a disaster.

That fear is palpable just across the Dnieper River in Nikopol, where residents have been under nearly constant Russian shelling since July 12, with eight people killed, 850 buildings damaged and over the half the population of 100,000 fleeing the city.

Liudmyla Shyshkina, a 74-year-old widow who lived within sight of the Zaporizhzhia plant before her apartment was bombarded and her husband killed, said she believes the Russians are capable of intentionally causing a nuclear disaster.

Fighting in early March caused a brief fire at the plant's training complex, which officials said did not result in the release of any radiation. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says Russia's military actions there amount to "nuclear blackmail."

No civilian nuclear plant is designed for a wartime situation, although the buildings housing Zaporizhzhia's six reactors are protected by reinforced concrete that could withstand an errant shell, experts say.

The more immediate concern is that a disruption of electricity supply to the plant could knock out cooling systems that are essential for the safe operation of the reactors, and emergency diesel generators are sometimes unreliable. The pools where spent fuel rods are kept to be cooled also are vulnerable to shelling, which could cause the release of radioactive material.

Kyiv told the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog, that shelling earlier this week damaged transformers at a nearby conventional power plant, disrupting electricity supplies to the

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Zaporizhzhia plant for several hours.

"These incidents show why the IAEA must be able to send a mission to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant very soon," said the agency's head, Rafael Mariano Grossi, adding that he expected that to happen "within the next few days, if ongoing negotiations succeed."

At a U.N. Security Council meeting Tuesday, U.N. political chief Rosemary DiCarlo urged the withdrawal of all military personnel and equipment from the plant and an agreement on a demilitarized zone around it.

Currently only one of the plant's four power lines connecting it to the grid is operational, the agency said. External power is essential not just to cool the two reactors still in operation but also the spent radioactive fuel stored in special facilities onsite.

"If we lose the last one, we are at the total mercy of emergency power generators," said Najmedin Meshkati, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of Southern California.

He and Schneider expressed concern that the occupation of the plant by Russian forces is also hampering safety inspections and the replacement of critical parts, and is putting severe strain on hundreds of Ukrainian staff who operate the facility.

"Human error probability will be increased manifold by fatigue," said Meshkati, who was part of a committee appointed by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences to identify lessons from the 2011 nuclear disaster at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant. "Fatigue and stress are unfortunately two big safety factors."

If an incident at the Zaporizhzhia plant were to release significant amounts of radiation, the scale and location of the contamination would be determined largely by the weather, said Paul Dorfman, a nuclear safety expert at the University of Sussex who has advised the British and Irish governments.

The massive earthquake and tsunami that hit the Fukushima plant destroyed cooling systems which triggered meltdowns in three of its reactors. Much of the contaminated material was blown out to sea, limiting the damage.

The April 26, 1986, explosion and fire at one of four reactors at the Chernobyl nuclear plant north of Kyiv sent a cloud of radioactive material across a wide swath of Europe and beyond. In addition to fueling anti-nuclear sentiment in many countries, the disaster left deep psychological scars on Ukrainians.

Zaporizhzhia's reactors are of a different model than those at Chernobyl, but unfavorable winds could still spread radioactive contamination in any direction, Dorfman said.

"If something really went wrong, then we have a full-scale radiological catastrophe that could reach Europe, go as far as the Middle East, and certainly could reach Russia, but the most significant contamination would be in the immediate area," he said.

That's why Nikopol's emergency services department takes radiation measurements every hour since the Russian invasion began. Before that, it was every four hours.

Inflation hits Dubai's karak tea, a beloved national staple

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — From Mustafa Moeen's spot behind the counter, he sees the many faces of Dubai. They come — tired, hungry, stressed out — for a respite and a cup of karak.

Laborers stop on the way to work. Cab drivers linger after long shifts. Emiratis cruise by on midnight joyrides. A cup of milky sweet tea to ease the burden of the day, customers say, long priced at just 1 dirham, a bit less than 30 U.S. cents.

But now, as supply chain shortages and Russia's war on Ukraine lead to price spikes on everything from breakfast sandwiches in Manhattan to chicken tinga in Mexico, Dubai tea sellers are bumping up prices of what's informally considered the national drink of the United Arab Emirates. Moeen says he had no choice but to raise the price to 1.50 dirhams, or just over 40 cents.

"Everything got more expensive for us — milk, sugar, tea bags. Even the price of cups doubled," Moeen said from the one-room storefront in Satwa, a neighborhood bustling with South Asian workers on rickety bicycles that can feel a world away from Dubai's flashy skyscrapers. "We also have to survive."

For nearly two decades, karak — an elixir of sugar, dehydrated milk and cardamom-infused tea — has

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largely been the same price, just one nickel-plated steel dirham coin. A dirham is worth 100 fils.

"It's not about the 50 fils. They are making small, small changes," said Zeeshan Razak, an accountant from Kerala, India, sipping tea with his colleague. "We are concerned about what it means."

It was one of the rare treats that a dirham could buy in Dubai, which draws both the world's richest people and legions of low-paid migrant workers.

"It's part of its brand that it costs 1 dirham," said Abdulla Moaswes, a Palestinian karak aficionado raised in the UAE who's known for his scholarship on the tea. "People stockpile the coins so they always have one on hand."

Oil-rich Gulf Arab governments have reaped a windfall since the world's economic recovery from COVID-19 and Moscow's invasion of Ukraine boosted global energy prices.

But rising inflation has taken a toll. The price of another sweet staple in Dubai long worth 1 dirham, the McDonald's soft-serve ice cream cone, recently spiked to 2 dirhams. McDonald's UAE franchisee said it made the "difficult decision" due to a spike in "operating, equipment, manpower and the raw material costs."

Residents are feeling the pinch.

"In the five years I've been here this is the worst time. Rent, food, petrol — I can't catch up," said Arslan, an app-hired chauffeur from Pakistan's Punjab province who drinks four cups of caffeinated karak daily to fuel his 12-hour night shift. "There's no way to cut back."

He gave only his first name for fear of reprisals, saying his landlord is threatening to call the police because he can't make rent.

Annual inflation in Dubai accelerated to a record 7.1% last month, with consumer prices growing fastest in food, transportation and entertainment, according to the emirate's statistics authority. Gas prices shot up nearly 80% from January to July — a shock for a wealthy petrostate that has long considered cheap fuel a birthright.

To protect its citizens from cost pressures, the UAE announced it would nearly double the welfare budget for low-income Emiratis.

But many of the country's poorest people aren't citizens eligible for stipends, but migrant laborers from India, Pakistan and elsewhere toiling long hours for slim salaries.

"Inflation is an issue in the country, and it's hitting segments of the expatriate population already operating on a shoestring budget," said Robert Mogielnicki, a senior scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. "Small changes in prices ... can have a big impact."

Many are reminded of the impact each day — when they go for karak. At night, the empty lots and street corners of old Dubai fill with workers gossiping and scrolling through their phones over steaming cups.

"I'll pay 1.50, fine, but it all adds up," said Anayeg Ula, a 29-year-old food delivery rider from Bangladesh, taking a karak break beside his bike. "I came here to make money, not spend it."

Though modest in size, a cup of karak contains volumes in terms of the UAE's history.

The oil boom of the 1970s brought millions of migrants to the Gulf Arab states, along with their tea preferences. Indians and Pakistanis building up the coastal emirates craved masala chai, but lacked the money to buy fresh milk and the time to slow-cook tea over a coal fire. They needed quick chai at the cheap that could be stored and served in vast quantities at construction sites.

"Karak was born from necessity," said Moaswes, the karak scholar. "It's what the economic situation allowed for decades ago."

The tea exploded in popularity over the years, becoming a social ritual — as well as an indispensable routine.

The trend spread to Emiratis, who traditionally brew their Arabic tea ink-black but now claim the milky chai as part of their heritage. Dubai's tourism authority promotes top karak spots to visitors.

"It's nostalgic for me. That was breakfast on a daily basis, roaming around in our cars," recalls Ahmed Kazim, an Emirati who helped found a popular upscale karak shop, Project Chaiwala. "It's the UAE culture. You'll see a guy with a bicycle pull up next to a Lamborghini."

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The price of karak was 50 fils for a quarter-century, rising to 1 dirham in 2004 as Dubai rushed to build its booming desert skyline.

Some fear that if prices continue to climb, the staple may be lost to the working class who created it. Shashank Upadhyay, a bakery owner in Dubai's old Karama neighborhood, tried to sell karak for 2 dirhams earlier this year. But he swiftly backpedaled after seeing his customers "disturbed."

"In this area, chai is too important," Upadhyay said. "If we keep raising it, it will become something for people who go to high-end restaurants. But it's for local working people, like us."

Oz's Senate bid could be a Muslim first but is 'complicated'

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — If Dr. Mehmet Oz is elected to the U.S. Senate this fall, he'll be the first Muslim ever to serve in the chamber. It's something he hardly brings up while campaigning, his Democratic opponent isn't raising it and it's barely a topic of conversation in Pennsylvania's Muslim community.

Even if Muslims know that Oz — the celebrity heart surgeon best known as the host of daytime TV's "The Dr. Oz Show" — is a fellow Muslim, many may not identify with him culturally or politically.

And in any case, Muslims aren't monolithic and won't necessarily vote for a candidate just because they share a religion, Muslims across the state say — he'll have to win them over on the issues just as with all voters.

Oz, whose parents emigrated from Turkey, calls himself a "secular Muslim" and has said that the spiritual side of Islam resonates with him more than the religious law side of it.

He is also part of a Republican Party that is a political minority among Muslims and is endorsed by former President Donald Trump, who earned the enmity of some Muslims for enacting a 2017 ban on travelers coming to the United States from five predominantly Muslim countries.

For a Republican Party more accustomed to electing white Christians, Oz's religion is a strange bedfellow. Some Muslims say they have felt an animosity from the party in the past and Muslim candidates themselves have faced attacks from GOP rivals.

In a brief interview, Oz said it is good for the United States' leadership to show that it can elect Muslims, and it is good for Muslims to see one of their own elected to the U.S. Senate.

That kind of success would reinforce the message that "if you work hard in America, no matter what your heritage we treasure you," Oz said.

Oz won the GOP's seven-way May primary in a contest so narrow it triggered a statewide recount and he now faces Democrat John Fetterman, Pennsylvania's lieutenant governor, in the Nov. 8 election. The contest in the presidential battleground state could help determine partisan control of the Senate next year.

On the campaign trail, Oz follows national GOP talking points, such as trying to pin rising inflation and gun violence on President Joe Biden and his fellow Democrats.

Oz rarely discusses his religion and Fetterman hasn't brought it up — focusing instead on trying to paint Oz as a super-wealthy, out-of-touch carpetbagger from New Jersey.

If Muslims don't know that Oz is one of them, "that is because of him, really," said Algassimu Bah, a Philadelphian and immigrant from Sierra Leone. "He hasn't been talking about his faith. We've not heard him."

Imam Abdul Aziz Suraqah, of the Muslim Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh, said most members of the mosque probably know of Oz's faith, but seem no more passionate about Oz than any other candidate.

Imam Abdullah Pocius, who leads a mosque in Philadelphia, said he doubts that most Muslims who vote know that Oz identifies as a Muslim.

"The average American Muslim doesn't know anything about him, except that he's a TV doctor," Pocius said.

Oz was born in the United States to Turkish parents, married an American who is Christian and raised his children as Christians.

In a 2013 interview for the PBS series "Faces of America," Oz discussed his faith, saying that, while

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growing up, he became interested in Sufism, a mystical form of Islam that emphasizes someone's direct connection to God.

Oz described it as "spiritual."

Sufism is, however, generally viewed negatively by orthodox Muslims, who emphasize strictly following a set of religious laws, said Khalid A.Y. Blankinship, a Muslim and professor of religion at Temple University in Philadelphia.

In addition, Muslims in the United States are diverse — they include converted Americans and immigrants from Asia, Africa and Europe — and many might see Oz's Turkish heritage as more meaningful to him than Islam, Blankinship said.

When it comes to voting, party loyalty will override religion for the vast majority of Muslims, Blankinship said.

"Most people would not think of supporting him just because he's a Muslim," Blankinship said. "And they would look at what is he saying, what are his politics, what is his position going to be."

Suraqah said he tries to teach Muslims to be principled in their voting choices and to avoid supporting candidates "just because they speak nicely to the Muslim community" or appeal to them as fellow Muslims.

Still, it is important — and remarkable — that a major political party has nominated a Muslim for a Senate seat, Muslims say.

But galvanizing Pennsylvania's Muslim community might have only a slight effect on the election.

Estimates suggest that Muslims are 1% to 2% of the state's voters and Pew Research Center estimated in 2017 that two-thirds of American Muslims identified as Democrats, or leaned that way.

That could further isolate Oz from many Muslim voters.

"It is complicated because most Muslims are registered Democrats," said Wa'el Alzayat, CEO of Emgage, a national Muslim political advocacy organization. "While being a Muslim is nice and it's good, it is not sufficient and in some cases it doesn't matter what your faith is if you are not on the right side of the issues."

Salima Suswell, Emgage's executive director in Pennsylvania, said she became aware that Oz is a Muslim soon after he launched his campaign.

But, Suswell said his religious beliefs don't factor into her decision at the polls and that the issues Muslims care about are not limited to "stereotypical 'Muslim issues.'"

"We know that just because somebody proclaims to be a part of our religious community, it does not mean that they represent our values," she said.

Issues aside, it's a problem that Oz doesn't speak out against Trump as a source of Islamophobia and hate, Alzayat said.

Dr. Nadeem Iqbal, a Pittsburgh-area radiologist who was originally born in Pakistan, said he might be tempted to vote for a Muslim candidate.

But Iqbal wondered if or how Oz practices the religion and he can't accept Oz's ties to Trump, who he views as racist, anti-Muslim and empowering America's extremist and racist fringes.

"And personally," Iqbal said, "I will not vote for anyone endorsed by Donald Trump."

Biden kicks off midterm rally in safely Democratic Maryland

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Aiming to turn months of legislative accomplishments into political energy, President Joe Biden will hold a kickoff rally Thursday to boost Democrats' fortunes 75 days out from the midterm elections.

The event, in the safely Democratic Washington suburb of Rockville, Maryland, is meant to ease Biden into what White House aides say will be an aggressive season of championing his policy victories and aiding his party's candidates. It comes as Democrats have seen their political hopes rebound in recent months amid a legacy-defining burst of action by Biden and Congress.

From bipartisan action on gun control, infrastructure and domestic technology manufacturing to Democrats-only efforts to tackle climate change and health care costs, Biden is expected to highlight the

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achievements of the party's unified but razor-thin control of Washington. And he will try to sharpen the contrast with Republicans, who once seemed poised for sizable victories in November.

Just months ago, as inflation soared, Biden's poll numbers soured and his agenda stalled, Democrats braced for significant losses. But the intense voter reaction to the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and a productive summer on issues of core concern to Democrats have the party feeling like it is finally on the offensive heading into the Nov. 8 vote, even as the president remains unpopular.

Democrats, said Biden pollster John Anzalone, are "in a better position to compete because Joe Biden put us there."

"It doesn't mean that the wind's at our back," he added. "But we have more of a breeze than what felt like a gale hurricane in our face."

Biden's Thursday event comes a day after the president moved to fulfill a long-delayed campaign pledge to forgive federal student loans for lower- and middle-income borrowers — a move that Democrats believe will animate younger and Black and Latino voters.

Republicans, though, saw their own political advantage in the move, casting it as an unfair giveaway to would-be Democratic voters.

"President Biden's inflation is crushing working families, and his answer is to give away even more government money to elites with higher salaries," said Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell. "Democrats are literally using working Americans' money to try to buy themselves some enthusiasm from their political base."

Biden aides said he would continue to paint Republicans as the "ultra-MAGA" party — a reference to former President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign slogan — opposing his agenda and embracing conservative ideological proposals on abortion and Trump's false claims about the 2020 election.

Meanwhile, Democrats have benefited from Republican candidates who won primaries but are struggling in the general campaign. Trump-backed Senate candidates have complicated the GOP's chances in battleground states like Pennsylvania, Georgia and Arizona, while several Trump-aligned candidates in House races were not always the party's first choice.

Trump's grip on the GOP remains strong and has perhaps even become tighter in the aftermath of the FBI search of his Mar-a-Lago home.

JB Poersch, the president of Senate Majority Project, an outside group that is working to elect Democrats to the Senate, said the Republican candidates are "getting caught up in the Trump tornado once again — that is exactly what voters of both parties don't want."

Biden's political event, sponsored by the Democratic National Committee, comes as the president and members of his Cabinet are set to embark on what the White House has billed as the "Building a Better America Tour" to promote "the benefits of the President's accomplishments and the Inflation Reduction Act to the American people and highlight the contrast with Congressional Republicans' vision."

It comes as the White House has benefited from a steady decline in gasoline prices, which while still elevated have dropped daily since mid-June.

Months ago, Democratic lawmakers facing tough reelection fights sought to make themselves scarce when Biden came to town, though White House aides said Biden was still an asset to them by elevating issues that resonate with voters and sharpening the distinction with Republicans.

Now allies see the fortunes beginning to change and the president as more of a direct asset to campaigns.

In Maryland, Biden was set to be joined by gubernatorial candidate Wes Moore and a host of other officials on the ballot. Sen. Chris Van Hollen, who is up for reelection, was missing it, according to a spokesperson, because of a long-planned wedding anniversary trip with his wife, but he recorded a video welcoming Biden to his state that would play at the rally.

Cedric Richmond, the former Louisiana congressman and Biden senior adviser who now advises the Democratic National Committee, said if he were a candidate, he'd rush to have Biden at his side.

"I'd get in front of the van and become the drum major and talk about all the accomplishments that

have been happened under the leadership of Biden," Richmond said Wednesday. "You have a president who just keeps his head down and gets the work done and I think voters, as we kick off this campaign season, will see and appreciate that."

He acknowledged some Democrats might opt against "bringing Washington to their district."

"There are probably a few cases where that may make sense when you don't even want to be associated with Washington," Richmond said. "That has nothing to do with the president. That has everything to do with the typical dysfunction of Washington."

He added, "The important point to stress is you don't have that dysfunction right now because of President Biden."

Gov. Brian Kemp fights subpoena in Georgia election probe

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The judge presiding over a special grand jury that's investigating possible illegal attempts to influence the 2020 election in Georgia is wading into a fight over whether Republican Gov. Brian Kemp has to testify before the panel.

Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney, who's supervising the special grand jury, scheduled a hearing for Thursday morning after a dispute between lawyers for the governor and Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis' team of prosecutors escalated from tense emails to court filings in recent weeks.

The increasingly heated rhetoric is playing out as the Republican governor, who is seeking reelection in the fall, seeks to avoid speaking to a special grand jury looking into whether former President Donald Trump and his allies broke any laws as they tried to overturn Trump's narrow election loss to Democrat Joe Biden. Kemp's lawyers have accused Willis, a Democrat, of pursuing his testimony for "improper political purposes," an allegation the district attorney strongly denies.

Willis' investigation was prompted by a January 2021 phone call between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger during which the then-president suggested the state's top election official could "find" the votes needed to overturn his loss.

Raffensperger and some other state officials have already appeared before the special grand jury, but Kemp is one of a number of potential witnesses who are fighting orders to testify.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., whose telephone calls to Raffensperger and his staff in the weeks after the election are of interest to prosecutors, was supposed to testify earlier this week, but a federal appeals court put that on hold while he fights his subpoena.

A judge in Texas last week ordered Dallas-based lawyer and podcaster Jacki Pick to travel to Atlanta to testify, and her attempt to challenge that order was denied Tuesday by an appeals court. Pick, who's also known as Jacki Deason, gave a presentation before a Georgia legislative committee in December 2020 in which she alleged fraud by election workers at State Farm Arena in Atlanta.

Willis has said she's considering summoning Trump himself to appear before the grand jury, a step that would surely set off a legal fight. The high-stakes investigation is one in a string of serious legal threats the former president is facing.

Willis told Kemp attorney Brian McEvoy in a June email that she and her team wanted to ask the governor, among other things, about the call between Trump and Raffensperger. Trump also called Kemp in December 2020 asking him to order a special legislative session to secure the state's electoral votes for him.

After an agreement to have the governor sit for a recorded interview fell apart, the district attorney's office got a subpoena to have the governor testify on Aug. 18, according to court filings. The day before he was to testify, Kemp's lawyers filed a motion to quash that subpoena.

During Thursday's hearing, McBurney will determine whether Kemp has to abide by the subpoena.

Kemp's lawyers argue that he is protected from testifying about his official duties by "sovereign immunity," a principle that says the state can't be sued without its consent. They also cited executive privilege, saying any material related to the governor's deliberative process and communications is protected. And they raised attorney-client privilege, saying the governor routinely sought advice from his office's attorneys

in relation to the 2020 election and shouldn't have to testify about that.

Willis' team has argued that sovereign immunity and executive privilege don't apply in this case and that they would avoid any topic that may be subject to attorney-client privilege.

Six months into war, Russian goods still flowing to US

By JULIET LINDERMAN and MARTHA MENDOZA Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — On a hot, humid East Coast day this summer, a massive container ship pulled into the Port of Baltimore loaded with sheets of plywood, aluminum rods and radioactive material — all sourced from the fields, forests and factories of Russia.

President Joe Biden promised to "inflict pain" and deal "a crushing blow" on Vladimir Putin through trade restrictions on commodities like vodka, diamonds and gasoline in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine six months ago. But hundreds of other types of unsanctioned goods worth billions of dollars, including those found on the ship bound for Baltimore from St. Petersburg, Russia, continue to flow into U.S. ports.

The Associated Press found more than 3,600 shipments of wood, metals, rubber and other goods have arrived at U.S. ports from Russia since it began launching missiles and airstrikes into its neighbor in February. That's a significant drop from the same period in 2021 when about 6,000 shipments arrived, but it still adds up to more than \$1 billion worth of commerce a month.

In reality, no one involved actually expected trade to drag to a halt after the invasion. Banning imports of certain items would likely do more harm to those sectors in the U.S. than in Russia.

"When we impose sanctions, it could disrupt global trade. So our job is to think about which sanctions deliver the most impact while also allowing global trade to work," Ambassador Jim O'Brien, who heads the State Department's Office of Sanctions Coordination, told the AP.

Experts say the global economy is so intertwined that sanctions must be limited in scope to avoid driving up prices in an already unstable market.

Also, U.S. sanctions don't exist in a vacuum; layers of European Union and U.K. bans result in convoluted trade rules that can be confusing to buyers, sellers and policymakers.

For example, the Biden administration and the EU released separate lists of Russian companies that cannot receive exports, but at least one of those companies — which supplies the Russian military with metal to make fighter jets currently dropping bombs in Ukraine — is still selling millions of dollars of metal to American and European firms, AP found.

While some U.S. importers are sourcing alternative materials elsewhere, others say they have no choice. In the case of wood imports, Russia's dense birch forests create such hard, strong timber that most American wooden classroom furniture, and much home flooring, is made from it. Shipping containers of Russian items — goats, weightlifting shoes, crypto mining gear, even pillows — arrive at U.S. ports almost every day.

A breakdown of imported goods from Russia shows some items are clearly legal and even encouraged by the Biden administration, like the more than 100 shipments of fertilizer that have arrived since the invasion. Now-banned products like Russian oil and gas continued to arrive in U.S. ports long after the announcement of sanctions due to "wind down" periods, allowing companies to complete existing contracts.

In some cases, the origin of products shipped out of Russian ports can be difficult to discern. U.S. energy companies are continuing to import oil from Kazakhstan through Russian ports, even though that oil is sometimes mixed with Russian fuel. Trade experts warn that Russian suppliers are unreliable, and opaque corporate structures of most major Russian companies make it difficult to determine whether they have ties to the government.

"It is a general rule: when you have sanctions, you'll have all kinds of murky schemes and illicit trade," said Russian economist Konstantin Sonin, who teaches at the University of Chicago. "Still, sanctions make sense because even though you cannot kill 100% of revenues, you can reduce them."

Many American companies are choosing to cut off Russian trade. Coors beer, for example, returned a shipment of hops to a state-owned Russian company in May as part of a commitment to suspend all

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business in the country, said Molson Coors Beverage Co. spokeswoman Jennifer Martinez.

Russia and the U.S. were never major trading partners, and so sanctioning imports is only a very small slice of the retaliatory strategy. Restrictions on exports from the U.S. — of technology in particular — cause more damage to the Russian economy, and sanctioning the Russian Central Bank has frozen Russia's access to roughly \$600 billion in currency reserves held across the U.S. and Europe.

Nonetheless, sanctions carry a symbolic weight beyond the financial harm they might inflict, particularly for American consumers horrified by the war.

Here's a look at some of the goods that have flowed between the two countries:

METALS

Russia is a key exporter of metals like aluminum, steel and titanium; cutting off that trade could dramatically drive up prices for Americans already grappling with inflation, said Morgan Stanley economist Jacob Nell.

"The basic idea with sanctions is that you're trying to act in a way that causes more pain to the other side and less pain to yourself," he said.

Most American companies dealing in metals have longstanding relationships with Russian suppliers. Such trade, particularly of aluminum, has continued virtually uninterrupted since the beginning of the war.

AP found more than 900 shipments totaling more than 264 million tons of metals since February. Russia is one of the largest producers of unwrought aluminum outside of China and a significant global exporter. But the war has affected that global market as well.

"Like all manufacturers," said Aluminum Association spokesperson Matt Meenan, "we have seen supply chain impacts in terms of increased energy costs and other inflationary pressures which the invasion exacerbated."

Russian aluminum ends up in American car parts and airplanes, soda cans and cables, ladders and solar racks. The largest U.S. buyer at the start of 2022 was a subsidiary of Russian-owned global aluminum giant Rusal. In April, Rusal America's senior executives bought the U.S.-based part of the company and rebranded it as PerenniAL. In July alone, PerenniAL imported more than 35,000 tons from Russia. The company did not respond to requests for comment.

Also, among the private companies choosing to source materials from Russia are U.S. government contractors supported by federal tax dollars. Boeing, the world's largest aerospace company signed a federal contract for up to \$23.8 billion in 2021; it imported 20 tons of aluminum in June from Kamensk-Uralsky Metallurgical Works. In March, the U.S. banned exports to Kamensk-Uralsky because it supplies metals to the Russian military, but placed no restrictions on imports. A Boeing representative said the company made the decision to end trade with Russia in March, and explained that the shipment that arrived in June had been purchased four months before.

Another metal importer, Tirus US, is owned by Russian company VSMPO-AVISMA, the world's largest titanium producer. VSMPO also provides metal to the Russian military to build fighter jets. The company's broad global footprint and specific product — titanium — underscores the challenges of isolating Russia from global trade. Tirus US sells titanium to more than 300 companies in 48 countries, including a range of U.S. buyers, from jewelry makers to aerospace companies. VSMPO did not respond to requests for comment.

WOOD

Russia's vast forests are some of the largest in the world. After Canada, Russia is the second largest exporter of wood, and has some of the only mills that can make strong, solid Baltic birch plywood, flooring used throughout the U.S.

This year, the Biden administration began imposing tariffs on Russian wood exports, a move which infuriated Ronald Liberatori, a Nevada-based wood dealer who sells Russian grown Baltic birch to all the major furniture makers, construction companies and flooring manufacturers in the U.S.

"The problem here is Russia is the only country in the world that makes this product," he said. "There's no alternative source."

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He said that on top of the tariff, he had to put up an \$800,000 bond to ensure he'd pay the tax, further driving up prices.

"Who's paying for this? Who? You and every other individual in the United States," he said. "We're so damned upset with what Biden has done. This is a government versus government issue."

Liberatori said decision-makers need to consider who is going to be more hurt by tariffs before imposing them.

Another wood and paper importer told AP that while it stopped any new orders in February, it had vast amounts of lumber in Russia that already had been paid for; the final shipment arrived in the U.S. in July.

FUEL

On March 8, Biden announced the United States is banning all imports of Russian oil, gas and energy, "targeting the main artery of Russia's economy."

"That means Russian oil will no longer be acceptable at U.S. ports, and the American people will deal another powerful blow to Putin's war machine," he said.

Within hours, there were reports that a ship carrying 1 million barrels of Russian oil to the U.S. changed course to France. But plenty of others pushed on.

That week, about a million barrels of Russian crude oil had arrived off the port of Philadelphia, bound for Delta Airlines' oil refinery Monroe Energy. Meanwhile, a tanker with about 75,000 barrels of Russian tar oil pulled into the port of Texas City, Texas, bound for Valero's refineries after a long north Atlantic crossing, according to trade records.

The shipments continued to Valero, ExxonMobil and others. ExxonMobil media manager Julie King told AP a July oil delivery was of Kazakh origin and not subject to sanctions. She said Exxon "supports the internationally coordinated efforts to bring Russia's unprovoked attack to an end, and are complying with all sanctions."

Monroe spokesman Adam Gattuso said the company has not received any more Russian fuel and doesn't "anticipate doing so for the foreseeable future." Valero did not respond to requests for comment.

Andrea Schlaepfer, a spokesperson for Dutch fuel exporter Vitol, said that all of its oil and gas shipments since April 22 have been from Kazakhstan, where pipelines and rail networks run from the landlocked country's oil fields and refineries to neighboring Russian ports.

For the use of its port infrastructure, moorings and fees, Russia makes about \$10 million each year.

Schlaepfer said U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents review and verify that its shipments entering the U.S. don't contain Russian products. But CBP did not answer repeated questions about how it handles sanctions and bans on Russian goods. A CBP fact sheet says it plays a "critical role" in enforcing prohibitions on imports, however a spokesman repeatedly referred The AP to the State and Treasury departments.

OTHER

So far this year, almost 4,000 tons of Russian bullets have also arrived in the U.S., where they were distributed to gun shops and ammo dealers. Some were sold to U.S. buyers by Russian state-owned companies, while others came from at least one sanctioned oligarch. Those shipments slowed significantly after April.

AP also tracked millions of dollars worth of shipments of radioactive uranium hexafluoride from Russian state-owned Tenex JSC, the world's largest exporter of initial nuclear fuel cycle products, to Westinghouse Electric Co. in South Carolina. Nuclear material is not sanctioned.

Westinghouse spokeswoman Cathy Mann said that as part of the nuclear fuel manufacturing process, their fuel fabrication facilities receive enriched uranium product and convert it into fuel pellets. She said Westinghouse doesn't own the uranium used to make fuel. That material belongs to customers who operate nuclear power plants throughout the world.

"As a result, our customers have the accountability to determine where and from whom the materials are procured – some of which is sourced from Russia or enriched by a Russian company," she said. "Westinghouse condemns Russia's invasion and the resulting hostility and loss of life."

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In addition, some of the products sent to the U.S. from Russian ports continue on to Mexico and Canada. Toyota vehicle components, for example, arrived last month in New Orleans bound for a Mexican plant run by Toyota Tshusho, the car company's trading arm.

Radioactive material sent from Russia to the U.S. is hauled north of the border to sterilize packaged medical supplies used throughout North America.

Although imports of some food items, such as seafood and vodka, have been restricted, the Treasury Department last month published a fact sheet reiterating that agricultural trade between the U.S. and Russia is still very much allowed.

The Red October chocolate factory sits just across from the Kremlin in Moscow. Today it's a tourist attraction with apartments, stores and restaurants. But the company, Krasny Oktyabr, still makes and sells candy and other traditional treats from a production plant on the outskirts of Russia.

In Brooklyn, New York, Grigoriy Katsura, at the U.S. offices of Krasnyi Oktyabr Inc, said they continue to import delectables, a taste of childhood for Russian immigrants.

"Of course they're used to it," he said.

And so every few weeks, the shipments arrive at their warehouse from Russia: buckwheat, dried fruit and their world-renowned chocolate.

Inflation's harsh realities on display as Fed officials meet

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

JACKSON HOLE, Wyoming (AP) — A half-hour drive or so from the resort where the high priests of international finance — leading economists and central bank officials — have convened in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to discuss the world's economic challenges, Ash Hermanowski oversees the distribution of about 1,200 free meals a day.

At a food bank called Jackson Cupboard, Hermanowski hands out meals from a commercial garage after being forced from a previous site by a malfunctioning sprinkler. The food bank couldn't afford any other place in town.

Just across the street, The Glenwood, a collection of townhomes that will sell for millions, is nearing completion. "Unparalleled luxury," its website says, in a "truly relaxing oasis."

It's the "ultimate irony," Hermanowski said. "The staff and I, we talk about it all the time. We all struggle to live here, and they're building high-end residences. That dichotomy exists all over town, but people refuse to see it."

As the Federal Reserve's annual economic symposium gets under way Thursday at a lodge in Grand Teton National Park, some of the very problems Fed officials are grappling with — high inflation, soaring rental costs and home prices and wide economic inequalities — can be found near the idyllic mountain setting.

On Friday, Fed Chair Jerome Powell will deliver a speech that could signal how high or how fast the central bank may raise interest rates in the coming months. Powell's remarks will be scrutinized by Wall Street traders and economists and could potentially cause sharp swings in financial markets.

In its drive to tame the worst inflation bout the nation has endured in four decades, the Powell Fed has embarked on its fastest series of rate hikes since the early 1980s. The Fed is trying to slow the economy just enough to cool inflation without causing a recession — a notoriously delicate task.

Inflation is particularly high in the town of Jackson and the surrounding Teton County, which, even before the pandemic erupted two years ago, was the wealthiest and most unequal place in the nation. (Jackson Hole is the name of the broader valley.) The state of Wyoming has calculated that the cost of living in the county at the end of 2021 was 68% higher than in the rest of the state — with housing costs 130% higher.

At the food bank, Hermanowski says, demand has escalated from a year ago as surging food and gas prices have sapped the budgets of their clients. Roughly 85% of the food bank's recipients have a job, often more than one, said Sharel Lund, executive director of one22, a nonprofit that includes Jackson Cupboard.

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Like many resort towns, Jackson has always been expensive. But the pandemic turbocharged the disparities that have widened the gap between the wealthy and everyone else. Real estate prices soared as many affluent families, seeking to escape crowded cities, moved into the Jackson area or spent more time at vacation homes they already owned.

With many office professionals able to work remotely, the area's natural beauty became an alluring draw. Wyoming's low-tax status has also proved appealing to high-income earners.

Jackson, a town of about 25,000 people year-round, still retains its aura as an old Western town, with its archways made from elk antlers around the town square. The square is lined with a "Cowboy Bar" and an old-timey "Five and Dime" shop.

Yet wedged in among such outlets are symbols of the increasingly luxe Jackson: High-end jewelry shops and a Swarovski crystal store that is selling a bald eagle figurine for \$9,600.

"We definitely see both sides of it here," said Hannah Cooley, executive director of Hole Food Rescue, a nonprofit that redistributes leftover food from restaurants and bakeries. "You have the ultra-wealthy with their massive houses. And then you have three immigrant families crammed into a one-bedroom apartment."

Already-high home prices and rents in Jackson have jumped further since the pandemic, just as they have nationally, a particular hardship for people who work as housekeepers, chefs and waiters at resorts. The median price for a home: \$3 million, twice what it was five years ago. The average apartment rent in Teton County jumped 12.4% last year, to \$2,780, according to state government data.

Jonathan Schechter, a member of Jackson's Town Council, says that according to the most recent IRS data, the average income in Teton County in 2019 was \$312,442, highest in the nation and nearly 50% above the second-highest, Manhattan.

April Norton, director of the Jackson/Teton County Affordable Housing Department, points to a major obstacle to home construction: 97% of the county's land is federally owned and can't be developed. Compounding the squeeze, retiring workers who bought homes at affordable prices decades ago are now selling them for eye-popping prices that many current workers, even higher-income professionals, can't afford.

Norton's in-laws recently retired from jobs as an engineer and accountant in Jackson. Having built their own home in the 1970s, they will eventually be able to sell it for a price far above what current engineers or accountants could afford. A neighbor just sold a home for \$8 million.

The county is trying multiple approaches to address the shortage of affordable housing. They include building homes available only to people who work locally and with caps on price appreciation. Such "deed-restricted" homes have still sold for more than \$700,000, evidence of the intense demand and limited supply.

Still, a county report shows there is a waitlist of roughly 1,500 families seeking affordable housing, up from 1,100 last year.

The housing crunch has exacerbated worker shortages that are plaguing the county, a problem being felt by employers across the nation. Norton said the school system lost 60 teachers last year, in part because of a lack of housing. Many workers, including nurses and services workers, are stuck commuting from places like Victor, Idaho, a roughly 45-minute drive over the 8,500 foot Teton pass, which is treacherous for much of the winter.

"Retention of staff is the No. 1 challenge for businesses here," said Anna Olson, president of the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce. Some businesses, she said, are buying housing and providing it to workers at below-market rents. There's also a tax initiative on the ballot this November, which, if approved, will provide about \$100 million to support more housing development.

As more wealthy people have moved to Jackson, they have often sought out landscapers, nannies and other service workers, Norton said, adding to the demand for jobs and intensifying the shortage of affordable housing.

On Wednesday, the local newspaper, the Jackson Hole News & Guide, featured eight pages of help-wanted ads but only a half-page of listings for housing. Many were for temporary winter rentals, because

residents often leave the area to escape the cold.

One two-bedroom condo was asking \$5,250 a month.

Uvalde school board fires police chief after mass shooting

By ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — The Uvalde school district fired police chief Pete Arredondo on Wednesday under mounting pressure in the grieving Texas town to punish officers over letting a gunman at Robb Elementary School remain in a fourth-grade classroom for more than an hour with an AR-15 style rifle as 19 children and two teachers were killed.

In a unanimous vote, the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District's board of trustees fired Arredondo in an auditorium of parents and survivors of the May 24 massacre. Arredondo, who did not attend the meeting, becomes the first officer to lose his job following one of the deadliest classroom shootings in U.S. history.

His ouster came three months to the day after the tragedy, and less than two weeks before students return to school in Uvalde, where some children remain too scared or scarred to go back inside a classroom.

Cheers from the crowd followed the vote, and some parents walked out of an auditorium in tears. Outside, several Uvalde residents called for other officers to be held accountable.

"Coward!" some in the audience yelled as the meeting got underway.

Arredondo, who has been on leave from the district since June 22, has come under the most intense scrutiny of the nearly 400 officers who rushed to school but waited more than 70 minutes to confront the 18-year-old gunman in a fourth-grade classroom.

Most notably, Arredondo was criticized for not ordering officers to act sooner. Col. Steve McCraw, director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, has said Arredondo was in charge of the law enforcement response to the attack.

Minutes before the meeting of the Uvalde school board got underway, Arredondo's attorney released a scathing 4,500-word letter that amounted to the police chief's fullest defense to date of his actions. Over 17 defiant pages, Arredondo is not a fumbling school police chief who a damning state investigation blamed for not taking command and wasted time by looking for keys to a likely unlocked door, but a brave officer whose level-headed decisions saved the lives of other students.

It alleges that Arredondo warned the district about a variety of security issues in the schools a year before the shooting and asserted he wasn't in charge of the scene. The letter also accused Uvalde school officials of putting his safety at risk by not letting him carry a weapon to the school board meeting if he were to attend, citing "legitimate risks of harm to the public and to Chief Arredondo."

"Chief Arredondo is a leader and a courageous officer who with all of the other law enforcement officers who responded to the scene, should be celebrated for the lives saved, instead of vilified for those they couldn't reach in time," George Hyde wrote.

Following the vote, Hyde's office did not immediately return a request for comment.

Uvalde school officials have been under mounting pressure from victims' families and members of the community, many of whom have called for Arredondo's termination. Superintendent Hal Harrell had first moved to fire Arredondo in July but postponed the decision at the request of the police chief's attorney.

Among those at the meeting was Ruben Torres, father of Chloe Torres, who survived the shooting in room 112 of the school. He said that as a former Marine, he took an oath that he faithfully executed willingly, and did not understand why officers did not take action when leadership failed.

"Right now, being young, she is having a hard time handling this horrific event," Torres said.

Shirley Zamora, the mother of a student at Robb Elementary, said accountability shouldn't end with Arredondo's dismissal.

"This is just going to be the beginning. It's a long process," she said.

Only one other officer — Uvalde Police Department Lt. Mariano Pargas, who was the city's acting police chief on the day of massacre — is known to have been placed on leave for their actions during the shooting.

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The Texas Department of Public Safety, which had more than 90 state troopers at the scene, has also launched an internal investigation into the response by state police. State Sen. Roland Gutierrez, a Democrat who represents Uvalde, said McCraw, the state police chief, also deserves scrutiny.

"You fail at something so badly that people are getting hurt, then certainly we have to have some greater accountability," he said. "And accountability means losing your job, so be it."

School officials have said the campus at Robb Elementary will no longer be used when students return Sept 6. Instead, campuses elsewhere in Uvalde will serve as temporary classrooms for elementary school students, not all of whom are willing to return to school in-person following the shooting.

School officials say a virtual academy will be offered for students. The district has not said how many students will attend virtually, but a new state law passed last year in Texas following the pandemic limits the number of eligible students receiving remote instruction to "10% of all enrolled students within a given school system."

Schools can seek a waiver to exceed the limit but Uvalde has not done so, according to the Texas Education Agency.

New measures to improve school safety in Uvalde include "8-foot, non-scalable perimeter fencing" at elementary, middle and high school campuses, according to the school district. Officials say they have also installed additional security cameras, upgraded locks, enhanced training for district staff and improving communication.

Idaho can't enforce abortion ban in medical emergencies

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

A federal judge in Idaho has barred the state from enforcing a strict abortion ban in medical emergencies over concerns that it violates a federal law on emergency care.

The ruling Wednesday evening came after a federal judge this week in Texas made the opposite call, barring the federal government from enforcing a legal interpretation of the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act that would require Texas hospitals to provide abortion services if the health or life of the mother is at risk.

In Idaho, the ban makes performing an abortion in any "clinically diagnosable pregnancy" a felony punishable by up to five years in prison. Much of Idaho's law will still go into effect Thursday, but U.S. District Judge B. Lynn Winmill ruled Wednesday the state cannot prosecute anyone who is performing an abortion in an emergency medical situation.

That's because abortions in those cases appear to fall under a federal health care law requiring Medicare-funded hospitals to provide "stabilizing treatment" to patients, Winmill said.

That includes cases when the health of a pregnant patient is in serious jeopardy, when continuing the pregnancy could result in a serious impairment to a person's bodily functions, or a serious dysfunction of any bodily organ or part.

The pause on enforcement in Idaho will continue until a lawsuit challenging the ban is resolved, the judge said in the written ruling.

The U.S. Department of Justice sued the Republican-led state of Idaho earlier this month, saying the abortion ban set to take effect on Thursday violates the federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor (EMTALA) Act. Idaho's law criminalizes all abortions in "clinically diagnosable pregnancies," but allows physicians to defend themselves in court by arguing the procedure was necessary to avert the death of the mother.

Idaho Attorney General's spokesman Scott Graf said his office would not comment on the ruling because the case is still working its way through the courts.

Winmill said the case wasn't about abortion rights but about whether state or federal law takes precedence in this situation. The judge in the Idaho case said it was clear federal law did.

Winmill said the Idaho law would pose a dilemma for a doctor who felt they had to, under "EMTALA obligations," perform an abortion to save the life of the mother even though they are banned under state law.

"At its core, the Supremacy Clause says state law must yield to federal law when it's impossible to com-

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ply with both. And that's all this case is about," Winmill wrote. "It's not about the bygone constitutional right to an abortion."

In Texas, a federal judge took the opposite approach. Texas had sued Department of Health and Human Services and Secretary Xavier Becerra last month, arguing the federal law commonly referred to as EMTALA doesn't require doctors to provide abortions if doing so would violate a state law.

In a ruling late Tuesday, U.S. District Judge James Wesley Hendrix temporarily blocked the government from enforcing the guidance in Texas, saying it would force physicians to place the health of the pregnant person over that of the fetus or embryo even though EMTALA "is silent as to abortion."

Performing an abortion creates an "emergency medical condition" in the fetus or embryo, the judge wrote.

"Since the statute is silent on the question, the Guidance cannot answer how doctors should weigh risks to both a mother and her unborn child," the judge's order said. "Nor can it, in doing so, create a conflict with state law where one does not exist. The Guidance was thus unauthorized."

The Department of Health and Human Services said it was reviewing the legal decision to determine its next steps.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called the Texas decision, "a blow to Texans," saying pregnant women in Texas may now be denied appropriate treatment for conditions such as dangerously high blood pressure or severe bleeding.

"It's wrong, it's backwards, and women may die as a result. The fight is not over," Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

The Department of Health and Human Services issued the guidance in July, weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that abortion is not a constitutional right.

The agency cited EMTALA requirements on medical facilities to determine whether a person seeking treatment might be in labor or whether they face an emergency health situation — or one that could develop into an emergency — and to provide stabilizing treatment.

Texas argued that the EMTALA guidelines also violated the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which says some laws must be narrowly tailored to serve a compelling government interest if they affect individuals' religious freedoms.

In Texas, a ban on abortion at all points of a pregnancy is scheduled to take effect Thursday. It has narrow exceptions for saving the life of the unborn child or woman, preventing a serious health condition from being aggravated or caused by the pregnancy, or removing an ectopic pregnancy.

Texas clinics have already stopped offering nearly all types of abortion because of uncertainty over whether the state's 1925 ban can be enforced. The state also has a ban on abortions after embryonic cardiac activity can be detected, which is generally about six weeks into a pregnancy and often before a woman realizes she's pregnant.

EXPLAINER: NASA tests new moon rocket, 50 years after Apollo

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Years late and billions over budget, NASA's new moon rocket makes its debut next week in a high-stakes test flight before astronauts get on top.

The 322-foot (98-meter) rocket will attempt to send an empty crew capsule into a far-flung lunar orbit, 50 years after NASA's famed Apollo moonshots.

If all goes well, astronauts could strap in as soon as 2024 for a lap around the moon, with NASA aiming to land two people on the lunar surface by the end of 2025.

Liftoff is set for Monday morning from NASA's Kennedy Space Center.

The six-week test flight is risky and could be cut short if something fails, NASA officials warn.

"We're going to stress it and test it. We're going to make it do things that we would never do with a crew on it in order to try to make it as safe as possible," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The retired founder of George Washington University's space policy institute said a lot is riding on this

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trial run. Spiraling costs and long gaps between missions will make for a tough comeback if things go south, he noted.

"It is supposed to be the first step in a sustained program of human exploration of the moon, Mars, and beyond," said John Logsdon. "Will the United States have the will to push forward in the face of a major malfunction?"

The price tag for this single mission: more than \$4 billion. Add everything up since the program's inception a decade ago until a 2025 lunar landing, and there's even more sticker shock: \$93 billion.

Here's a rundown of the first flight of the Artemis program, named after Apollo's mythological twin sister.

ROCKET POWER

The new rocket is shorter and slimmer than the Saturn V rockets that hurled 24 Apollo astronauts to the moon a half-century ago. But it's mightier, packing 8.8 million pounds (4 million kilograms) of thrust. It's called the Space Launch System rocket, SLS for short, but a less clunky name is under discussion, according to Nelson. Unlike the streamlined Saturn V, the new rocket has a pair of strap-on boosters refashioned from NASA's space shuttles. The boosters will peel away after two minutes, just like the shuttle boosters did, but won't be fished from the Atlantic for reuse. The core stage will keep firing before separating and crashing into the Pacific in pieces. Two hours after liftoff, an upper stage will send the capsule, Orion, racing toward the moon.

MOONSHIP

NASA's high-tech, automated Orion capsule is named after the constellation, among the night sky's brightest. At 11 feet (3 meters) tall, it's roomier than Apollo's capsule, seating four astronauts instead of three. For this test flight, a full-size dummy in an orange flight suit will occupy the commander's seat, rigged with vibration and acceleration sensors. Two other mannequins made of material simulating human tissue — heads and female torsos, but no limbs — will measure cosmic radiation, one of the biggest risks of spaceflight. One torso is testing a protective vest from Israel. Unlike the rocket, Orion has launched before, making two laps around Earth in 2014. This time, the European Space Agency's service module will be attached for propulsion and solar power via four wings.

FLIGHT PLAN

Orion's flight is supposed to last six weeks from its Florida liftoff to Pacific splashdown, twice as long as astronaut trips in order to tax the systems. It will take nearly a week to reach the moon, 240,000 miles (386,000 kilometers) away. After whipping closely around the moon, the capsule will enter a distant orbit with a far point of 38,000 miles (61,000 kilometers). That will put Orion 280,000 miles (450,000 kilometers) from Earth, farther than Apollo. The big test comes at mission's end, as Orion hits the atmosphere at 25,000 mph (40,000 kph) on its way to a splashdown in the Pacific. The heat shield uses the same material as the Apollo capsules to withstand reentry temperatures of 5,000 degrees Fahrenheit (2,750 degrees Celsius). But the advanced design anticipates the faster, hotter returns by future Mars crews.

HITCHHIKERS

Besides three test dummies, the flight has a slew of stowaways for deep space research. Ten shoebox-size satellites will pop off once Orion is hurtling toward the moon. The problem is these so-called CubeSats were installed in the rocket a year ago, and the batteries for half of them couldn't be recharged as the launch kept getting delayed. NASA expects some to fail, given the low-cost, high-risk nature of these mini satellites. The radiation-measuring CubeSats should be OK. Also in the clear: a solar sail demo targeting an asteroid. In a back-to-the-future salute, Orion will carry a few slivers of moon rocks collected by Apollo 11's Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin in 1969, and a bolt from one of their rocket engines, salvaged from the sea a decade ago. Aldrin isn't attending the launch, according to NASA, but three of his former colleagues will be there: Apollo 7's Walter Cunningham, Apollo 10's Tom Stafford and Apollo 17's Harrison Schmitt, the next-to-last man to walk on the moon.

APOLLO VS. ARTEMIS

More than 50 years later, Apollo still stands as NASA's greatest achievement. Using 1960s technology, NASA took just eight years to go from launching its first astronaut, Alan Shepard, and landing Armstrong

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and Aldrin on the moon. By contrast, Artemis already has dragged on for more than a decade, despite building on the short-lived moon exploration program Constellation. Twelve Apollo astronauts walked on the moon from 1969 through 1972, staying no longer than three days at a time. For Artemis, NASA will be drawing from a diverse astronaut pool currently numbering 42 and is extending the time crews will spend on the moon to at least a week. The goal is to create a long-term lunar presence that will grease the skids for sending people to Mars. NASA's Nelson, promises to announce the first Artemis moon crews once Orion is back on Earth.

WHAT'S NEXT

There's a lot more to be done before astronauts step on the moon again. A second test flight will send four astronauts around the moon and back, perhaps as early as 2024. A year or so later, NASA aims to send another four up, with two of them touching down at the lunar south pole. Orion doesn't come with its own lunar lander like the Apollo spacecraft did, so NASA has hired Elon Musk's SpaceX to provide its Starship spacecraft for the first Artemis moon landing. Two other private companies are developing moonwalking suits. The sci-fi-looking Starship would link up with Orion at the moon and take a pair of astronauts to the surface and back to the capsule for the ride home. So far, Starship has only soared six miles (10 kilometers). Musk wants to launch Starship around Earth on SpaceX's Super Heavy Booster before attempting a moon landing without a crew. One hitch: Starship will need a fill-up at an Earth-orbiting fuel depot, before heading to the moon.

Student loan forgiveness could help more than 40 million

By COLLIN BINKLEY, SEUNG MIN KIM and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than 40 million Americans could see their student loan debt reduced — and in many cases eliminated — under the long-awaited forgiveness plan President Joe Biden announced Wednesday, a historic but politically divisive move in the run-up to the midterm elections.

Fulfilling a campaign promise, Biden is erasing \$10,000 in federal student loan debt for those with incomes below \$125,000 a year, or households that earn less than \$250,000. He's canceling an additional \$10,000 for those who received federal Pell Grants to attend college.

It's seen as an unprecedented attempt to stem the tide of America's rapidly rising student debt, but it doesn't address the broader issue — the high cost of college.

Republicans quickly denounced the plan as an insult to Americans who have repaid their debt and to those who didn't attend college. Critics across the political spectrum also questioned whether Biden has authority for the move, and legal challenges are virtually certain.

Biden also extended a pause on federal student loan payments for what he called the "final time." The pause is now set to run through the end of the year, with repayments to restart in January.

"Both of these targeted actions are for families who need it the most: working and middle class people hit especially hard during the pandemic," Biden said at the White House Wednesday afternoon.

The cancellation applies to federal student loans used to attend undergraduate and graduate school, along with Parent Plus loans. Current college students qualify if their loans were issued before July 1. For dependent students, their parents' household income must be below \$250,000.

Most people will need to apply for the relief. The Education Department has income data for a small share of borrowers, but the vast majority will need to prove their incomes through an application process. Officials said applications will be available before the end of the year.

Biden's plan makes 43 million borrowers eligible for some debt forgiveness, with 20 million who could get their debt erased entirely, according to the administration. About 60% of borrowers are recipients of federal Pell Grants, which are reserved for undergraduates with the most significant financial need, meaning more than half can get \$20,000 in relief.

Sabrina Cartan, a 29-year-old media strategist in New York City, is expecting her federal debt to get wiped out entirely. When she checked the balance Wednesday, it was \$9,940.

Cartan used the loans to attend Tufts University, and with Biden's plan she will be able to help her

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parents repay the additional thousands they borrowed for her education. As a first-generation college student, she called it a "leveling moment."

"I know there are people who feel that this isn't enough, and that is true for a lot of people," said Cartan, who already has repaid about \$10,000 of her loans. "I can say for me personally and for a lot of people, that is a lot of money."

For Braxton Simpson, Biden's plan is a great first step, but it's not enough. The 23-year-old MBA student at North Carolina Central University has more than \$40,000 in student loans. As an undergraduate student she took jobs to minimize her debt, but at \$10,000 a semester, the costs piled up.

As a Black woman, she felt higher education was a requirement to obtain a more stable financial future, even if that meant taking on large amounts of debt, she said.

"In order for us to get out of a lot of the situations that have been systemically a part of our lives, we have to go to school," Simpson said. "And so we end up in debt."

The plan doesn't apply to future college students, but Biden is proposing a separate rule that would reduce monthly payments on federal student debt.

The proposal would create a new payment plan requiring borrowers to pay no more than 5% of their earnings, down from 10% in similar existing plans. It would forgive any remaining balance after 10 years, down from 20 years now.

It would also raise the floor for repayments, meaning no one earning less than 225% of the federal poverty level would need to make monthly payments.

As a regulation, it would not require congressional approval. But it can take more than a year to finalize.

Biden's plan comes after more than a year of deliberation, with the president facing strong lobbying from liberals who wanted sweeping debt forgiveness, and from moderates and conservatives who questioned its basic fairness.

Once a popular campaign promise during the presidential primary, the issue created an almost unwinnable situation. Some fellow Democrats criticized the plan Wednesday, saying it's too costly and does little to solve the debt crisis.

"In my view, the administration should have further targeted the relief, and proposed a way to pay for this plan," said Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo. "While immediate relief to families is important, one-time debt cancellation does not solve the underlying problem."

Still, many Democrats rallied around it, including support from those who wanted Biden to go beyond \$10,000.

"I will keep pushing for more because I think it's the right thing to do," said Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., who had urged Biden to forgive up to \$50,000 a person. "But we need to take a deep breath here and recognize what it means for the president of the United States to touch so many hard-working middle class families so directly."

Proponents see cancellation as a matter of racial justice. Black students are more likely to take out federal student loans and at higher amounts than their white peers.

The NAACP, which pressed Biden to cancel at least \$50,000 per person, said the plan is "one step closer" to lifting the burden of student debt.

Derrick Johnson, the group's president, urged Biden to cancel the debt quickly and without bureaucratic hurdles for borrowers.

Biden's decision to impose an income cap goes against objections from some who say adding the detailed application process to verify incomes could deter some borrowers who need help the most.

The Biden administration defended the cap as a gate against wealthier borrowers. Politically, it's designed to counter arguments from critics who call debt cancellation a handout for the wealthy. Republicans hit hard with that argument on Wednesday despite the cap.

"President Biden's inflation is crushing working families, and his answer is to give away even more government money to elites with higher salaries," Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell said. "Democrats are literally using working Americans' money to try to buy themselves some enthusiasm from their political

base.”

One of the chief political sticking points has been the cost: Biden’s new plan, including debt cancellation, a new repayment plan and the payment freeze, will cost between \$400 billion to \$600 billion, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonprofit that advocates for lower deficits.

Asked about the cost Wednesday, Susan Rice, Biden’s domestic policy adviser, said, “I can’t give you that off the top of my head.”

There are also lingering questions about the administration’s authority to cancel student loan debt. The Justice Department released a legal opinion concluding that the Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act gives the Education secretary the “authority to reduce or eliminate the obligation to repay the principal balance of federal student loan debt.”

The legal opinion also concluded that the forgiveness could be applied on a “class-wide” basis in response to the coronavirus pandemic, a national emergency..

Lawsuits are likely nonetheless. The Job Creators Network, which promotes conservative economic policies, said it was considering legal options, with president and CEO Alfredo Ortiz calling the president’s effort “fundamentally unfair” to those who never took out loans for college.

Gender dysphoria covered by disability law, court rules

By DENISE LAVOIE AP Legal Affairs Writer

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — A federal ruling that gender dysphoria is covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act could help block conservative political efforts to restrict access to gender-affirming care, advocates and experts say.

A panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals last week became the first federal appellate court in the country to find that the 1990 landmark federal law protects transgender people who experience anguish and other symptoms as a result of the disparity between their assigned sex and their gender identity.

The ruling could become a powerful tool to challenge legislation restricting access to medical care and other accommodations for transgender people, including employment and government benefits, advocates said.

“It’s a very important and positive ruling to increase people’s access to gender-affirming care,” said Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality.

The ruling is binding in the states covered by the Richmond-based 4th Circuit — Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia — but will inevitably be cited in cases in other states, said Kevin Barry, a law professor at Quinnipiac University.

The decision came in the case of a transgender woman who sued the Fairfax County sheriff in Virginia for housing her in a jail with men. The decision is not limited to transgender people challenging jail policies, but also applies broadly to all areas of society covered by disability rights law, including employment, government benefits and services and public accommodations, Barry said.

“This decision destigmatized a health condition — gender dysphoria — and it says that what Congress did in 1990 wasn’t OK,” Barry said.

The sheriff’s office did not respond to phone messages seeking comment.

Some Republican leaders who have led efforts to limit access to transition treatment for youths have labeled it a form of child abuse. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott this year, for instance, ordered the state’s child welfare agency to investigate reports of gender-affirming care for children as abuse.

A new rule in Florida restricts Medicaid coverage for gender dysphoria treatments for youths and adults. The state health agency previously released a report stating that puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones and sex reassignment surgery have not been proven safe or effective in treating gender dysphoria.

And Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is widely touted as a potential 2024 Republican presidential candidate, recently tweeted that children should not be able to take puberty blockers “or mutilate their body by getting a sex change.”

But leading medical entities contradict those positions, Heng-Lehtinen said.

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"This health care is under attack politically in a lot of the country, but medically all of the credible professionals involved — the American Psychiatric Association, the American Medical Association and others — have all recognized for years that this is essentially primary care," Heng-Lehtinen said.

In the case before the 4th Circuit, Kesha Williams was initially assigned to live on the women's side of the Fairfax County jail when she arrived in 2018.

Williams told the nurse she is transgender, has gender dysphoria and received hormone treatments for the previous 15 years. But after she explained that she had not had genital surgery, she said, she was assigned to the men's section under a policy that inmates must be classified according to their genitals.

In her lawsuit, Williams said that she was harassed and that her prescribed hormone medication was repeatedly delayed or skipped. Deputies ignored her requests to refer to her as a woman and instead called her "mister," "sir," "he" or "gentleman," she said. Her requests to shower privately and for body searches to be conducted by a female deputy were denied, she said.

A federal judge granted a motion by the sheriff's office to dismiss the lawsuit, finding that because the Americans with Disabilities Act excluded "gender identity disorders not resulting from physical impairments," Williams could not sue under the law.

A three-judge panel of the 4th Circuit reversed that ruling, sending the case back to U.S. District Court.

The 4th Circuit panel said in its ruling Aug. 16 that there is a distinction between gender identity disorder and gender dysphoria. The court cited advances in medical understanding that led the American Psychiatric Association to remove gender identity disorder from the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and to add gender dysphoria, defined in the manual as the "clinically significant distress" felt by some transgender people. Symptoms can include intense anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation.

The modern diagnosis of gender dysphoria "affirms that a transgender person's medical needs are just as deserving of treatment and protection as anyone else's," Judge Diana Gribbon Motz wrote in the majority opinion.

Judge A. Marvin Quattlebaum Jr. dissented in part.

"Whether we focus on when Congress passed the ADA or look beyond to today, the distinction Williams attempts to draw between gender identity disorder and gender dysphoria fails," Quattlebaum wrote.

'Pre-bunking' shows promise in fight against misinformation

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

Soon after the Russian invasion, the hoaxes began. Ukrainian refugees were taking jobs, committing crimes and abusing handouts. The misinformation spread rapidly online throughout Eastern Europe, sometimes pushed by Moscow in an effort to destabilize its neighbors.

It's the kind of swift spread of falsehoods that has been blamed in many countries for increased polarization and an erosion of trust in democratic institutions, journalism and science.

But countering or stopping misinformation has proven elusive.

New findings from university researchers and Google, however, reveal that one of the most promising responses to misinformation may also be one of the simplest.

In a paper published Wednesday in the journal *Science Advances*, the researchers detail how short online videos that teach basic critical thinking skills can make people better able to resist misinformation.

The researchers created a series of videos similar to a public service announcement that focused on specific misinformation techniques — characteristics seen in many common false claims that include emotionally charged language, personal attacks or false comparisons between two unrelated items.

Researchers then gave people a series of claims and found that those who watched the videos were significantly better at distinguishing false information from accurate information.

It's an approach called "pre-bunking" and it builds on years of research into an idea known as inoculation theory that suggests exposing people to how misinformation works, using harmless, fictional examples, can boost their defenses to false claims.

With the findings in hand, Google plans to roll out a series of pre-bunking videos soon in Eastern Europe

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focused on scapegoating, which can be seen in much of the misinformation about Ukrainian refugees. That focus was chosen by Jigsaw, a division of Google that works to find new ways to address misinformation and extremism.

"We have spent quite a bit of time and energy studying the problem," said Beth Goldberg, Jigsaw's head of research and one of the authors of the paper. "We started thinking: How can we make the users, the people online, more resilient to misinformation?"

The two-minute clips then demonstrate how these tactics can show up in headlines, or social media posts, to make a person believe something that isn't true.

They're surprisingly effective. Subjects who viewed the videos were found to be significantly better at distinguishing false claims from accurate information when tested by the researchers. The same positive results occurred when the experiment was replicated on YouTube, where nearly 1 million people viewed the videos.

Researchers are now investigating how long the effects last, and whether "booster" videos can help sustain the benefits.

Earlier findings have suggested that online games or tutorials that teach critical thinking skills can also improve resiliency to misinformation. But videos, which could be played alongside online advertisements, are likely to reach many more people, said Jon Roozenbeek, a Cambridge University professor and one of the authors of the study.

Other authors included researchers at the University of Bristol in the U.K. and the University of Western Australia.

Google's effort will be one of the largest real-world tests of pre-bunking so far. The videos will be released on YouTube, Facebook and TikTok, in Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. All three countries have accepted large numbers of Ukrainian refugees and their citizens could be vulnerable to misinformation about refugees.

Jigsaw CEO Yasmin Green said the work on prebunking is intended to complement Google's other efforts to reduce the spread of misinformation: "As the scourge of misinformation grows, there's a lot more we can do to provide people with prompts and features that help them stay safe and informed online."

While journalistic fact checks can be effective in debunking a particular piece of misinformation, they're time and labor intensive. By focusing on characteristics of misinformation in general instead of specific claims, pre-bunking videos can help a person spot false claims on a wider variety of topics.

Another method, content moderation by social media companies, can often be inconsistent. While platforms like Facebook and Twitter often remove misinformation that violates their rules, they're also criticized for failing to do more. Other platforms like Telegram or Gab boast a largely hands-off approach to misinformation.

Social media content moderation and journalistic fact checks can also run the risk of alienating those who believe the misinformation. They might also be ignored by people who already distrust legitimate news outlets.

"The word fact checking itself has become politicized," Roozenbeek said.

Pre-bunking videos, however, don't target specific claims, and they make no assertions about what is true or not. Instead, they teach the viewer how false claims work in general — whether it's a claim about elections or NASA's moon landings, or the latest outbreak of the avian flu.

That transferability makes pre-bunking a particularly effective way of confronting misinformation, according to John Cook, a research professor at Australia's Monash University who has created online games that teach ways to spot misinformation.

"We've done enough research to know this can be effective," Cook said. "What we need now is the resources to deploy this at scale."

22 reported killed in Independence Day attack in Ukraine

By DEREK GATOPOULOS and INNA VARENYTSIA Associated Press

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KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces Wednesday launched a rocket attack on a Ukrainian train station on the embattled country's Independence Day, killing 22 people, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said after warning for days that Moscow might attempt "something particularly cruel" this week.

The lethal attack took place in Chaplyne, a town of about 3,500 people in the central Dnipropetrovsk region, Ukrainian news agencies quoted Zelenskyy as telling the U.N. Security Council via video. The president's office also reported that an 11-year-old child was killed by rocket fire earlier in the day in the settlement.

"Chaplyne is our pain today," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address to the nation.

At one point, Zelenskyy put the number of wounded at about 50. The deputy head of Zelenskyy's office later said 22 people were wounded in the attack, which hit five passenger rail cars.

Ukraine had been bracing for especially heavy attacks around the national holiday that commemorates Ukraine's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Wednesday also marked the six-month point in the war.

Days ahead of Independence Day, Kyiv authorities banned large gatherings in the capital through Thursday for fear of missile strikes.

Residents of Kyiv, which has been largely spared in recent months, woke up Wednesday to air raid sirens, but no immediate strikes followed. As the day wore on, Russian bombardments were reported in the country's east, west and center, with the most serious attack apparently at the train station.

Outgoing British Prime Minister Boris Johnson marked the holiday with a visit to Kyiv — his third since the war broke out — and other European leaders used the occasion to pledge unwavering support for Ukraine, locked in a battle that was widely expected to be a lightning conquest by Moscow but has turned into a grinding war of attrition. U.S. President Joe Biden announced a new military aid package of nearly \$3 billion to help Ukrainian forces fight for years to come.

Over the weekend, Zelenskyy cautioned that Russia "may try to do something particularly nasty, something particularly cruel" this week. He repeated the warnings ahead of the train station attack, saying, "Russian provocations and brutal strikes are a possibility."

Nevertheless, a festive atmosphere prevailed during the day at Kyiv's Maidan square as thousands of residents posed for pictures next to burned-out Russian tanks put on display. Folk singers set up, and many revelers — ignoring the sirens — were out and about in traditionally embroidered dresses and shirts.

Others were fearful.

"I can't sleep at night because of what I see and hear about what is being done in Ukraine," said a retiree who gave only her first name, Tetyana, her voice shaking with emotion. "This is not a war. It is the destruction of the Ukrainian people."

In a holiday message to the country, Zelenskyy exulted over Ukraine's success in fending off Moscow's forces since the invasion, saying: "On Feb. 24, we were told: You have no chance. On Aug. 24, we say: Happy Independence Day, Ukraine!"

Britain's Johnson urged Western allies to stand by Ukraine through the winter.

"This is not the time to put forward flimsy negotiating proposals," he said. "You can't negotiate with a bear when it's eating your leg or with a street robber when he has you pinned to the floor."

A car bombing outside Moscow that killed the 29-year-old daughter of right-wing Russian political theorist Alexander Dugin on Saturday also heightened fears that Russia might intensify attacks on Ukraine this week. Russian officials have blamed Ukraine for the death of Darya Dugina, a pro-Kremlin TV commentator. Ukraine has denied any involvement.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces have encountered unexpectedly stiff Ukrainian resistance in their invasion and abandoned their effort to storm the capital in the spring. The fighting has turned into a slog that has reduced neighborhoods to rubble and sent shock waves through the world economy.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, speaking Wednesday at a meeting of his counterparts from a security organization dominated by Russia and China, claimed the slow pace of Moscow's military action was due to what he said was an effort to spare civilians.

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Russian forces have repeatedly targeted civilian areas in cities, including hospitals and a Mariupol theater where hundreds of people were taking shelter.

But Shoigu said Russia is carrying out strikes with precision weapons against Ukrainian military targets, and "everything is done to avoid civilian casualties."

"Undoubtedly, it slows down the pace of the offensive, but we do it deliberately," he said.

On the battlefield, Russian forces struck several towns and villages in Donetsk province in the east over 24 hours, killing one person, authorities said. A building materials superstore in the city of Donetsk was hit by a shell and erupted in flames, the mayor said. There were no immediate reports of any injuries.

In the Dnipropetrovsk region, the Russians again shelled the cities of Nikopol and Marhanets, damaging several buildings and wounding people, authorities said. Russian troops also shelled the city of Zaporizhzhia, but no casualties were reported.

In addition, Russian rockets struck unspecified targets in the Khmelnytskyi region, about 300 kilometers (180 miles) west of Kyiv, the regional governor said. Attacks there have been infrequent.

'Magic mushroom' psychedelic may help heavy drinkers quit

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

The compound in psychedelic mushrooms helped heavy drinkers cut back or quit entirely in the most rigorous test of psilocybin for alcoholism.

More research is needed to see if the effect lasts and whether it works in a larger study. Many who took a dummy drug instead of psilocybin also succeeded in drinking less, likely because all study participants were highly motivated and received talk therapy.

Psilocybin, found in several species of mushrooms, can cause hours of vivid hallucinations. Indigenous people have used it in healing rituals and scientists are exploring whether it can ease depression or help longtime smokers quit. It's illegal in the U.S., though Oregon and several cities have decriminalized it. Starting next year, Oregon will allow its supervised use by licensed facilitators.

The new research, published Wednesday in JAMA Psychiatry, is "the first modern, rigorous, controlled trial" of whether it can also help people struggling with alcohol, said Fred Barrett, a Johns Hopkins University neuroscientist who wasn't involved in the study.

In the study, 93 patients took a capsule containing psilocybin or a dummy medicine, lay on a couch, their eyes covered, and listened to recorded music through headphones. They received two such sessions, one month apart, and 12 sessions of talk therapy.

During the eight months after their first dosing session, patients taking psilocybin did better than the other group, drinking heavily on about 1 in 10 days on average vs. about 1 in 4 days for the dummy pill group. Almost half who took psilocybin stopped drinking entirely compared with 24% of the control group.

Only three conventional drugs — disulfiram, naltrexone and acamprosate — are approved to treat alcohol use disorder and there's been no new drug approvals in nearly 20 years.

While it's not known exactly how psilocybin works in the brain, researchers believe it increases connections and, at least temporarily, changes the way the brain organizes itself.

"More parts of the brain are talking to more parts of the brain," said Dr. Michael Bogenschutz, director of the NYU Langone Center for Psychedelic Medicine, who led the research.

Less is known about how enduring those new connections might be. In theory, combined with talk therapy, people might be able to break bad habits and adopt new attitudes more easily.

"There's a possibility of really shifting in a relatively permanent way the functional organization of the brain," Bogenschutz said.

Patients described life-changing insights that gave them lasting inspiration, Bogenschutz said.

Mary Beth Orr, 69, of Burien, Washington, said her psilocybin-induced hallucinations — flying over breathtaking landscapes and merging telepathically with creative people throughout history — taught her she wasn't alone.

Before enrolling in the study in 2018, Orr had five or six drinks every evening and more on weekends.

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"The quantity was unacceptable and yet I couldn't stop," she said. "There was no off switch that I could access."

During her first psilocybin experience, she saw a vision of her late father, who gave her a pair of eagle eyes and said, "Go." She told the therapists monitoring her: "These eagle eyes can't see God's face, but they know where it is."

She stopped drinking entirely for two years, and now has an occasional glass of wine. More than the talk therapy, she credits psilocybin.

"It made alcohol irrelevant and uninteresting to me," Orr said. Now, "I am tethered to my children and my loved ones in a way that just precludes the desire to be alone with alcohol."

Patients receiving psilocybin had more headaches, nausea and anxiety than those getting the dummy drug. One person reported thoughts of suicide during a psilocybin session.

In an experiment like this, it's important that patients don't know or guess if they got the psilocybin or the dummy drug. To try to achieve this, the researchers chose a generic antihistamine with some psychoactive effects as the placebo.

Still, most patients in the study correctly guessed whether they got the psilocybin or the dummy pill.

Paul Mavis couldn't guess. The 61-year-old from Wilton, Connecticut, got the placebo, but still quit drinking. For one thing, the talk therapy helped, suggesting to him that his emotional life stalled at age 15 when he started drinking to feel numb.

And he described a life-changing moment during a session where he was taking the dummy drug: He imagined the death of a loved one. Suddenly, an intense, incapacitating grief overcame him.

"I was crying, which isn't typical for me. I was sweating. I was bereft," he said. "As I'm trying to reconcile this grief, like, why am I feeling this?"

"Instantly, I thought, 'Drinking equals death.'" He said he hasn't had a drink since.

Dr. Mark Willenbring, former director of treatment research at the National Institute for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, said more research is needed before psilocybin can be considered an effective addition to talk therapy. He noted that talking with a therapist helped both groups — those who got psilocybin and those who didn't — and the added benefit of psilocybin appeared to wear off over time.

"It's tantalizing, absolutely," Willenbring said. "Is more research required? Yes. Is it ready for prime time? No."

Study: Pfizer COVID pill showed no benefit in younger adults

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pfizer's COVID-19 pill appears to provide little or no benefit for younger adults, while still reducing the risk of hospitalization and death for high-risk seniors, according to a large study published Wednesday.

The results from a 109,000-patient Israeli study are likely to renew questions about the U.S. government's use of Paxlovid, which has become the go-to treatment for COVID-19 due to its at-home convenience. The Biden administration has spent more than \$10 billion purchasing the drug and making it available at thousands of pharmacies through its test-and-treat initiative.

The researchers found that Paxlovid reduced hospitalizations among people 65 and older by roughly 75% when given shortly after infection. That's consistent with earlier results used to authorize the drug in the U.S. and other nations.

But people between the ages of 40 and 65 saw no measurable benefit, according to the analysis of medical records.

The study has limitations due to its design, which compiled data from a large Israeli health system rather than enrolling patients in a randomized study with a control group — the gold-standard for medical research.

The findings reflect the changing nature of the pandemic, in which the vast majority of people already have some protection against the virus due to vaccination or prior infection. For younger adults, in par-

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ticular, that greatly reduces their risks of severe COVID-19 complications. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently estimated that 95% of Americans 16 and older have acquired some level of immunity against the virus.

"Paxlovid will remain important for people at the highest risk of severe COVID-19, such as seniors and those with compromised immune systems," said Dr. David Boulware, a University of Minnesota researcher and physician, who was not involved in the study. "But for the vast majority of Americans who are now eligible, this really doesn't have a lot of benefit."

A spokesman for Pfizer declined to comment on the results, which were published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration authorized Paxlovid late last year for adults and children 12 and older who are considered high risk due to conditions like obesity, diabetes and heart disease. More than 42% of U.S. adults are considered obese, representing 138 million Americans, according to the CDC.

At the time of the FDA decision there were no options for treating COVID-19 at home, and Paxlovid was considered critical to curbing hospitalizations and deaths during the pandemic's second winter surge. The drug's results were also far stronger than a competing pill from Merck.

The FDA made its decision based on a Pfizer study in high-risk patients who hadn't been vaccinated or treated for prior COVID-19 infection.

"Those people do exist but they're relatively rare because most people now have either gotten vaccinated or they've gotten infected," Boulware said.

Pfizer reported earlier this summer that a separate study of Paxlovid in healthy adults — vaccinated and unvaccinated — failed to show a significant benefit. Those results have not yet been published in a medical journal.

More than 3.9 million prescriptions for Paxlovid have been filled since the drug was authorized, according to federal records. A treatment course is three pills twice a day for five days.

A White House spokesman on Wednesday pointed to several recent papers suggesting Paxlovid helps reduce hospitalizations among people 50 and older. The studies have not been published in peer-reviewed journals.

"Risk for severe outcomes from COVID is along a gradient, and the growing body of evidence is showing that individuals between the ages of 50 and 64 can also benefit from Paxlovid," Kevin Munoz said in an emailed statement.

Administration officials have been working for months to increase use of Paxlovid, opening thousands of sites where patients who test positive can fill a prescription. Last month, U.S. officials further expanded access by allowing pharmacists to prescribe the drug.

The White House recently signaled that it may soon stop purchasing COVID-19 vaccines, drugs and tests, shifting responsibility to the private insurance market. Under that scenario, insurers could set new criteria for when they would pay for patients to receive Paxlovid.

Legality of student loan plan relies on pandemic, 2003 law

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is tying its authority to cancel student debt to the coronavirus pandemic and to a 2003 law aimed at providing help to members of the military. Legal challenges are expected.

Skeptics of the administration's ability to act on its own, without new legislation, had once included President Joe Biden himself and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

But in a legal opinion released Wednesday, the Justice Department said that the HEROES Act of 2003 gives the administration "sweeping authority" to reduce or eliminate student debt during a national emergency, "when significant actions with potentially far-reaching consequences are often required."

The law was adopted with overwhelming bipartisan support at a time when U.S. forces were fighting two wars, in Afghanistan and Iraq. It gives the Education secretary authority to waive rules relating to

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student financial aid programs in times of war or national emergency.

Former President Donald Trump declared a national emergency in 2020 because of the pandemic, and it remains in effect.

But neither Trump nor Biden, until the president's announcement on Wednesday, had tried to wipe out so much student debt at one time.

The Justice Department's legal justification seemed to be anticipating criticism that the broad-based debt cancellation might run afoul of Supreme Court rulings, including a June decision limiting the administration's ability to combat climate change.

In that case, the court declared that when dealing with such "major questions," the administration must point to clear congressional authorization when it asserts new power over an important part of the economy.

The justification for the debt cancellation "seems to tee up nicely -- perhaps inadvertently -- a major-questions doctrine challenge as the opinion seems to suggest the agency could forgive all student loans for everyone due to pandemic" if the agency head deemed it necessary, Chris Walker, a University of Michigan law professor wrote on Twitter.

But Abby Shafroth, an attorney at the National Consumer Law Center, said a challenge to the loan-forgiveness plan could falter in several ways, including the specific reference to national emergencies in the 2003 law.

Both the Trump and Biden administrations have previously relied on the HEROES Act to pause loan repayments during the pandemic and, in Biden's case, overhaul a student debt forgiveness program for public workers, Shafroth said.

"Today's action is significant, but not different in kind," she said.

A separate issue may be finding someone who is harmed by the administration's action and has legal standing to sue, she said.

The Job Creators Network, which promotes conservative economic policies, said it was weighing a lawsuit to try and block Biden's plan.

"This executive overreach transfers taxpayer dollars from hardworking ordinary Americans and small businesses to disproportionately higher earners with college degrees," said Alfredo Ortiz, president and CEO of the group. "It does nothing to address the underlying issue of outrageous college costs. Indeed, it rewards colleges for making education unaffordable and entrenches the failing status quo."

An Education Department memo, produced in the final days of the Trump administration, concluded that there was no authority to cancel debt on a broad basis.

The department has never invoked the law, or any other statute, "for the blanket or mass cancellation, compromise, discharge or forgiveness of student loan principal balances," Reed Rubinstein, then an Education Department lawyer, wrote in January 2021.

The issue has been under review for some 18 months, Lisa Brown, the top lawyer at the Education Department, wrote in a separate memo that was released Wednesday and called on Education Secretary Miguel Cardona to rescind Rubinstein's memo.

Pelosi also reversed course. In Las Vegas Tuesday, Pelosi said that she "didn't know what -- what authority the President had to do this. And now clearly, it seems he has the authority to do this."

Paul Newman's daughters sue late actor's charity foundation

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — A new lawsuit has exposed a deep rift between two of Paul Newman's daughters and the late actor's charitable foundation funded by profits from the Newman's Own line of food and drink products.

The daughters, Susan Kendall Newman and Nell Newman, allege their own charity organizations are both supposed to receive \$400,000 a year from the Newman's Own Foundation under a mandate by their father, but the foundation has cut those payments in half in recent years.

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They filed a lawsuit Tuesday in state court in Stamford, Connecticut, seeking \$1.6 million in damages to be donated to their foundations for charitable giving.

The daughters say their father, who started Newman's Own Foundation three years before he died in 2008, allowed the foundation to use his name and likeness — but only on several conditions including giving each of the two daughters' foundations \$400,000 a year.

Susan Kendall Newman, who lives in Oregon, and Nell Newman, of California, worry the foundation is setting the stage to completely remove them from having any say in how some of profits from Newman's Own products are donated to charities. They also accused the foundation of "contradicting" their father's wishes and intentions for years.

"No one should have to feel that the legacy of a departed loved one is being dishonored in the way that Newman's Own Foundation has disregarded the daughters of Paul Newman," Andy Lee, a New York City attorney for the daughters, said in a statement.

"This lawsuit does not seek personal compensation for Mr. Newman's daughters, but simply seeks to hold (Newman's Own Foundation) accountable to the charities they have shortchanged in recent years and would ensure they receive an increased level of support in the future, in line with Mr. Newman's wishes," he said.

Newman's Own Foundation has not yet filed a response to the lawsuit in court but has released a statement.

"Best practices surrounding philanthropic organizations do not allow for the establishment of perpetual funding allotments for anyone, including Nell and Susan Newman," the statement said. "A meritless lawsuit based on this faulty wish would only divert money away from those who benefit from Paul Newman's generosity."

The foundation added, "While we expect to continue to solicit Newman family recommendations for worthy organizations, our funding decisions are made each year and will continue to reflect the clear aim of Paul Newman and our responsibility to the best practices governing private foundations."

Paul Newman, who lived in Westport with his wife, actor Joanne Woodward, created the Newman's Own brand in 1982, with all profits going to charities. Today the product line includes frozen pizza, salsa, salad dressings and pasta sauces, as well as dog food and pet treats.

In his will, Paul Newman left his assets to his wife and Newman's Own Foundation.

Newman's Own, the products company, is a subsidiary of Newman's Own Foundation, a nonprofit organization. The foundation says more than \$570 million has been given to thousands of charities since 1982.

According to 2020 tax records, the foundation had more than \$24 million in income and paid out \$11.5 million in contributions, gifts and grants. Operating and administrative expenses totaled nearly \$4.5 million.

According to his daughters' lawsuit, Newman's Own Foundation wrote to them only four days after their father's death, saying it would reserve the right to stop allocating funds to charities identified by the daughters. The lawsuit says that contradicted Paul Newman's explicit instructions to the foundation.

Whitmer kidnap plot convictions unlikely to curb extremism

By JOHN FLESHER Associated Press

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. (AP) — The conviction of two men for conspiring to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer shows that jurors in a deeply divided nation can still reach agreement in politically charged cases, according to experts.

But it leaves unanswered questions about the potential for violence by extremists with a vendetta against government and law enforcement, they say.

"I hope it will be a deterrent in the future, but we need to see some softening of the rhetoric before we can accurately predict that," said Michael Edison Hayden, spokesman for the nonprofit Southern Policy Law Center, which monitors hate groups.

A federal jury in Grand Rapids, Michigan, returned guilty verdicts Tuesday against Adam Fox and Barry Croft Jr. on two counts of conspiracy. Two others in the plot, Kaleb Franks and Ty Garbin, pleaded guilty earlier. Franks' sentencing hearing is set for Oct. 6, Fox's for Dec. 12 and Croft's for Dec. 28. Garbin is

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-serving a six-year term, but prosecutors Wednesday asked a judge to cut that to three due to his "remarkable" assistance to the government.

Prosecutors said they planned to grab Whitmer at her vacation home and blow up a bridge to stop police from responding.

A different jury in April deadlocked on Fox and Croft while acquitting two other men. That outcome prompted worries that the overheated political landscape was hampering jurors' ability to put aside biases, particularly when the FBI — a frequent target of right-wing activists and commentators — was involved.

Some legal observers criticized the government's handling of the case and questioned the wisdom of retrying it. Barbara McQuade, a former federal prosecutor, said refusing to do so would have been "the coward's way out."

"We're seeing an escalation of threats of violence against public officials," McQuade said. "The only way to stop that is by holding people accountable when they engage in acts like this, threatening to harm public officials."

The case unfolded against a backdrop of nationwide polarization.

Whitmer, a rising Democratic star, had exchanged barbs with former President Donald Trump and was unpopular with conservatives, including over her policies early on during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trump and other Republicans had accused the FBI of being a tool of Democrats. He described the Whitmer kidnapping plan as a "fake deal." Jury selection in the retrial of Fox and Croft happened the day after federal agents searched Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate for classified documents. During the trial, a man apparently angered by the search tried to breach the FBI's Cincinnati office and was killed.

Even so, the jury in Michigan's Western District — a blend of urban, suburban and rural areas representing a broad political spectrum — delivered "a real statement that citizens of our country aren't going to put up with violent actions against public officials," said Mark Chutkow, a former Detroit federal prosecutor.

Less clear is what, if any, effect the case will have on anti-government extremism and white-hot partisanship. Following the verdict, Whitmer renewed her call to "lower the temperature."

"This is about every American who is serving the public, who's dealing with threats, whether it's an election worker or it is a police officer or a teacher," she told reporters Wednesday after a back-to-school event in suburban Detroit. "This continued political rhetoric that is aimed at inspiring people to hurt their fellow Americans is dangerous."

The convictions of Croft and Fox could be another rallying cry for far-right extremists, although likely not as potent as 1990s sieges in Waco, Texas, and Ruby Ridge, Idaho, said Jon Lewis, a research fellow with George Washington University's program on extremism.

"It's possible that individuals in anti-government spaces could leverage this as an example of continued tyranny, abuse of the rights of Americans," Lewis said.

A more concerning outcome could be an increase in lone-wolf attacks as extremist groups become more wary of the potential for infiltration by undercover operatives, he said.

"It's much harder with the lone actor," Lewis said. "He doesn't tell anyone his plans, he has legal access to firearms."

The George Washington program is tracking cases against 49 people charged with "offenses related to the boogaloo movement," a loose confederation of believers in a second civil war, he said.

Far-right paramilitary groups were gleeful about the first trial's outcome and probably are unhappy with the convictions, said Mark Pitcavage, senior research fellow with the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism. But history suggests guilty verdicts are less likely to incite violent reactions than arrests perceived as unjust, he said.

It's equally doubtful that the case will bring about a calmer tone in politics, Pitcavage said.

"We're in such a heavily polarized society right now and few people seem to want to step back from the brink," he said.

The most significant ripple effect, he said, might be what was avoided: another defeat and further damage to the FBI's credibility.

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Neema Rahmani, a former federal prosecutor in California who has followed the Michigan case and criticized the government's performance in the first trial, said the convictions vindicated the bureau's investigation.

"Obviously there are folks who are always going to distrust the FBI," he said. "But this is a big win."

The convictions may boost public understanding of the FBI's tactics in combating domestic terrorism, particularly use of undercover operatives, said Dennis Lormel, president of the Society of Former FBI Agents.

"I understand the concerns about overreaching, especially with the rhetoric about the FBI being politicized," Lormel said. "But the opportunity to insert FBI employees or cooperating witnesses is critically important. If we lose that, we will be in a lot of trouble, we'll see more terrorist attacks."

Oklahoma governor rejects clemency for death row inmate

By SEAN MURPHY and KEN MILLER Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt on Wednesday rejected clemency for a man facing execution this week for the 1997 hammer killing of a Choctaw man, despite a recommendation from the state's Pardon and Parole Board that his life be spared.

James Coddington was convicted and sentenced to die for the beating death of his friend and coworker, 73-year-old Albert Hale, inside Hale's Choctaw home. Prosecutors say Coddington, who was 24 at the time, became enraged when Hale refused to give him money to buy cocaine.

Coddington's execution is scheduled for Thursday morning.

"After thoroughly reviewing arguments and evidence presented by all sides of the case, Governor Kevin Stitt has denied the Pardon and Parole Board's clemency recommendation for James Allen Coddington," Stitt's office said in a statement.

During a clemency hearing this month before the state's five-member Pardon and Parole Board, an emotional Coddington, now 50, apologized to Hale's family and said he is a different man today.

"I'm clean, I know God, I'm not ... I'm not a vicious murderer," Coddington told the board. "If this ends today with my death sentence, OK."

Mitch Hale, Albert Hale's son who had urged the parole board not to recommend clemency, said he feels a sense of relief with Stitt's decision.

"Our family can put this behind us after 25 years," Hale, 64, said. "No one is ever happy that someone's dying, but (Coddington) chose this path ... he knew what the consequences are, he rolled the dice and lost."

Hale said he, his wife, goddaughter and a friend were en route to McAlester to attend the execution.

Coddington's attorney, Emma Rolls, told the panel that Coddington was impaired by years of alcohol and drug abuse that began when he was an infant and his father put beer and whiskey into his baby bottles.

Rolls said Coddington doesn't have any pending appeals that would delay or stop his execution on Thursday.

"While we are profoundly disheartened by this decision, we appreciate the pardons board's careful consideration of James Coddington's life and case, Rolls said in a statement following Stitt's announcement.

"The Board's clemency recommendation acknowledged James's sincere remorse and meaningful transformation during his years on death row," Rolls said.

The Rev. Don Heath, chair of the Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty said "there is no mercy or forgiveness" in Stitt's heart.

"I am surprised, and, quite honestly, angry at Gov. Stitt's rejection of clemency for James Coddington. Stitt's statement does not give a reason for his denial — it simply states that a jury convicted Coddington of first-degree murder and sentenced him to death," Heath said in a statement.

"We have 25 executions scheduled over the next 29 months. I am afraid that the Pardon and Parole Board hearings will be moot exercises," Heath said.

The parole board had voted 3-2 to recommend Coddington for clemency.

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Stitt, a Republican, had said he planned to meet with Hale's family, prosecutors and Coddington's attorneys before making his decision.

Coddington was twice sentenced to death for Hale's killing, the second time in 2008 after his initial sentence was overturned on appeal.

Stitt has granted clemency only one time, in November, to death row inmate Julius Jones just hours before Jones was scheduled to receive a lethal injection. The first-term governor commuted Jones' sentence to life in prison without parole.

Jones' case had drawn national attention after it was featured in "The Last Defense," a three-episode documentary that cast doubt on Jones' conviction, and there were numerous protests in Oklahoma City in the days leading up to Jones' scheduled execution date.

Stitt said in an interview with The Associated Press earlier this month that had he allowed Jones' execution to go forward "that would have definitely torn our state apart."

Coddington's execution would be the fifth since Oklahoma resumed carrying out the death penalty in October.

The state had halted executions in September 2015 when prison officials realized they had received the wrong lethal drug.

It was later learned the same wrong drug had been used previously to execute an inmate, and executions in the state were put on hold.

Crucial illegal road threatens Amazon rainforest

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE RIO DE JANEIRO

An illegal dirt road ripping through protected areas in the Brazilian Amazon is now just a few miles shy of connecting two of the worst areas of deforestation in the region, according to satellite images and accounts from people familiar with the area. If the road is completed it will turn a large area of remaining forest into an island, under pressure from human activity on all sides.

Environmentalists have been warning about just this kind of development in the rainforest for decades. Roads are significant because most deforestation occurs alongside them, where access is easier and land value higher.

On the east side of the new road is a massively-deforested area where Brazil's largest cattle herd, 2.4 million head, now grazes. This municipality of Sao Felix do Xingu is the country's second-largest greenhouse gas emitter, thanks to deforestation, according to Climate Observatory, a network of environmental groups. It is roughly the size of Maine and has a population of 136,000.

To the west is an area where three years ago ranchers coordinated the burning of several swaths of virgin forest in an episode famously known as the Day of Fire. This municipality, larger than Maryland, is Brazil's eighth-largest greenhouse gas emitter.

Wedged in between is the Xingu basin. The Xingu River that runs through it is one of the main tributaries of the Amazon River. It begins in the drier Cerrado biome, surrounded by tens of thousands of square miles of protected areas.

The Xingu River is home to several Indigenous peoples, who are now pressed on both sides by an onslaught of settlers who have built a large network of dirt roads and illegal airstrips. Experts said the stakes could not be higher.

The opportunities for new deforestation "in the center of the corridor of protected areas of the Xingu brings the risk of an irreversible breaking of the Amazon rainforest, dividing it into islands of degraded forest, which does not have the strength to resist climate change. We need to protect and maintain large forest corridors to sustain the resilience of the threatened biome," Biviany Rojas, the program coordinator of Socio-Environmental Institute, a Brazilian non-profit, told the Associated Press.

Almost half of Brazil's climate pollution comes from deforestation, according to Climate Observatory. The destruction is so vast now that the eastern Amazon, just east of Xingu basin, has ceased to be a carbon sink, or absorber, for the Earth and has converted into a carbon source, according to a study published

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in 2021 in the journal Nature.

"They come to deforest, to extract timber and to dig for gold," Indigenous leader Mydjere Kayapo told the AP in a phone interview. His people, the Kayapo, have suffered invasions from loggers and gold miners, who contaminate rivers with mud and mercury, co-opt leaders and provoke internal division.

The new road was detected earlier this year. According to satellite images analyzed by a network of nonprofits called Xingu+ and reviewed by the AP, it is 27 miles (43 kilometers) long.

The road cuts through two ostensibly protected areas: Terra do Meio (Middle Earth) Ecological Station, a federal unit, and Iri State Forest, managed by the state of Pará, famous for its deforestation rates.

From January to August, Terra do Meio alone lost 9 square miles (24 square kilometers) of forest, and Iri lost 6 square kilometers (2 square miles) of rainforest along the illegal road. In July, Xingu+ reported the illegal road-building to Brazil's attorney general.

The city of Novo Progresso is also west of the new road. In recent days, the city has been covered by thick smoke from wildfires, deliberately set. On Monday alone, satellite sensors picked up 331 outbreaks of fire in the municipality, according to monitoring from Brazil's National Institute for Space Research. August, which falls in the dry season, is typically the second worst month for both deforestation and fire.

Brazil's federal agency ICMBio, which manages protected areas, and Pará's secretary of environment, didn't respond to AP emails seeking comment about the illegal road. These are the agencies responsible for protecting the areas flanking the road.

Under far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, the area deforested in Brazil's Amazon has reached a 15-year high, according to official data. The space agency said its national monitoring systems showed the Brazilian Amazon lost more than 5,000 square miles (13,200 square kilometers) of rainforest in the 12 months from Aug. 2020 to July 2021. New data is expected out by the end of the year.

Panel: Trump staffers pushed unproven COVID treatment at FDA

By MATTHEW PERRONE and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Officials in the Trump White House tried to pressure U.S. health experts into reauthorizing a discredited COVID-19 treatment, according to a congressional investigation that provides new evidence of that administration's efforts to override Food and Drug Administration decisions early in the pandemic.

The report Wednesday by the Democratic-led House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis also sheds new light on the role that television personalities played in bringing hydroxychloroquine to the attention of top White House officials. Investigators highlighted an email from Fox News' Laura Ingraham and others from Dr. Mehmet Oz, the celebrity heart surgeon who had a daytime TV show and is now the Republican Senate nominee in Pennsylvania. Ingraham attended an Oval Office meeting with President Donald Trump, who himself took the anti-malaria drug.

The FDA originally authorized use of hydroxychloroquine in late March 2020 based on small studies suggesting it could have some effectiveness against the coronavirus. At that time, many researchers hoped that existing antiviral drugs could be used to fight the virus. But by June, FDA officials had concluded the drug was likely ineffective and could cause potentially dangerous heart complications, revoking its emergency use.

Efforts by the Trump administration to control the release of COVID-19 guidance and install political operatives at public health agencies have been well documented.

The report by the House subcommittee investigating the government's COVID-19 response focused on pressure at the FDA, which serves as gatekeeper for the drugs, vaccines and other countermeasures against the virus.

Much of the information comes from an interview with the agency's former commissioner, Dr. Stephen Hahn, who was picked for the job by Trump in late 2019. Frustrated by the pace of FDA's medical reviews, Trump repeatedly accused Hahn -- without evidence -- of delaying decisions on COVID-19 drugs and vaccines "for political reasons."

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Although FDA commissioners are politically appointed, the agency's scientists are expected to conduct their reviews free from outside influence. Indeed, the FDA's credibility largely stems from its reputation for scientific independence.

But Hahn told investigators that he felt pressure due to the "persistence" of Trump aide Peter Navarro's calls to reauthorize hydroxychloroquine after the FDA's decision to pull its emergency use.

"We took a different stance at the FDA," Hahn told investigators. "So that disagreement, which of course ultimately became somewhat public, was a source of pressure."

The subcommittee chairman, Democrat Rep. Jim Clyburn of South Carolina, said efforts to bend the FDA's scientific work on treatments and vaccines exemplified how the "prior administration prioritized politics over public health." But Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise, the panel's top Republican, said the report was "further proof" that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., "only set up this sham panel to carry out a political vendetta" against Trump.

Much of the report focuses on actions taken by Navarro and Dr. Steven Hatfill, a virologist and outside adviser described by the subcommittee as a "full-time volunteer" on COVID-19 for the White House.

"Dr. Hatfill and Mr. Navarro devised multiple pressure schemes targeting FDA and federal officials who they contended were wrongly impeding widespread access to hydroxychloroquine," according to the report.

In his response, Hatfill said: "We never wrongly pressured anyone. We simply followed the science and the overwhelming evidence as detailed in several studies available at the time."

Navarro, in an emailed statement, said the subcommittee was "wrongly" perpetuating that hydroxychloroquine "was somehow dangerous." He also said he has chronicled his battles with the FDA in his White House memoir.

Importantly, there's no evidence that White House efforts ultimately changed the FDA's decisions on hydroxychloroquine or any other therapies.

Investigators also cited a March 28, 2020, email from Oz to Dr. Deborah Birx, White House coronavirus response coordinator, stating that the drug "appears safe and results are better than expected."

Birx forwarded the email to Hahn within the hour, saying "we should talk."

A cancer specialist with no prior political experience, Hahn was widely criticized during the early COVID-19 response for decisions that appeared to cave to White House officials.

According to emails obtained by the committee, Hatfill described "constant fighting with (Dr. Anthony) Fauci and Dr. Hahn" over access to hydroxychloroquine during the summer. Fauci is the nation's top infectious disease expert.

During this period Hatfill also urged Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., to request a federal investigation into the handling of hydroxychloroquine, according to a letter submitted for the Congressional Record.

There's no indication such a request was made. But in mid-August, Johnson and fellow Republican Sens. Mike Lee of Utah and Ted Cruz of Texas wrote the FDA seeking an explanation for the denial to reinstate hydroxychloroquine's authorization. Johnson also chaired a Senate committee hearing in November 2020 on treatment options and complained that doctors who prescribed hydroxychloroquine for COVID had been "scorned."

In the fall of 2020, the focus of both FDA and White House officials turned to the upcoming authorization of the first COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna.

As previously reported, the White House objected to an FDA requirement that vaccine makers gather two months of safety data before filing their applications, contending that condition would delay the launch of the shots. Trump had repeatedly stated the shots would be authorized before Election Day, despite government scientists signaling that timeline was unlikely.

The committee report suggested that the FDA's guidance for vaccine manufacturers was delayed more than three weeks — from mid-September until early October — due to White House concerns.

Hahn told investigators the agency faced "pushback about the issue" from multiple officials, including Trump's chief of staff, Mark Meadows, who told the FDA commissioner on Sept. 23, 2020, that the White House would not sign off on the two-month requirement.

On Oct. 6, the FDA quietly published its vaccine guidelines as part of a larger set of documents for

drugmakers. After the materials posted online, Hahn said Meadows called him to indicate that the FDA guidelines were approved.

The online publication drew fury from the president on Twitter.

"New FDA rules make it more difficult for them to speed up vaccines for approval before Election Day. Just another political hit job!" Trump tweeted at his FDA commissioner.

Psychologist: School shooter didn't get consistent treatment

By TERRY SPENCER and FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A psychologist who treated Florida school shooter Nikolas Cruz when he was 8 years old testified Wednesday that Cruz was a "peculiar child" who had many behavioral and developmental issues but his widowed mother seemed overwhelmed and wasn't consistent in her discipline or in getting him treatment.

Frederick Kravitz said he began treating Cruz in 2007 on a referral from Cruz's psychiatrist with Lynda Cruz telling him her adopted son suffered from anxiety and nervousness and had trouble controlling his temper. But she also said he was friendly and got along fine with his peers — claims that a neighbor, preschool teachers and an elementary school special education counselor have testified were not true.

Kravitz said that while he suggested weekly sessions for Cruz, his mother only brought him 15 times over a 13-month span, a decade before he murdered 17 people at Parkland's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Feb. 14, 2018.

He said that was a major issue — Lynda Cruz would agree that her son needed more consistent treatment and she needed to be more consistent in her discipline of him and his younger half-brother, Zachary, but did not follow through. She was 57, depressed from her husband's sudden 2003 death and dealing with two "tumultuous" young children, he said.

They would yell, throw tantrums and break furnishings, he said.

"They raised it to an art form," Kravitz said. "Nikolas was easily set off and Zachary seemed to derive some pleasure from pushing Nikolas' buttons."

That would set off their mother, something both boys seemed to enjoy.

"She lost her cool frequently and backed down to the boys frequently, which only made the problems worse," he said. He said he tried to work with her, but she felt embarrassed by her sons' behavior and felt people were judging her.

Cruz's attorneys are in Day 3 of their defense, hoping to persuade his jury to sentence him to life without parole instead of death. Cruz, 23, pleaded guilty in October to 17 counts of first-degree murder and the trial, which began July 18, is only to determine his sentence.

The defense is trying to overcome the prosecution's case, which featured surveillance video of Cruz, then 19, mowing down students and staff with an AR-15-style semiautomatic rifle as he stalked a three-story building for seven minutes, photos of the aftermath and a jury visit to the building.

For Cruz to receive a death sentence, the jury must be unanimous. If one juror votes for life, that will be his sentence.

The defense has focused on the mental and emotional problems Cruz exhibited from his earliest days. Testimony has shown that his birth mother was a street prostitute who abused cocaine and alcohol and as a toddler he was developmentally delayed, often violent towards other children and teased and bullied for his small stature, unusual appearance and odd behavior. When he was 8, he acted like a 6-year-old, at best, Kravitz said.

"He stood out like a sore thumb," he said.

Steven Schusler, who lived across the street from the Cruzes from 2009 to 2015, said that when Nikolas Cruz was 10, his landlord called Cruz "the weird one" to his face, causing the boy "to curl up" like a salted snail. He once saw Cruz running around the house with an air gun, his limbs flailing wildly — a move he demonstrated for the jury.

Kravitz said Cruz had a fear of abandonment because of his father's death and his adoption and had

an active "bad imagination."

"He was extremely fearful his mother would forget to pick him up (at school) and he would be stuck there," Kravitz said, even though that never happened.

He said Cruz had some signs of obsessive-compulsive disorder — for example, he always had to have exactly eight chicken nuggets.

He said he asked Cruz what his three wishes would be.

"Pokemon, a dog and more Pokemon," Kravitz said.

Lynda Cruz died in November 2017, about four months before the shooting.

Under cross-examination, Kravitz conceded that Cruz's mother did get him further psychiatric and psychological treatment and might have been reluctant to keep her son's appointments with him because of the \$87 per visit copay her insurance required.

Prosecutor Jeff Marcus asked Kravitz is there was anything about Cruz when he was 8 that would have indicated he would eventually commit mass murder. He said no.

"I've worked with some other very damaged kids and certainly to the best of my knowledge none of them have ever acted out like this," Kravitz said.

Primary takeaways: Abortion politics, DeSantis flexes muscle

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis learned who his Democratic challenger will be this fall. The impact of redistricting was on full display. Democrats sorted through rivalries amongst themselves. And the issue of abortion rights may give Democrats a boost in a tough election year.

The most intense stretch of the midterm primary season ended Tuesday with results that will set up fierce general election contests across the United States.

Takeaways from Tuesday's contests in Florida and New York:

ABORTION WILD CARD

Midterm elections are usually miserable for the party in power. But Democrats hope one of their biggest losses in memory may ultimately salvage 2022 for them.

Ever since the conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court revoked the constitutional right for a woman to obtain an abortion, Democrats have seen a boost in donations, polling and performance in special elections for open congressional seats. The latest came Tuesday in a Hudson Valley swing district that, in a Republican wave year, should have been an easy GOP win. Instead, Democratic Ulster County executive Pat Ryan defeated his Republican counterpart from Dutchess County, Marc Molinaro.

The stakes, governing-wise, were small — the seat will disappear in the fall as a new congressional map goes into effect. But because the race became a referendum on abortion after the high court's ruling, the political implications are huge. It comes after a ballot measure to ban the procedure was crushed in solidly conservative Kansas.

Republicans were anticipating a typical midterm landslide, with inflation high and President Joe Biden's approval rating low. It may still end up a solid GOP year, but Ryan's win is the latest indication that Democrats don't have to abandon hope.

DESANTIS FLEXES HIS MUSCLE

One Florida politician wasn't facing a primary challenge on Tuesday but made sure to dominate the news anyway — DeSantis.

DeSantis is considered former President Donald Trump's top rival for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, partly because of the way he's leaned into political and cultural divides in the Sunshine State. On Tuesday, he demonstrated why.

The governor began the day with a Cabinet meeting, which included the only Democrat elected statewide in Florida, Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried. She was competing for her party's nomination to face DeSantis that evening.

DeSantis shook Fried's hand as the meeting concluded and told her "good luck" before criticizing her

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campaign and predicting — accurately, it turned out — her loss in brief remarks to reporters.

“I think that you know she had an opportunity as being the only Democrat elected statewide to exercise some leadership and maybe get some things done and instead she’s used her time to try and smear me on a daily basis, that’s all she does,” DeSantis said of Fried.

After polls closed in the evening, DeSantis grabbed the spotlight again, speaking to a crowd in Miami. “We’re not going to let this state be overrun by woke ideology, we will fight the woke in the business, we will fight the woke in government agencies, we will fight the woke in our schools,” DeSantis said. “We will never, ever surrender to the woke agenda. Florida is the state where woke goes to die.”

Expect to hear a lot more like that from DeSantis in the months — and possibly years — ahead.

GERRYMANDERING’S LONG SHADOW

Florida and New York, which held primary elections Tuesday, were two of the states whose legislative maps were most radically redrawn this year to favor one political party. It was part of a centuries-old political gambit known as gerrymandering.

But Tuesday night showed two different sides of gerrymandering. The New York map that Democrats redrew to ruthlessly target vulnerable Republicans got tossed out by the state’s highest court as an illegal partisan act.

The map was redrawn to be more balanced, disregarding the political fortunes of some of New York’s most prominent members of Congress and lumping several high-profile lawmakers in the same district in a push for equity. Ignoring scattered protests that its April ruling came too late in the process to change the map, the high court moved the state’s congressional primary to Tuesday, two months after its June primary for state offices.

That’s why New York’s Democratic primaries Tuesday were so fractious and chaotic.

In contrast, Florida’s Republican-appointed State Supreme Court declined to change the partisan map that DeSantis pushed the Republican-controlled Florida legislature to approve. Unlike the New York court, the Florida court declined to mess with the map close to the election.

As a result, Florida’s incumbent House members generally stayed put Tuesday night, not forced into any career-ending primary battles because of districts being moved. The great exception was Rep. Charlie Crist, who ran for — and won — the Democratic nomination for governor partly because DeSantis’ map transformed his district into a solidly Republican one. The new map also effectively eliminated two seats, currently represented in Washington by Black Democrats, where African Americans comprise the largest share of voters.

Nationally, both parties tried to gerrymander during the past redistricting cycle, but Democrats were reined in slightly more than Republicans — largely due to Florida and New York. Florida’s top court may change that in the coming years when it rules on challenges to DeSantis’ maps.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Supreme Court is considering multiple cases that could change the ability of courts to redistrict gerrymanders. That may help determine whether we see more congressional primaries like New York’s, or more like Florida’s.

DEMOCRATIC DIVISIONS

It’s been muted by the spectacle of Trump’s makeover of the GOP, but Democrats also spent the primary season torn over the direction of their party.

Left-wing contenders continued to mount primary challenges to centrist Democrats. The left lost its most prominent bids to dislodge incumbent House members in south Texas and Cleveland.

Two new losses came Tuesday, when a liberal state senator was crushed by Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney in a congressional primary north of New York City. And attorney Dan Goldman, who worked on Trump’s first impeachment, narrowly beat a bevy of more progressive rivals in a primary for a congressional seat centered in Brooklyn.

But the left has won some victories this primary season, nabbing a nomination for a House seat in Pennsylvania and seeing one of its favorite politicians, that state’s lieutenant governor, John Fetterman, win the party’s nomination for Senate.

Neither side has been crushed, so expect more left-on-center primaries next election cycle.

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TRUMP'S PARTY, WITH AN ASTERISK

Trump set out to demonstrate his dominance of the GOP this primary season, and he succeeded — to a point.

His approval helped set the party's Senate field and was pivotal in a number of hotly contested primaries. He claimed his biggest prize last week, when his chosen candidate beat Rep. Liz Cheney in Wyoming's Republican primary. On Tuesday, Trump's chosen candidate, Air Force veteran and conservative activist Anna Luna, won her primary in an open GOP-leaning seat on Florida's Gulf Coast.

But Trump had some huge humiliations — especially when he tried to intervene in governor's races in Idaho, Nebraska and especially Georgia, where Trump failed to oust Gov. Brian Kemp for refusing to overturn the 2020 election in his state and award it to Trump.

Even more significantly, Trump elevated candidates who may not be able to win competitive races — or may even pose a threat to democracy itself. Last week, the GOP's Senate leader, Mitch McConnell, warned that his party may not win a Senate majority due to "candidate quality" among its nominees. They include Trump-backed candidates struggling in swing states, like Herschel Walker in Georgia, JD Vance in Ohio and Mehmet Oz in Pennsylvania.

Others, like the GOP's nominees for Pennsylvania governor, Doug Mastriano, and Arizona governor, Kari Lake, have denied that Trump lost the 2020 election, raising questions about whether they'd certify the actual winners of future elections if they take over their statehouses.

Trump does not always have to intercede for extreme candidates who have mimicked his style to rise in Republican primaries. On Tuesday, Laura Loomer, a conservative provocateur who's been banned from several social media websites for posting anti-Muslim remarks, surprised many with a strong — albeit unsuccessful — showing in a primary challenge to 73-year-old Florida Rep. Daniel Webster.

Still, Trump's effect on the GOP became immeasurable this primary season.

This story has been corrected to show Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney defeated a liberal state senator, not an assemblywoman; and deletes a reference to a Democratic-appointed court as having redrawn the map since others were involved as well.

Heche will be laid to rest at historic Hollywood cemetery

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Actor Anne Heche will be laid to rest at a storied Los Angeles cemetery alongside many Hollywood luminaries, her family said Tuesday.

Heche was cremated and her ashes will be placed in a mausoleum at Hollywood Forever Cemetery at a later date.

In a statement to The Associated Press, Heche's son Homer Laffoon said he and her other son Atlas Tupper "are convinced our Mom would love the site we have chosen for her; it's beautiful, serene and she will be among her Hollywood peers."

The details were released nearly two weeks after she was declared dead at a hospital from injuries suffered in a fiery car crash.

The cemetery has in recent years become a cultural hub for film screenings, musical performances and festivals.

Laffoon went to see the band My Morning Jacket there after his mother's death, with tickets bought before she died. He loved the vibrancy of the location, and took it as a sign that her grave should be there.

"Hollywood Forever is a living place," Laffoon's statement said.

A small private memorial will be held once Heche's headstone is etched.

"She was our Mom, but the kindness and the outpouring of the past few days reminded us that she also belongs to her fans, to the entertainment community, and now, to the ages," the statement said.

Founded in 1899 and located near the Paramount Pictures lot, the cemetery is home to the graves and tombs of actors including Judy Garland and Douglas Fairbanks, and of musicians including Chris Cornell

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and Johnny Ramone.

Heche's spot in the mausoleum will be in the cemetery's Garden of Legends is near that of Mickey Rooney, and faces a lake where Burt Reynolds' remains were recently relocated.

Heche, 53, was among the biggest film stars of the late 1990s, starring opposite actors including Johnny Depp and Harrison Ford, and had worked consistently in movies and television for more than three decades. But personal turmoil, which she described in a memoir and interviews, often followed her.

On Aug. 5, her car jumped a curb and smashed into a West Los Angeles home. Both the car and the home burst into flames. She was declared brain dead on Aug. 11, and was kept alive on life support for three more days so her organs could be donated.

Her death was ruled an accident, and the cause were inhalation injuries and burns, according to the Los Angeles County coroner.

Floods wreak havoc across Pakistan; 903 dead since mid-June

By MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Heavy rains have triggered flash floods and wreaked havoc across much of Pakistan since mid-June, leaving 903 dead and about 50,000 people homeless, the country's disaster agency said Wednesday.

Thousands whose homes were swept away now live in tents, miles away from their inundated villages and towns, after being rescued by soldiers, local disaster workers and volunteers.

The National Disaster Management Authority said Wednesday that 126 people were killed in flood-related incidents in the past 48 hours, with most of the victims being women and children.

The flooding has further exacerbated Pakistan's economic crisis. Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif issued an appeal Wednesday from abroad, urging philanthropists to help flood-affected areas in Pakistan.

Sharif is currently in the Gulf Arab state of Qatar, where he arrived on Tuesday, seeking financial assistance, loans and foreign investment for his cash-strapped Islamic nation. His government has promised to compensate those who lost homes in the floods.

After talks on Wednesday with Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Sharif announced that the Qatari Investment Authority is prepared to invest \$3 billion in Pakistan. The trip is Sharif's first official visit to Qatar as prime minister since he replaced Imran Khan, who was ousted in a no-confidence in Parliament in April.

After inundating much of southwestern Baluchistan and eastern Punjab province, flash floods have now started to affect also the southern Sindh province. Authorities this week closed schools in Sindh and Baluchistan.

Sherry Rehman, Pakistan's minister of climate change, tweeted on Tuesday that local authorities are unable to cope on their own and appealed on the world community to help.

Pakistani Television footage on Wednesday showed people wading through waist-high water, holding their children and carrying essential items on their heads. Rescuers used trucks and boats to evacuate people to safer places and food, tents and other basic supplies were being dispatched to flood-affected areas.

In some places, the popular Geo TV reported, families struggled to bury their loved ones as local graveyards were also inundated by floodwaters. The TV broadcast footage showing mourners carrying coffins through flooded areas to bury the dead away from submerged homes.

Monsoon rains, which started in mid-June, were expected to continue this week, mainly in the south.

Murad Ali Shah, the top elected official in Sindh province, said the situation was worse than in 2010, when floods killed at least 1,700 people in Pakistan, mostly in Sindh. "We are doing our best to evacuate people from flood-hit areas," he said Tuesday.

Floods have damaged as many as 129 bridges across Pakistan, disrupting the supply of fruit and vegetables to markets and causing a hike in prices.

Experts say climate change has caused erratic weather conditions in Pakistan, resulting in cloudbursts, and melting of glaciers that has swelled rivers. They say that limiting planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions will help limit more drastic weather events around the world, including in this South Asian country.

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"In recent decades, we never witnessed such an unusual heavier downpour in Pakistan," said scientist Shahla Gondal, adding that authorities are ill-equipped and "do not know how to tackle" flooding disasters.

Kansas activist sues for a statewide abortion recount

WICHITA, Kan. (AP) — A Kansas anti-abortion activist is suing for a complete hand recount of an election in which voters soundly rejected a proposal to remove abortion rights from the state's constitution.

Mark Gietzen is representing himself in a lawsuit filed Tuesday in Sedgwick County District Court after a nine-county hand recount that his supporters largely funded wrapped up over the weekend. Fewer than 100 votes changed out of more than 500,000 cast in those counties. The measure failed by about 165,000 votes statewide.

Republican Secretary of State Scott Schwab said in a news release that the recount results should "put to rest the unfounded claims of election fraud."

In the lawsuit, Gietzen alleges without evidence that votes statewide might have been vulnerable to the same type of programming error that initially switched results in a county commission race. The suit also seeks a revote "where necessary."

A judge quickly dismissed a lawsuit Gietzen filed before the election seeking to have ballot drop boxes removed across the state.

Israel's premier urges West to reject Iran nuclear deal

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's prime minister urged President Joe Biden and Western powers to call off an emerging nuclear deal with Iran, saying that negotiators are letting Tehran manipulate the talks and that an agreement would reward Israel's enemies.

Yair Lapid called the emerging agreement a "bad deal" and suggested that Biden has failed to honor red lines he had previously promised to set.

"The countries of the West draw a red line, the Iranians ignore it, and the red line moves," Lapid told reporters at a press conference in Jerusalem. An emerging deal, Lapid said, "does not meet the standards set by President Biden himself: preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear state."

Biden has been eager to revive the 2015 deal, which offered sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on Iran's nuclear program. The original deal unraveled after then-President Donald Trump withdrew from it in 2018 and reimposed sanctions, with strong encouragement from Israel.

It remains unclear whether the United States and Iran will be able to reach a new agreement. But the Biden administration is expected to weigh in on Iran's latest offer in the coming days. With an agreement appearing close, Israel has stepped up its efforts to block it.

Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only, though U.N. experts and Western intelligence agencies say Iran had an organized military nuclear program through 2003.

Nonproliferation experts warn Iran has enriched enough uranium up to 60% purity — a short technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90% — to make one nuclear weapon should it decide to do so. However, Iran still would need to design a bomb and a delivery system for it, likely a monthslong project.

Israel is widely believed to have acquired nuclear weapons decades ago, something it has neither confirmed nor denied in keeping with a policy of nuclear ambiguity.

Tehran has increasingly claimed that the Americans are now delaying the deal, even though Iran spent months in back-and-forth negotiations that previously stalled in both Vienna and Qatar.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said it has begun a "precise review" of the U.S. response to a European proposal and would submit its own response to the Europeans, Iran's official IRNA news agency reported Wednesday. Kanaani did not elaborate.

Lapid warned that Iran would divert billions of dollars in unfrozen funds to hostile militant groups, such as Hezbollah in neighboring Lebanon, that threaten Israel.

"This money will fund the Revolutionary Guard," Lapid said, adding later, "It will fund more attacks on

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American bases in the Middle East. It will be used to strengthen Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad."

He stopped short of blaming any one power for the apparent progress of the talks, but he opened his statement Wednesday by singling out the European Union and suggesting that those nations and other negotiating powers are caving in to last-minute Iranian demands.

"The Iranians are making demands again. The negotiators are ready to make concessions, again," Lapid said.

He was careful to repeat that Biden, who visited Israel last month during a trip through the Middle East, remains a strong ally.

Israel's national security adviser, Eyal Hulata, is in Washington this week for talks with Biden administration officials, and Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz will head to the U.S. on Thursday for meetings with the head of the U.S. military's Central Command, which oversees operations in the Middle East, and national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

Lapid is serving as Israel's caretaker prime minister until elections on Nov. 1, when he will face off against former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other rivals. While the two men have deep differences, they hold virtually identical positions when it comes to Iran. In 2015, Netanyahu, now opposition leader, delivered a speech to Congress in an unsuccessful attempt to derail what would become President Barack Obama's signature foreign policy achievement.

Israel has long said it would not allow its regional archrival Iran to obtain nuclear weapons, and that it was not bound by the agreements between world powers and Tehran. It also has called for diplomacy to be accompanied by a "credible" threat to take military action against Iran if needed.

"We are not prepared to live with a nuclear threat above our heads from an extremist, violent Islamist regime," Lapid said Wednesday. "This will not happen. Because we will not let it happen."

17-year-old pilot sets record for solo flight around world

By VESELIN TOSHKOV Associated Press

SOFIA, Bulgaria (AP) — A 17-year-old pilot became the youngest person to fly solo around the world in a small aircraft after he landed on Wednesday in Bulgaria, where his journey kicked off five months ago.

Mack Rutherford, a Belgian-British dual national, landed on an airstrip west of Bulgaria's capital, Sofia, to complete his task and to claim two Guinness World Records. Along with becoming the youngest person to fly around the world by himself, Rutherford is the youngest person to circumnavigate the globe in a microlight plane.

Rutherford said he hoped his achievement would inspire young people to pursue their dreams.

"Just follow your dreams, no matter how old you are – work hard and move forward to achieve your goals," he said after he stepped out of the aircraft.

His sister, Zara, who finished her own trip global flight in January at age 19, previously held the ultralight record. Mack Rutherford took the age record from Travis Ludlow of Britain, who was 18 when he made a solo flight around the world last year.

The journey, which began March 23, took Rutherford through 52 countries over five continents. He turned 17 during the trip. To set a mark recognized by the Guinness World Records, he crossed the equator twice.

Born into a family of aviators, Rutherford qualified for his pilot's license in 2020, which at the time, made him the youngest pilot in the world at the age of 15.

His solo trip flying around the world kicked off in Bulgaria because his sponsor, the web hosting company ICDSOFT, is headquartered in Sofia and loaned him the plane.

Like his sister, Rutherford flew a Shark, one of the fastest ultralight aircraft in the world with a cruising speed reaching 300 kph (186 mph). Normally a two-seater, it was modified for his long journey by replacing the second seat with an extra fuel tank.

Initially planned to take up to three months, the trip lasted longer because of several unexpected obstacles along his way, including monsoon rains, sandstorms and extreme heat.

But most of the delays were caused by waits to obtain permits and other documents required for further

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flight or having to alter the scheduled route if they were rejected.

The flight took him through Africa and the Gulf region to India, China, South Korea and Japan. He crossed the northern Pacific and landed after 10 uninterrupted hours in the air on a volcanic island near the Bering Strait.

From there, he headed to Alaska and down the West Coast of the United States to Mexico. Rutherford then headed north again along the U.S. East Coast to Canada, and across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe.

On Wednesday, a huge crowd of people had arrived at the airport to welcome Rutherford and to celebrate his achievements. Among them were the three members of his immediate family.

His father, Sam Rutherford, said he was extremely happy and proud of his children's achievements. He told reporters that such an event is especially encouraging for children to follow their dreams and parents to support them in their endeavors.

His sister, Zara Rutherford, said she kept in close touch with her younger brother during his journey.

"While he was flying, I constantly tried to keep in touch and help him. Our parents called him every day, and I joined in those conversations. I gave him advice on the route, on the flight, so that I could be useful to him," she said.

Mack Rutherford said he will now focus on his education.

"The next thing I'm going to do is to go back to school and catch up as much as I can," he said.

Panda twins born in China as species struggles for survival

BEIJING (AP) — Twin giant pandas have been born at a breeding center in southwestern China, a sign of progress for the country's unofficial national mascot as it struggles for survival amid climate change and loss of habitat.

The male and female cubs, born Tuesday at the Qinling Panda Research Center in Shaanxi province, are the second pair of twins born to their mother, Qin Qin. Another panda, Yong Yong, gave birth to twins at the center earlier this month.

Qin Qin was also born at the center and previously gave birth to twin females in 2020.

State media gave no word on the father, but Chinese veterinarians for years have been using artificial insemination to boost the population of the animals, which reproduce rarely in the wild and rely on a diet of bamboo in the mountains of western China.

The efforts have paid off, with some captive-bred pandas being released into the wild. The population of wild pandas has ticked up gradually, reaching an estimated 1,800. About 500 others live in captivity in zoos and reserves, the majority in the mountainous, heavily forested province of Sichuan.

Encroachment on their land by farmers and industry has reduced the pandas' space while cutting them off from other populations with which to breed.

Like much of central and western China, Sichuan has been hit by soaring summer temperatures and drought this year that have sparked forest fires and the withering of crops and forests, generally attributed to global climate change.

Today in History: August 25, deaths of McCain and Kennedy

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Aug. 25, the 237th day of 2022. There are 128 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 25, 2018, Sen. John McCain of Arizona, who had spent years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam before a 35-year political career that took him to the Republican presidential nomination, died at the age of 81 after battling brain cancer for more than a year.

On this date:

In 1718, hundreds of French colonists arrived in Louisiana, with some settling in present-day New Orleans.

In 1875, Capt. Matthew Webb became the first person to swim across the English Channel, getting from

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Dover, England, to Calais (ka-LAY'), France, in 22 hours.

In 1928, an expedition led by Richard E. Byrd set sail from Hoboken, N.J., on its journey to Antarctica.

In 1944, during World War II, Paris was liberated by Allied forces after four years of Nazi occupation.

In 1958, the game show "Concentration" premiered on NBC-TV.

In 1980, the Broadway musical "42nd Street" opened. (Producer David Merrick stunned the cast and audience during the curtain call by announcing that the show's director, Gower Champion, had died earlier that day.)

In 1981, the U.S. spacecraft Voyager 2 came within 63,000 miles of Saturn's cloud cover, sending back pictures of and data about the ringed planet.

In 1985, Samantha Smith, 13, the schoolgirl whose letter to Yuri V. Andropov resulted in her famous peace tour of the Soviet Union, died with her father in an airliner crash in Auburn, Maine, that also killed four other passengers and two crew members.

In 2001, R&B singer Aaliyah (ah-LEE'-yah) was killed with eight others in a plane crash in the Bahamas; she was 22.

In 2009, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, the liberal lion of the U.S. Senate, died at age 77 in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, after a battle with a brain tumor.

In 2014, a funeral was held in St. Louis for Michael Brown, the Black 18-year-old who was shot to death by a police officer in suburban Ferguson.

In 2020, two people were shot to death and a third was wounded as 17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse opened fire with an AR-15-style rifle during a third night of protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin, over the police shooting of a Black man, Jacob Blake. (Rittenhouse, who was taken into custody in Illinois the next day, said he was defending himself after the three men attacked him as he tried to protect businesses from protesters; he was acquitted on all charges, including homicide.)

Ten years ago: Neil Armstrong, 82, who commanded the historic Apollo 11 lunar landing and was the first man to set foot on the moon in July 1969, died in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Five years ago: Hurricane Harvey, the fiercest hurricane to hit the U.S. in more than a decade, made landfall near Corpus Christi, Texas, with 130 mph sustained winds; the storm would deliver five days of rain totaling close to 52 inches, the heaviest tropical downpour that had ever been recorded in the continental U.S. The hurricane left at least 68 people dead and caused an estimated \$125 billion in damage in Texas. President Donald Trump pardoned former Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio, who had been convicted of a misdemeanor contempt-of-court charge for defying a judge's orders that he stop conducting immigration patrols; the 85-year-old retired lawman had faced the prospect of jail time at his sentencing in October.

One year ago: Secretary of State Antony Blinken said about 4,500 Americans had been evacuated so far from Afghanistan; officials believed there were about 6,000 Americans wanting to leave when the U.S. airlift began in mid-August. The U.S. Embassy in Kabul issued a security alert warning American citizens to stay away from three specific gates at the airport in Kabul. (There would be a deadly suicide bomb attack at the airport the following day.) Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued an executive order banning any state or local mandates requiring people to be vaccinated against COVID-19; the move came as Texas reported the most COVID-19 patients in its hospitals since the pandemic began. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a memo that military troops must immediately start getting the COVID-19 vaccine. A man who was angered by state-ordered coronavirus restrictions was sentenced to just over six years in prison for planning to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer; Ty Garbin was among six men charged in federal court, but was the first to plead guilty.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Tom Skerritt is 89. Jazz musician Wayne Shorter is 89. Movie director Hugh Hudson is 86. Author Frederick Forsyth is 84. Movie director John Badham is 83. Filmmaker Marshall Brickman is 83. R&B singer Walter Williams (The O'Jays) is 79. Actor Anthony Heald is 78. Rock singer-actor Gene Simmons is 73. Actor John Savage is 73. Author Martin Amis (AY'-mihs) is 73. Country singer-musician Henry Paul (Outlaws; Blackhawk) is 73. Rock singer Rob Halford is 71. Rock musician Geoff Downes (Asia) is 70. Rock singer Elvis Costello is 68. Movie director Tim Burton is 64. Actor Christian LeBlanc is 64. Actor

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Ashley Crow is 62. Actor Ally Walker is 61. Country singer Cyrus (AKA Billy Ray Cyrus) is 61. Actor Joanne Whalley is 61. Rock musician Vivian Campbell (Def Leppard) is 60. Actor Blair Underwood is 58. Actor Robert Maschio is 56. Rap DJ Terminator X (Public Enemy) is 56. Alternative country singer Jeff Tweedy (Wilco) is 55. Actor David Alan Basche (BAYSH) is 54. Television chef Rachael Ray is 54. Actor Cameron Mathison is 53. Country singer Jo Dee Messina is 52. Model Claudia Schiffer is 52. Country singer Brice Long is 51. Actor Nathan Page is 51. Actor-writer-director Ben Falcone is 49. Actor Eric Millegan is 48. Actor Alexander Skarsgard is 46. Actor Jonathan Togo is 45. Actor Kel Mitchell is 44. Actor Rachel Bilson is 41. Actor Blake Lively is 35. Actor Josh Flitter is 28.