

Groton Daily Independent

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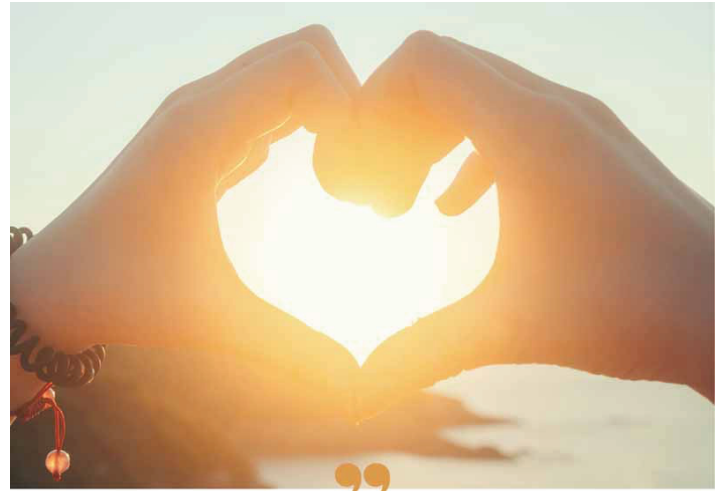
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“If you really want to receive joy and happiness, then serve others with all your heart. Lift their burden, and your own burden will be lighter.”

EZRA TAFT BENSON

Wednesday, Aug. 31

School Breakfast, Hash brown, Pizza

School Lunch: Chicken Alfredo, Cooked Broccoli

Senior Menu: Breaded codfish, parsley buttered potatoes, creamy coleslaw, fruit, while wheat bread.

Groton UMC: 9:30am Community Coffee Hour

Thursday, Sept. 1

School Breakfast: Oatmeal

School Lunch: Hamburgers, Tri Taters

Senior Menu: Ham, sweet potatoes, peas, acini depepi fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

Cross Country at Redfield

1 p.m.: Cory Greenwood Assembly

Volleyball at Sisseton (8th grade at 5 p.m. followed by 7th grade in practice gym; C match at 5 p.m. followed by JV and varsity)

Friday, Sept. 2

NO SCHOOL

Senior Menu: Chili, corn bread, coleslaw, lime pear Jell-O.

4 p.m.: Girls Soccer hosts Dakota Valley

7 p.m.: Football hosts Dakota Hills Coop



Groton Community Transit

~JOB OPENING AVAILABLE~

Groton Community Transit is currently seeking an office dispatcher/driver..15-25 hours/week. Position includes scheduling daily transportation and drivers, some office work and driving. Starting wage \$14.00 /hr.

Application can be picked up at Groton Community Transit, 205 E 2nd Ave, Groton, SD 57445.. Applications accepted through September 2, 2022. Call 605-397-8661 for any questions or more information...EQE.

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

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

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GROTON'S EVENTS



Sept. 2 - 4 Airport
Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton
Municipal Airport

Sept. 10 8am-3pm
Lion's Club Fall City-
wide Rummage Sale



Sept. 11 10am
Couples Sunflower
Tourney at Olive
Grove Golf Course

Oct. 1 10am-3pm
Pumpkin Fest at
the City Park



Oct. 7 10am
Lake Region Marching
Band Festival

Oct. 31 4-6pm
Downtown Trick
or Treat



Oct. 31 5:30-7pm
United Methodist
Church Trunk or Treat

GROTON
Chamber Of Commerce

120 N Main St., Groton, SD 57445

605-397-8422

GrotonChamber.com

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Groton Area netters have clean sweep over Ipswich

The Groton Area Tiger volleyball team posted a 3-1 win over Ipswich with game scores of 25-23, 19-25, 25-14 and 25-20..

The match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bahr Spray Foam, John Sieh Agency, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Locke Electric , Dacotah Bank, SD Army National Guard, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc. Justin Hanson and Ryan Tracy provided the play-by-play action.

Ipswich had the early lead of the first set at 4-1, but Groton Area rallied to take a 7-4 lead. Ipswich chipped away at Groton's advantage and took a 21-20 lead. The set was tied at 22 and 23 before Groton Area scored the last two points with the game winning ace serve by Jerica Locke.

Ipswich jumped ahead again the second set, but never relinquished its lead. It was tied at four, but Ipswich kept the upper hand. After a tie of 11, Ipswich jumped ahead and went for the 25-19 win.

Groton Area took the 6-0 lead in the third set and never trailed to post a 28-14 win. Ipswich took the early lead in the fourth set at 3-2 and 8-4. Groton Tied the set at 11, 12, 13 and 17 before taking the lead. Groton Area scored six straight points to take a 22-17 lead and went on for the 25-20 win.

Emma Kutter had her first varsity match. She came in the second set to score a block and a kill, warmed up even more the third set with three kills and a block, and warmed up yet even more in the fourth set with five kills.

Sydney Leight led Groton Area with 12 kills, Kutter had nine kills and two blocks, Aspen Johnson had eight kills and three blocks, Anna Fjeldheim had three kills and three ace serves, Lydia Meier had four kills, Jerica Locke three ace serves, Elizabeth Flihs one kill and one ace and Laila Roberts had one ace.

Gracie Lange led Ipswich with 13 kills, one block and one ace serve while Baylee Kulesa had five kills, three blocks and one ace serve.

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 25-9, 21-24 and 15-8. Jayedyn Penning led Groton Area with nine kills and three ace serves, Chesney Weber had three kills and five ace serves, Talli Wright five kills and one ace, Faith Traphagen three aces, one block and one kill, Jerica Locke two kills and one ace, Rylee Dunker and Kella Tracy each had two kills and Emma Kutter had one kill. The game was broadcast on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bob and Vicki Walter.

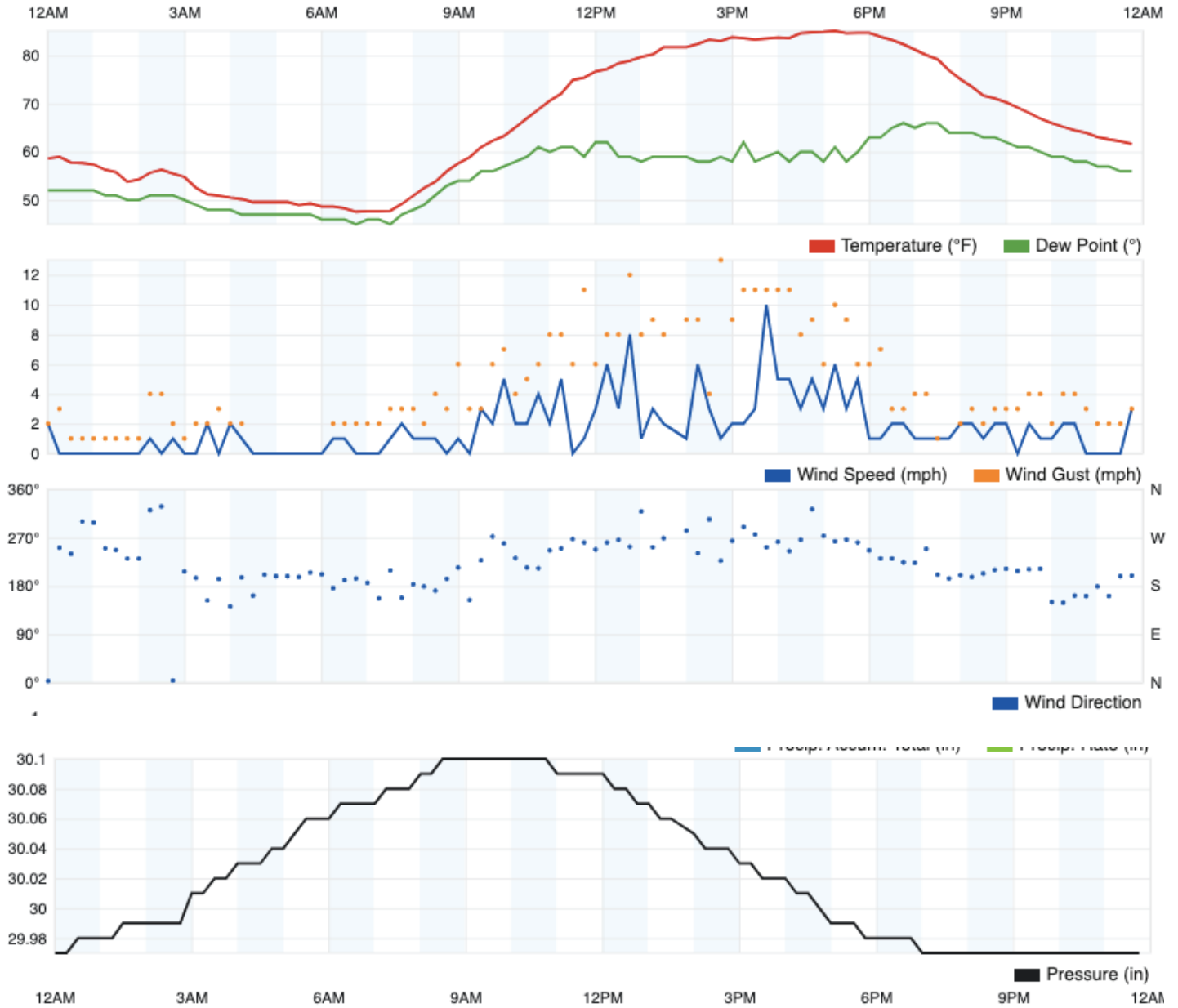
Groton Area won the C match, 25-7, 13-25 and 15-4. The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bob and Vicki Walter with Aspen Johnson and Anna Fjeldheim doing the play-by-play action.

Carly Gilbert had five ace serves and one kill, Rylee Dunker had five kills, Talie Wright two kills and an ace, Kella Tracy and Chesney Weber each had a kill and an ace, Cali Tollifson had a kill and London Bahr one ace serve.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 88 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 58 °F

Thursday



Hot

High: 90 °F

Thursday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 63 °F

Friday



Sunny

High: 81 °F

Wednesday



85 to 95 °

warmest over central SD

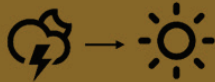
Thursday



88 to 98°

warmest over central SD

Friday



80 to 90°

AM t'storms far NE SD & WC MN
warmest over south central SD

weather.gov/abr

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



We will see mostly dry conditions through the end of the weekend with temperatures a little above normal.

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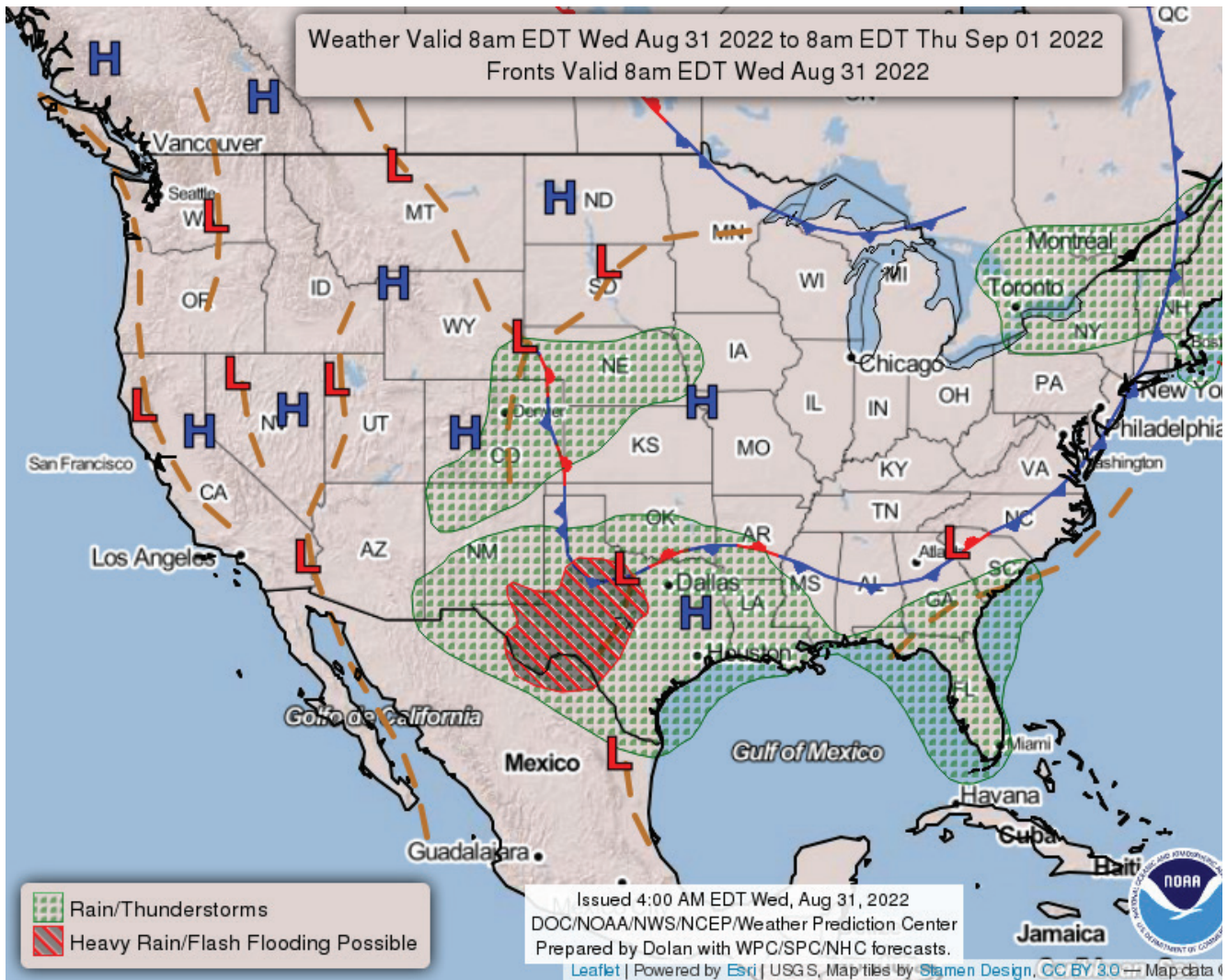
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 85 °F at 4:53 PM
Low Temp: 48 °F at 6:45 AM
Wind: 13 mph at 1:45 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 22 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 98 in 1921
Record Low: 32 in 1987
Average High: 80°F
Average Low: 53°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 2.24
Precip to date in Aug.: 1.42
Average Precip to date: 16.34
Precip Year to Date: 15.96
Sunset Tonight: 8:13:43 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:52:45 AM



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Today in Weather History

August 30, 1979: A thunderstorm rolled over Ellsworth Air Force Base bringing almost 60 mph winds to the area.

1776 - General Washington took advantage of a heavy fog to evacuate Long Island after a defeat. Adverse winds kept the British fleet from intervening. (David Ludlum)

1838: A major tornado, possibly the worst in Rhode Island history, passed south of Providence. It uprooted and stripped trees of their branches, unroofed or destroyed many houses, and sucked water out of ponds. The tornado barely missed a local railroad depot, where many people were waiting for a train. The tornado injured five people.

1839 - A hurricane moved from Cape Hatteras NC to offshore New England. An unusual feature of the hurricane was the snow it helped produce, which whitened the Catskill Mountains of New York State. Considerable snow was also reported at Salem NY. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - A tropical depression brought torrential rains to portions of southern Texas. Up to twelve inches fell south of Houston, and as much as eighteen inches fell southeast of Austin. The tropical depression spawned fourteen tornadoes in three days. (David Ludlum) Record cold gripped the northeastern U.S. Thirty-one cities in New England reported record lows, and areas of Vermont received up to three inches of snow. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Eight cities in California and Oregon reported record high temperatures for the date, including Redding CA and Sacramento CA where the mercury hit 100 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms drenched Georgia and the Carolinas with heavy rain, soaking Columbia, SC, with 4.10 inches in three hours. Fresno CA was the hot spot in the nation with a record high of 109 degrees. Duluth MN tied their record for the month of August with a morning low of 39 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced large hail in Montana and North Dakota during the evening and early nighttime hours. Hail three inches in diameter was reported 20 miles south of Medora ND, and thunderstorms over Dawson County MT produced up to three inches of rain. Thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail at Roundup MT, Dazey ND and Protection KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2002: Typhoon Rusa dumps torrential rains across South Korea, causing widespread flooding from the 30th through September 1st. Typhoon Rusa was the most powerful typhoon to hit South Korea since 1959. Nearly 90,000 people were evacuated. The province of Gangwon was hit the hardest, where an estimated 36 inches of rain fell in less than 48 hours. The torrential rains flooded nearly 36,000 homes. The Korean Defense Ministry reported flood waters submerged 16 jet fighters and 622 military buildings and facilities at Kangung airbase.



When Knowledge Hurts

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:12–18 (NIV)

Wisdom Is Meaningless

12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! 14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

15 What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

16 I said to myself, "Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge." 17 Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

18 For with much wisdom comes much sorrow;
the more knowledge, the more grief..

Insight By: Arthur Jackson

The book of Ecclesiastes is as strange as Proverbs is familiar. Author Ray Pritchard notes that "the ratio of regular readers of the Proverbs versus Ecclesiastes is probably 1000:1." Though less popular, the significance of the book must not be missed. Ecclesiastes reads like somebody's journal entries as the author (believed by many to have been Solomon), records his search for fulfillment, the results of his search, and some recommendations. The thesis statement of the book is given in verse 2: "Meaningless! Meaningless! . . . Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." How does one hold in tension the reality that our worldly existence is a gift from a loving God? While the point is highlighted over and over in the book that "all is vanity" (nkjv)—the fact that such a fragile life is best lived in the "fear of God" is also emphasized (see 12:13–14)..

Comment By: Mike Wittmer

Zach Elder and his friends pulled up to shore after a twenty-five-day rafting trip through the Grand Canyon. The man who came to retrieve their rafts told them about the COVID-19 virus. They thought he was joking. But as they left the canyon their phones pinged with their parents' urgent messages. Zach and his friends were stunned. They wished they could return to the river and escape what they now knew.

In a fallen world, knowledge often brings pain. The wise Teacher of Ecclesiastes observed, "With much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief" (1:18). Who hasn't envied a child's blissful ignorance? She doesn't yet know about racism, violence, and cancer. Weren't we happier before we grew up and discerned our own weaknesses and vices? Before we learned our family's secrets—why our uncle drinks heavily or what caused our parents' divorce?

The pain from knowledge can't be wished away. Once we know, it's no use pretending we don't. But there's a higher knowledge that empowers us to endure, even thrive. Jesus is the Word of God, the light that shines in our darkness (John 1:1–5). He "has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Your pain is your reason to run to Jesus. He knows you and cares for you..

Reflect and Prayer: What's something you wished you didn't know? Tell Jesus about it. Then leave it with Him. Whenever it troubles you, take it to Jesus again.

Jesus, I don't enjoy pain, but if it drives me to You, it's worth it.

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2022-23 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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- Colored \$42.60/6 months
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News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli def. Miller, 25-17, 23-25, 25-17

Baltic def. Beresford, 25-21, 25-20, 25-23

Bison def. Faith

Bon Homme def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-23, 26-24, 25-15

Burke def. Winner, 25-13, 25-19, 25-23

Canton def. Madison, 22-25, 25-18, 20-25, 25-18, 15-8

Chester def. McCook Central/Montrose, 25-16, 25-11, 25-14

Colman-Egan def. Arlington, 25-20, 25-20, 18-25, 25-23

Colome def. Crow Creek, 25-6, 25-11, 25-15

Corsica/Stickney def. Freeman Academy/Marion, 25-20, 25-20, 25-22

Dell Rapids def. Elk Point-Jefferson, 22-25, 22-25, 25-18, 25-17, 15-5

Douglas def. Custer, 25-9, 25-12, 25-20

Elkton-Lake Benton def. Castlewood, 25-19, 11-25, 25-20

Faulkton def. Sully Buttes, 22-25, 25-20, 25-17, 17-25, 15-13

Florence/Henry def. Flandreau, 25-23, 25-19, 25-17

Freeman def. Irene-Wakonda, 25-9, 25-17, 25-15

Gayville-Volin def. Canistota, 25-23, 24-26, 25-18, 25-23

Hamlin def. Great Plains Lutheran, 25-15, 25-13, 25-9

Hanson def. Sanborn Central/Woonsocket, 25-12, 25-15, 26-24

Harrisburg def. Yankton, 25-22, 25-14, 25-22

Hot Springs def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-22, 25-17, 25-17, 23-25, undefined-undefined

Howard def. Bridgewater-Emery, 25-14, 25-12, 25-19

Ipswich def. Groton Area, 25-23, 19-25, 25-14

Jones County def. Wall, 25-18, 25-11, 25-19

Kimball/White Lake def. Ethan, 25-15, 25-19, 25-17

Lemmon def. Hettinger/Scranton, N.D., 19-25, 25-21, 25-20, 25-10

McLaughlin def. Dupree, 25-8, 25-12, 25-15

Milbank def. Deuel, 25-16, 25-16, 25-22

Mobridge-Pollock def. Herreid/Selby Area, 25-22, 25-14, 25-14

New England, N.D. def. Harding County, 25-21, 25-18, 20-25, 25-12

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland def. Dell Rapids St. Mary, 30-28, 18-25, 25-22, 26-24

Parkston def. Avon, 25-11, 25-13, 25-11

Rapid City Christian def. Alliance, Neb., 25-18, 25-18, 26-24

Redfield def. Hitchcock-Tulare, 25-5, 25-13, 25-20

Scotland def. Alcester-Hudson, 25-21, 22-25, 19-25, 25-22, 15-10

Sioux Falls Lincoln def. Sioux Falls Jefferson, 25-15, 25-20, 24-26, 25-12

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Brandon Valley, 22-25, 25-23, 29-27, 25-11

Sioux Falls Roosevelt def. Sioux Falls Washington, 25-20, 22-25, 26-28, 25-23, 17-15

Sioux Valley def. Parker, 25-11, 25-11, 25-16

St. Thomas More def. Sturgis Brown, 25-11, 25-13, 25-17

Stanley County def. Chamberlain, 25-16, 23-25, 25-10, 25-21

Tea Area def. West Central, 21-25, 25-10, 25-19, 26-24

Tri-Valley def. Dakota Valley, 25-10, 25-16, 25-17

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Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Menno, 25-19, 25-13, 25-20
Wagner def. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, 26-24, 25-18, 25-16
Wessington Springs def. Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op, 25-21, 20-25, 25-19, 25-19
Wolsey-Wessington def. DeSmet, 25-18, 25-6, 25-15

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

02-38-55-57-65, Mega Ball: 17, Megaplier: 3

(two, thirty-eight, fifty-five, fifty-seven, sixty-five; Mega Ball: seventeen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$169,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 134,000,000

'Greatest preseason' star QB Streveler among Jets' cuts

By DENNIS WASZAK Jr. AP Pro Football Writer

FLORHAM PARK, N.J. (AP) — Chris Streveler will always have a special place in New York Jets preseason lore.

The former CFL quarterback, who led New York to three fourth-quarter comeback victories this summer, was among the team's cuts as it got down to the mandated 53-man roster Tuesday.

"Tough business," Streveler wrote on Twitter. "So thankful for the opportunities this preseason. This is just another step in the journey. The work and the mindset don't change!"

Among the Jets' other notable cuts were: running backs Tevin Coleman and La'Mical Perine; wide receiver Calvin Jackson Jr.; tight end Trevon Wesco; defensive linemen Jonathan Marshall, Jabari Zuniga and Bradlee Anae; linebacker Hamsah Nasirildeen; cornerbacks Isaiah Dunn and Javelin Guidry; and safeties Will Parks and Jason Pinnock.

Pinnock (fifth round), Nasirildeen (sixth) and Marshall (sixth) were all late draft picks of GM Joe Douglas last year.

When the Jets signed the 27-year-old Streveler shortly before training camp, the move came with little fanfare. He was considered by many merely a "camp arm," with starter Zach Wilson and backups Joe Flacco and Mike White ahead of him on the depth chart.

"That's what it starts out as and then you just let a guy go and it's up to him to seize the opportunity and make the best of his opportunity," coach Robert Saleh said. "And it was really cool to see what he did."

In the preseason opener at Philadelphia, Wilson went down with a knee injury and Flacco wasn't in uniform for that game. So White stepped in — and was later replaced by Streveler, who threw two fourth-quarter TD passes in the win. That came after Streveler had taken no snaps in team drills in camp up to that point.

The former South Dakota star led another late-game comeback against Atlanta, and then threw two more touchdown passes to lead the Jets from behind to beat the Giants in the preseason finale. He finished 24 of 33 for 277 yards with five touchdowns and one interception in three games this summer.

It prompted Saleh to say Streveler "probably had one of the greatest preseasons in the history of football."

It just wasn't enough for Streveler to make the Jets' initial 53-man roster, even with some fans rooting for him to make the team over White. But Saleh made it clear Streveler — who had three previous NFL stints, including appearing in seven regular-season games with Arizona — would be welcomed back on the practice squad if he clears waivers.

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"Strev is awesome," Saleh said. "I had a great conversation with him. Hoping we get him back. It's overall body of work, too, and he definitely performed — I don't want to take that away from him. But when you look at Mike White from a year ago, OTAs, training camp, he had two rough (preseason) games, but had a really nice game against the Giants.

"Mike just has an overall body of work, really understands what we're trying to get done."

Meanwhile, Wilson remains sidelined after undergoing arthroscopic surgery to repair a meniscus tear. He also has a bone bruise, and the Jets won't rush him back to the field.

"As soon as he feels he's ready to go," Saleh said. "There's no timeline. We saw him on the bike, he's walking around, he was out at practice today. He's taking in all the information, he's at walkthroughs, he's in every meeting. So, as soon as he gets cleared by the doctors and he feels good, he'll be out there."

So there remains a very strong chance Flacco will be under center for the Jets in their regular-season opener at home against Baltimore on Sept. 11.

"If Zach's not ready by Week 1, and we've got a lot to see over the next week," Saleh said, "then, yeah, Joe will be the starter."

NOTES: WR Denzel Mims remains on the roster despite requesting a trade last week. Saleh was asked if he thought Mims is being held "hostage" by the Jets for not granting his request to be dealt. "Is he frustrated? Is he frustrated with all of us? Sure, I'm sure he is," Saleh said. "He wants to play and for that, I don't think he's a hostage. It's a lot easier to kick somebody out the door if they want a trade if they're jerks and that's not Denzel. He's a good young man and I love the way he approaches everything, even with this, the way he's come about it, very professional, comes to meetings, practice, does all of it. So I guess I just don't view him as a hostage."

A moment in time: AP journalists remember Diana's death

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — It was a warm Saturday evening and a group of journalists had gathered at a Paris restaurant to enjoy the last weekend of summer. At sometime past midnight, phones around the table began to ring — seemingly all at once — as news desks contacted reporters and photographers to alert them that Princess Diana's car had crashed in the Pont de l'Alma tunnel.

Here's how the news of Diana's death unfolded in the early hours of Aug. 31, 1997, and the days that followed as told by journalists who covered the story for The Associated Press.

Jocelyn Noveck, then Associated Press news editor in Paris:

"We were paying the bill and all of a sudden there was this cacophony of mobile phones going off. The first one that went off was a British reporter's, a British cameraman, and he just got up and started running. And the rest of us called out, 'What happened?' And he just said, 'The Princess of Wales! Crash!' And then kept running."

"The first thought there was oh, maybe one of the boats that go up and down the Seine, the Bateaux Mouches, maybe one of them is called the Princess of Wales and it crashed into the banks of the river. That sounded like a digestible story to imagine. But, of course, soon we realized that Diana had been in a car, in a limousine ... the Mercedes had crashed."

Stuart McAlister, former Associated Press cameraman in Paris:

"I got down to the tunnel and it was chaos, absolute chaos. There were late-night revelers and tourists who, of course, were walking at that time of night to go back to their hotels. They were on top of the Pont de l'Alma looking down. They couldn't see anything because they were on the top of the bridge. ... The police were doing what they could to keep people back. Of course, having a press pass, I just jumped into the road, ran into the center of the road ... I could very clearly see emergency vehicles and the Mercedes down in the tunnel. So I stood on this intersection and started filming what I could."

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Jerome Delay, AP photographer:

"I parked my motorcycle, and as I parked it, I saw a police van pull out and with windows you could see through. And I saw some colleagues in that police van. My first thought was, 'Well, if there is a picture to be made, they were there before — they have it. I'm just going to be here to pick up the pieces.' Well, it turned out they made some pictures, that the rest of their film had been seized and everything. And I started to shoot from afar what was pretty much a car accident, of all things. ... I don't like to call it luck because this was not a very pleasant situation. People got hurt. People died. But they brought a tow truck and a crane to remove the vehicle, at which point I just moved. It was very easy. I mean, there was no real police blockade or anything like that stopping me from doing my work. I guess I was very discreet because I was not carrying 20 cameras around my neck and screaming to the world, 'Let me go through, I'm a journalist, I have rights, blah, blah, blah.' I was just making my way slowly to where I was supposed to be to be able to see. And I shot some pictures from the overhead as the car was pulled out of the tunnel on that flatbed truck. And it turns out, I think, over my 30 years at The Associated Press, that might be the worst picture I ever shot, but also the most published picture I ever shot, because, I guess, its historical value."

Chris Burns, former AP reporter:

"I went to the hospital, Salpetriere, where Diana was taken. And there we were watching as the flowers and the mourners were gathering outside and were waiting for news, waiting to hear something from the hospital, and it seemed like hours and it was hours. And finally they called a press conference before sunrise. And there the anesthesiologist was describing all the medical procedures that they went through to try to revive her. It was sort of painstaking. It took a while. We thought, 'OK, well, well, is she alive? Is she dead?' And then finally, after this long description, he said, 'We were unable to revive her. We declared her deceased at ...' I think it was 4 a.m. And there was this moment of silence, this sort of pause. The way I felt was: Princesses don't die this way anyway, do they? ... And then everybody was scrambling for their phones. But that sort of moment of denial was quite moving, actually. Moving."

Yves Dam Van, former AP cameraman in Paris:

"My first memory is that it felt like the sky had fallen on us. As a journalist, you kind of think of all the events that could happen. Diana was not on the list because she was an icon for everybody, and icons don't die. When the phone rang after midnight and I was told the news, I remained bewildered. I thought: 'It's not possible, it cannot happen. It's impossible, someone is playing a joke on me.'"

After Diana's death, the story shifted to London, where members of the public gathered outside her home to mourn the loss of a young woman they had watched grow from a shy teenager into a glamorous princess who championed causes ranging from AIDS treatment to land mine removal.

Ted Anthony, AP reporter who traveled from New York to help cover the story:

"I remember walking through Kensington Gardens and seeing all these flowers and drawings. I remember one vividly from Moomina from the Maldives that stuck out to me, and they were all just talking about how important Diana was in their life and in the way that they saw the world in her work on AIDS, her work with charities, and simply her status as a woman who had persevered and endured. ... The thing I remember the most was that people who wouldn't normally have been affected by this type of thing told me that they were deeply affected. And the whole people's princess notion and (former Prime Minister) Tony Blair speaking about her and all of that, it all came together to form this — the word surreal is overused — but I think that it was a surreal few days where you felt like you were sort of caught up in something and carried along on a wave. And your job was to watch and chronicle and try to understand. But you knew that it was bigger than any one person around you."

Maureen Johnson, former AP London reporter:

"I do remember being out on the streets around Westminster and a bit further away and just the sheer numbers of people that had come. There seemed to be very little traffic and just people of all colors and backgrounds ... and carrying these heaps and heaps of flowers. And it was almost unreal. There was a sort of silence in the center of London. And it went on for a number of days."

Myron Belkind, former London bureau chief

"It just shows you the impact that one person could have and she did it from 1981 until 1997. Hard to imagine she died at age 36. And I think also going back to Westminster Abbey, how could we ever forget Elton John playing and singing "Goodbye, English Rose"? It was a moment that I think united the country and the world. Here I am at age 82. I think it's hard to imagine that could have happened with anyone else (other) than Princess Diana ... It's a lesson for us to watch in the future. There are others who will come to the fore of the public and it will have impact, but hard to imagine it will rise to the level of the life of Princess Diana."

Taiwan forces fire at drones flying over island near China

TAIPEI undefined

Taiwan's military fired warning shots at drones from China flying over its outposts just off the Chinese coastline, underscoring heightened tensions and the self-ruled island's resolve to respond to new provocations.

Taiwan's forces said in a statement that troops took the action on Tuesday after drones were found hovering over the Kinmen island group. Dadan, one of the islands where a drone was spotted, lies roughly 15 kilometers (9 miles) off the Chinese coast.

The statement Wednesday referred to the unmanned aerial vehicles as being of "civilian use," but gave no other details. It said the drones returned to the nearby Chinese city of Xiamen after the shots were fired. Taiwan previously fired only flares as warnings.

The incident comes amid heightened tensions after China fired missiles into the sea and sent planes and ships across the dividing line in the Taiwan Strait earlier this month. It followed angry rhetoric from Beijing over a trip to Taiwan by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the highest-ranking U.S. dignitary to visit the island in 25 years.

China claims Taiwan as its own territory and its recent actions have been viewed as a rehearsal of a possible blockade or invasion. China's drills brought strong condemnation from Taiwan's chief ally, the U.S., along with fellow regional democracies such as Australia and Japan. Some of China's missiles early in August fell into nearby Japan's exclusive economic zone.

Taiwan maintains control over a range of islands in the Kinmen and Matsu groups in the Taiwan Strait, a relic of the effort by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists to maintain a foothold on the mainland after being driven out by Mao Zedong's Communists amid civil war in 1949.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry said China's actions failed to intimidate the island's 23 million people, saying they had only hardened support for the armed forces and the status quo of de-facto independence.

Officials said anti-drone defenses were being strengthened, part of a 12.9% increase in the Defense Ministry's annual budget next year. The government is planning to spend an additional 47.5 billion New Taiwan dollars (\$1.6 billion), for a total of 415.1 billion NTD (\$13.8 billion) for the year.

The U.S. is also reportedly preparing to approve a \$1.1 billion defense package for Taiwan that would include anti-ship and air-to-air missiles to be used to repel potential Chinese invasion attempt.

Following the Chinese drills, the U.S. sailed two warships through the Taiwan Strait, which China has sought to designate as its sovereign waters. Foreign delegations from the U.S., Japan and European nations have continued to arrive to lend Taipei diplomatic and economic support.

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey is currently visiting Taiwan to discuss production of semiconductors, the critical chips that are used in everyday electronics and have become a battleground in the technology

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competition between the U.S. and China.

Ducey is seeking to woo suppliers for the new \$12 billion Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp. (TSMC) plant being built in his state.

The governor is also visiting tech powerhouse South Korea, and in a statement on his official website said his aim was to take these relationships to the next level - to strengthen them, expand them and ensure they remain mutually beneficial."

Last week, the Indiana governor visited Taiwan on a similar mission.

Taiwanese Air Force pilots have also trained at Luke Air Force Base outside Phoenix for more than 25 years, an indication of continuing U.S. support for Taiwan's defense despite the lack of formal diplomatic ties.

Taiwan produces more than half the global supply of high-end processor chips. China's firing of missiles during its exercises disrupted shipping and air traffic, and highlighted the possibility that chip exports might be interrupted.

Reacting to Ducey's visit, China on Wednesday reaffirmed its opposition to any official contacts between the U.S. and Taiwan. That was a further reminder of the Communist Party's refusal to acknowledge the separation of powers within the U.S. government and the right of American local officials to operate independently of the administration.

"We urge the relevant parties in the U.S. to ... stop any forms of official contacts with Taiwan, and refrain from sending wrong signals to the Taiwan independence forces," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said at a daily briefing.

"China will take strong measures to resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Zhao said.

UN inspectors head to Ukraine nuclear plant in war zone

By DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — United Nations inspectors made their way toward Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant on Wednesday, a long-anticipated mission that the world hopes will help secure the Russian-held facility in the middle of a war zone and avoid catastrophe.

Underscoring the danger, Kyiv and Moscow again accused each other of attacking the area around Europe's biggest nuclear plant.

In recent days, the plant was temporarily knocked offline because of fire damage to transmission line — heightening fears that fighting could lead to a massive radiation leak or even a reactor meltdown. The risks are so severe that officials have begun distributing anti-radiation iodine tablets to nearby residents.

Russia-backed local authorities claimed Wednesday that Ukrainian forces repeatedly shelled the territory of the plant and that drone strikes hit the plant's administrative building and training center. Regional Ukraine governor Valentyn Reznichenko, meanwhile, said a city across the river from the plant came under heavy artillery fire during the night.

"This appears to be nuclear blackmail of the local population and international society," Reznichenko said on Telegram.

The complex, a vital source of energy for Ukraine, has been occupied by Russian forces and run by Ukrainian workers since the early days of the 6-month-old war. Ukraine alleges Russia is essentially holding the plant hostage, storing weapons there and launching attacks from around it, while Moscow accuses Ukraine of recklessly firing on the facility.

For months, as the fighting has played out, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency has sought access to the plant — and world leaders have demanded the U.N. nuclear watchdog be allowed to inspect it.

With a team finally on the way, Rafael Grossi, the head of the agency, said he knew full well the implications of the unprecedented mission.

"We are going to a war zone. We are going to occupied territory," he said upon departure early

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He added that he had received "explicit guarantees" from Russia that the mission of 14 experts would be able to do its work.

Russian authorities in Enerhodar, where the plant is located, said there were no casualties or release of radioactivity in the most recent fighting.

But that did little to assuage fears for the safety of the U.N. mission itself. Ukraine on Tuesday accused the Russians of bombing the roads the mission planned to use to access the plant, alleging they were trying to encourage the inspectors to course route and move via Russia-controlled areas instead.

The world watched the mission's progress with anxiety. European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell renewed a call to Russia for the area around the power plant to be fully demilitarized.

"They are playing games. They are gambling with the nuclear security," Borrell told reporters in the Czech capital, Prague. "We cannot play war games in the neighborhood of a site like this."

Kyiv is seeking international assistance to take back control of the area.

"We think that the mission should be a very important step to return (the plant) to Ukrainian government control by the end of the year," Ukrainian Energy Minister German Galushchenko told The Associated Press.

If all goes well, the inspectors should reach the Zaporizhzhia region, 450 kilometers (280 miles) south-east of the Ukrainian capital, later Wednesday. The experts may have to pass through areas of active fighting, with no publicly announced cease-fire.

Grossi met Tuesday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to discuss the mission, which is expected to last several days.

In other developments:

— Zelenskyy's office said Wednesday that automatic weapons fire was heard on the streets of southern Kherson and claimed Russian soldiers were searching private residences for partisans, as Ukrainians resisting Russian rule are known. There was speculation early in the week that Ukraine had attempted to start a counteroffensive there.

His office said that in the east, four people were killed and two wounded in rocket firing in the Donetsk region in the past day.

— Russia's Gazprom stopped the flow of natural gas through a major pipeline from to western Europe early Wednesday, a move it announced in advance and said was for routine maintenance.

Europe plan for floating gas terminals raises climate fears

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ AP Energy Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — As winter nears, European nations, desperate to replace the natural gas they once bought from Russia, have embraced a short-term fix: A series of roughly 20 floating terminals that would receive liquefied natural gas from other countries and convert it into heating fuel.

Yet the plan, with the first floating terminals set to deliver natural gas by year's end, has raised alarms among scientists who fear the long-term consequences for the environment. They warn that these terminals would perpetuate Europe's reliance on natural gas, which releases climate-warming methane and carbon dioxide when it's produced, transported and burned.

Some scientists say they worry that the floating terminals will end up becoming a long-term supplier of Europe's vast energy needs that could last years, if not decades. Such a trend could set back emission-reduction efforts that experts say haven't moved fast enough to slow the damage being done to the global environment.

Much of the liquefied natural gas, or LNG, that Europe hopes to receive is expected to come from the United States. The need arose after Russia's invasion of Ukraine shattered its ties with Europe and led to a cutoff of most of the natural gas that Moscow had long provided. Along the U.S. Gulf Coast, export terminals are expanding, and many residents there are alarmed about the rise in drilling for gas and the resulting loss of land as well as extreme weather changes associated with burning fossil fuels.

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"Building this immense LNG infrastructure will lock the world into continued reliance on fossil fuels and continued climate damage for decades to come," said John Sterman, a climate scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Natural gas contributes significantly to climate change — both when it's burned, becoming carbon dioxide, and through leakages of methane, an even more potent greenhouse gas. Yet European nations, which for years have been leaders in shifting to cleaner energy, have proposed bringing more than 20 floating LNG terminals into their ports to help compensate for the loss of Russia's natural gas.

The terminals, which tower over homes and stretch nearly 1,000 feet (304 meters), can store roughly 6 billion cubic feet (170,000 cubic meters) of LNG and convert it into gas for homes and businesses. They can be built faster and more cheaply than onshore import terminals, though they're costlier to operate, according to the International Gas Union.

"Every country needs to prepare for a scenario where there may be a cut in Russian supplies," said Nikoline Bromander, an analyst with Rystad Energy. "If you are dependent, you need to have a backup plan."

Many environmental scientists argue that the money being earmarked for the ships — which cost about \$500 million each to build, according to Rystad — would be better spent on rapidly adopting clean-energy or efficiency upgrades that could reduce energy consumption.

Constructing more solar or wind farms, which takes years, wouldn't immediately replace Russian gas. But with adequate funding, Sterman suggested, greater energy efficiencies — in homes, buildings and factories, along with the deployment of wind, solar and other technologies — could vastly reduce Europe's need to replace all the gas it's lost.

Germany, among Europe's strongest advocates for the floating LNG terminals, is expecting five of the ships and has committed roughly 3 billion euros to the effort, according to Global Energy Monitor. Germany has also approved a law to fast-track the terminals' development, suspending the requirement for environmental assessments.

It's a move that troubles environmental groups.

"It's totally obvious," asserted Sascha Müller-Kraenner, CEO of Environmental Action Germany, that "the provisions of the law were developed in close dialogue with the gas industry."

Germany's government and energy industry have defended their embrace of the LNG terminals as an urgent response to the loss of most of the Russian gas they had long received, which they fear Moscow will shut off completely.

"In an exceptional situation such as this, where it's a matter of Germany's gas supply security, it is justified to accelerate the approval process," Germany's energy industry association, BDEW, said in a statement.

Susanne Ungrad, a spokeswoman for Germany's Economy and Energy Ministry, noted that efforts are being made to lower methane emissions in exporting countries like the United States. And she said that in pursuing the construction of LNG terminals, Europe authorities will conduct comprehensive assessments.

Greig Aitken, an analyst at Global Energy Monitor, noted that a terminal that's set to open near Gdansk, Poland, has signed contracts with American LNG suppliers that extend well past 2030. That could make it problematic for the European Union to meet its goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030.

Italy, Greece, France, the Netherlands, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Slovenia and the U.K. all have one or more floating LNG terminals planned, according to Rystad Energy.

In some cases, proponents argue, the ships could aid the environmental cause. They note, for example, that as Russian gas supplies have dwindled, communities in Germany and elsewhere have been burning coal, which typically produces more emissions than natural gas. Increasing the supply of natural gas would make this less necessary.

Still, methane can frequently leak along the natural gas supply chain. So in some cases, the net climate effect of burning natural gas may be no better than coal.

The U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned that continuing to use the fossil fuel

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infrastructure already in place would cause global warming to exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit). At that level, heat would be expected to worsen the flash floods, extreme heat, intense hurricanes and longer-burning wildfires that have resulted from climate change and have cost lives.

"It is a little disheartening to see Europe, which has been the seat of so much energy and action and bold emissions targets, being home to this particular way with doubling down on fossil fuel infrastructure," said Kim Cobb, a climate scientist at Brown University.

In the United States, the largest export market for Europe-bound LNG, three new export terminals are under construction. Eleven additional terminals and four expansions are in the planning stages. Some export terminals that had struggled to attract financing are now seeing more investment and interest, said Ira Joseph, a longtime energy analyst.

"What you've seen happen over the last two months — they're signing up sales and purchase agreements, right and left," Joseph said.

Rio Grande LNG, an export terminal proposed by Next Decade in Brownsville, Texas, for example, appeared to stall last year in the face of environmental protests. But this spring, a French company, Engie, and several clients in Asia signed long-term contracts to buy LNG from the terminal. Now, Next Decade says it's likely to obtain all the financing it needs.

Europe's gas scarcity has escalated global LNG prices, leading buyers in China and elsewhere to sign long-term contracts with suppliers in the United States. American LNG exports will likely grow by 10 million tons over the next year, said Bromander, the Rystad analyst.

The floating LNG ships have been billed as a short-term solution to keep gas flowing for a few years while cleaner energy sources like wind and solar are built up. But critics say it's unlikely that a ship built to last decades would permanently halt operations after a few years.

Once the floating terminals are built, they can be used anywhere in the world. So if European nations no longer want floating LNG terminals as they transition to cleaner energy, the ships could sail off to another port, essentially locking in the use of natural gas for decades.

And in some cases, particularly in Germany, some of the proposed floating terminals appear to be paving the way for on-shore terminals that would be built to last 30 or 40 years — well past the point that nations should be burning fossil fuels, environmental groups say.

"After the war is resolved and, as we all hope, peace is restored, are they really going to say, 'Oh, let's take it to the scrap yard?'" Sterman asked. "They're not going to do that."

Gorbachev mourned as rare world leader but some still bitter

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER and PATRICK QUINN Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The passing of Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union and for many the man who restored democracy to then-communist-ruled European nations, was mourned Wednesday as the loss of a rare leader who changed the world and for a time gave hope for peace among the superpowers.

But the man who died at age 91 on Tuesday was also reviled by many countrymen who blamed him for the 1991 implosion of the Soviet Union and its diminution as a superpower. The Russian nation that emerged from its Soviet past shrank in size as 15 new nations were created.

The loss of pride and power also eventually led to the rise of Vladimir Putin, who has tried for the past quarter-century to restore Russia to its former glory and beyond.

"After decades of brutal political repression, he embraced democratic reforms. He believed in glasnost and perestroika — openness and restructuring — not as mere slogans, but as the path forward for the people of the Soviet Union after so many years of isolation and deprivation" President Joe Biden said.

He added that "these were the acts of a rare leader — one with the imagination to see that a different future was possible and the courage to risk his entire career to achieve it. The result was a safer world and greater freedom for millions of people."

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Gorbachev won the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in ending the Cold War but although widely feted abroad, he was a pariah at home.

Putin acknowledged that Gorbachev had "a deep impact on the course of world history."

"He led the country during difficult and dramatic changes, amid large-scale foreign policy, economic and social challenges," Putin said in a short telegram sending his condolences to Gorbachev's family.

Gorbachev "realized that reforms were necessary and tried to offer his solutions to the acute problems," Putin said.

Reactions from Russian officials and lawmakers were overall mixed. They applauded Gorbachev for his part in ending the Cold War but censured him for the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Oleg Morozov, a member of the main Kremlin party, United Russia, said Gorbachev should have "repented" for mistakes that went against Russia's interests.

"He was a willing or an unwilling co-author of the unfair world order that our soldiers are now fighting on the battlefield," Morozov said, in a reference to the current war in Ukraine.

World leaders paid tribute to a man some described as a great and brave leader.

Outgoing British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that "in a time of Putin's aggression in Ukraine, his tireless commitment to opening up Soviet society remains an example to us all."

French President Emmanuel Macron described Gorbachev as "a man of peace whose choices opened up a path of liberty for Russians. His commitment to peace in Europe changed our shared history."

German leaders praised Gorbachev for paving the way for their country's reunification.

"We will not forget that perestroika made it possible to try to establish democracy in Russia and that democracy and freedom became possible in Europe, that Germany could be united and the Iron Curtain disappeared," Chancellor Olaf Scholz told reporters.

However, Scholz also pointed out that Gorbachev died at a time when many of his achievements have been destroyed.

"We know that he died at a time when not only democracy in Russia has failed — there is no other way to describe the current situation there — but also Russia and Russian President Putin are drawing new trenches in Europe and have started a horrible war against a neighboring country, Ukraine," he said.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who was part of the Spanish government when the Iron Curtain fell, remembered Gorbachev as a man who "sent a wind of freedom through Russian society. He tried to change the communist system from inside, which became impossible."

Others in Europe challenged positive recollections of Gorbachev.

Gabrielius Landsbergis, the son of Vytautas Landsbergis who led Lithuania's independence movement in the early 1990s, tweeted that "Lithuanians will not glorify Gorbachev."

Memories are still fresh in the Baltic country of Jan. 13, 1991, when hundreds of Lithuanians headed to the television tower in Vilnius to oppose Soviet troops deployed to crush the country's bid to restore its independence. In the clashes that followed, 14 civilians were killed and over 140 were injured. Moscow recognized Lithuania's independence in August that year.

"We will never forget the simple fact that his army murdered civilians to prolong his regime's occupation of our country. His soldiers fired on our unarmed protesters and crushed them under his tanks. That is how we will remember him," Landsbergis wrote.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called Gorbachev "a one-of-a kind statesman who changed the course of history" and "did more than any other individual to bring about the peaceful end of the Cold War."

"The world has lost a towering global leader, committed multilateralist, and tireless advocate for peace," the U.N. chief said in a statement.

Gorbachev's contemporaries pointed to the end of the Cold War as one of his achievements.

"Mikhail Gorbachev played a critical role in the peaceful end to the Cold War. At home, he was a figure of historical importance, but not in the way he intended," said Robert M. Gates, who headed the CIA from 1991 to 1993 and later became U.S. defense secretary.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog called Gorbachev "one of the 20th century's most extraordinary figures."

He was a brave and visionary leader, who shaped our world in ways previously thought unimaginable.”

In Asia, he was remembered as a leader with the courage to bring change.

China’s government recognized Gorbachev’s role in healing relations between Moscow and Beijing. Gorbachev had been an inspiration to reformist thinkers in China during the late 1980s, and his visit to Beijing in 1989 marked a watershed in relations between the sides.

“Mr. Gorbachev made positive contributions to the normalization of relations between China and the Soviet Union. We mourn his passing and extend our sympathies to his family,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said.

However, China’s Communist Party leaders also regard Gorbachev’s liberal approach as a fatal display of weakness and his moves toward peaceful coexistence with the West as a form of surrender.

States tapping historic surpluses for tax cuts and rebates

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Stoked by the largest surplus in state history, Missouri’s Republican-led Legislature devised a \$500 million plan to send one-time tax refunds to millions of households. In a shock to some, GOP Gov. Mike Parson vetoed it.

Parson’s objection: He wanted a bigger, longer-lasting tax cut.

“Now is the time for the largest income tax cut in our state’s history,” Parson declared as he called lawmakers back for a September special session to consider a \$700 million permanent tax reduction.

Upon its likely approval, Missouri will join at least 31 states that already have enacted some type of tax cut or rebate this year — an astounding outpouring of billions of tax dollars back to the people. Idaho lawmakers are convening Thursday to consider more tax breaks, and Montana lawmakers also are weighing a special session for tax relief.

Flush with federal pandemic aid and their own surging tax revenue, states have cut income tax rates for individuals and businesses, expanded tax deductions for families and retirees, pared back property taxes, waived sales taxes on groceries and suspended motor fuel taxes to offset inflationary price spikes. Many also have provided immediate tax rebates.

Republicans and Democrats alike have joined the tax-cutting trend during a midterm election year.

Yet divisions have emerged about how far to go. While Democrats generally have favored targeted tax breaks and one-time rebates, some Republicans have pressed for permanent income tax rate reductions that could lower tax bills — and state revenue — for years to come. Parson describes it as “real, lasting relief.”

Some budget analysts warn that permanent tax cuts could strain states during a future recession. The U.S. economy has shrunk for two straight quarters this year, meeting one informal sign of a recession.

“Quite simply, relying on the current surplus to fund permanent tax changes isn’t fiscally sustainable, or responsible, and will ultimately require cuts to state services,” said Amy Blouin, president and CEO of the Missouri Budget Project, a nonprofit that analyzes fiscal policies.

For some states, the current surpluses are unlike anything they’ve previously seen.

The 2022 fiscal year, which ended June 30 for most states, marked the second straight year of large growth in tax collections after economic shutdowns triggered declines early in the coronavirus pandemic. Many states reported their largest-ever surpluses, according to the National Association of State Budget Officers.

“I don’t think there’s been a time in history where states are better equipped to ride out a potential recession,” said Timothy Vermeer, senior state tax policy analyst at the Tax Foundation, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank. “A majority, if not all, of the rainy day funds are in a really healthy position.”

Income tax rate cuts have passed in 13 states this year, already equaling last year’s historic total, according to the Tax Foundation. Republicans control the legislatures in all of those states except New York, where Democrats who wield power accelerated the timetable for a previously approved tax rate reduction.

Republican-led Arkansas was the most recent to take action during an August special session. A new

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law will speed up a gradual income tax rate reduction enacted last year and provide a one-time inflationary tax credit. Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson described the \$500 million package as “a transfer of wealth from the government to the taxpayer” that “could not have come at a more important time.”

Nationwide, inflation is at a 40-year-high, raising prices on most goods and services and squeezing incomes.

At least 15 states have approved one-time rebates from their surpluses, including 10 led by Democratic governors and legislatures, four by Republicans and one — Virginia — with split partisan control.

Democratic-led California, which posted a record \$97 billion surplus, is sending rebates of between \$200 and \$1,050 to individuals earning less than \$250,000 annually and households earning less than \$500,000.

All four GOP-controlled states providing rebates — Georgia, Indiana, Idaho and South Carolina — also made permanent income tax rate cuts.

Though often popular, tax rebates do little to fight inflation and “may actually be counterproductive” by enabling additional consumer spending on items in scarce supply and thus contributing to higher prices, said Hernan Moscoso Boedo, an economist at the University of Cincinnati.

Still, big surpluses coupled with inflation make rebates a tempting option for politicians, especially during an election year.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican facing a re-election challenge from Democrat Stacey Abrams, has been among the most aggressive tax-cutters. He signed legislation gradually reducing the income tax rate from 5.75% to 4.99%. He also signed a measure providing a \$1.1 billion tax rebate, with up to \$250 for individuals and \$500 for couples. He has proposed an additional \$2 billion in income and property tax rebates. And after a law temporarily suspending the state’s gas tax expired in May, Kemp extended the gas tax break through mid-September.

“We’re trying to help Georgians fight through this tough time,” Kemp said.

In Colorado, legislative staff estimate it will cost \$2.7 million to carry out legislation expediting an income tax refund of \$750 for individuals and \$1,500 for couples. The constitutionally mandated refund of surplus revenue was originally due to be paid next year but is being distributed now — along with a letter from Democratic Gov. Jared Polis touting it as inflation relief.

Polis, who is up for re-election in November, had been a previous critic of the automatic refund provision. His Republican challenger, Heidi Ganahl, is accusing him of “hypocrisy.”

Idaho Gov. Brad Little, a Republican, has called the Legislature back for a special session starting Thursday to consider more tax breaks.

He’s proposing to use part of the state’s projected \$2 billion budget surplus for a \$500 million income tax rebate this year. He also wants to cut more than \$150 million annually by creating a flat 5.8% income tax rate starting next year. That comes after the state reduced the top tax rate each of the last two years.

“Folks, this is conservative governing in action,” Little said while asserting the tax cuts still would leave enough money to boost education funding by hundreds of millions of dollars.

Montana lawmakers are weighing whether to convene a special session later in September to provide tax breaks from a budget surplus. A proposal calls for giving \$1,000 rebates to homeowners who paid property taxes during the past two years. It also would provide income tax rebates of \$1,250 for individuals and \$2,500 for couples.

Montana’s Republican House and Senate majority leaders said in a joint statement that the rebates would offer help “as soon as possible with expenses such as gas, groceries, school supplies and so much more.” But some lawmakers, including term-limited GOP Rep. Frank Garner, have expressed reluctance.

“My first concern is if this proposal is driven by an imminent emergency or by those wanting to write checks to voters because their emergency is merely an imminent election,” Garner wrote in an opinion column.

Russian politicians offer mixed view of Gorbachev’s legacy

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By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian officials and lawmakers treaded carefully Wednesday while reacting to Mikhail Gorbachev's death, praising him for his role in ending the Cold War but deploring his failure to avert the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The stance was reflected by state television broadcasts, which paid tributes to Gorbachev as a historic figure but described his reforms as poorly planned and held him responsible for failing to safeguard the country's interests in dialogue with the West.

The criticism echoed earlier assessments by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has famously lamented the collapse of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century."

In a telegram of condolences released by the Kremlin, Putin praised Gorbachev as a man who left "an enormous impact on the course of world history."

"He led the country during difficult and dramatic changes, amid large-scale foreign policy, economic and society challenges," Putin said. "He deeply realized that reforms were necessary and tried to offer his solutions for the acute problems."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described Gorbachev as an "extraordinary" statesman who will "always remain in the country's history."

"Gorbachev has given an impulse to ending the Cold War and he sincerely wanted to believe that it will be over and a new romantic period will start between the renewed Soviet Union and the collective West," Peskov said. "Those romantic expectations failed to materialize. The bloodthirsty nature of our opponents has come to light, and it's good that we realized that in time."

While avoiding explicit personal criticism of Gorbachev, Putin in the past repeatedly blamed him for failing to secure written commitments from the West that would rule out NATO's expansion eastward — an issue that has become a major irritant in Russia-West ties for decades and fomented tensions that exploded when the Russian leader sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Members of the Kremlin-controlled parliament sought followed a similar path, hailing Gorbachev's historic role but lamenting the Soviet collapse.

Leonid Slutsky, the head of the foreign affairs committee in the lower house, the State Duma, hailed Gorbachev as "the most remarkable politician of his time," but described him as a "contradictory" figure whose reforms "played into the hands of those who were trying to wipe the USSR off the world's map."

Sergei Mironov, the leader of the Just Russia party, told the official Tass news agency that Gorbachev "was like a breath of fresh air, embodying the hopes for colossal changes," but added that his policies led to "the loss of a great country" and became a "tragedy for generations of Russians."

Some others were far less polite.

Oleg Morozov, a member of the main Kremlin party, the United Russia, said that Gorbachev should have "repented" for the errors that hurt Russia's interests.

"There is a mystical coincidence in Gorbachev passing away at a time when the special military operation in Ukraine," Morozov said in remarks carried by the state RIA Novosti news agency. "He was a willing or an unwilling co-author of the unfair world order that our soldiers are now fighting on the battlefield."

Nikolai Kolomeitsev, the deputy head of the Communist faction in the Duma, went even further, denouncing Gorbachev as a "traitor" who "destroyed the state."

Gorbachev's foundation said that he will be buried at Moscow's Novodevichy cemetery next to his wife. The date hasn't been set yet and it wasn't immediately clear whether he will be given a state funeral.

In Pakistan, fears of waterborne diseases as floods recede

By MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Officials in Pakistan raised concern Wednesday over the spread of waterborne diseases among thousands of flood victims as waters from powerful monsoon rains began to recede in many parts of the country.

Massive flooding from the rains since mid-June has killed at least 1,162 people, a phenomenon experts

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blame on climate change.

Some doctors said initially they were seeing mostly patients traumatized by the flooding, but are now treating people suffering from diarrhea, skin infections and other waterborne ailments in the country's flood-hit areas.

The development has forced the government to deploy additional medical teams and dispatch medicine besides providing clean drinking water to survivors, many of whom are living in tents and makeshift homes.

The warning came a day after record-breaking floods prompted the United Nations to formally issue an appeal for \$160 million in emergency funding to the impoverished Islamic nation, where about a million homes have been damaged or destroyed.

Dr. Azra Fazal Pechuho, health minister in the country's worst-affected province of Sindh, said officials have set up 4,210 medical camps in the province's flood-hit areas to treat victims now suffering from skin and waterborne diseases, which are common during floods.

The World Health Organization began aiding Pakistani authorities in their efforts to treat people injured in the rains and flooding. The agency said in a statement it was working to increase surveillance for acute diarrhea, cholera and other communicable diseases to avoid their spreading further, and is also providing medicine and medical supplies to health facilities.

"WHO is working with health authorities to respond quickly and effectively on the ground," said Dr. Palitha Mahipala, the WHO representative in Pakistan. "Our key priorities now are to ensure rapid access to essential health services to the flood-affected population, (to) strengthen and expand disease surveillance, outbreak prevention and control, and ensure robust health cluster coordination."

Authorities said waterborne diseases among flood victims are now common across the country.

"Initially we received injured people, but now diarrhea is common," said Farhad Khan, a physician in charge of a medical camp set up in the northwestern town of Charsadda. It is one of the worst flood-hit districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan, where floods killed 257 people since mid-June.

Pakistani authorities backed by the military, rescuers and volunteers, have struggled to evacuate marooned people to safer places. On Wednesday, military helicopters continued evacuating flood victims and delivering food to remote regions, according to a statement released by the military. It said it has deployed at least 6,500 troops to assist in rescue and relief operations.

Rescuers were also using boats to evacuate stranded people in southern Sindh province and in remote villages in eastern Punjab province, according to government officials.

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif in a visit to the flood-hit Swat Valley promised the rehabilitation of every person displaced by the flood. In his televised comments, Shahbaz thanked U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for responding to Pakistan's request and issuing an appeal for \$160 million in emergency funding to help flood victims. Guterres on Tuesday urged the world: "Let's stop sleepwalking toward the destruction of our planet by climate change."

Sharif's visit comes days after a raging Swat River destroyed the iconic New Honeymoon Hotel in the northwestern tourist resort of Kalam. There were no casualties as tourists and staff left the hotel following government evacuation instructions, and residents in Kalam said many streets there were still flooded.

Pakistan says it has received aid from some countries and others were dispatching aid, too. According to initial government estimates, the devastation caused \$10 billion in damage to the economy.

Kamran Bangash, a government spokesman in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, said with evacuations wrapping up, officials are now focused on providing food and clean drinking water to flood victims.

"We fear the outbreak of the waterborne disease in flood-hit areas," he told The Associated Press. He said hundreds of people have contracted such illnesses in various parts of the province.

"In recent weeks floodwater badly affected hundreds of thousands of people. We don't want them to again suffer; this time due to non-availability of clean water and it can be avoided," Bangash said.

Although the rains stopped three days ago, large swaths of the country remain under water, and the main rivers, the Indus and the Swat, are still swollen. The National Disaster Management Authority has warned emergency services to be on maximum alert, saying flood waters over the next 24 hours could

cause further damage.

Survey finds young people follow news, but without much joy

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Young people are following the news but aren't too happy with what they're seeing. Broadly speaking, that's the conclusion of a study released Wednesday showing 79% of young Americans say they get news daily. The survey of young people ages 16 to 40 — the older of which are known as millennials and the younger Generation Z — was conducted by Media Insight Project, a collaboration between The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the American Press Institute.

The report pokes holes in the idea that young people aren't interested in news, a perception largely driven by statistics showing older audiences for television news and newspapers.

"They are more engaged in more ways than people give them credit for," said Michael Bolden, CEO and executive director of the American Press Institute.

An estimated 71% of this age group gets news daily from social media. The social media diet is becoming more varied; Facebook doesn't dominate the way it used to. About a third or more get news each day from YouTube and Instagram, and about a quarter or more from TikTok, Snapchat and Twitter. Now, 40% say they get news from Facebook daily, compared with 57% of millennials who said that in a 2015 Media Insight Project survey.

Yet 45% also said they get news each day from traditional sources, like television or radio stations, newspapers and news websites.

The poll found that about a quarter of young people say they regularly pay for at least one news product, like print or digital magazines or newspapers, and a similar percentage have donated to at least one nonprofit news organization.

Only 32% say they enjoy following the news. That's a marked decrease from seven years ago, when 53% of millennials said that. Fewer young people now say they enjoy talking with family and friends about the news.

Other findings, such as people who say they feel worse the longer they spend online or who set time limits on their consumption, point to a weariness with the news, said Tom Rosenstiel, a University of Maryland journalism professor.

"I wasn't surprised by that," Bolden said. "It has been a challenging news cycle, especially the last three years."

About 9 in 10 young people say misinformation about issues and events is a problem, including about 6 in 10 who say it's a major problem. Most say they've been exposed to misinformation themselves.

Asked who they consider most responsible for its spread, young people pointed to social media companies and users, politicians and the media in equal measure.

That may surprise people in the media who believe they are fighting misinformation, and are not part of the problem, Bolden said. A significant number of people disagree.

"Whether that's accurate or not, the people in this business have to deal with that perception," he said.

He suggested that it's important for news organizations to better explain what it is that they do and how coverage decisions are made, along with taking a step back to make clear how government functions, as well as holding leaders to account.

The percentage of people who say "news stories that seem to mostly create conflict rather than help address it" and "media outlets that pass on conspiracy theories and unsubstantiated rumors" are a major problem exceeded the number of people concerned about journalists putting too much opinion in their stories, the survey found.

That would seem to point a finger at cable news outlets that fill air time with debates on particular issues, often pitting people with extreme points of view. New CNN chief executive Chris Licht has recently called on his network to cool the overheated segments.

"There are people who have grown up in this world of political food-fight media, and this is the only

world they know," said Rosenstiel, who worked on the survey as Bolden's predecessor at the press institute. "They might have heard their parents talk about Walter Cronkite, but they haven't seen that."

The topics people ages 16 to 40 say they most follow in the news? Celebrities, music and entertainment, at 49%, and food and cooking, at 48%, top the list. At least a third follow a wide range of other issues, including health and fitness, race and social justice, the environment, health care, education, politics and sports.

Feds cite efforts to obstruct probe of docs at Trump estate

By ERIC TUCKER, JILL COLVIN and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department said Tuesday that classified documents were "likely concealed and removed" from former President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate as part of an effort to obstruct the federal investigation into the discovery of the government records.

The FBI also seized 33 boxes containing more than 100 classified records during its Aug. 8 search of Mar-a-Lago and found classified documents stashed in Trump's office, according to a filing that lays out the most detailed chronology to date of months of strained interactions between Justice Department officials and Trump representatives over the discovery of government secrets.

The filing offers yet another indication of the sheer volume of classified records retrieved from Mar-a-Lago. It shows how investigators conducting a criminal probe have focused not just on why the records were improperly stored there, but also on the question of whether the Trump team intentionally misled them about the continued, and unlawful, presence of the top secret documents.

The timeline laid out by the Justice Department made clear that the extraordinary search of Mar-a-Lago came only after other efforts to retrieve the records had failed, and that it resulted from law enforcement suspicion that additional documents remained inside the property despite assurances by Trump representatives that a "diligent search" had accounted for all of the material.

It also included a picture of some of the seized documents bearing clear classification markings, perhaps as a way to rebut suggestions that whoever packed them or was handling them could have easily failed to appreciate their sensitive nature.

The photo shows the cover pages of a smattering of paperclip-bound classified documents — some marked as "TOP SECRET//SCI" with bright yellow borders, and one marked as "SECRET//SCI" with a rust-colored border — along with whited-out pages, splayed out on a carpet at Mar-a-Lago. Beside them sits a cardboard box filled with gold-framed pictures, including a Time magazine cover.

Though it contains significant new details on the investigation, the Justice Department filing does not resolve a core question that has driven public fascination with the investigation — why Trump held onto the documents after he left the White House and why he and his team resisted repeated efforts to give them back. In fact, it suggests officials may not have received an answer.

During a June 3 visit to Mar-a-Lago by FBI and Justice Department officials, the document states, "Counsel for the former President offered no explanation as to why boxes of government records, including 38 documents with classification markings, remained at the Premises nearly five months after the production of the Fifteen Boxes and nearly one-and-a-half years after the end of the Administration."

That visit to Mar-a-Lago, which came weeks after the Justice Department issued a subpoena for the records, receives substantial attention in the document and appears to be a key investigative focus.

Though Trump has said he had declassified all of the documents at Mar-a-Lago, his lawyers did not suggest that during the visit and instead "handled them in a manner that suggested counsel believed that the documents were classified," according to the document.

FBI agents who went there to receive additional materials were given "a single Redweld envelope, double-wrapped in tape, containing the documents," the filing states.

That envelope, according to the FBI, contained 38 unique documents with classification markings, including five documents marked confidential, 16 marked secret and 17 marked top secret.

During that visit, the document says, Trump's lawyers told investigators that all the records that had

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come from the White House were stored in one location — a Mar-a-Lago storage room — and that “there were no other records stored in any private office space or other location at the Premises and that all available boxes were searched.”

After that, though, the Justice Department, which had subpoenaed video footage for the property, “developed evidence that government records were likely concealed and removed from the Storage Room and that efforts were likely taken to obstruct the government’s investigation.” The filing does not identify the individuals who may have relocated the boxes.

In their August search, agents found classified documents both in the storage room as well as in the former president’s office — including three classified documents found not in boxes, but in office desks.

“That the FBI, in a matter of hours, recovered twice as many documents with classification markings as the ‘diligent search’ that the former President’s counsel and other representatives had weeks to perform calls into serious question the representations made in the June 3 certification and casts doubt on the extent of cooperation in this matter,” the document states.

It says, “In some instances, even the FBI counterintelligence personnel and DOJ attorneys conducting the review required additional clearances before they were permitted to review certain documents.”

The investigation began from a referral from the National Archives and Records Administration, which recovered 15 boxes from Mar-a-Lago in January that were found to contain 184 documents with classified markings, including top secret information.

The purpose of the Tuesday night filing was to oppose a request from the Trump legal team for a special master to review the documents seized during this month’s search and set aside those protected by claims of legal privilege. U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon is set to hear arguments on the matter on Thursday.

Cannon on Saturday said it was her “preliminary intent” to appoint such a person but also gave the Justice Department an opportunity to respond.

On Monday, the department said it had already completed its review of potentially privileged documents and identified a “limited set of materials that potentially contain attorney-client privileged information.” It said Tuesday that a special master was therefore “unnecessary.”

In a separate development, the Trump legal team has grown with the addition of another attorney. Chris Kise, Florida’s former solicitor general, has joined the team of lawyers representing Trump, according to two people familiar with the matter who were not authorized to discuss the move by name and spoke on condition of anonymity. Kise did not return messages seeking comment.

U.N. monitors head to troubled Ukraine nuclear plant

By DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A team of international nuclear inspectors was heading Wednesday to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant caught in the middle of the fighting in southern Ukraine amid international concern of a potential accident or radiation leak.

Rafael Grossi, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said he hoped to establish a permanent mission in Ukraine to monitor Europe’s largest nuclear plant.

“These operations are very complex operations. We are going to a war zone. We are going to occupied territory. And this requires explicit guarantees from not only from the Russians, but also from the Republic of Ukraine,” Grossi said in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv before the monitoring the mission’s departure.

“We have been able to secure that. ... So now we are moving.”

The power plant has been occupied by Russian forces and operated by Ukrainian workers since the early days of the 6-month-old war.

It was recently cut off temporarily from the electrical grid because of fire damage, causing a blackout in the region and heightening fears of a catastrophe in a country haunted by the Chernobyl disaster.

Ukrainian Energy Minister German Galushchenko said Kyiv is seeking international assistance to try and demilitarize the area.

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"We think that the mission should be a very important step to return (the plant) to Ukrainian government control by the end of the year," Galushchenko told The Associated Press.

"We have information that they are now trying to hide their military presence, so they should check all of this."

Zaporizhzhia is a vital source of energy for Ukraine and remains connected to its power grid. Ukraine and Russia accuse each other of shelling the wider region around the nuclear power plant and the risks are so severe that officials have begun distributing anti-radiation iodine tablets to nearby residents. Grossi met Tuesday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to discuss the mission that is expected to last several days. The inspectors from the IAEA, a United Nations body, were due to reach the Zaporizhzhia region, 450 kilometers (280 miles) southeast of the Ukrainian capital, later Wednesday.

War protest: Statues fall as Europe purges Soviet monuments

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — In the Latvian capital of Riga, an obelisk that soared high above a park to commemorate the Soviet Army's capture of that nation in 1944 was toppled last week. It crashed into a pond to the cheers of those watching.

Days earlier in Estonia, a replica of a Soviet tank with the communist red star was removed by cranes and trucked away to a museum — one of up to 400 destined for removal. And in Poland, Lithuania and Czechia, monuments to the Red Army have been coming down for months, a belated purge of what many see as symbols of past oppression.

Russia's war on Ukraine has given a renewed push to topple the last remaining Soviet monuments in nations that regained their sovereignty from Moscow more than three decades ago. These countries now belong to NATO and the European Union and are staunch supporters of Ukraine.

At the end of the communist era, when Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia regained their independence from the Soviet Union and Poland and its neighbors rejected Moscow-backed communism, those nations began renaming streets and purging the most hated symbols, including statues of Soviet founder Vladimir Lenin and other communist bosses. Many of these relics are now housed in museums.

In Warsaw, authorities in 1989 quickly toppled a monument to Felix Dzerzhinsky, a Polish aristocrat who organized the Soviet secret police after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. Under his rule, the Cheka, the forerunner of the KGB, was responsible for a wave of terror.

Such changes followed the reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Soviet leader, who died in a Moscow hospital on Tuesday at the age of 91.

But memorials to Soviet soldiers or their role in defeating Nazi Germany remained in many places, met with indifference or respect for the ordinary soldiers who died fighting Adolf Hitler's brutal regime.

The war in Ukraine, however, has triggered memories of how some of those soldiers also raped local women and carried out other war crimes.

Krista Sarv, the research director for the Estonian History Museum, said after statues of Lenin and other leading communists were toppled in the 1990s, people could largely ignore the other memorials. But views changed suddenly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, and now the memorials "scream loudly about occupation and annexation."

Karol Nawrocki, the head of Poland's Institute of National Remembrance which is overseeing the removal of the monuments, says "before our eyes, history has become a living experience."

"Dressed in the uniforms of the Russian Federation, with Lenin and Stalin in their heads and hearts, Russian soldiers 'liberate' Ukraine by murdering women, children and killing soldiers," Nawrocki said.

"Let it be clear: There is no place in the Polish public space for any commemoration of the totalitarian communist regime and its people," he added.

A 2016 decommunization law had already called for a purge of communist symbols and names, but some municipalities did not have the money for that, so the institute has stepped in to help. Since February, the Polish institute has identified 60 monuments for removal — and has toppled more than 20.

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In Lithuania, a number of remaining Soviet memorials have been removed since the spring to little protest. But in Latvia and Estonia, which have sizeable Russian minorities, the removals have stirred greater emotions, with local Russians — and the Russian government — seeing it as an offense against their war heroes.

Dmitry Prokopenko, a Russian-speaking Latvian who opposed removing the Riga obelisk, said his grandparents fought and a great-grandfather died in the fight “for freedom against the Nazis.” To him, the memorial honored their sacrifice.

“Latvia is a land where Latvians and Russians live together,” he said. “I think that one part of the state, one part of the country, should respect also the rights of the other part.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry on Tuesday released a lengthy statement denouncing the demolition of Soviet monuments in the Baltic countries as “barbaric” and threatening Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia with retaliatory measures.

In apparent slap against Poland, Belarus last week reportedly leveled a memorial containing the graves of Polish wartime soldiers.

Polish officials declared that action barbaric, given that Poland has a policy of not disturbing the graves of Soviet soldiers. Rafal Leskiewicz, a historian with the Polish remembrance institute, explained “as Christians, we treat graves as holy ground. It doesn’t matter who is in the graves.”

In some cases locals support keeping Red Army memorials because of its role in defeating Nazi Germany. Some fear the erasure of historical memory, or see an affront to their own ancestors who fought alongside the Soviets.

In Poland’s northern city of Gdansk, there’s been a heated debate about a Soviet T-34 tank on Victory Avenue, and the city has decided not to remove it. The tank commander was a Polish lieutenant, and Polish soldiers played a key role in freeing the former German city of Danzig from the Nazis.

In an open letter, two descendants of wartime Polish soldiers expressed their indignation at the removal of monuments.

They recalled that Polish soldiers died fighting with the Soviets to free Poland from the Nazis and that the Soviet victory resulted in Poland receiving a swath of defeated Germany’s territory and cities including Gdansk and Wroclaw. They also noted it was the Red Army that liberated Auschwitz, Majdanek and many other Nazi death camps.

“Had it not been for the victory of Polish and Soviet soldiers in May 1945, Poland might not have existed at all,” said the letter by magazine editor Pawel Dybicz and historian August Grabski.

But many other Poles note that World War II broke out after Soviet Union and Nazi Germany agreed secretly in 1939 to carve up Poland and the Baltic states. Only after Germany betrayed and invaded the Soviet Union did the Red Army begin to fight the Germans.

Even before Russia’s war in Ukraine, the monuments have been a source of tensions.

In 2007, the relocation of a World War II monument of a Red Army soldier in Tallinn, Estonia, sparked days of rioting.

In 2013, an artist put up a statue depicting a Soviet soldier raping a pregnant woman next to the Gdansk tank. The unauthorized sculpture was quickly removed. After Russia invaded Ukraine, a different artist covered the tank with a large hand-sewn Ukrainian flag to protest what he called the “tyranny” of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In March, as Poland was figuring out a timetable for taking down Soviet monuments, a resident of the northern city of Koszalin took matters into his own hands. He drove an excavator onto a cemetery and toppled the statue of a Soviet soldier being hugged by a girl.

Nawrocki says the official removal of Soviet monuments in Poland is progressing at “a very fast pace, but it is a matter that should have been settled long ago.”

Japan PM apologizes for party’s church links, will cut ties

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

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TOKYO (AP) — Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Wednesday his ruling party will cut ties with the Unification Church following a widening scandal triggered by former leader Shinzo Abe's assassination last month, and apologized for causing the loss of public trust in politics.

Widespread cozy ties between members of Kishida's governing Liberal Democratic Party, many of them belonging to Abe's faction, and the South Korean-born church have surfaced since Abe was shot to death while giving a campaign speech in July.

The suspect, Tetsuya Yamagani, who was arrested at the scene, allegedly told police he killed Abe because of his apparent link to the church. In a letter seen by The Associated Press and social media posts believed to be his, Yamagani said he believed his mother's large donations to the church had ruined his life.

Some Japanese have expressed understanding, even sympathy, as details of the man's life emerged, creating deep implications for the political party that has governed Japan virtually uninterrupted since World War II.

While religious groups must abide by law, "politicians are strictly required to be careful about groups with social problems," Kishida said. Members of his Cabinet and other key posts have agreed to review their past links and cut ties with the church.

"As president of the LDP, I honestly express my apology" for causing the public's doubts and concerns over the continuing revelations in media reports about the party's extensive ties to the church, Kishida said.

The Unification 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 over their shared interests of opposing communism. Abe's grandfather and former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi was a key figure who helped the church's political unit in Tokyo.

Since the 1980s, the church has faced accusations of problematic recruiting, sales of religious items and donations, which often lead to financial strains on the followers' families and, according to experts, mental health of adherents' children. The issues led to the government's decision to cut ties with the church.

Abe sent a video message last year to the Universal Peace Federation, an international group affiliated with the church, which experts say may have motivated the suspect in Abe's shooting. Abe had praised the federation's co-founder Hak Ja Han Moon, who is also head of the church, for her effort in promoting traditional family values.

Experts and cult watchers also say that the church has promoted its key agendas such as the opposition to women's advancement and same-sex marriage to influence policy.

Kishida shuffled his Cabinet earlier in August to purge seven ministers linked to the church. Among them was Abe's younger brother Nobuo Kishi, who acknowledged that church followers volunteered in his election campaign. Dozens of LDP members have since come forward with their ties to the church and related organizations.

Kishida said at the news conference that he has instructed LDP Secretary General Toshimitsu Motegi to survey the party fully over any other members' ties to the church. Kishida said he is rushing the effort but it may take time because the review will span decades.

Kishida apologized for the loss of public trust because of the scandal and his lack of explanation for organizing a state funeral for Abe, one of most divisive leaders in Japan's postwar history.

The state funeral scheduled for Sept. 27 has split public opinion. The only other state funeral in postwar Japan was for former Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, who signed the San Francisco Treaty that restored ties with the Allies and ended the U.S. occupation of Japan.

Kishida's Cabinet last week allocated at least a 250 million yen (\$1.8 million) budget to invite about 6,000 guests for the funeral at the Budokan arena in Tokyo.

Kishida insisted that Abe deserved a state funeral because of his achievement in raising Japan's global profile as its longest-serving postwar leader. He said Japan must respond with courtesy to "outpouring

of condolences" from foreign leaders and legislations.

High-stakes year begins for kids still learning to read

By BIANCA VAZQUEZ TONESS Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Five of the 19 students in teacher Chelsea Grant's third grade classroom are reading below grade level.

When it's time to read aloud on a recent Friday, the students show vastly different levels of skill and confidence.

"Remember you read with expression, feeling and fluency," Grant told her Atlanta students. "I want to feel it."

Two girls puff up their chests and read like they're trying out for the school play, while the rest stay seated. Some read slowly and haltingly. Many trip over tricky words – "phosphorescent" and "radiance" – and a few get stuck on simpler ones. Others don't volunteer at all.

Grant's students -- "my babies" as she calls them -- spent the better part of the 2020-2021 school year learning from home. It was first grade, a crucial year for learning to read.

Many are still far behind.

Mounting evidence from around the country shows that students who spent most of the time learning remotely during the 2020-2021 school year, many of them Black and Latino, lost about half of an academic year of learning. That's twice as much as their peers who studied in person that year.

Third graders are at a particularly delicate moment. This is the year when they must master reading or risk school failure. Everything after third grade will require reading comprehension to learn math, social studies and science. Students who don't read fluently by the end of third grade are more likely to struggle in the future, and even drop out, studies show.

"Those students are very vulnerable," said John King Jr., former U.S. Secretary of Education and president of the Education Trust, a Washington, D.C., think tank that advocates for improving access to high-quality education for low-income students and students of color.

"You just worry, are kids going to get all they need? If not, there's the risk of a lost generation of students."

Atlanta has taken more drastic steps than most other cities to make up for that lost learning. The 50,000-student district was one of the only school systems to extend the school day. Elementary school students attend seven hours of school, half an hour more than before the pandemic.

"We know that part of the best practice (to improve) performance is to have time with students," said Atlanta Superintendent Lisa Herring in a recent interview. She and her team settled on adding time to the school day because it was one of the only things they could control, she said. They also added summer school seats, but couldn't require it for most students.

During the extra 30 minutes, students who are behind attend small-group tutoring. If done well, tutoring has a greater impact than most other interventions, studies show.

Grant's student Malaysia Thomas, 8, attended summer school for reading and math, and now attends small-group tutoring for both subjects. "It's fun," Thomas said of tutoring. "But there are all of these big words I can't read."

Her mother, Diamond Anderson, interjects: "I have seen her tremendously improve ... and I'm grateful for any extra help," she said.

Brandi Thomas noticed her daughter Drew, who is also in Grant's class, fell behind during the pandemic. Her daughter wasn't able to solve problems or answer questions as quickly as most of the other students. And she couldn't read well. "She was frustrated that she couldn't keep up. It was hard to watch her struggle," Thomas said.

Drew wasn't able to attend summer school because her mother, a single parent and hairdresser, needed to work as many hours as possible during the summer to support her family. But Drew has attended tutoring at school.

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Thomas went a step further last year and hired her own tutor for Drew, three times a week. "I just knew it would take a village to get her up to speed," she said. With that extra help, Drew can now "read backwards and forwards," said Thomas.

Even with all Atlanta is doing, some experts are wondering if that city, never mind other districts, is doing enough to help students become proficient readers and master other subjects.

Los Angeles added four optional days to this year's school calendar, added summer school capacity and has left it up to schools to decide how to provide tutoring. New York City created an afterschool program for students with special needs to receive tutoring and other services and plans to reduce class sizes at certain schools. Boston adopted a new approach to teaching children to read, added summer school seats and contracted an online tutoring company for students to use at home.

Evidence from around the country shows that even when schools provide some of these services, such as optional after school tutoring or summer school, many parents aren't using them.

"I don't think most school districts have a realistic sense of what it's actually going to take to make up for the losses," said Harvard University economist Thomas Kane, who has studied the impact of the pandemic on student learning. He advocates for extending the school year by four to five weeks, for a couple of years, although he admits the idea is politically unpopular.

Atlanta's plan, which extends the school day and offers tutoring for a total of three years, "would seem to be enough -- at least on paper," Kane wrote in an email. Students would need to attend enough days of summer school, which is often a challenge for districts, and small group tutoring sessions would need to be small with three children or fewer.

He estimates Atlanta students lost a total of 18 weeks of instruction in math and 12 weeks in reading between March 2020 and the end of the 2020-2021 school year. The longer school day and summer school give those kids a little less than six weeks in extra time.

Atlanta school leaders say their testing shows students are making improvements, but wouldn't say what percentage are seeing growth or whether they're on track to become proficient.

"There's clearly some areas where we need to hone in even more," said Herring. "We've got some work to do. ... But there is urgency to make up for the disruptions."

In the meantime, some parents won't wait and are finding the extra resources on their own. Brandi Thomas says hiring her own tutor for her daughter was the right thing to do.

The other day the mother and daughter were at a stop light, and Drew started reading a billboard advertising a law firm. "She read the words 'attorney' and 'settlement,'" Brandi said. "I was like, 'OK! You can read.'"

Thomas doesn't plan to give up the private tutor for her daughter. "I just can't let her fall behind," she said.

Zombie cells central to the quest for active, vital old age

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

In an unfinished part of his basement, 95-year-old Richard Soller zips around a makeshift track encircling boxes full of medals he's won for track and field and long-distance running.

Without a hint of breathlessness, he says: "I can put in miles down here."

Steps away is an expensive leather recliner he bought when he retired from Procter & Gamble with visions of relaxing into old age. He proudly proclaims he's never used it; he's been too busy training for competitions, such as the National Senior Games.

Soller, who lives near Cincinnati, has achieved an enviable goal chased by humans since ancient times: Staying healthy and active in late life. It's a goal that eludes so many that growing old is often associated with getting frail and sick. But scientists are trying to change that — and tackle one of humanity's biggest challenges — through a little known but flourishing field of aging research called cellular senescence.

It's built upon the idea that cells eventually stop dividing and enter a "senescent" state in response to various forms of damage. The body removes most of them. But others linger like zombies. They aren't

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dead. But as the Mayo Clinic's Nathan LeBrasseur puts it, they can harm nearby cells like moldy fruit corrupting a fruit bowl. They accumulate in older bodies, which mounting evidence links to an array of age-related conditions such as dementia, cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis.

But scientists wonder: Can the zombie cell buildup be stopped?

"The ability to understand aging – and the potential to intervene in the fundamental biology of aging – is truly the greatest opportunity we have had, maybe in history, to transform human health," LeBrasseur says. Extending the span of healthy years impacts "quality of life, public health, socioeconomics, the whole shebang."

With the number of people 65 or older expected to double globally by 2050, cellular senescence is "a very hot topic," says Viviana Perez Montes of the National Institutes of Health. According to an Associated Press analysis of an NIH research database, there have been around 11,500 total projects involving cellular senescence since 1985, far more in recent years.

About 100 companies, plus academic teams, are exploring drugs to target senescent cells. And research offers tantalizing clues that people may be able to help tame senescence themselves using the strategy favored by Soller: exercise.

Although no one thinks senescence holds the key to super long life, Tufts University researcher Christopher Wiley hopes for a day when fewer people suffer fates like his late grandfather, who had Alzheimer's and stared back at him as if he were a stranger.

"I'm not looking for the fountain of youth," Wiley says. "I'm looking for the fountain of not being sick when I'm older."

MORTAL CELLS

Leonard Hayflick, the scientist who discovered cellular senescence in 1960, is himself vital at 94. He's a professor of anatomy at the University of California, San Francisco, and continues to write, present and speak on the topic.

At his seaside home in Sonoma County, he leafs through a binder filled with his research, including two early papers that have been cited an astonishing number of times by other researchers. Before him on the living room table are numerous copies of his seminal book, "How and Why We Age," in various languages.

This scientific renown didn't come easily. He discovered cellular senescence by accident, cultivating human fetal cells for a project on cancer biology and noticing they stopped dividing after about 50 population doublings. This wasn't a big surprise; cell cultures often failed because of things like contamination. What was surprising was that others also stopped dividing at the same point. The phenomenon was later called "the Hayflick limit."

The finding, Hayflick says, challenged "60-year-old dogma" that normal human cells could replicate forever. A paper he authored with colleague Paul Moorhead was rejected by a prominent scientific journal, and Hayflick faced a decade of ridicule after it was published in *Experimental Cell Research* in 1961.

"It followed the usual pattern of major discoveries in science, where the discoverer is first ridiculed and then somebody says, 'Well, maybe it works' ... then it becomes accepted to some extent, then becomes more widely accepted."

At this point, he says, "the field that I discovered has skyrocketed to an extent that's beyond my ability to keep up with it."

ZOMBIE BUILDUP

Scientists are careful to note that cell senescence can be useful. It likely evolved at least in part to suppress the development of cancer by limiting the capacity of cells to keep dividing. It happens throughout our lives, triggered by things like DNA damage and the shortening of telomeres, structures that cap and protect the ends of chromosomes. Senescent cells play a role in wound healing, embryonic development and childbirth.

Problems can arise when they build up.

"When you're young, your immune system is able to recognize these senescent cells and eliminate

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them," says Perez, who studies cell biology and aging. "But when we start getting old ... the activity of our immune system also gets diminished, so we're losing the capacity to eliminate them."

Senescent cells resist apoptosis, or programmed cell death, and characteristically get big and flat, with enlarged nuclei. They release a blend of molecules, some of which can trigger inflammation and harm other cells — and paradoxically can also stimulate the growth of malignant cells and fuel cancer, LeBrasseur says.

Scientists link some disorders to buildups of senescent cells in certain spots. For example, research suggests certain senescent cells that accumulate in lungs exposed to cigarette smoke may contribute substantially to airway inflammation in COPD.

The idea that one process could be at the root of numerous diseases is powerful to many scientists.

It inspired Dr. James Kirkland to move on from geriatric medicine. "I got tired of prescribing better wheelchairs and incontinence devices," says Kirkland, a professor of medicine at Mayo considered a pioneer of the senescence renaissance. "I wanted to do something more fundamental that could alleviate the suffering that I saw."

DRUG TARGETS

That quest leads him and others to develop medicines.

Experimental drugs designed to selectively clear senescent cells have been dubbed "senolytics," and Mayo holds patents on some. In mice, they've been shown to be effective at delaying, preventing or easing several age-related disorders.

Possible benefits for people are just emerging. Kirkland, LeBrasseur and colleagues did a pilot study providing initial evidence that patients with a serious lung disease might be helped by pairing a chemotherapy drug with a plant pigment. Another pilot study found the same combination reduced the burden of senescent cells in the fat tissue of people with diabetic kidney disease.

At least a dozen clinical trials with senolytics are now testing things like whether they can help control Alzheimer's progression, improve joint health in osteoarthritis and improve skeletal health. Some teams are trying to develop "senomorphics" that can suppress detrimental effects of molecules emitted by senescent cells. And a Japanese team has tested a vaccine on mice specific to a protein found in senescent cells, allowing for their targeted elimination.

Scientists say serious work to improve human health could also bring fringe benefits — like reducing skin wrinkling.

"I tell my lab that if we find a drug that clears the bad senescent cells and not the good ones and we cure Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's and osteoporosis and macular degeneration, it would be wonderful," says Judith Campisi, a biogerontology expert at the Buck Institute for Research on Aging. "But if we cure wrinkles, we'll be rich, and I'll never have to write another grant."

Amid the buzz, some companies market dietary supplements as senolytics. But researchers warn they haven't been shown to work or proven safe.

And there's still much to learn about clinical trial drugs.

"We know that senolytics work pretty well in mice," Wiley says. "We're still really figuring out the basics with people."

'MOST PROMISING TOOL'

Today, LeBrasseur, who directs a center on aging at Mayo, says exercise is "the most promising tool that we have" for good functioning in late life, and its power extends to our cells.

Research suggests it counters the buildup of senescent ones, helping the immune system clear them and counteracting the molecular damage that can spark the senescence process.

A study LeBrasseur led last year provided the first evidence in humans that exercise can significantly reduce indicators, found in the bloodstream, of the burden of senescent cells in the body. After a 12-week aerobics, resistance and balance training program, researchers found that older adults had lowered indicators of senescence and better muscle strength, physical function and reported health. A recently-published research review collects even more evidence — in animals and humans — for exercise as a senescence-targeting therapy.

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While such studies aren't well-known outside scientific circles, many older adults intuitively equate exercise with youthfulness.

Rancher Mike Gale, 81, installed a track and field throwing circle on his sprawling property in Petaluma, California, so he and some friends could practice throwing the discus and other equipment. Against a backdrop of rolling green hills, they twist, step, throw and retrieve over and over again.

"I'd like to be competing in my 90s," Gale says. "Why not?"

Soller asked himself a similar question long ago.

After a torn hamstring stopped him from running track in high school, he fell into an unhealthy lifestyle in early adulthood, smoking two packs of cigarettes a day. But he and his wife Jean quit cold turkey when their daughter Mary came along.

He started running again just before turning 50, and since then has run in races across the U.S., including two marathons, and participated in decades of Senior Games competitions. In May, Soller joined 12,000 like-minded athletes in Florida for the latest national games in the Fort Lauderdale area – winning five medals to add to his collection of 1,500 prizes.

His daughter filmed his first-place finish in the 200-meter dash from the stands, cheering: "Go, Dad, go!"

Soller says exercise keeps him fit enough to handle what comes his way – including an Alzheimer's diagnosis for his wife of 62 years. They sometimes stroll neighborhood streets together, holding hands.

"Do as much as you can," he says. "That should be the goal for anyone to stay healthy."

For Pakistan flood victims, waters hit swiftly and brutally

By RIAZ KHAN Associated Press

CHARSADDA, Pakistan (AP) — Rubina Bibi was cooking food for her family in her mudbrick home in her village in northwest Pakistan when the nearby mosque blared a warning from its loudspeaker. Flood waters were coming, it announced, everyone should move to safer ground.

She and her family didn't take it seriously. There had been flooding in their village of Majooki more than a decade ago, and they hadn't needed to flee.

This time, however, it was on a different scale entirely. Days of torrential rains had sent a massive surge of water down the nearby Swat River — so powerful that on that day, last Friday, it broke through a reservoir that usually controls the river's flow.

When the water hit Majooki hours after the warning, it poured into the house where the 53-year-old Bibi lived with her two sons, a daughter-in-law and her grandchildren.

One of her grandchildren, 5-month-old Dua Humayun, was sleeping on a cot in the house's courtyard. In an instant, the baby was swept away by the rushing waters. It was too fast for anyone to even think of saving her. She was gone.

Pakistani officials say the flooding that has hit across the country over the past weeks is like nothing they have seen before. It has been caused by unprecedented heavy and unrelenting monsoon rains, fueled they say by the world's changing climate.

Millions in villages, towns and cities around Pakistan were caught off guard by the swiftness and power of the waters.

Bibi spoke to The Associated Press at a tent camp set up in a sports complex in the city of Charsadda for hundreds of people left homeless by the deluge. She spoke of her granddaughter's death with composure, but inside the tent, her daughter-in-law could be heard sobbing.

"The floodwaters entered our house suddenly. We didn't have time to take anything as we were leaving," Bibi said. She, her sons and daughter-in-law carried her surviving grandchildren tightly as they waded through waist-deep water out of their home. They then walked in the stifling summer heat for four kilometers (2.5 miles) to Charsadda.

More than 1,160 people have been killed in flooding across Pakistan since mid-June, hundreds of them in the major surge that began last week. More than 33 million people in the country of 220 million have been affected, including those left homeless by the destruction of more than 1 million homes. Pakistani officials have put the economic damage at some \$10 billion, including everything from collapsed bridges

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and roads to destroyed crops.

The district around Charsadda has been one of the hardest hit areas. The Swat River meets the Kabul River nearby, and the nearby farmlands are laced with tributaries — all of them still surging with swollen waters despite a pause in rain in recent days. Authorities have warned that more rains are expected in coming weeks.

The city of Charsadda, home to more than 120,000, has been trashed. On Tuesday, some neighborhoods remained flooded with water shin-deep or higher.

Residents whose homes still stood took out their soggy blankets and furniture and other possessions to dry. Others surveyed wrecked mud-brick or shoddy cinder-block homes with collapsed walls and roofs. Deep, thick mud coated everything.

Bibi's home village of Majooki, once home to 2,500 people, remains under waist-deep water. The rice and wheat that residents stored in their homes to meet the year's need have been ruined. Hundreds of thousands of villages across Pakistan lost crops.

Many of Majooki's residents are now at the tent camp in Charsadda's Abdul Wali Khan Sports Complex. Hundreds of tents stood in rows, and children lay inside on plastic mats with what few belongings they took with them piled nearby. Some eat rice or other staples being distributed by the government.

"It is very hot here. We have a tent and a plastic mattress, but there is no fan. We are not getting enough food," Bibi said.

A widow, Bibi had worked washing clothes and cleaning in homes, and one of her sons was a construction worker. Now they are without work for the foreseeable future. She and others from the village have not been able to return and have no idea what remains of their homes.

"We are facing a lot of difficulties. We want more help so that we can start our life again," Bibi said.

The floods' devastation has hit Pakistan as it is already struggling to keep its crisis-stricken economy from collapse. The government is severely strapped for cash, and inflation has been spiraling. The International Monetary Fund gave a boost this week by releasing a long-awaited, \$1.17 billion tranche of a bailout negotiated in 2019, but only after the government promised painful austerity measures.

The United Nations on Tuesday launched an emergency appeal for \$160 million in aid to help flood victims. Planeloads of food, medical supplies and other aid have arrived in recent days. But Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif warned on Tuesday that any delay in the provision of help would be disastrous.

At the sport complex tent camp, another Majooki resident, Saifoor Khan, recalled how he too ignored the call to flee that came from the mosque loudspeaker that day.

Majooki was hit by the last major floods in 2010, but in that case no houses were destroyed and no one fled, he said. When the waters hit on Friday, the 50-year-old taxi driver, his wife and his seven children also had to wade their way to safety.

"I have no idea for how many days and weeks we will have to live in these tents," he said.

"I pray that no one faces such an ordeal."

Mikhail Gorbachev, who steered Soviet breakup, dead at 91

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Mikhail Gorbachev, who set out to revitalize the Soviet Union but ended up unleashing forces that led to the collapse of communism, the breakup of the state and the end of the Cold War, died Tuesday. The last Soviet leader was 91.

Gorbachev died after a long illness, according to a statement issued by the Central Clinical Hospital in Moscow. No other details were given.

Though in power less than seven years, Gorbachev unleashed a breathtaking series of changes. But they quickly overtook him and resulted in the collapse of the authoritarian Soviet state, the freeing of Eastern European nations from Russian domination and the end of decades of East-West nuclear confrontation.

U.S. President Joe Biden called Gorbachev a "man of remarkable vision" and a "rare leader" who had "the imagination to see that a different future was possible and the courage to risk his entire career to

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achieve it.

"The result was a safer world and greater freedom for millions of people," Biden said in a statement.

"Hard to think of a single person who altered the course of history more in a positive direction" than Gorbachev, said Michael McFaul, a political analyst and former U.S. ambassador in Moscow, on Twitter. "Gorbachev was an idealist who believed in the power of ideas and individuals. We should learn from his legacy."

Gorbachev's decline was humiliating. His power hopelessly sapped by an attempted coup against him in August 1991, he spent his last months in office watching republic after republic declare independence until he resigned on Dec. 25, 1991. The Soviet Union wrote itself into oblivion a day later.

A quarter-century after the collapse, Gorbachev told The Associated Press that he had not considered using widespread force to try to keep the USSR together because he feared chaos in the nuclear country.

"The country was loaded to the brim with weapons. And it would have immediately pushed the country into a civil war," he said.

Many of the changes, including the Soviet breakup, bore no resemblance to the transformation that Gorbachev had envisioned when he became Soviet leader in March 1985.

By the end of his rule, he was powerless to halt the whirlwind he had started. Yet Gorbachev may have had a greater impact on the second half of the 20th century than any other political figure.

"I see myself as a man who started the reforms that were necessary for the country and for Europe and the world," Gorbachev told the AP in a 1992 interview shortly after he left office.

"I am often asked, would I have started it all again if I had to repeat it? Yes, indeed. And with more persistence and determination," he said.

Gorbachev won the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in ending the Cold War and spent his later years collecting accolades and awards from all corners of the world. Yet he was widely despised at home.

Russians blamed him for the 1991 implosion of the Soviet Union — a once-fearsome superpower whose territory fractured into 15 separate nations. His former allies deserted him and made him a scapegoat for the country's troubles.

His run for president in 1996 was a national joke, and he polled less than 1% of the vote.

In 1997, he resorted to making a TV ad for Pizza Hut to earn money for his charitable foundation.

"In the ad, he should take a pizza, divide it into 15 slices like he divided up our country, and then show how to put it back together again," quipped Anatoly Lukyanov, a one-time Gorbachev supporter.

Gorbachev never set out to dismantle the Soviet system. What he wanted to do was improve it.

Soon after taking power, Gorbachev began a campaign to end his country's economic and political stagnation, using "glasnost," or openness, to help achieve his goal of "perestroika," or restructuring.

In his memoirs, he said he had long been frustrated that in a country with immense natural resources, tens of millions were living in poverty.

"Our society was stifled in the grip of a bureaucratic command system," Gorbachev wrote. "Doomed to serve ideology and bear the heavy burden of the arms race, it was strained to the utmost."

Once he began, one move led to another: He freed political prisoners, allowed open debate and multi-candidate elections, gave his countrymen freedom to travel, halted religious oppression, reduced nuclear arsenals, established closer ties with the West and did not resist the fall of Communist regimes in Eastern European satellite states.

But the forces he unleashed quickly escaped his control.

Long-suppressed ethnic tensions flared, sparking wars and unrest in trouble spots such as the southern Caucasus region. Strikes and labor unrest followed price increases and shortages of consumer goods.

In one of the low points of his tenure, Gorbachev sanctioned a crackdown on the restive Baltic republics in early 1991.

The violence turned many intellectuals and reformers against him. Competitive elections also produced a new crop of populist politicians who challenged Gorbachev's policies and authority.

Chief among them was his former protégé and eventual nemesis, Boris Yeltsin, who became Russia's

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first president.

"The process of renovating this country and bringing about fundamental changes in the international community proved to be much more complex than originally anticipated," Gorbachev told the nation as he stepped down.

"However, let us acknowledge what has been achieved so far. Society has acquired freedom; it has been freed politically and spiritually. And this is the most important achievement, which we have not fully come to grips with in part because we still have not learned how to use our freedom."

There was little in Gorbachev's childhood to hint at the pivotal role he would play on the world stage. On many levels, he had a typical Soviet upbringing in a typical Russian village. But it was a childhood blessed with unusual strokes of good fortune.

Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev was born March 2, 1931, in the village of Privolnoye in southern Russia. Both of his grandfathers were peasants, collective farm chairmen and members of the Communist Party, as was his father.

Despite stellar party credentials, Gorbachev's family did not emerge unscathed from the terror unleashed by Soviet dictator Josef Stalin: Both grandfathers were arrested and imprisoned for allegedly anti-Soviet activities.

But, rare in that period, both were eventually freed. In 1941, when Gorbachev was 10, his father went off to war, along with most of the other men from Privolnoye.

Meanwhile, the Nazis pushed across the western steppes in their blitzkrieg against the Soviet Union; they occupied Privolnoye for five months.

When the war was over, young Gorbachev was one of the few village boys whose father returned. By age 15, Gorbachev was helping his father drive a combine harvester after school and during the region's blistering, dusty summers.

His performance earned him the order of the Red Banner of Labor, an unusual distinction for a 17-year-old. That prize and the party background of his parents helped him land admission in 1950 to the country's top university, Moscow State.

There, he met his wife, Raisa Maximovna Titorenko, and joined the Communist Party. The award and his family's credentials also helped him overcome the disgrace of his grandfathers' arrests, which were overlooked in light of his exemplary Communist conduct.

In his memoirs, Gorbachev described himself as something of a maverick as he advanced through the party ranks, sometimes bursting out with criticism of the Soviet system and its leaders.

His early career coincided with the "thaw" begun by Nikita Khrushchev. As a young communist propaganda official, he was tasked with explaining the 20th Party Congress that revealed Soviet dictator Josef Stalin's repression of millions to local party activists. He said he was met first by "deathly silence," then disbelief.

"They said: 'We don't believe it. It can't be. You want to blame everything on Stalin now that he's dead,'" he told the AP in a 2006 interview.

He was a true if unorthodox believer in socialism. He was elected to the powerful party Central Committee in 1971, took over Soviet agricultural policy in 1978 and became a full Politburo member in 1980.

Along the way, he was able to travel to the West, to Belgium, Germany, France, Italy and Canada. Those trips had a profound effect on his thinking, shaking his belief in the superiority of Soviet-style socialism.

"The question haunted me: Why was the standard of living in our country lower than in other developed countries?" he recalled in his memoirs. "It seemed that our aged leaders were not especially worried about our undeniably lower living standards, our unsatisfactory way of life, and our falling behind in the field of advanced technologies."

But Gorbachev had to wait his turn. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev died in 1982, and was succeeded by two other geriatric leaders: Yuri Andropov, Gorbachev's mentor, and Konstantin Chernenko.

It wasn't until March 1985, when Chernenko died, that the party finally chose a younger man to lead the country: Gorbachev. He was 54 years old.

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His tenure was filled with rocky periods, including a poorly conceived anti-alcohol campaign, the Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

But starting in November 1985, Gorbachev began a series of attention-grabbing summit meetings with world leaders, especially U.S. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, which led to unprecedented, deep reductions in the American and Soviet nuclear arsenals.

After years of watching a parade of stodgy leaders in the Kremlin, Western leaders practically swooned over the charming, vigorous Gorbachev and his stylish, brainy wife.

But perceptions were very different at home. It was the first time since the death of Soviet founder Vladimir Lenin that the wife of a Soviet leader had played such a public role, and many Russians found Raisa Gorbachev showy and arrogant.

Although the rest of the world benefited from the changes Gorbachev wrought, the rickety Soviet economy collapsed in the process, bringing with it tremendous economic hardship for the country's 290 million people.

In the final days of the Soviet Union, the economic decline accelerated into a steep skid. Hyper-inflation robbed most older people of their life's savings. Factories shut down. Bread lines formed.

And popular hatred for Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa, grew. But the couple won sympathy in summer 1999 when it was revealed that Raisa Gorbachev was dying of leukemia.

During her final days, Gorbachev spoke daily with television reporters, and the lofty-sounding, wooden politician of old was suddenly seen as an emotional family man surrendering to deep grief.

Gorbachev worked on the Gorbachev Foundation, which he created to address global priorities in the post-Cold War period, and with the Green Cross foundation, which was formed in 1993 to help cultivate "a more harmonious relationship between humans and the environment."

In 2000, Gorbachev took the helm of the small United Social Democratic Party in hopes it could fill the vacuum left by the Communist Party, which he said had failed to reform into a modern leftist party after the breakup of the Soviet Union. He resigned from the chairmanship in 2004.

He continued to comment on Russian politics as a senior statesman — even if many of his countrymen were no longer interested in what he had to say.

"The crisis in our country will continue for some time, possibly leading to even greater upheaval," Gorbachev wrote in a memoir in 1996. "But Russia has irrevocably chosen the path of freedom, and no one can make it turn back to totalitarianism."

Gorbachev veered between criticism and mild praise for current Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has been assailed for backtracking on the democratic achievements of the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras.

While he said Putin did much to restore stability and prestige to Russia after the tumultuous decade following the Soviet collapse, Gorbachev protested growing limitations on media freedom, and in 2006 bought one of Russia's last investigative newspapers, Novaya Gazeta.

Gorbachev also spoke out against Putin's invasion of Ukraine. A day after the Feb. 24 attack, he issued a statement calling for "an early cessation of hostilities and immediate start of peace negotiations."

"There is nothing more precious in the world than human lives. Negotiations and dialogue on the basis of mutual respect and recognition of interests are the only possible way to resolve the most acute contradictions and problems," he said.

Gorbachev ventured into other new areas in his 70s, winning awards and kudos around the world. He won a Grammy in 2004 along with former U.S. President Bill Clinton and Italian actress Sophia Loren for their recording of Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf," and the United Nations named him a Champion of the Earth in 2006 for his environmental advocacy.

Gorbachev is survived by a daughter, Irina, and two granddaughters.

The official news agency Tass reported that he will be buried at Moscow's Novodevichy cemetery next to his wife.

Equity is goal, not mandate, in California electric car rule

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By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Discounted prices, car-share programs and at least one million more public charging stations are among the ways California will try to make electric cars easier to buy and drive as it phases out the sale of gas-powered cars.

But the state won't force automakers to participate in any equity programs designed to ensure people of all income levels can buy electric cars.

"This rule had the opportunity to really set the path for lower income households to have increased access and affordability (for) electric vehicles, but it missed the mark," said Roman Partida-Lopez, legal counsel for transportation equity with The Greenlining Institute.

Instead, car companies will get extra credit toward their sales quotas if they make cars available to car share or other programs aimed at disadvantaged Californians. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom has pledged \$10 billion over six years for incentives to get electric vehicles into the hands of low-income residents, charging infrastructure, and other efforts to put cleaner cars and trucks on the road.

The Stockton Mobility Collective is one example. Designed to increase transportation options in disadvantaged parts of the city, the collective will set up five to seven neighborhood charging stations with 30 electric cars people can rent out on an hourly or daily basis. The first cars and charging stations launched last week in an apartment complex. The program got \$7.4 million from the state.

Car ownership in South Stockton is low, so interest in the program is high, said Christine Corrales, senior regional planner for the program. But it's just the first step in what must be a major effort to make electric vehicles a realistic option for lower-income Californians.

"If the infrastructure is not available locally, it may be challenging to encourage people to adopt and switch over," she said. "That's something that we're trying to be proactive about."

The regulations passed by the California Air Resources Board last week say that 2035 the state will require automakers to sell only cars that run on electricity or hydrogen, though some can be plug-in hybrids that use gas and batteries. People will still be able to buy used cars that run on gas, and car companies will still sell some plug-in hybrids. Beyond questions of affordability and access, the state will need to overcome skepticism of people who think electric cars simply aren't for them.

"We've got to get past the elitism that's involved with owning an electric car," said Daniel Myatt, who brought an electric car in 2020 through the state's Clean Cars 4 All program, which he qualified for when he was out of work due to an illness.

Since 2015, more than 13,000 electric cars have been purchased through the program. It offers people up to \$9,500 for people to trade in their gas cars for electric or hybrid models.

About 38% of the money spent on a separate rebate program has gone toward low-income or disadvantaged communities, and the state has spent hundreds of millions of dollars building charging stations in those neighborhoods. Today, though, there are just 80,000 public charging stations around the state, far short of the 1.2 million the state estimates it needs by 2030.

Under the new regulations, car makers can get extra credit toward their sales quotas if they participate in several equity programs.

Those programs include: Selling cars at a discount to car-share or other community programs; making sure cars that come off lease go to California dealers that participate in trade-in programs; or selling cars at a discounted price. To meet the third option, cars would have to cost less than \$20,275 and light-duty trucks less than \$26,670 to qualify for the extra credit. It only applies to model years 2026 through 2028, and there's no restriction on who those cars can be sold to.

Southern California Even Access is using a \$2.5 million state grant to install at least 120 chargers across a 12-county region, at apartment complexes and public places like library parking lots. Apartment complex owners can get \$2,500 per charger installed on the property.

Overall, the state should do more public messaging about the programs that are available to buy electric vehicles so that all communities can enjoy the benefits of fewer cars that spew emissions and pollution, said Lujana Medina, environmental initiatives manager for Los Angeles County. The state must also

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invest in a workforce that can support an electric transportation economy, she said.

"There will have to be some really progressive public purpose programs that help drive electric vehicle adoption and sales," she said.

Alicia Young of Santa Clara, California, was unsure when she first heard about the state's trade-in program. But she eventually pursued the deal, leaving behind her 2006 Nissan for a plug-in hybrid from Ford. It cost \$9,000 after her trade-in value.

The car runs more smoothly and just as fast as any gas-powered car she's ever owned. She mostly runs it on battery charges, though she still fills the gas tank about once a month. The apartment complex where she lives with her mother does not have a car charger, so she often relies on charging stations at the grocery store or other public places.

She's shared information about the trade-in program with her colleagues at the senior retirement center where she works, but many of them seem mistrustful, she said. The state could speed adoption by having public messengers from a wide variety of backgrounds to help build trust in electric cars, she said.

"It's a little bit different at first, but that's normal with any new car," she said.

US life expectancy plunged again in 2021, down nearly a year

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. life expectancy dropped for the second consecutive year in 2021, falling by nearly a year from 2020, according to a government report being released Wednesday.

In the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the estimated American lifespan has shortened by nearly three years. The last comparable decrease happened in the early 1940s, during the height of World War II.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officials blamed COVID-19 for about half the decline in 2021, a year when vaccinations became widely available but new coronavirus variants caused waves of hospitalizations and deaths. Other contributors to the decline are longstanding problems: drug overdoses, heart disease, suicide and chronic liver disease.

"It's a dismal situation. It was bad before and it's gotten worse," said Samuel Preston, a University of Pennsylvania demographer.

Life expectancy is an estimate of the average number of years a baby born in a given year might expect to live, given death rates at that time. It is "the most fundamental indicator of population health in this country," said Robert Hummer, a University of North Carolina researcher focused on population health patterns.

U.S. life expectancy rose for decades, but progress stalled before the pandemic.

It was 78 years, 10 months in 2019. In 2020, it dropped to 77 years. Last year, it fell to about 76 years, 1 month.

The last time it was that low was in 1996.

Declines during the pandemic were worse for some racial groups, and some gaps widened. For example, life expectancy for American Indian and Alaskan Native people saw a decline of more than 6 1/2 years since the pandemic began, and is at 65 years. In the same span, life expectancy for Asian Americans dropped by about two years, and stands at 83 1/2.

Experts say there are many possible reasons for such differences, including lack of access to quality health care, lower vaccination rates, and a greater share of the population in lower-paying jobs that required them to keep working when the pandemic was at its worst.

The new report is based on provisional data. Life expectancy estimates can change with the addition of more data and further analysis. For example, the CDC initially said life expectancy in 2020 declined by about 1 year 6 months. But after more death reports and analysis came in, it ended up being about 1 year 10 months.

But it's likely the declines in 2020 and 2021 will stand as the first two consecutive years of declining life expectancy in the U.S. since the early 1960s, CDC officials said.

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Findings in the report:

—Life expectancy for women in the United States dropped about 10 months, from just under 80 years in 2020 to slightly more than 79 in 2021. Life expectancy for men dropped a full year, from about 74 years to 73.

—COVID-19 deaths were the main reason for the decline. The second largest contributor was deaths from accidental injuries — primarily from drug overdoses, which killed a record-breaking 107,000 Americans last year.

—White people saw the second biggest drop among racial and ethnic groups, with life expectancy falling one year, to about 76 years, 5 months. Black Americans had the third largest decline, falling more than eight months, to 70 years, 10 months

—Hispanic Americans had seen a huge drop in life expectancy in 2020 — four years. But in 2021, life expectancy for them dropped by about two months, to about 77 years, 7 months. Preston thinks good vaccination rates among Hispanics played a role.

The report also suggests gains against suicide are being undone.

U.S. suicides rose from the early 2000s until 2018. But they fell a little in 2019 and then more in 2020, the first year of the pandemic. Experts had wondered if that may have been related to a phenomenon seen in the early stages of wars and national disasters in which people band together and support each other.

The new report said suicide contributed to the decline in life expectancy in 2021, but it did not provide detail. According to provisional numbers from a public CDC database, the number of U.S. suicides increased last year by about 2,000, to 48,000. The U.S. suicide rate rose as well, from 13.5 per 100,000 to 14.1 — bringing it back up to about where it was in 2018.

Michigan board to consider abortion rights ballot initiative

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and SARA BURNETT Associated Press/Report for America

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — An election board in Michigan is scheduled to decide Wednesday whether a ballot initiative that seeks to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution should go before voters in November, although the board's verdict isn't expected to be the last word on the issue.

The proposed constitutional amendment aims to negate a 91-year-old state law that would ban abortion in all instances except to save the life of the mother.

Michigan's 1931 law — which abortion opponents had hoped would be triggered by a conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court overturning *Roe vs. Wade* in June — remains blocked after months of court battles. A state judge ruled Aug. 19 that Republican county prosecutors couldn't enforce the ban, saying it was "in the public's best interest to let the people of the great state of Michigan decide this matter at the ballot box."

Both sides have indicated they will file challenges with the state's Democrat-leaning Supreme Court if the decision goes against them.

The Bureau of Elections verified last Thursday that the ballot initiative petition contained enough valid signatures for the amendment to qualify for the ballot and recommended that the state Board of Canvassers approve the measure. The board does not always follow the bureau's recommendations.

Abortion rights have become a powerful motivator for voters since *Roe* was overturned. In conservative Kansas, voters overwhelmingly defeated a ballot measure to ban the procedure, and the issue has swayed votes in special elections for Congress, including in a battleground district in upstate New York. Nationally, Democrats have seen an increase in fundraising since the Supreme Court decision.

Having abortion rights on the ballot in November would almost certainly be a boon for Democrats in Michigan, a swing state where voters will also be deciding whether Democrats keep control of statewide offices, including governor and secretary of state. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and other Democrats have put abortion rights front and center in their campaigns, and after Republicans chose businesswoman Tudor Dixon as the GOP nominee for governor, Democrats released an ad blasting her strong opposition

to abortion, including in cases of rape and incest.

The organization behind the Michigan ballot initiative turned in over 700,000 petition signatures — a record number for any ballot initiative in the state — providing names, addresses and phone numbers that can be used as voter contacts during the campaign season.

The Michigan Board of Canvassers, comprising two Republicans and two Democrats, has become increasingly partisan in recent years.

The board made national headlines following the 2020 presidential election when one member, who has since resigned, abstained from voting to certify Joe Biden's victory in the state. The other GOP board member, who voted to certify, wasn't re-nominated by the state GOP party and was replaced by Tony Daunt, the board chairman.

Earlier this year, two leading candidates for the GOP nomination for governor were dropped from the primary ballot after the board deadlocked along partisan lines on whether too many fraudulent signatures on their nomination papers made them ineligible. A tie vote meant the candidates lost.

A deadlock in Wednesday's vote would officially mean the initiative was rejected, but a final decision would most likely come from the Michigan Supreme Court. Groups have seven business days following the board's decision to appeal to the high court and the ballot must be finalized by Sept. 9.

The board also is expected to decide Wednesday whether another initiative, to expand voting in the state, should make the fall ballot. The measure would expand voter rights by allowing nine days of in-person early voting, state-funded absentee ballot postage and drop boxes in every community.

Timmy Trumpet muted in Mets' loss, back Wednesday for Díaz

By JERRY BEACH Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Timmy Trumpet was all set to horn in on this most notable season for the New York Mets.

The Australian-born musician was at Citi Field with trumpet in hand Tuesday night, ready if needed to pop onto the diamond and blare his song "Narco" live if Mets closer Edwin Díaz emerged from the bullpen.

Díaz never got into the game as the Dodgers won 4-3 in a matchup of NL division leaders. Instead, Mets fans had to be content to sing along as Trumpet played a more muted version of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" from just outside the Los Angeles dugout during the seventh-inning stretch.

But minutes after attending his first major league game, Trumpet tweeted he'd back Wednesday night, hoping again to play Díaz's wildly popular entrance song in person when the Mets hosted the Dodgers.

"SEE YOU TOMORROW FOR ROUND 2 NYC," he posted. "We got this!!"

Hours before Tuesday night's game, Trumpet put the instrument to his lips and blasted the instantly recognizable first notes of "Narco."

A blown song, not a blown save, in the mostly empty ballpark.

"It's actually really cool to be in a stadium where you can hear it echoing around like that. I've never been in a stadium this big before," he said.

Born Timothy Smith, he became fast friends with Díaz earlier this season after Trumpet reached out to the pitcher when the song went viral.

With the crowd applauding Tuesday, the 40-year-old musician put on a jersey with Díaz's No. 39 and the name Trumpet on the back and threw out the first ball, an arcing toss to Mets outfielder Tyler Naquin that barely reached the plate.

"I hope I come into the game tonight," Díaz, wearing a shirt with a blue-and-orange "Edwin" pictured above a trumpet, said before the first pitch. "Because he'll perform for me and the fan base."

Díaz actually began using "Narco" — which Trumpet recorded with the Dutch DJ duo Blasterjaxx in 2017 — during his final season with the Seattle Mariners in 2018. He pivoted to "No Hay Limite" by Miky Woodz upon being traded to the Mets prior to the 2019 season, when he posted a 5.59 ERA and blew seven saves.

He returned to "Narco" in 2020, when the Mets played to empty stadiums during the COVID-19 pan-

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demic. But it took his dominance this season — Díaz is 3-1 with a 1.40 ERA, 28 saves and 99 strikeouts in 51 1/3 innings — to vault the song into the rarefied air of all-time closer entrance songs alongside the likes of “Enter Sandman” (for Mariano Rivera) and “Hells Bells” (for Trevor Hoffman).

The lights at Citi Field dim and the scoreboard goes dark as Díaz walks from the bullpen mound to the door. Upon his first step onto the field, the song starts and tens of thousands of people leap to their feet and begin clapping and miming trumpet actions as mascots Mr. and Mrs. Met pretend to play their own plastic trumpets.

“I think what I like most so far is the fans — the people in the crowd, watching the video of them reacting to the track that Díaz picks is just insane, they’re wild,” Trumpet said. “It looks like a huge party and that was the intention of this song when we wrote it in the first place. So it’s a huge honor.”

Mets manager Buck Showalter said earlier this month he delayed a trip to the bathroom to watch Díaz’s entrance. And his teammates have been among those sending “Narco” into the top five at Spotify, the Internet streaming service.

“We all get excited for it, too,” Mets reliever Adam Ottavino said. “For whatever reason — the simplicity of it, just with the trumpets and everything, people really respond to that. You can see why it’s spread. I found myself searching for the song on Spotify at some point.”

“It’s just pretty cool. The great ones have had iconic songs at times — Mariano and Trevor Hoffman, stuff like that — so this is really cool that he has that going,” he said.

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts, a longtime friend and teammate of Hoffman’s in San Diego, said his favorite entrance song remains “Hells Bells.” He said he was aware of the sensation “Narco” has become.

“Hopefully we don’t hear it over the next three days,” Roberts said with a grin. “Hopefully we can stand him up and he can just be here and not have to entertain tonight.”

LA man jailed in Venezuela begs for Biden not to forget him

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A Los Angeles attorney detained in Venezuela is pleading for help from the Biden administration, saying in a jailhouse message that he feels forgotten by the U.S. government as he faces criminal charges at the hands of one of the nation’s top adversaries.

Eyvin Hernandez, who has been detained for five months, describes in the recording how he has dedicated the past 15 years to public service as an employee of the Los Angeles County public defender’s office, seeking fair treatment for often penniless clients.

“No one should be abandoned at the time of their greatest need and when they’re most vulnerable,” he said in the almost two-minute recording, which was provided to The Associated Press by Hernandez’s family. “However, I don’t feel like my government feels that way about me.”

In a calm voice, Hernandez said he and other Americans imprisoned in Venezuela — there are at least 10, including five oil executives and three veterans — feel “like our government has abandoned us.”

Hernandez’s appeal comes as the Biden administration is under pressure to do more to bring home roughly 50 Americans it believes have been wrongfully detained by hostile governments around the world. Much of the focus is on Russia, where the U.S. has taken the unusual step of proposing a swap of a convicted arms dealer for WNBA All-Star Brittney Griner. U.S. officials have for months been quietly pursuing a separate deal with Nicolás Maduro’s socialist government in Venezuela, which holds the largest contingent of Americans suspected of being used as bargaining chips.

Henry Martinez said his brother sent him the voice message Aug. 21. A copy was also provided to the State Department, which has been weighing whether to turn Hernandez’s case over to the administration’s special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, Roger Carstens.

In the recording, Hernandez said it’s been months since he or any of his fellow Americans have seen a courtroom, nor do they have any hopes of getting a fair trial.

“This place is meant to break you psychologically and spiritually,” he said of confinement at a maximum security prison housing many of Maduro’s opponents. “We’re all innocent, yet we’re being charged and

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treated as terrorists.”

He said the uncertainty, isolation and human rights violations are taking a toll, with two Americans having already attempted suicide and a third on the brink with daily mental breakdowns.

“If you don’t get us out soon, then there might not be anyone left to save,” he said.

The AP was unable to verify Hernandez’s claims. But United Nations officials have long complained about the lack of independence for Venezuelan judges and prosecutors and about conditions at the facility where Hernandez and several other Americans are being held.

A State Department spokesman declined to comment on Hernandez’s case, citing privacy limitations, but said the agency continuously reviews the detentions of Americans overseas. He also noted that the U.S. government has issued an advisory warning Americans to avoid all travel to Venezuela due to the risk of wrongful detentions and threats from illegal armed groups, especially along the country’s porous borders.

Hernandez, who turned 44 in jail, was arrested March 31 along the Colombia-Venezuela border. His family says he traveled there from the city of Medellin with a Venezuelan friend who needed to get her passport stamped to resolve an issue with her migratory status in Colombia. His family said he never intended to enter Venezuela, and he was due to fly home three days later.

But the two apparently fell into the hands of criminal gangs.

Upon arrival by bus to the city of Cucuta, they hailed a taxi for the short drive to the Simon Bolivar International Bridge, according to an account Hernandez shared with his family. A fourth individual hopped in the front seat, purportedly offering his services as a guide who could help them navigate the confusion at the border, an area overrun by squatters, criminal gangs and a mass of people making their way back and forth in illegal crossings.

Before they knew it, the cab was stopped along a dirt path, and the two were ordered to get out and walk across the invisible border separating the two countries.

Once Hernandez realized his mistake, it was too late to turn back. A man carrying a rifle demanded he cough up \$100, according to his family. When he protested that he didn’t have any cash, they put a hood over his head.

When his captors found his American passport, they told him he was in trouble and handed him over to security forces, who kept him incommunicado for weeks.

Adding to the Hernandez family’s anguish is the fact that he isn’t classified as wrongfully detained, a definition that covers Americans believed innocent or jailed for the purpose of exacting concessions from the U.S. Without such designation, a process that can take months, the U.S. government’s ability to push for his release is limited.

At least three of the 11 other Americans known to be detained in Venezuela are in a similar state of limbo. They include Jerrel Kenemore, a computer programmer arrested within a week of Hernandez, and two former Green Berets who took part in a blunder-filled beach attack in 2020 aimed at overthrowing Maduro.

Biden last month signed an executive order aimed at providing more information to families of Americans detained abroad and imposing stiff sentences on the criminals, terrorists and government officials holding them.

Maduro’s socialist government is a harsh critic of U.S. foreign policy. But more recently, as the Biden administration has shown a willingness to review the Trump-era policy of punishing Maduro with sanctions and calling for regime change, the outlook for a possible release has improved.

In March, the Maduro government freed two Americans following a surprise trip to Caracas by senior White House and State Department officials, including Carstens, who met with Hernandez in a subsequent wellness check on detained Americans in June. Maduro also vowed to resume negotiations with his opponents, although has so far failed to follow through.

Indianapolis man arrested in shooting of 3 Dutch soldiers

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INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Indianapolis police arrested a man Tuesday in connection with a shooting over the weekend that left one Dutch soldier dead and two wounded.

Shamar Duncan, 22, of Indianapolis, was arrested on a preliminary charge of murder, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department said.

Duncan was being held in jail and will not be eligible for release from jail while the Marion County Prosecutor's Office reviews the case, police said.

Duncan's arrest did not appear in online court records, and it wasn't clear whether he has an attorney who might comment on the case.

A 26-year-old member of the Dutch Commando Corps, identified by U.S. authorities as Simmie Poetsema, died of his injuries "surrounded by family and colleagues," the Dutch Defense Ministry said in a statement Monday.

The shooting occurred Saturday in downtown Indianapolis.

"IMPD detectives want to thank members of the community for their cooperation during this investigation," IMPD spokesman Shane Foley said. "During the investigation, multiple individuals spoke with detectives and provided detectives with video connected to the investigation."

Dutch Defense Minister Kajsa Ollongren expressed concern Tuesday about gun violence in the United States in the aftermath of the shooting.

"We do many trainings of our servicemen in the United States, and we really don't expect this to happen. So it's very, very concerning for us." Ollongren told The Associated Press at a meeting of European Union defense ministers in Prague.

Poetsema and the two other soldiers were shot after what Indianapolis police believe was a disturbance outside the hotel where they were staying about 3:30 a.m. Saturday near several downtown bars and nightclubs, authorities said. The soldiers were in the U.S. for training exercises at a southern Indiana military base.

Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett said Monday that the soldiers had returned to the hotel after a "scuffle" at a bar and were outside when the gunfire came from what he called "a drive-by shooting."

Indianapolis police declined to confirm Hogsett's account Tuesday or release more information on the circumstances or the investigation of the shooting.

Ollongren declined to comment on the shooting while investigations continue. She said there is "good contact" between Dutch military police and authorities in Indianapolis.

"We have read things in the media, we have heard what the mayor said but we feel it's very important to have a real thorough investigation. So we're waiting for that until we comment on what actually happened," she said.

Ollongren said U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin contacted her Monday "to express his regrets and his condolences."

Hogsett said he believed the city's downtown area was safe and that city officials were working to reduce violence.

"Too often, not just in Indianapolis, conflict resolution has become just people pulling out guns and shooting each other," Hogsett said.

Take 2: NASA aims for Saturday launch of new moon rocket

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA will try again Saturday to launch its new moon rocket on a test flight, after engine trouble halted the first countdown this week.

Managers said Tuesday they are changing fueling procedures to deal with the issue. A bad sensor also could be to blame for Monday's scrapped launch, they noted.

The 322-foot (98-meter) rocket — the most powerful ever built by NASA — remains on its pad at Kennedy Space Center with an empty crew capsule on top.

The Space Launch System rocket will attempt to send the capsule around the moon and back. No one

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will be aboard, just three test dummies. If successful, it will be the first capsule to fly to the moon since NASA's Apollo program 50 years ago.

Proceeding toward a Saturday launch will provide additional insight, even if the problem reappears and the countdown is halted again, said NASA's rocket program manager, John Honeycutt. That's better "than us sitting around scratching our heads, was it good enough or not."

"Based on what I've heard from the technical team today, what we need to do is continue to pore over the data and polish up our plan on putting the flight rationale together," he said.

During Monday's launch attempt, readings showed that one of the four main engines in the rocket's core stage could not be chilled sufficiently prior to the planned ignition at liftoff. It appeared to be as much as 40 degrees Fahrenheit (5 degrees Celsius) warmer than the desired minus-420 degrees Fahrenheit (minus-250 degrees Celsius), the temperature of the hydrogen fuel, according to Honeycutt. The three other engines came up just a little short.

All of the engines appear to be fine, according to Honeycutt.

The chilling operation will be conducted a half-hour earlier for Saturday afternoon's launch attempt, once fueling begins that morning. Honeycutt said the timing of this engine chilldown was earlier during successful testing last year, and so performing it sooner may do the trick.

Honeycutt also questioned the integrity of one engine sensor, saying it might have provided inaccurate data Monday. To change that sensor, he noted, would mean hauling the rocket back into the hangar, resulting in weeks of delay.

Already years behind schedule, the \$4.1 billion test flight is the opening shot in NASA's Artemis moon-exploration program, named after the twin sister of Apollo in Greek mythology. Astronauts could strap in as soon as 2024 for a lap around the moon and actually attempt a lunar landing in 2025.

Indiana abortion clinics sue to block ban set to take effect

By TOM DAVIES and ARLEIGH RODGERS Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Indiana abortion clinic operators filed a lawsuit Tuesday seeking to block the state's ban on abortions before it takes effect in about two weeks. .

The lawsuit filed in a Monroe County court claims the ban, which includes limited exceptions, "strips away the fundamental rights of people seeking abortion care" in violation of the Indiana Constitution. It asks for a judge to block the law from going into effect on Sept. 15, arguing the ban "will infringe on Hoosiers' right to privacy, violate Indiana's guarantee of equal privileges and immunities, and includes unconstitutionally vague language."

Indiana's Republican-dominated Legislature approved the tighter abortion restrictions during a two-week special legislative session that ended Aug. 5, making it the first state to do so since the U.S. Supreme Court eliminated federal abortion protections for abortions by overturning *Roe v. Wade* in June.

The Indiana law includes exceptions, allowing abortions in cases of rape and incest, before 10 weeks post-fertilization; to protect the life and physical health of the mother; and if a fetus is diagnosed with a lethal anomaly.

The legal question of whether the Indiana Constitution protects abortion rights is unclear, said Ken Falk, legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana, which filed the lawsuit.

Falk pointed to a 2004 state appeals court decision that said privacy was a core value under the state constitution that extended to all residents, including women seeking an abortion. But the Indiana Supreme Court later upheld a law mandating an 18-hour waiting period before a woman could undergo an abortion while not deciding whether the state constitution included a right to privacy or abortion.

The leader of Indiana's most prominent anti-abortion group argued the state constitution protects life as among the "inalienable rights."

"We are confident the state will prevail and pray the new law is not blocked from going into effect on September 15, knowing that any delay will mean the indiscriminate killing of unborn children will continue at abortion clinics across Indiana," Indiana Right to Life CEO Mike Fichter said in a statement.

Jennifer Drobac, an Indiana University law professor, said she believed the argument that the state

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constitution prohibits lawmakers from stripping legal privileges from some residents that are available to others is a strong argument against the abortion ban.

"When you look at people who become pregnant, their medical care is being regulated in a way that the medical care of people who do not become pregnant is not being regulated," she said. "Men, for example, can access the full panoply of available medical resources in a health situation."

Under new Indiana law, abortions could be performed only in hospitals or outpatient centers owned by hospitals, meaning all abortion clinics would lose their licenses. Any doctors found to have performed an illegal abortion would be stripped of their state medical licenses and could face felony criminal charges punishable by up to six years in prison.

Indiana's ban followed the political firestorm over a 10-year-old rape victim who traveled to the state from neighboring Ohio to end her pregnancy. The case gained wide attention when an Indianapolis doctor said the child came to Indiana because of Ohio's "fetal heartbeat" ban.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of abortion-rights supporters including Planned Parenthood, which operates four of Indiana's seven licensed abortion clinics, along with groups that operate two of the other clinics and a doctor who performs abortions.

It will be heard by a judge in southern Indiana's Monroe County, which includes the liberal-leaning city of Bloomington and Indiana University's main campus. All nine of the county's nine judges are Democrats, while all other counties with abortion clinics have judges who've either been elected as Republicans or been appointed by Republican governors.

The ACLU's Falk said the suit was filed in Monroe County because an abortion clinic is located there but did not respond to a question about whether the group was seeking a friendly judge.

Drobac said she believed filing in the complaint in Bloomington could be where the ban opponents "have the greatest opportunity for success."

Republican legislative leaders said they believed the abortion restrictions would be upheld by the courts.

"We set out to pass a bill in the special session that would protect life and support mothers and babies, and that's what we did," Senate President Pro Tem Rodric Bray said in a statement. "It was always our intent to draft a bill that could withstand a constitutional challenge, and I hope to see that will be the case."

Biden blasts 'MAGA Republicans,' 'sickening' attacks on FBI

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, MARC LEVY and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WILKES-BARRE, Pa. (AP) — President Joe Biden on Tuesday railed against the "MAGA Republicans in Congress" who have refused to condemn the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol and now are targeting the FBI as he tried to portray Democrats as the true pro-law enforcement party ahead of the November midterms.

In remarks initially billed as a crime-prevention speech, Biden seized on comments from allies of former President Donald Trump who have called for stripping funding from the FBI since it executed a search warrant at Trump's Florida residence. Biden's remarks were the first substantive defense he has made of the FBI since the Aug. 8 search at Mar-a-Lago, which triggered not just withering criticism of the agency but threats of violence against its employees.

"It's sickening to see the new attacks on the FBI, threatening the life of law enforcement and their families, for simply carrying out the law and doing their job," Biden said before a crowd of more than 500 at Wilkes University in Pennsylvania. "I'm opposed to defunding the police; I'm also opposed to defunding the FBI."

It was a notably different tack for Biden, who has steered clear of extensively commenting on any element of the Justice Department's investigation since federal agents conducted the search at Trump's estate. Biden also appeared to call out — without naming him — recent comments from Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who warned of "riots in the streets" should Trump ultimately face prosecution.

"The idea you turn on a television and see senior senators and congressmen saying, 'If such and such

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happens there'll be blood on the street?" Biden said. "Where the hell are we?"

The speech Tuesday continued Biden's aggressive rhetoric against the GOP ahead of the midterms, as Democrats enjoy a slightly brighter political environment buoyed by significant legislative accomplishments and a presidential approval rating that has trended slightly upward. During a political rally in the Washington suburbs last week, Biden likened Republican ideology to "semi-fascism." He is set to deliver a democracy-focused speech on Thursday in Philadelphia that the White House has said "will make clear" who is fighting for democratic values.

As he has done before, Biden on Tuesday criticized GOP officials who have refused to denounce the pro-Trump rioters who breached the U.S. Capitol nearly 20 months ago. Referencing Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan, Biden said, "Let me say this to my MAGA Republican friends in Congress: Don't tell me you support the law enforcement if you won't condemn what happened on the 6th."

The campaign-style speech near Biden's birthplace was the first of three visits by the president in less than a week to the state that is home to a competitive governor's race and a U.S. Senate contest that could help determine whether Democrats will keep their majority in the chamber. Trump is hosting his own rally in Pennsylvania on Saturday.

Democrats believe Pennsylvania is their strongest opportunity to flip a Senate seat currently held by Republicans. Meanwhile, the open race for governor will give the winner power over how 2024's presidential election is run in a battleground state that is still buffeted by Trump's baseless claims that Democrats fraudulently stole the 2020 election from him.

Biden's comments on the FBI come as his son Hunter faces a federal investigation for tax evasion. He has not faced any charges, and he's previously denied wrongdoing.

The president also used his remarks Tuesday to promote his administration's crime-prevention efforts and to continue to pressure Congress to revive a long-expired federal ban on assault-style weapons. Democrats and Republicans worked together in a rare effort to pass gun safety legislation earlier this year after massacres in Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde, Texas. They were the first significant firearm restrictions approved by Congress in nearly three decades, but Biden has repeatedly said more needs to be done.

"We beat the NRA. We took them on and beat the NRA straight up. You have no idea how intimidating they are to elected officials," an animated Biden said. "We're not stopping here. I'm determined to ban assault weapons in this country! Determined. I did it once before. And I'll do it again."

As a U.S. senator, Biden played a leading role in temporarily banning assault-style weapons, including firearms similar to the AR-15 that have exploded in popularity in recent years, and he wants to put the law back into place. Biden argued that there was no rationale for such weapons "outside of a war zone" and noted that parents of the young victims at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde had to supply DNA because the weapon used in the massacre rendered the bodies unidentifiable.

"DNA, to say that's my baby!" Biden said. "What the hell is the matter with us?"

Democrats are trying to blunt Republican efforts to use concern about crime to their advantage in the midterms. It's a particularly fraught issue in Pennsylvania, a key swing state.

The Republican candidate for governor, Doug Mastriano, accuses Democrat Josh Shapiro of being soft on crime as the state's twice-elected attorney general, saying Shapiro "stands aside" as homicides rise across Pennsylvania.

Homicides have been increasing in Pennsylvania, but overall crime seems to have fallen over the last year, according to state statistics.

"The real heroes here are the people who put on the uniform every single day," said Shapiro, who spoke shortly before Biden's remarks at Wilkes University. "We know that policing is a noble profession, and we know that we need to stand with law enforcement."

In the U.S. Senate race, heart surgeon turned television celebrity Dr. Mehmet Oz, the Republican nominee, has tried to portray the Democratic candidate, Lt. Gov. John Fetterman, as extreme and reckless on crime policy.

Fetterman has endorsed recommendations that more geriatric and rehabilitated prisoners can be released from state prisons without harming public safety. Oz and Republicans have distorted that into the claim that Fetterman wants to release “dangerous criminals” from prisons or that he’s in favor of “emptying prisons.”

Fetterman’s campaign on Tuesday released a new 30-second ad emphasizing that Fetterman — as mayor of the tiny, impoverished western Pennsylvania steel town of Braddock from 2006 through 2018 — has dealt with street-level crime, and Oz hasn’t. In the ad, Fetterman said he ran for mayor “to stop the violence” after two of his students in an afterschool program were murdered and “I worked side by side with police.”

Fetterman was not in Wilkes-Barre with Biden on Tuesday, but he’s expected to march in Pittsburgh’s Labor Day parade when the president visits Sept. 5. Biden also will be in Pennsylvania on Thursday for a prime-time speech that the White House said will address “the continued battle for the soul of the nation” and defending democracy.

Student loan relief limited for many by US drug war’s legacy

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

President Joe Biden says he hopes his proposal to forgive federal student loans will narrow the nation’s racial wealth gap. But a generation of Black and Hispanic Americans was disproportionately shut out of one of the keys to Biden’s plan: the Pell Grant program.

As part of the “war on drugs” — a consequential, anti-crime legislative agenda that Biden championed as a U.S. senator — an estimated hundreds of thousands of convicted drug offenders had their access to federal financial aid delayed or denied, including Pell Grants and student loans. If they wanted to go to college after their prison terms ended, these offenders had to take on larger, often predatory, private student loans.

Some were discouraged from seeking federal aid by a requirement to disclose their drug record on financial aid applications, while others put off attending college or dropped out entirely.

The people most harmed by these policies: Black and Latino men, thanks to drug laws in the 1990s with harsh punishments for crack cocaine and marijuana offenses. Incarceration rates for men of color skyrocketed. The policies remained in place for 25 years, until Congress repealed the Pell Grant ban in 2020.

America’s student loan debt burden, which now tops \$1.6 trillion, “is especially heavy on Black and Hispanic borrowers, who on average have less family wealth to pay for it,” Biden said last week as he announced the forgiveness plan.

The administration has offered to forgive up to \$10,000 in student debt for individuals earning annual incomes of less than \$125,000, or less than \$250,000 for families. And its offer doubles the debt relief to \$20,000 for borrowers who also received Pell Grants, a federal program that gives the neediest undergraduates aid that they don’t have to repay.

Studies show that Pell Grants — one of the nation’s most effective financial aid programs — routinely help more than half of Black students and almost half of Hispanic students afford college. According to the White House, among the 43 million borrowers who are eligible for debt relief under Biden’s plan, more than 60% are Pell Grant recipients.

The White House said in a statement to The Associated Press that the student debt relief plan will wipe away about half of the average debt held by Black and Hispanic borrowers, not counting the additional \$10,000 cancellation for Pell Grant recipients.

In a speech Tuesday, after the AP story published, Biden said people leaving prison need help to successfully reenter society.

“If you served your time, you shouldn’t be deprived of being able to get a Pell Grant to go to school,” Biden said in remarks at Wilkes University in Pennsylvania on his administration’s plans to prevent crime. “You should be able to get a degree -- that’s the best thing you can do.”

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Amid debate over whether Biden's forgiveness plan goes far enough for disproportionately indebted communities, criminal justice reform advocates say the president's solutions to the student debt crisis must be as comprehensive as the anti-drug laws were.

"I think there's a particular onus on this administration and on this president to be part of the solution for issues that he was very deeply involved in," said Melissa Moore, the director of civil systems reform at Drug Policy Alliance.

There's a generation of former drug offenders who borrowed to pay for school, but don't have Pell Grants or federal loans, and won't have any of their student debt forgiven. According to a Student Borrower Protection Center report on private loan debt, Black students are four times as likely as white students to struggle in repayment of private loans.

"For people who previously would have had to check that box, there should be some mechanism by which, if you were excluded in the past, you are prioritized now for relief," Moore said.

An AP review last year of federal and state incarceration data showed that, between 1975 and 2019, the U.S. prison population jumped from 240,593 to 1.43 million Americans, as a result of the war on drugs that President Richard Nixon declared in 1971. About 1 in 5 people were incarcerated with a drug offense listed as their most serious crime.

Nixon's Democratic and Republican presidential successors would go on to leverage drug war policies, responding to an alarming national surge in violent crime linked to the illegal drug trade, cementing the drug war's legacy.

Following the passage of stiffer state and federal penalties for crack cocaine and other drugs, the incarceration rates for Black and Hispanic Americans tripled between 1970 and 2000. By comparison, the white incarceration rate only doubled in that same timespan.

Biden's Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 put in place the ban on Pell Grants and other federal financial aid for people incarcerated in federal or state prison. However, then-Sen. Biden reportedly opposed the amendment that added the ban to his bill. At the time, his spokesperson said Biden believed education programs could break the cycle of recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals.

Ultimately, Biden worked passionately to pass the crime bill he sponsored. Academic programs in federal and state prisons, which had been robust, dwindled severely nationwide.

Later, in 1998, Congress expanded the ban to exclude any student with a state or federal drug conviction from receiving Pell Grants and federal student loans, for as little as one year or indefinitely, depending on the number of convictions. Biden voted in favor of the measure, although his opinion on the Pell Grant provision was unclear.

In just the five years after the expanded ban took effect, the measure cost more than 140,000 would-be college students between \$41 million and \$54 million in Pell Grants per year, and between \$100 million and \$164 million in federal student loans per year, according to an estimate by the federal Government Accountability Office.

However, in 2006, Congress changed the ban on grants to drug offenders. It applied only to students whose convictions happened while they were receiving federal student aid, narrowing its effect significantly, although experts say the law still forced hundreds of enrolled students to drop out of college when they lost their aid. The ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals was fully repealed when Congress passed the omnibus spending and COVID-19 relief legislation in December 2020.

Drug convictions no longer affect a student's financial aid eligibility, although the question still appears on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. In April, the U.S. Department of Education expanded its Second Chance Pell Program, which provides grants to incarcerated students to help them enroll in academic programs. A further expansion of Pell Grants to incarcerated students begins in July 2023, according to the Department of Education.

For DeAnna Hoskins, the legacy of the war on drugs nearly cost her much-needed Pell Grants and student loans. She attended college after her incarceration and, by happenstance, just after Congress lifted the

ban on aid to people with drug convictions.

"The '94 crime bill was so comprehensive in the destruction that it did," said Hoskins, the president of JustLeadershipUSA, a criminal justice reform group. She questions how Biden's debt relief plan was crafted. "I feel like you're piecemealing our liberation back to us."

There are tens of thousands of people who had to get private student loans at high interest rates, because of the ban on Pell Grants, Hoskins added.

"This is why it's so important, when decisions like this are being made, that the voices of people with lived experiences are present," she said. "We can help you obtain the equity you're seeking."

Prosecutors rest in R. Kelly's trial-fixing, child porn case

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Prosecutors rested their case Tuesday at R. Kelly's federal trial in Chicago after presenting two weeks of testimony, including from four Kelly accusers, in their bid to prove the singer enticed underage girls for sex, produced child pornography and successfully rigged his 2008 state trial.

Among the last prosecution witnesses was a 42-year-old woman who went by the pseudonym "Nia." Taking the stand Tuesday morning, she was the fourth and final accuser to testify at the trial in Kelly's hometown. A fifth accuser, who prosecutors had said during openings would testify, never did. They didn't explain why.

Through her testimony, Nia painted a picture of Kelly as a master manipulator who reeled in star-stuck fans, like her, to sexually abuse them and then discarded them.

The highlight of prosecutors' case came two weeks ago with the testimony of a 37-year-old woman who used the pseudonym "Jane." She described Kelly sexually abusing her hundreds of times starting in 1998 when she was 14 and Kelly was around 30.

Jane's testimony is vital to the charge accusing Kelly of fixing his 2008 child pornography trial, at which he was acquitted. She testified that Kelly and his associates threatened and paid off her and her parents to lie to a grand jury before that trial.

Legal teams for Kelly and two co-defendants now get their chance to attack the government's case. Judge Harry Leinenweber told jurors they would have Wednesday off, then return for the first defense witnesses Thursday. Closing arguments are expected to happen in the middle of next week.

A New York federal judge sentenced Kelly in June to 30 years in prison for convictions on racketeering and sex trafficking charges.

Kelly gave Nia, an aspiring actress and model, his telephone number after the then-15 year-old asked him for an autograph at an Atlanta mall in 1996, she testified. She said Kelly knew her age when he invited her to a concert in Minnesota, bought her plane ticket and sent a limousine with an all-red interior to pick her up.

On the way to the airport, Nia stopped to buy a red rose for Kelly, which she placed in her hotel room. When Kelly came to her room, he kissed her, then told her to undress and sit next to him on the bed. She said she was uncomfortable but did as he said. After touching her and himself, he quickly left, she said.

"I never got the chance to give him the rose," Nia told jurors.

Nia spoke calmly and clearly as Kelly, wearing in a dark blue suit and black face mask, sat some 25 feet (7.6 meters) in front of her and looked directly at her. When Jane testified earlier in the trial, he often kept his eyes down.

Nia said that for weeks after meeting Kelly, he promptly answered all her calls. But before long, he never answered them. When she saw him years later at a video shoot, she said she was hurt when he didn't appear to recognize or acknowledge her.

She ended up suing Kelly in the early 2000s, alleging sexual abuse. Kelly quickly settled, paying her \$500,000.

Kelly's 2008 state trial revolved around a video prosecutors said showed him sexually abusing Jane. She did not testify at that trial, but she told jurors at the current trial that she was the child in the video

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and Kelly was the adult man. Jurors at the ongoing trial viewed excerpts of that video and two others.

Kelly sold millions of albums even after allegations about his abuse began circulating publicly in the 1990s. Widespread outrage didn't emerge until after the #MeToo reckoning and the 2019 docuseries "Surviving R. Kelly."

Kelly associates Derrel McDavid and Milton Brown are co-defendants at the Chicago trial. McDavid, a longtime Kelly business manager, is accused of helping Kelly rig the 2008 trial. Brown is charged with receiving child pornography. Like Kelly, they have denied wrongdoing.

'Triangle of Sadness' actor, model Charlbi Dean dies at 32

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Charlbi Dean, the South African actor and model who had a breakout role in "Triangle of Sadness," which won this year's top prize at the Cannes Film Festival, has died at age 32.

Dean died Monday at a hospital in New York from a sudden unexpected illness, her representatives said Tuesday.

Dean also had a recurring role as the assassin Syonide on the DC Comics television series "Black Lightning," which aired on the CW from 2018 to 2021.

She was born Charlbi Dean Kriek in Cape Town, where she was also raised.

Dean began modeling as a child, making frequent appearances on fashion runways and magazine covers in the decades that followed.

She survived a near-fatal car accident in 2009.

She made her acting debut in the 2010 film "Spud," an adaptation of a popular South African novel about a boys' boarding school starring Troye Sivan and John Cleese. She reprised her role in a 2013 sequel.

In "Triangle of Sadness," the first English-language film from Swedish "Force Majeure" director Ruben Östlund, Dean and Harris Dickinson play a celebrity fashion-model couple on a cruise for the ultra-rich that descends into chaos. It also stars Woody Harrelson as the ship's captain.

The film won the Palme D'Or at Cannes in May and opens in the U.S. and most of Europe in October.

At the festival before the film won the award, Dean told The Associated Press, "For me, I'm like, I've already won. I'm already at Cannes with the movie. That's so unbelievable. Anything is just a cherry on top at this point for me, you know?"

Gen Z, millennials speak out on reluctance to become parents

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — At 24, El Johnson has made up her mind that she won't bear children, though she and her girlfriend haven't ruled out adoption.

The graduate student who works in legal services in Austin, Texas, has a list of reasons for not wanting to give birth: the climate crisis and a genetic health condition among them.

"I don't think it's responsible to bring children into this world," Johnson said. "There are already kids who need homes. I don't know what kind of world it's going to be in 20, 30, 40 years."

She's so sure, in fact, that she'll soon have her tubes removed. It's a precautionary decision sealed by the fall of Roe v. Wade and by tight restrictions on abortion services in her state and around the country.

Other women interviewed also cited climate change, along with overwhelming student debt coupled with inflation, as reasons they'll never be parents. Some younger men, too, are opting out and more are seeking vasectomies.

Whatever the motivation, they play a role in dramatically low birth rates in the U.S.

The U.S. birth rate fell 4% in 2020, the largest single-year decrease in nearly 50 years, according to a government report. The government noted a 1% uptick in U.S. births last year, but the number of babies born was still lower than before the coronavirus pandemic: about 86,000 fewer than in 2019.

Walter and Kyah King live in suburban Las Vegas. Walter, 29, a sports data scientist, and Kyah, 28, a college career counselor, have been together nearly 10 years, the last four as a married couple. The

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realization that they didn't want to have kids came on slowly for both of them.

"It was in our early 20s when the switch sort of flipped," Kyah said. "We had moved to California and we were really just starting our adult lives. I think we talked about having three kids at one point. But just with the economy and the state of the world and just thinking about the logistics of bringing children into the world. That's really when we started to have our doubts."

Finances are top of mind. Before taxes, the two earn about \$160,000 combined, with about \$120,000 in student loan debt for Kyah and about \$5,000 left for Walter. The couple said they wouldn't be able to buy a house and shoulder the costs of even one child without major sacrifices they're not willing to make.

But for Kyah, the decision goes well beyond money.

"I think we would be great parents, but the thought of going into our health system to give birth is really scary. Black women, black mothers, are not valued in the same way that white mothers are," said Kyah, who is Black.

When Kyah's IUD expires, Walter said he'll consider a vasectomy, a procedure that went on the rise among men under 30 during the pandemic.

Jordan Davidson interviewed more than 300 people for a book out in December titled, "So When are You Having Kids?" The pandemic, she said, led many to delay childbirth among those contemplating children at all.

"These timelines that people created for themselves of, I want to accomplish X by three years from now, changed. People weren't necessarily willing to move the goalposts and say, OK, I'm going to forgo these accomplishments and do this differently," she said. "People still want to travel. They still want to go to graduate school. They still want to meet certain financial benchmarks."

Fears about climate change have cemented the idea of living without children for many, Davidson said.

"Now with increased wildfires, droughts, heat waves, all of a sudden it is becoming real that, OK, this is happening during my time, and what is this going to look like during the time that my children are alive?" she said.

In New York City, 23-year-old Emily Shapiro, a copywriter for a pharmaceutical ad agency, earns \$60,000 a year, lives at home as she saves money and has never wanted children.

"They're sticky. I could never imagine picking up a kid that's covered in ice cream. I'm a bit of a germaphobe. I don't want to change a diaper. If I did have one, I wouldn't want them until they're in, like, sixth grade. I also think the physical Earth isn't doing so great so it would be unfair," she said.

Among those Jordan interviewed, concerns over the environment were far more prevalent among the younger group. Questions of affordability, she said, troubled both millennials and members of Gen Z.

"There is a lot of fear around having children who would be worse off than they viewed themselves during their childhoods," Davidson said.

Dannie Lynn Murphy, who helps find software engineers for Google, said she was nearly 17 when she was removed from her home by child protective services due to a pattern of child abuse. Her wife, she said, was similarly raised in a "not great" environment.

"Both of us at one point would have said yes to kids," she said. "In my late teenage, early adult years, I saw and understood the appeal and was attracted to the idea of getting to raise someone differently than I was raised. But the practical realities of a child kind of suck."

Murphy earns about \$103,000 a year, with bonuses and equity that can drive that amount up to \$300,000. Her wife earns about \$60,000 as an attorney. They don't own their Seattle home.

"I can't see myself committing to a mortgage, let alone a child," the 28-year-old Murphy said. "I think the primary reason is financial. I would prefer to spend that money on traveling versus sinking a half a million dollars into raising a child. Secondly, there's now the fear of behaving with our children the way our parents behaved with us."

Alyssa Persson, 31, was raised in small town South Dakota. Getting married and having children was ingrained in the culture, she said. It wasn't until after her divorce from her high school sweetheart that she took a step back and asked herself what she actually wanted out of life.

"Most women where I'm from lose their identities in motherhood," said Persson, who now lives in St.

Louis and earns about \$47,000 a year as a university librarian.

She's carrying student loan debt of about \$80,000. Persson is a former teacher who loves children, but she feels she is now thinking more clearly than ever about the costs, implications and sacrifices of parenting.

"Having children sounds like a trap to me, to be frank," she said. "Financially, socially, emotionally, physically. And if there were ever any shadow of a doubt, the fact that I cannot comfortably support myself on my salary is enough to scare me away from the idea entirely."

Germany upbeat on energy security; Baltics count on wind

By FRANK JORDANS, BARBARA SURK and JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz insisted Tuesday that his country was well-prepared to tackle a possible energy shortage due to Russia's squeeze on European gas supplies, as fears grow about the rising prices that will hit consumers across the continent this winter.

Speaking at the start of a two-day government retreat, Scholz cited Germany's decision to reactivate oil and coal-fired power plants, mandate the filling of natural gas storage facilities and lease floating liquefied natural gas terminals following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A decision on extending the operating life of Germany's three remaining nuclear power plants is also expected soon.

"All of this and many further measures have contributed to us being in a much better situation as far as supply security is concerned than could have been foreseen a couple of months ago," Scholz told reporters at the government guest house in Meseberg, north of Berlin.

"We will be able to cope quite well with the threats that we face from Russia, which is using gas as part of its strategy in the war against Ukraine," he said.

Scholz said Germany's gas storage facilities are already over 80% full, more than they were at this time last year, and the government is expected to agree on more measures shortly to help consumers cope with steeply rising energy prices.

Russia has cut off or reduced natural gas to a dozen European Union countries. Since spring, EU leaders have been appealing to the public to use less gas over the summer to build storage for winter. The bloc has proposed that nations voluntarily cut their use by 15%. It's also seeking the power to impose mandatory cuts across the 27-nation bloc if there is a severe gas shortage.

Seven Baltic Sea nations — Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Denmark — on Tuesday announced a commitment to a seven-fold increase of wind power production by 2030 as a way to free northern Europe from its dependence on Russian natural gas.

The Netherlands announced Tuesday that it had managed to dial down natural gas use by 25% during the first half of the year compared to the same period in 2021, with energy-intensive industries and power stations leading the way.

In France, the minister for energy transition, Agnes Pannier-Runacher, said the country's strategic energy reserves were 90% full. Energy-saving plans are still essential in the coming weeks to avoid possible rationing in peak winter cold season, she said. France rolled out an "energy sobriety" plan in June, targeting a 10% reduction in energy use by 2024.

"We need to prepare for the worst-case scenario, which is a total interruption of deliveries (from Russia)," Pannier-Runacher told broadcaster France Inter.

Russia's state-controlled energy company Gazprom further reduced gas deliveries to the French company Engie, raising fears that Moscow might cut off gas completely as political leverage over the war in Ukraine.

Gazprom informed Engie of a reduction in gas deliveries, starting Tuesday, because of "a disagreement between the parties on the application of several contracts." Deliveries for Engie from Gazprom have significantly dropped since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, with recent monthly supply of 1.5 TWh, which compares to Engie's total annual supplies in Europe above 400 TWh, the company said.

Engie has already secured enough gas to meet its commitments to customers, it said.

French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne on Monday urged businesses to make energy saving plans, warn-

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ing that companies would be hit first should the government be forced into rationing gas and electricity. In an effort to wean themselves off Russian gas and reduce their climate impact, European countries have significantly ramped up efforts to build wind, solar and other renewable energies.

On wind power, seven EU countries agree to set combined goals for offshore wind in the Baltic Sea region of at least 19.6 GW by 2030. The present capacity of the Baltic Sea region is currently under 3 gigawatts. Under the plan, up to 1,700 new offshore wind turbines would produce power equivalent to almost 20 nuclear power plants, providing enough electricity for up to 30 million households.

"(Russian President Vladimir) Putin is using energy as a weapon and has put Europe on the brink of an energy crisis with skyrocketing prices," Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said.

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said the new wind energy plan also will allow the countries "to have more affordable energy prices" while her Latvian counterpart, Arturs Krisjanis Karins, said "this can be done if we're working together."

"That is amazing. Up to 20 gigawatt by 2030," Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, said during the one-day Baltic Sea Energy Security Summit in Copenhagen. "It is already one-third of the overall EU ambition for offshore wind capacity by 2030."

The energy crisis has also prompted European countries to call for previously shelved energy projects to be revived, such as a gas pipeline linking the Iberian Peninsula with the rest of Europe.

, attended also by Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez,

Women race political clock, cross state lines for abortions

By LINDSEY TANNER AND PATRICK ORSAGOS Associated Press

DAYTON, OHIO (AP) — In the dim light of a clinic ultrasound room, Monica Eberhart reclines on an exam table as a nurse moves a probe across her belly. Waves of fetal cardiac activity ripple across the screen. "The heartbeat," the nurse says. "About 10 weeks and two days."

Eberhart exhales. It's good news. "That means I'm just under," she says, raising her hands and crossing her fingers.

The 23-year-old mother of three is racing a political clock. When she learned she was pregnant again, she decided abortion was her best choice — even if it meant navigating a patchwork of state laws enacted since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

Hours after the ruling in late June, Ohio imposed a ban on abortions once cardiac activity can be detected, at about six weeks of pregnancy. Since then, Women's Med clinic in Dayton has been referring hundreds of patients like Eberhart to its sister facility of the same name in Indiana, 120 miles away. There, in-clinic abortions are allowed until 13 weeks and six days of pregnancy — for now. Indiana lawmakers recently approved a ban on almost all abortions, after weeks of debate in the Statehouse. The law takes effect Sept. 15.

At just over 10 weeks into her pregnancy, Eberhart will need to travel to Indianapolis for an abortion. It's disruptive, an inconvenience — but she's more than ready. With new state laws and court challenges popping up on what seems like a daily basis, she doesn't want to wait any longer.

"I have to get it done, I can't really wait. I've put everything on hold just to get this one thing handled," Eberhart says. "I absolutely cannot afford another baby, whether that be financially or mentally."

Women's Med has performed few abortions in Ohio since the state ban was enacted; most women don't learn they're pregnant until after six weeks. The Dayton clinic, a two-story building that blends into its leafy suburban surroundings, has been in business for almost 40 years. Recent days have become increasingly chaotic, workers say.

They see desperate patients — a teenager who was raped, women with ectopic pregnancies, families unfamiliar with Ohio law. Some workers have left. Those who remain say they're determined to keep helping patients, even when it means sending them out of state.

"We are going to see as many people and do as much for these people as we can until we close down," says Dr. Jeanne Corwin, who works at both clinics. The Ohio clinic closes next month; Indiana's is likely

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to follow. Until then, Corwin focuses on preparing her Ohio patients to travel.

During Eberhart's visit, she and Corwin sit in her office. States have various requirements on what patients must be told -- procedure details, after-care instructions, birth control methods. But Indiana, Corwin explains, requires her to give what she derides as false information about fetal pain, and to discuss medical cremation. It is, she says, a bureaucratic process aimed at dissuading abortions.

Eberhart listens. Like most women at the clinic, she is undeterred.

The Indiana clinic can squeeze her in the next day, despite the influx of patients. The appointment gives her just enough time to meet Indiana's requirement for an 18-hour waiting period after the in-person education and counseling session. Anti-abortion advocates hope some women will decide against the procedure in that window, but Eberhart knows what she wants.

A manager for a beauty supply store, she lives paycheck to paycheck, and she struggles with postpartum depression from the birth of her youngest. She relies on her parents to help care for all three kids -- ages 4, 3 and 10 months.

"Love my kids to death, and they're everything I would ever want in my life," she says. "But if I, rationally speaking, could choose to do it over ... no kids at 18. Wait till I'm like 35. Wait till I have a whole house, a pension, a 401(k), a savings, three cars. Like, wait till you are financially able and stable."

Her children are staying with her parents for a few days; Eberhart wants them to know nothing of her plans. That night, at her unusually quiet house, Eberhart plays video games and watches TV. She doesn't feel scared or worried. Still, she struggles to sleep.

In the morning, the father, a friend who's been supportive of Eberhart's decision to seek an abortion, arrives to pick her up.

"I'm finally on my way," she tells herself. She manages to nap during the 2.5-hour drive, hoping to stave off pregnancy-induced nausea.

They arrive about noon at the Indianapolis clinic — a low-slung, nondescript building in a modest neighborhood. As at the Ohio facility, anti-abortion demonstrators gather here nearly every day, and an armed security guard is posted at the door.

Opponents believe unrestricted abortions disregard human life and argue that strict limits or bans are needed to protect the unborn. For Eberhart, the demonstrators are a nonfactor in her decision. Adoption was never an option for her — she spent time in foster care herself and says she knows the system is overflowing with children. She wants to move forward with the abortion; then, as she'll later say, "no more unplanned babies."

Eberhart and a steady stream of other patients file into the clinic. They sit, some fidgeting on padded waiting-room chairs, staring at pastel walls and a droning soap opera on the TV. Each feels the urgency brought on by looming legislation.

There's the nurse who got pregnant when her IUD failed. The 27-year-old is still breastfeeding her 5-month-old and recovering from ovarian-cyst surgery. She and her partner worry that another pregnancy is too dangerous. At 11 weeks pregnant, she, too, traveled from Ohio.

A retail worker in Louisville got a ride from a friend when her appointment was abruptly canceled over a new state ban there. Indiana's waiting period means she'll have to make the two-hour drive again, another day. The 27-year-old was on birth control when she got pregnant.

A factory worker from southern Indiana says her strict, Catholic father would disown her over an abortion. She's certain she's going to hell. But as a 28-year-old single mom, she knows she can't raise another child.

A high school honor student got pregnant when her boyfriend's condom broke. She told her mom, who revealed a secret she'd kept even from her husband — she had two abortions long ago, before marriage, when any notion that Roe v. Wade could be overturned seemed remote.

All these women — who spoke to AP on condition of anonymity, over fears that family and friends would learn of their abortion plans — will see Dr. Katie McHugh. She and the other staff in Indianapolis are performing twice as many abortions as they did before the Supreme Court ruling. In July, 474 patients had abortions there, compared with just over 200 in May. At least half come from other states.

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McHugh sees more fear in her patients these days, and she tries to extend extra kindness. "There's a sense of desperation," she says. "They feel so lucky that they got in just under the wire."

Depending on laws in patients' home states, the clinic offers abortion by procedure or pills, with women taking two prescription medicines days apart. It's the preferred and most common method to terminate pregnancy in the country, typically for women up to 70 days into pregnancy.

Eberhart is barely past that limit — but even if she qualified, she'd still need to have the more invasive medical procedure to empty her womb. The clinic won't risk the legal liability of patients using the pills back home, in more restrictive states.

Over an hour after arrival, it's time for Eberhart's procedure. The doctor tells her, "I'm sorry you had to come all the way here, but we're glad we can help."

Eberhart lies down on the exam table in a cramped procedure room and places her feet in the stirrups, a paper sheet covering her legs — much like an ordinary gynecological exam.

McHugh talks Eberhart through each step — feeling for the uterus, applying a numbing medication. Eberhart winces as she feels a pinch, then relaxes. She makes a bit of small talk, telling the doctor about her kids.

McHugh inserts a thin, hollow tube. It's attached to larger tubing and a suctioning pump. McHugh uses it to remove the pregnancy.

The procedure is over in five minutes. Eberhart feels little pain. McHugh tells her to take care.

Eberhart moves to a recovery area, rests on a reclining chair and snacks on a small bag of chips.

"I'm generally in good spirits," she says. "I knew what I signed up for."

Over the next few days, she has minor cramps, some hormonal moodiness — but no regrets.

Mostly, she feels an overwhelming sense of relief — that she was able to find a clinic to give her the care she wanted, that the fast-closing window for abortion had remained open long enough.

"I just want to do what's right for my body and my life," she said.

Musk cites whistleblower as new reason to exit Twitter deal

By KELVIN CHAN and TOM KRISHER The Associated Press

Tesla CEO Elon Musk and Twitter lobbed more accusations at each other Tuesday in the latest round of legal filings over Musk's efforts to rescind his offer to buy the social media platform.

Musk filed more paperwork in his bid to terminate the deal, this time based on information in a whistleblower complaint filed by Twitter's former head of security.

Twitter fired back by saying Musk's attempt to back out is "invalid and wrongful."

In a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Musk said his legal team notified Twitter of "additional bases" for ending the deal on top of the ones given in the original termination notice issued in July.

Twitter has sued Musk, asking the Delaware Chancery Court to force him to go through with the \$44 billion deal. A high-stakes trial is set to start the week of Oct. 17.

In a letter to Twitter Inc., which was included in the filing, Musk's advisors cited the whistleblower report by former executive Peiter Zatkó — also known by his hacker handle "Mudge."

Zatkó, who served as Twitter's head of security until he was fired early this year, alleged in his complaint to U.S. officials that the company misled regulators about its poor cybersecurity defenses and its negligence in attempting to root out fake accounts that spread disinformation.

The Musk letter, addressed to Twitter's Chief Legal Officer Vijaya Gadde, said Zatkó's allegations provide extra reasons to end the deal if the July termination notice "is determined to be invalid for any reason."

Billionaire Musk has spent months alleging that the company he agreed to acquire undercounted its fake and spam accounts, which means he doesn't have to go through with the deal.

In a separate SEC filing, Twitter responded to what it called Musk's latest "purported termination," saying it's "based solely on statements made by a third party that, as Twitter has previously stated, are riddled with inconsistencies and inaccuracies and lack important context."

Zatko received a subpoena Saturday from Musk's team compelling him to testify in what Zatko's lawyers emphasized would be an "involuntary" deposition ahead of the coming courtroom battle between Twitter and Musk.

"He did not make his whistleblower disclosures to the appropriate governmental bodies to benefit Musk or to harm Twitter, but rather to protect the American public and Twitter shareholders," Zatko's lawyers wrote in a prepared statement.

Twitter is likely to amend its lawsuit to include Zatko's allegations, so the court can decide on both the bot and cybersecurity issues. That could delay the trial because Musk will say he needs more time to prepare, said Brian Quinn, a law professor at Boston College.

The court will have to decide whether the bot or cybersecurity issues are a "material adverse effect" that will harm Twitter's business for years — a difficult legal bar to clear, Quinn said.

The bot issue, which Twitter disclosed in filings with the SEC, seems to be an issue that Twitter would win on, Quinn said. Cybersecurity problems raised by Zatko may not be such an easy victory, he said.

"This is more grist for the mill," Quinn said. "It's not as obvious for the most part that this is a winner for Twitter. But once you start to analyze these closely, it's still an uphill battle for Musk."

New York to restrict gun carrying after Supreme Court ruling

By MICHAEL HILL, MAYSOON KHAN and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Amid the bright lights and electronic billboards across New York's Times Square, city authorities are posting new signs proclaiming the bustling crossroads a "Gun Free Zone."

The sprawling Manhattan tourist attraction is one of scores of "sensitive" places — including parks, churches and theaters — that will be off limits for guns under a sweeping new state law going into effect Thursday. The measure, passed after a U.S. Supreme Court decision in June expanded gun rights, also sets stringent standards for issuing concealed carry permits.

New York is among a half-dozen states that had key provisions of its gun laws invalidated by the high court because of a requirement for applicants to prove they had "proper cause" for a permit. Gov. Kathy Hochul said Friday that she and her fellow Democrats in the state Legislature took action the next week because the ruling "destroyed the ability for a governor to be able to protect her citizens from people who carry concealed weapons anywhere they choose."

The quickly adopted law, however, has led to confusion and court challenges from gun owners who say it improperly limits their constitutional rights.

"They seem to be designed less towards addressing gun violence and more towards simply preventing people from getting guns — even if those people are law-abiding, upstanding citizens, who according to the Supreme Court have the rights to have them," said Jonathan Corbett, a Brooklyn attorney and permit applicant who is one of several people challenging the law in court.

Under the law, applicants for a concealed carry permit will have to complete 16 hours of classroom training and two hours of live-fire exercises. Ordinary citizens would be prohibited from bringing guns to schools, churches, subways, theaters and amusement parks — among other places deemed "sensitive" by authorities.

Applicants also will have to provide a list of social media accounts for the past three years as part of a "character and conduct" review. The requirement was added because shooters have sometimes dropped hints of violence online before they opened fire on people.

Sheriffs in some upstate counties said the additional work for their investigators could add to existing backlogs in processing applications.

In Rochester, Monroe County Sheriff Todd Baxter said it currently takes two to four hours to perform a pistol permit background check on a "clean" candidate. He estimate the new law will add another one to three hours for each permit. The county has about 600 pending pistol permits.

"It's going to slow everything down just a bit more," he said.

In the Mohawk Valley, Fulton County Sheriff Richard C. Giardino had questions on how the digital

sleuthing would proceed.

"It says three years worth of your social media. We're not going to print out three years of social media posts by everybody. If you look at my Facebook, I send out six or 10 things a day," said the sheriff, a former district attorney and judge.

The list of prohibited spaces for carrying guns has drawn criticism from advocates who say it's so extensive it will make it difficult for people with permits to move about in public. People carrying a gun could go into private business only with permission, such as a sign posted on the window.

Giardino has already started giving out signs to local businesses saying people can carry legal firearms on the premises. Jennifer Elson, who owns the Let's Twist Again Diner in Amsterdam, said she put up the sheriff's sign, along with one of her own reading in part "per our governor, we have to post this nonsense. If you are a law abiding citizen who obtained a legal permit to carry, you are welcome here."

"I feel pretty strongly that everybody's constitutional rights should be protected," she said.

But in Times Square, visited by about 50 million tourists annually, and many less crowded places carrying a gun will be illegal starting Thursday.

New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams said Tuesday she looked forward to seeing authorities move to "protect New Yorkers and visitors who frequent Times Square."

One lawsuit challenging provisions of the law argued the rules make it hard for license holders to leave home without violating the law. A federal judge is expected to rule soon on a motion challenging multiple provisions of the law, which was filed on behalf of a Schenectady resident who holds a license to carry.

The Supreme Court ruling also led to a flurry of legislation in California to tighten rules on gun ownership, including a new law that could hold gun dealers and manufacturers responsible for any harm caused by anyone they have "reasonable cause to believe is at substantial risk" of using a gun illegally.

Earlier this month, Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker signed into law a measure that would require gun permit applicants to undergo personal interviews with a licensing authority.

New Jersey required people to get training before receiving a permit and would require new residents to register guns brought in from out of state.

Hawaii, which has the nation's lowest number of gun deaths, is still weighing its options. Since the Supreme Court's ruling, the state has only granted one new gun permit.

While New York does not keep statewide data on pistol permit applications, there are reports of long lines at county clerks' office and other evidence of a surge in applications before the law takes effect.

In the Mohawk Valley, Pine Tree Rifle Club President Paul Catucci said interest in the club's volunteer-run safety courses "blew right up" late this summer.

"I had to turn hundreds of them away," he said.

Heavy fighting rages in Ukraine's Russian-occupied south

By PAUL BYRNE Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine claimed to have destroyed bridges and ammunition depots and pounded command posts in a surge of fighting in the Russian-occupied south, fueling speculation Tuesday that its long-awaited counteroffensive to try to turn the tide of war is underway. Russia said it inflicted heavy casualties in return.

The clashes took place in Ukraine's Kherson region, where Moscow's forces rolled up major gains early in the war.

While independent verification of battlefield action has been difficult, Britain's Defense Ministry said in an intelligence report that several Ukrainian brigades had stepped up their artillery fire in front-line sectors across southern Ukraine.

Ukrainian authorities kept the world guessing about their intentions, sidestepping talk of a major counteroffensive over the past couple of days.

The port city of Kherson, with a prewar population of about 300,000, is an important economic hub close to the Black Sea and the first major city to fall to the Russians in the war that began six months ago.

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Occupation forces have spoken of plans to hold a referendum on making the Kherson region a part of Russia and have pressured residents to take Russian citizenship and stop using Ukraine's currency.

Ukraine's presidential office reported "tough battles" going on across practically all of the area and said Ukrainian forces destroyed ammunition depots and all large bridges across the Dnieper River vital to supplying Russian troops.

The Ukrainian military said Tuesday evening that the Russians were shelling more than 15 settlements in the Kherson area and resorting to airstrikes.

The British said that most of Russia's units around Kherson "are likely under-manned and are reliant upon fragile supply lines" while its forces there are undergoing a significant reorganization.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov maintained that its forces stood up well and that Ukraine lost hundreds of troops, tanks and other armored vehicles in Monday's action. His claim could not be independently verified.

Ukrainian independent military analyst Oleh Zhdanov told The Associated Press that "it will be possible to talk about the effectiveness of Ukrainian actions only after large cities are retaken." He added that Ukrainian forces had breached the first and the second lines of defense in the Kherson region several times in the past, "but it didn't bring about results."

"The most important thing is Ukrainian artillery's work on the bridges, which the Russian military can no longer use," Zhdanov said.

The war has turned into a stalemate over the past months, with casualties and destruction mounting and the population bearing the brunt of the suffering during relentless shelling in the east and south.

In other battlefield reports, at least nine civilians were killed in more Russian shelling, Ukrainian officials said, from the Black Sea port of Mykolaiv to the northeastern industrial hub of Kharkiv, where five were killed in the city center.

The fighting complicates what could be a treacherous trip from Kyiv to Europe's largest nuclear power plant, Zaporizhzhia, by an inspection team from the U.N.'s atomic energy agency.

The experts may have to pass through areas of active fighting, with no publicly announced cease-fire, to reach the Russian-occupied plant, where shelling has driven fears of a catastrophe. Ukraine and Russia have accused each other of shelling the area over and over.

Nikopol, a city just across the Dnieper from the plant, again came under a barrage of heavy shelling, authorities said, with a bus station, stores and a children's library damaged. And a Russian missile strike targeted the city of Zaporizhzhia, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the plant, Ukraine said.

In other developments:

—The first ship carrying grain from war-torn Ukraine for people in the hungriest parts of the world docked at the Horn of Africa port of Djibouti as deadly drought and conflict grip East Africa. The grain is going to Ethiopia.

—European Union nations were divided over whether to slap a broad visa ban on Russian citizens, torn between a desire to ramp up pressure on President Vladimir Putin and concern about punishing people who don't support his war.

—German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said his country — Europe's biggest economy — is well prepared to tackle a possible energy shortage because of Russia's squeeze on European gas supplies. Russia has cut off or reduced the flow of gas to a dozen EU countries, raising fears ahead of winter. Seven Baltic Sea countries announced plans for a sevenfold increase of wind power production by 2030 to free northern Europe from its dependence on Russian natural gas.

—The Vatican defended Pope Francis from allegations he hasn't come down hard enough on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, saying the pontiff clearly views the war as "senseless, repugnant and sacrilegious."

EXPLAINER: What spurred the bloody armed clashes in Baghdad?

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq's long-running power struggle between rival Shiite camps devolved into bloody

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street violence this week – the culmination of months of simmering tensions and a political vacuum.

For 24 hours, loyalists of powerful cleric Muqtada al-Sadr transformed the country's government Green Zone into a front line, trading fire with security forces and rival militias, and bringing the capital to a standstill. Just as quickly, with a single word — “withdraw” — from the cleric in a speech Tuesday, the fighting came to a stop.

His supporters put down their weapons and left.

It was a powerful message to al-Sadr's Iran-backed rivals and the political elite of the cleric's enduring power over his hundreds of thousands of followers and an equally dangerous example of the damage they are capable of doing to the embattled country.

Following his calls for withdrawal, Iraqi leaders, including the caretaker premier, expressed their thanks to al-Sadr and praised his restraint.

Al-Sadr has long derived his political influence from his ability to to both command his mass following to destabilize the street, and just as quickly bring them into line. His announcement Monday that he would exit politics showed Iraqis what could happen when that voice of restraint is taken away: chaos, devastation and death.

The protests and heavy clashes that have so far left 30 killed and over 400 wounded may have come to a close, but the political impasse that brought on this chapter of unrest is far from over.

So, what does al-Sadr want and is there an end to Iraq's crisis?

WHO IS MUQTADA AL-SADR?

Al-Sadr is a populist cleric who emerged as a symbol of resistance against the U.S. occupation of Iraq after the 2003 invasion. He formed a militia, the Mahdi Army, that eventually disbanded and renamed it Saraya Salam — the Peace Brigades.

He has presented himself as an opponent of both the U.S. and Iran and has fashioned himself a nationalist with an anti-reform agenda. In reality, he is an establishment figure with deep influence in Iraq's state institutions through the appointments of key civil servants.

Al-Sadr derives much of his appeal through his family legacy. He is the son of Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr, who was assassinated in 1999 for his critical stance against Saddam Hussein. Many of his followers say they are devoted to him because they were once devotees of his father.

Al-Sadr eventually entered politics and garnered a reputation for being unpredictable and theatrical by frequently calling on his followers to gain political leverage over his rivals. His powerful rhetoric infused with religion and calls for revolution resonated deeply with his disenfranchised following.

Through these strategies he has become a powerful player with a fiercely devoted grassroots following concentrated in Iraq's most impoverished quarters. Most of his loyalists who stormed the Green Zone were unemployed and blamed the Iraqi political elite.

In 2021, al-Sadr's party won the largest share of seats in October parliamentary elections but not enough to secure a majority in government. His refusal to negotiate with his Iran-backed Shiite rivals on forming a government plunged Iraq into an unprecedented political vacuum now in its tenth month.

WHAT DO AL-SADR'S FOLLOWERS WANT?

The political crisis escalated in July when al-Sadr's supporters broke into parliament to deter his rivals in the Coordination Framework, an alliance of mostly Iran-backed Shiite parties, from forming a government.

Hundreds staged an ongoing sit-in outside the building for over four weeks. Frustrated when he was not able to corral enough lawmakers to form a government that excluded his rivals, al-Sadr also ordered his bloc to resign their parliamentary seats and called for early elections and the dissolution of parliament.

That call was embraced and reiterated by his following, many of whom have long felt marginalized by the ruling elite.

In Sadr City, the Baghdad suburb where al-Sadr's followers are highly concentrated, most complain of inadequate basic services, including electricity in the scorching summer heat. The majority have roots in the rural communities of southern Iraq and have little education. Most face enormous challenges finding work.

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Most of those who stormed parliament in July and the government palace on Monday were young men for whom it was their first glimpse inside Iraq's halls of power, where they seldom feel welcome.

Angered by deep class divides and a history of dispossession, al-Sadr's followers say they believe the cleric will revolutionize a political system they believe has forgotten about them. But in reality, in Iraq's power-sharing political system, al-Sadr holds significant power and sway.

WHY ARE THE CLASHES SO DANGEROUS?

Monday's clashes brought Iraq on the precipice of street warfare and was the product of months of political tensions and power struggles between al-Sadr and the Iran-backed Shiite camp over the formation of the next government.

Al-Sadr's rivals in the Coordination Framework have shown signs they would not be against early elections but both camps disagree over the mechanism. The judiciary has rejected al-Sadr's call to dissolve parliament as unconstitutional.

With the roots of the political impasse still unresolved, conflict can flare up again. The greatest threat to Iraq's stability is protracted armed fighting between the paramilitary forces of the rival Shiite camps.

This occurred outside of the capital as the clashes wore on in the Green Zone on Monday night. Militiamen loyal to al-Sadr stormed the headquarters of Iran-backed militia groups in the southern provinces, a move that could have escalated into tit-for-tat attacks as has happened in the past.

It's a scenario that neighboring Iran, which wields much influence in Iraq, dreaded most. Iranian officials, including Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali-Khamenei, have repeatedly called for Shiite unity and attempted to broker dialogue with al-Sadr. But the cleric has refused, firm in his resolve to form a government without Iran-backed groups.

Members of Iraq's majority Shiite Muslim population were oppressed when Saddam Hussein ruled the country for decades. The 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam, a Sunni, reversed the political order. Just under two-thirds of Iraq is Shiite, with a third Sunni.

Now, the Shiites are fighting among themselves, with those backed by Iran and those who consider themselves Iraqi nationalists jockeying for power, influence and state resources.

Danube drought reveals parts of hidden World War II history

By DUSAN STOJANOVIC Associated Press

PRAHOVO, Serbia (AP) — The worst drought in Europe in decades hasn't only scorched farmland and hampered river traffic, it also has exposed a part of almost forgotten World War II history: The hulks of dozens of World War II German battleships have emerged from the Danube River as its water levels have dropped.

In the middle of the mighty river separating Serbia and Romania near the Serbian port of Prahovo, a rusty hull, a broken mast where the swastika flag used to fly, an upper deck where a command bridge used to be, a barrel that could have been holding fuel — or even explosive materials — lean on a pebble-stone dune that has emerged from the water.

The ships, some still laden with munition, belonged to Nazi Germany's Black Sea fleet that was deliberately sunk by the Germans as they retreated from Romania as Soviet forces advanced.

Historians say up to 200 German warships were scuttled in September 1944 near Prahovo in the Danube gorge known as The Iron Gate on the orders of the fleet's commander as they came under heavy fire from the Soviets. The idea behind the deliberate sinking was to at least slow down the Soviet advance in the Balkans. But it didn't help as Nazi Germany surrendered months later, in May 1945.

The unusually hot weather across Europe this summer was linked by scientists to global warming and other factors. The dropping water levels created dangerous conditions for shipping on many rivers on the continent, including the Danube, Europe's second-longest river that flows through 10 nations. Authorities in Serbia have used dredging to keep vessels moving.

The wrecks appearing from the depths are an impressive sight, but they have caused decades of trouble for those using the river, and now the Serbian government, with European Union support, is planning

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to do something about them.

Some of the wrecks were removed from the river by the Communist Yugoslav authorities right after the war. But most of them remained, hampering shipping, especially in summer when water levels are low. For years there were plans to take the ships out of the muddy waters, but the operation was considered too risky because of the explosives they carried and there were no funds to do it until recently.

Now, the European Union and the European Investment Bank have agreed to provide loans and grants to finance the operation to remove some of the vessels near Prahovo in order to improve the traffic capacity of the Danube. The total cost of the operation is estimated at 30 million euros (\$30 million), of which about 16 million are grants.

"These vessels have been sunk and they have been lying on the river bed ever since," the EU ambassador to Serbia, Emanuele Giaufret, said during a recent trip to the wreckage site. "And this is a problem. It's a problem for the traffic on the Danube, it restricts the capacity to move, it's a hazard because certain vessels still contain unexploded ordnance."

Accompanying Giaufret was Alessandro Bragonzi, the head of the European Investment Bank in the Western Balkans. He said the project consists of the removal of 21 sunken vessels.

"It has been estimated that more vessels are underwater, up to 40, but those that are currently impeding the fairway conditions of the Danube, especially during periods of low water level, are 21," Bragonzi said.

Experts say the salvage operation will consist of removing the explosive materials from the sunken vessels and then destroying the wrecks, rather than dragging the ships out of the river.

US asks farmers: Can you plant 2 crops instead of 1?

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — There is only so much farmland in the United States, so when Russia's invasion of Ukraine last spring prompted worries that people would go hungry as wheat remained stuck in blockaded ports, there was little U.S. farmers could do to meet the new demand.

But that may be changing.

Earlier this summer, the U.S. Department of Agriculture instituted new policies to encourage American farmers to begin growing two crops on one piece of land, one after the other, a practice known as double-cropping. By changing insurance rules to lessen the risk of growing two crops, the USDA hopes to significantly increase the amount of wheat that U.S. farmers could grow every year, lessening the reliance on big wheat producers like Ukraine and Russia and eliminating bottlenecks.

The idea is an intriguing development from the Ukraine war that hasn't received widespread attention. As fall approaches, it's unclear how many farmers will actually try the new system, but some who already grow two crops say it's something farmers should consider.

"I think it's a great idea," said Illinois farmer Jeff O'Connor, who has double-cropped for years and hosted President Joe Biden at an event in May to promote efforts to increase food production. "How successful it will be, I don't know."

Even if the effort is only moderately successful, agriculture groups are hoping for new ways of meeting a growing global demand for food while generating more profit for farmers amid high fertilizer and fuel costs. As Andrew Larson with the Illinois Soybean Association put it, "It removes some of the hurdles and provides a lot more flexibility."

In 2020, the U.S. exported wheat valued at \$6.3 billion. The U.S. along with Russia, Australia and Canada usually lead the world in wheat exports, with Ukraine typically ranked fifth, though its shipments will drop this year due to the war.

Double-cropping isn't new in parts of the South and southern Midwest, which have the key advantage of longer growing seasons. Those warmer temperatures let farmers squeeze in a fall planting of one crop — usually winter wheat — that is dormant over the winter and then grows and can be harvested in late spring, just as farmers plant a second crop — typically soybeans.

The problem comes when cool weather delays the spring harvest of wheat, which in turn delays the

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planting of soybeans. And that's where the USDA's new effort could ease the risk of a costly planting backup.

The USDA's Risk Management Agency would streamline crop insurance approvals for farmers planting a second crop in more than 1,500 counties where double-cropping seems viable. The agency also would work with crop insurers and farm groups to promote a greater availability of coverage in other counties.

In announcing its effort, the USDA said it was aiming to "stabilize food prices and feed Americans and the world amidst continuing challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain disruptions, and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia."

The USDA didn't mention climate change, but the agency and other experts have long said warming temperatures will spur farmers to rethink what they grow and how.

The new program is focused more on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is a leading supplier of wheat to people in Africa and the Middle East. After the invasion, wheat prices nearly doubled to over \$12 a bushel, though since then prices have steadily dropped as supply concerns have eased, in part because of agreements that have allowed for the export of some Ukraine wheat.

The USDA didn't respond to a request for details about how many farmers the agency hopes will begin double-cropping or how much U.S. production could increase.

Farmers who double-crop often have smaller crops, but two smaller crops would still be significantly larger than an individual crop.

A study published in August by the University of Illinois and Ohio State University found that was certainly the case this year, as high wheat prices resulted in double-cropped land in southern Illinois bringing a projected \$251 per acre return for wheat and soybeans, which is \$81 higher than a stand-alone soybean crop. The double-crop benefit was less dramatic in other parts of the state and could be less if wheat prices drop.

Mark Lehenbauer, who raises livestock and grows row crops near Palmyra, Missouri, said he's double-cropped for years and finds it reliably profitable. Still, he cautions that there is a years-long learning curve as farmers learn how to accomplish the task of planting one crop just as they need to harvest another.

And Lehenbauer acknowledged that many farmers may simply be reluctant to take on the added risks or extra workload.

"There are a lot of extra steps in there," Lehenbauer said. "It adds some complexity."

Ultimately, the biggest factor behind whether farmers begin growing an extra crop of wheat is what price they can get for the crop, said Pat Westhoff, director of the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute at the University of Missouri. Although prices have dropped from the peaks soon after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they remain at the still profitable level of nearly \$8 a bushel.

"It really comes down to where wheat prices go in the future," he said. "Even with the drop in prices we've seen, wheat prices are pretty high so there should be a little more incentive for wheat double cropping in this next year than there has been."

In new gun law, a quiet breakthrough for victims of abuse

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nikiesha Thomas was on her way to work one day when she told her sister that she was thinking about getting involved with domestic violence prevention.

The idea gave Keeda Simpson pause. Her younger sister had never mentioned anything like that before, and she was bringing it up in a phone call just days after filing for a protective order against her ex-boyfriend.

It was their last conversation.

Less than an hour later, Thomas' ex-boyfriend walked up to her parked car in a southeastern neighborhood of the nation's capital and shot through her passenger window, killing the 33-year-old.

It's cases like hers, where warning signs and legal paperwork weren't enough to save a life, that lawmakers had in mind this summer when they crafted the first major bipartisan law on gun violence in decades.

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The measure signed by President Joe Biden in June was part of a response to a harrowing string of shootings over the summer, including the slaying of 19 children at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

The package included tougher background checks for the youngest gun buyers and help for states to put in place "red flag" laws that make it easier for authorities to take weapons from people adjudged dangerous.

Also tucked into the bill was a proposal that will make it more difficult for a convicted domestic abuser to obtain firearms even when the abuser is not married to or doesn't have a child with the victim.

Nearly a decade in the making, lawmakers' move to close the "boyfriend loophole" received far less attention than other aspects of the legislation. But advocates and lawmakers are hopeful this provision will save lives and become a major part of the law's legacy.

"We have so many women killed — one every 14 hours, from domestic partners with guns in this country," Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., a longtime advocate for the proposal, said before passage of the bill in June. "Sadly, half of those involve dating partners, people who aren't married to someone, but they are in a romantic relationship with them in some way."

Federal law has long barred people convicted of domestic violence or subject to a domestic violence restraining order from being able to buy a gun. But that restriction had only applied to an individual who is married to the victim, lived with the victim or had a child with the victim. As a result, it missed a whole group of perpetrators — current and former boyfriends or intimate partners — sometimes with fatal consequences.

At least 19 states and the District of Columbia have taken action on this issue, according to data compiled by Everytown for Gun Safety. Klobuchar and domestic violence advocates have worked for years to do the same on the federal level, with little success.

The struggle over defining a boyfriend in the law remained difficult to the end. Negotiations in Congress nearly broke down over the provision. The same thing happened in March when a similar bipartisan effort to reauthorize a 1990s-era law that extended protections to victims of domestic and sexual violence passed only after Democratic lawmakers took out the loophole provision to ensure Republican support.

"That was the toughest issue in our negotiations," Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., a lead negotiator of the gun package, said of the loophole proposal. "The biggest discussion that took us a long time at the end was around the question of how you would get your rights back after you had been prohibited."

Murphy and other Democratic negotiators were able to persuade Republicans by including a narrow path to restoring access to firearms for first-time offenders after five years, only if they are not convicted of another misdemeanor for violent crime. For married couples, and those who have had a child together, the firearm ban is permanent.

To some advocates, more change is still needed. The legislation only partially closes the loophole because dating partners subject to a domestic violence restraining order, as in Thomas' case, are still able to buy and maintain access to firearms.

"It will for sure save lives. But also to be clear, this is a partial closure of what's known as the boyfriend loophole. There's still a lot of work to be done," Jennifer Becker, the legal director and senior attorney for Legal Momentum, a legal defense and education fund for women, told The Associated Press.

Federal crime data for 2020 showed that out of all murder victims among intimate partners — including divorced and gay couples — girlfriends accounted for 37%, while wives accounted for 34%. Only 13% of the victims were boyfriends, and 7% were husbands.

In 2018, a group of researchers who looked at intimate partner homicides in 45 states from 1980 to 2013 found that when firearm prohibitions linked to domestic restraining orders included people who were dating, deaths dropped by 13%.

"It suggests that when you cast that wider net, by covering boyfriends, you are able to cover people who are more dangerous and potentially save more lives," April Zeoli, a researcher at the University of Michigan who was part of that study, told the AP.

Thomas' family hopes the changes in the law will save lives and ensure their daughter's death wasn't

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in vain. They say Thomas was doing everything she could to protect herself when she left her yearslong relationship with 36-year-old Antoine Oliver in late September 2021.

It was only after her death in October that her family members found out that the protective order Thomas had filed three days earlier, detailing how her former partner had access to firearms and she felt unsafe, was never served. Sheriff's deputies in Prince George's County, Maryland, where Oliver lived, had been trying to reach him by phone.

When law enforcement finally reached Oliver, he told them he would come to accept service of the judicial order the following day. Instead, authorities said, he killed Thomas that day before fatally shooting himself.

"Some days I just sit and review the paper she had filed with the court just a few days prior and just think, what else could she have done to protect herself?" said Nadine Thomas, her mother. Gilbert Thomas, her father, said his daughter did everything she was supposed to do, but it was the system that failed her.

"She feared for her life and what did the police do? They called him and made arrangements for him to come to pick up the order," he said. "There was no urgency placed on it."

But now the family is bracing for the anniversary of Thomas' killing. The weight of grief is heavy, particularly for her 11-year-old daughter, Kylei, whom Thomas had from a relationship before she met Oliver.

In the months before her death, Thomas had been making plans to buy a home for her and her daughter. She was saving up from her job with the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education, where she was assigned to an intervention program to help some of the district's most challenged students.

"We really were starting to map out some things and it just got taken away," her sister, Keeda Simpson, said. "One of the last things we talked about was her wanting to evoke change for other women."

"I'm going to do whatever it takes — even if it's a small thing — to help someone else that's in her situation, not to lose their life," she added.

Diana's death stunned the world — and changed the royals

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Above all, there was shock. That's the word people use over and over again when they remember Princess Diana's death in a Paris car crash 25 years ago this week.

The woman the world watched grow from a shy teenage nursery school teacher into a glamorous celebrity who comforted AIDS patients and campaigned for land mine removal couldn't be dead at the age of 36, could she?

"I think we need to remind ourselves that she was probably the best known woman in the English-speaking world, aside from perhaps Queen Elizabeth II herself," said historian Ed Owens.

"And, given this massive celebrity persona that she had developed, to have that extinguished overnight, for her to die in such tragic circumstances, at such a young age, I think really came as a massive shock to many people."

It was that disbelief that cemented Diana's legacy as the woman who brought lasting change to Britain's royal family, helping bridge the gap between centuries of tradition and a new, multicultural nation in the internet age.

First, there was the outpouring of grief from the public who streamed to the princess' home at Kensington Palace to mourn the loss of a woman most had never met. That alone forced the royals to recognize that Diana's common touch had connected with people in ways that hadn't yet occurred to the House of Windsor.

Those lessons have since inspired other royals, including Diana's sons, Princes William and Harry, to be more informal and approachable. For proof, look no further than the glitzy concert that was a centerpiece of June's Platinum Jubilee celebrating the queen's 70 years on the throne.

There were rock bands and opera singers, dancers and lasers painting pictures of corgis on the sky. But the biggest applause was for Elizabeth herself, who appeared in a short film to share a pot of tea with British national treasure Paddington Bear. She then solved a longtime mystery and revealed what's

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inside her famous black handbag: A marmalade sandwich — just for emergencies.

It wasn't obvious Diana would be a royal rebel when she married Prince Charles.

A member of the aristocratic Spencer family, Diana was known for flouncy bows, sensible skirts and a boyish blond bob when she started dating the future king. After leaving school at 16, she spent time at a finishing school in the Swiss Alps and worked as a nanny and preschool teacher while living in London.

But she blossomed, becoming an international style icon the moment she walked down the aisle of St. Paul's Cathedral shrouded in lace and followed by a 25-foot train on July 29, 1981.

From that moment on, reporters and photographers followed Diana wherever she went. While Diana hated the intrusion, she quickly learned the media was also a tool she could use to bring attention to a cause and to change public perceptions.

That impact was seen most famously when the princess opened the U.K.'s first specialized ward for AIDS patients on April 9, 1987.

Such ribbon-cutting ceremonies are a staple of royal duties. But Diana realized there was more at stake. She reached out and took the hands of a young patient, demonstrating the virus couldn't be transmitted by touch. The moment, captured by photos beamed worldwide, helped combat the fear, misinformation and stigma surrounding the AIDS epidemic.

A decade later, Diana was even more media savvy.

Seven months before she died, Diana donned a protective visor and flak jacket and walked down a path cleared through a minefield in Angola to promote the work of The HALO Trust, a group devoted to removing mines from former war zones. When she realized some photographers didn't get the shot, she turned around and did it again.

The images brought international attention to the campaign to rid the world of explosives that lurk underground long after wars end. Today, a treaty banning land mines has been signed by 164 countries.

But that public platform came at a price.

Her marriage disintegrated, with Diana blaming Charles' continuing liaison with longtime mistress, Camilla Parker Bowles. The princess also struggled with bulimia and acknowledged suicide attempts, according to "Diana: Her True Story — In Her Own Words," published in 1992 based on tapes Diana sent to author Andrew Morton.

"When I started my public life, 12 years ago, I understood the media might be interested in what I did," Diana said in 1993. "But I was not aware of how overwhelming that attention would become. Nor the extent to which it would affect both my public duties and my personal life, in a manner that's been hard to bear."

In the end, it contributed to her death.

On Aug. 30, 1997, a group of paparazzi camped outside the Hotel Ritz in Paris in hopes of getting shots of Diana and boyfriend Dodi Fayed pursued their car to the Pont de l'Alma tunnel, where their driver lost control and crashed.

Diana died Aug. 31, 1997.

A stunned world mourned. Bouquets of flowers, many including personal notes, carpeted the grounds outside Diana's home in Kensington Palace. Weeping citizens lined the streets outside Westminster Abbey during her funeral.

The public reaction contrasted with that of the royal family, who were criticized for not quickly appearing in public and refusing to lower the flag over Buckingham Palace to half-staff.

The mourning prompted soul-searching among members of the House of Windsor. They set about to better understand why Diana's death had prompted such an overwhelming spectacle, said Sally Bedell Smith, a historian and author of "Diana in Search of Herself."

"I think her legacy was something that the queen in her wisdom (sought) to adapt in the early years after her death," Smith said of focus groups and studies the monarchy used to grasp Diana's appeal.

"The queen was more likely to interact with people, and I think you see the informality magnified now, particularly with William and Kate," she said.

William, his wife, Kate, for example, made improving mental health services a primary goal, going so

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far as to publicly discuss their own struggles. Harry also is a champion for wounded military veterans.

The rehabilitation of Charles' reputation had to wait until public anger over his treatment of Diana began to fade. That's now well under way, helped by his 2005 marriage to Camilla, who softened his image. The queen earlier this year said she hoped Camilla would become queen consort when Charles ascends the throne, trying to heal old wounds.

But there are lessons for the monarchy to learn as it struggles with the fallout from the scandal over Prince Andrew's links to convicted pedophile Jeffrey Epstein. Beyond that, there's the decision of Harry and his wife, Meghan, to give up royal duties for life in Southern California.

Meghan, an American biracial former actress who grew up in Los Angeles, has said she felt constrained by palace life and that a member of the royal family even inquired about the potential skin color of her first child before he was born.

This episode shows the royals haven't fully learned the lesson of Diana, said Owens, author of "The Family Firm: Monarchy, Mass Media and the British Public 1932-1953."

"Once again, not enough room was created," Owens said of Meghan.

Diana had her own struggles with the palace, airing her grievances in a 1995 BBC interview that continues to make headlines. The BBC was forced to apologize last year after an investigation found reporter Martin Bashir used "deceitful methods" to secure the interview.

Diana's brother said this year that the interview and the way it was obtained contributed to Diana's death because it led her to refuse continued protection from the palace after her divorce.

But her words about how she wished to be viewed remain firmly in memory.

"I'd like to be a queen of people's hearts, in people's hearts, but I don't see myself being queen of this country," Diana said in the interview. "I don't think many people will want me to be queen."

Today in History: August 31, U.S. mission in Iraq ends

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Aug. 31, the 243rd day of 2022. There are 122 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 31, 2010, President Barack Obama ended the U.S. combat mission in Iraq, declaring no victory after seven years of bloodshed and telling those divided over the war in his country and around the world: "It is time to turn the page."

On this date:

In 1881, the first U.S. tennis championships (for men only) began in Newport, Rhode Island.

In 1886, an earthquake with an estimated magnitude of 7.3 devastated Charleston, South Carolina, killing at least 60 people, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

In 1962, the Caribbean nation of Trinidad and Tobago became independent of British colonial rule.

In 1980, Poland's Solidarity labor movement was born with an agreement signed in Gdansk (guh-DANSK') that ended a 17-day-old strike.

In 1992, white separatist Randy Weaver surrendered to authorities in Naples, Idaho, ending an 11-day siege by federal agents that had claimed the lives of Weaver's wife, son and a deputy U.S. marshal. (Weaver was acquitted of murder and all other charges in connection with the confrontation; he was convicted of failing to appear for trial on firearms charges and was sentenced to 18 months in prison but given credit for 14 months he'd already served.)

In 1994, the Irish Republican Army declared a cease-fire. Russia officially ended its military presence in the former East Germany and the Baltics after half a century.

In 1996, three adults and four children drowned when their vehicle rolled into John D. Long Lake in Union, South Carolina; they had gone to see a monument to the sons of Susan Smith, who had drowned the two boys in Oct. 1994.

In 1997, Prince Charles brought Princess Diana home for the last time, escorting the body of his former

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wife to a Britain that was shocked, grief-stricken and angered by her death in a Paris traffic accident earlier that day.

In 2005, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin reported "a significant number of dead bodies in the water" following Hurricane Katrina; Nagin ordered virtually the entire police force to abandon search-and-rescue efforts and to instead stop increasingly hostile thieves.

In 2016, on Mexican soil for the first time as the Republican presidential nominee, a firm but measured Donald Trump defended the right of the United States to build a massive border wall along its southern flank, standing up for the centerpiece of his immigration plan during a joint press conference with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto.

In 2019, a gunman carried out a shooting rampage that stretched ten miles between the Texas communities of Midland and Odessa, leaving seven people dead before police killed the gunman outside a movie theater in Odessa.

In 2020, at a rally in Pittsburgh, Democrat Joe Biden resoundingly condemned violent protesters and called for their prosecution; he accused President Donald Trump of causing the divisions that had ignited the violence. Trump reiterated that he blamed radical troublemakers who he said were stirred up and backed by Biden.

Ten years ago: In a speech to an annual Federal Reserve conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Chairman Ben Bernanke sent a clear message that the Fed would do more to help the still-struggling U.S. economy, but did not specify exactly what, or when. Writer Richard Bach, author of "Jonathan Livingston Seagull," was seriously hurt after his small plane went down in Washington state.

Five years ago: Rescuers began a block-by-block search of tens of thousands of Houston homes, looking for anyone who might have been left behind in the floodwaters from Hurricane Harvey. The Trump administration ordered Russia to close its consulate in San Francisco and offices in Washington and New York, intensifying tensions between Washington and Moscow; Russia was given 48 hours to comply. Iraq's prime minister said the northern town of Tal Afar had been "fully liberated" from the Islamic State group after a nearly two-week operation.

One year ago: President Joe Biden said the U.S. airlift to extract more than 120,000 Americans, Afghans and allies from Afghanistan to end a 20-year war was an "extraordinary success," even though more than 100 Americans and thousands of Afghans who wanted to leave were not yet out; he defended his decision to withdraw all U.S. troops, saying he was "not going to extend this forever war." Hundreds of thousands of people in Louisiana sweltered in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida with no electricity, no tap water and precious little gasoline; the mayor of New Orleans ordered a nighttime curfew after the storm left the city in darkness. The Texas Legislature passed a sweeping GOP rewrite of election laws after months of protests by Democrats; the measure would tighten already-strict voting rules, banning 24-hour polling locations and empowering partisan poll watchers.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Jack Thompson is 82. Violinist Itzhak Perlman is 77. Singer Van Morrison is 77. Rock musician Rudolf Schenker (The Scorpions) is 74. Actor Richard Gere is 73. Actor Stephen Henderson is 73. Olympic gold medal track and field athlete Edwin Moses is 67. Rock singer Glenn Tilbrook (Squeeze) is 65. Rock musician Gina Schock (The Go-Go's) is 65. Singer Tony DeFranco (The DeFranco Family) is 63. R&B musician Larry Waddell (Mint Condition) is 59. Actor Jaime P. Gomez is 57. Rock musician Jeff Russo (Tonic) is 53. Singer-composer Deborah Gibson is 52. Actor Zack Ward is 52. Golfer Padraig (PAH'-drig) Harrington is 51. Actor Chris Tucker is 50. Actor Sara Ramirez is 47. R&B singer Tamara (Trina & Tamara) is 45.