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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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Aaron Severson, Brett Anderson, Darrell Hillestad and Branden Abeln erected the tent at the Groton Airport for the fly-in/walkin this weekend. There was also a helper in the skidsteer. The event runs Friday through Monday. The airport is located about five miles north of Groton.

The contractor that was coming to work on the water reservoir is not able to do the painting on September 1st as planned.

The new date for water restrictions has been set for September 10th.

No irrigation systems are allowed to run starting September 10th.

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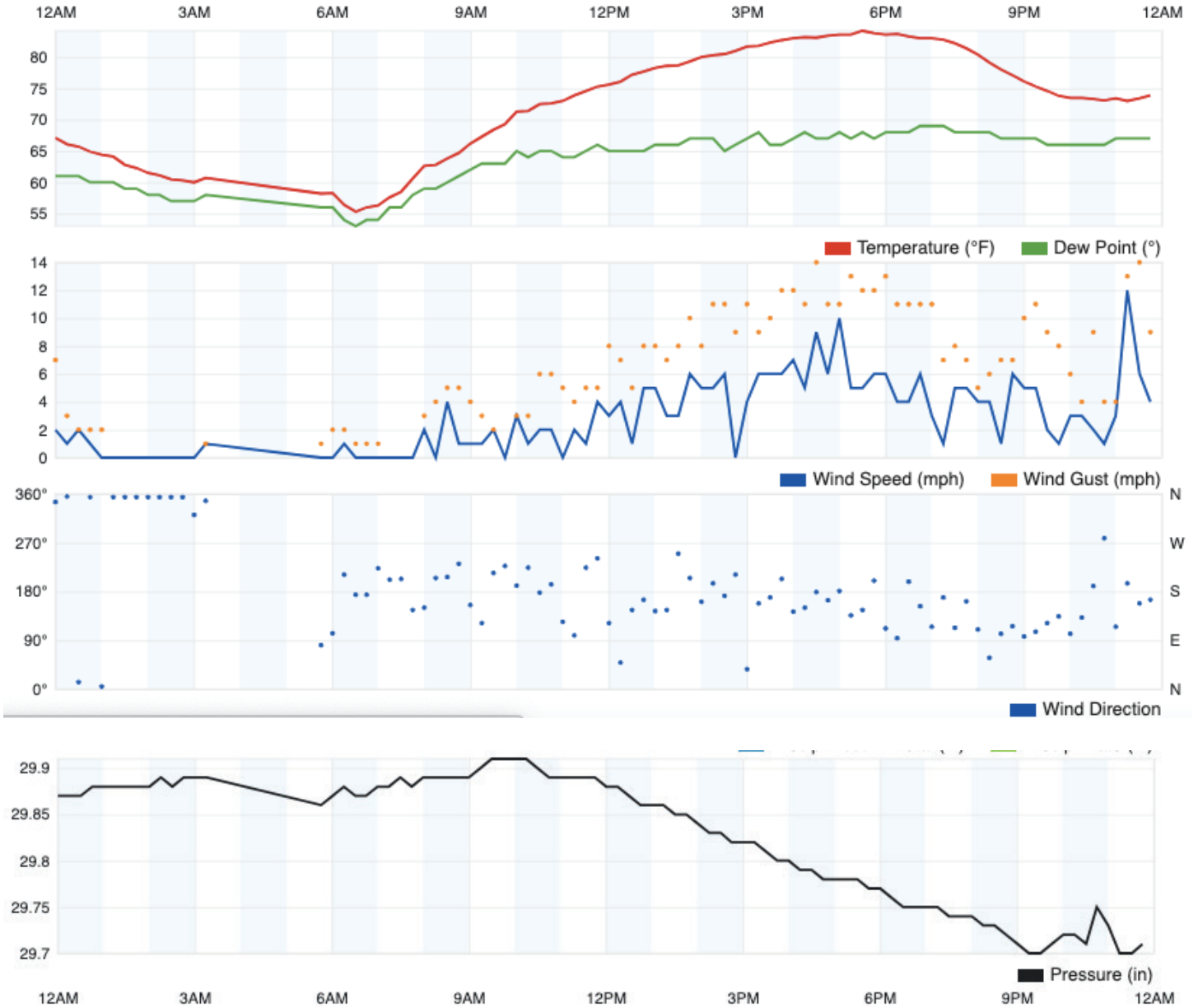
There have been some guest people who have been doing the play-by-play action on GDILIVE.COM. Tuesday night in Groton, Anna Fjeldheim and Aspen Johnson did the C match while Justin Hanson and Ryan Tracy did the varsity match.

(Photos by Paul Kosel)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Hot

High: 91 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 62 °F

Friday



Sunny

High: 81 °F

Friday
Night



Clear

Low: 48 °F

Saturday



Sunny

High: 75 °F

Thursday Sept 1

Friday Sept 2

Light winds become southerly and breezy

10 AM - 1 PM

Temperatures Peak
Low 90s Across NE SD and WC MN
Upper 90s along & west of the Missouri River

3 PM - 6 PM

Winds switch to the north and become gusty as cold front moves through

1 AM - 6 AM

Isolated shower or thunderstorm over far northeast SD / west central MN

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
Aberdeen, SD



Increasing southerly winds and hot temperatures can be expected this afternoon. Late tonight into Friday a cold front will slide across the region. Winds will switch around to the north and cooler air will follow. There is a small chance that this front may spark a shower or thunderstorm across northeast South Dakota or west central MN, but by-and-far the region is expected to remain dry.

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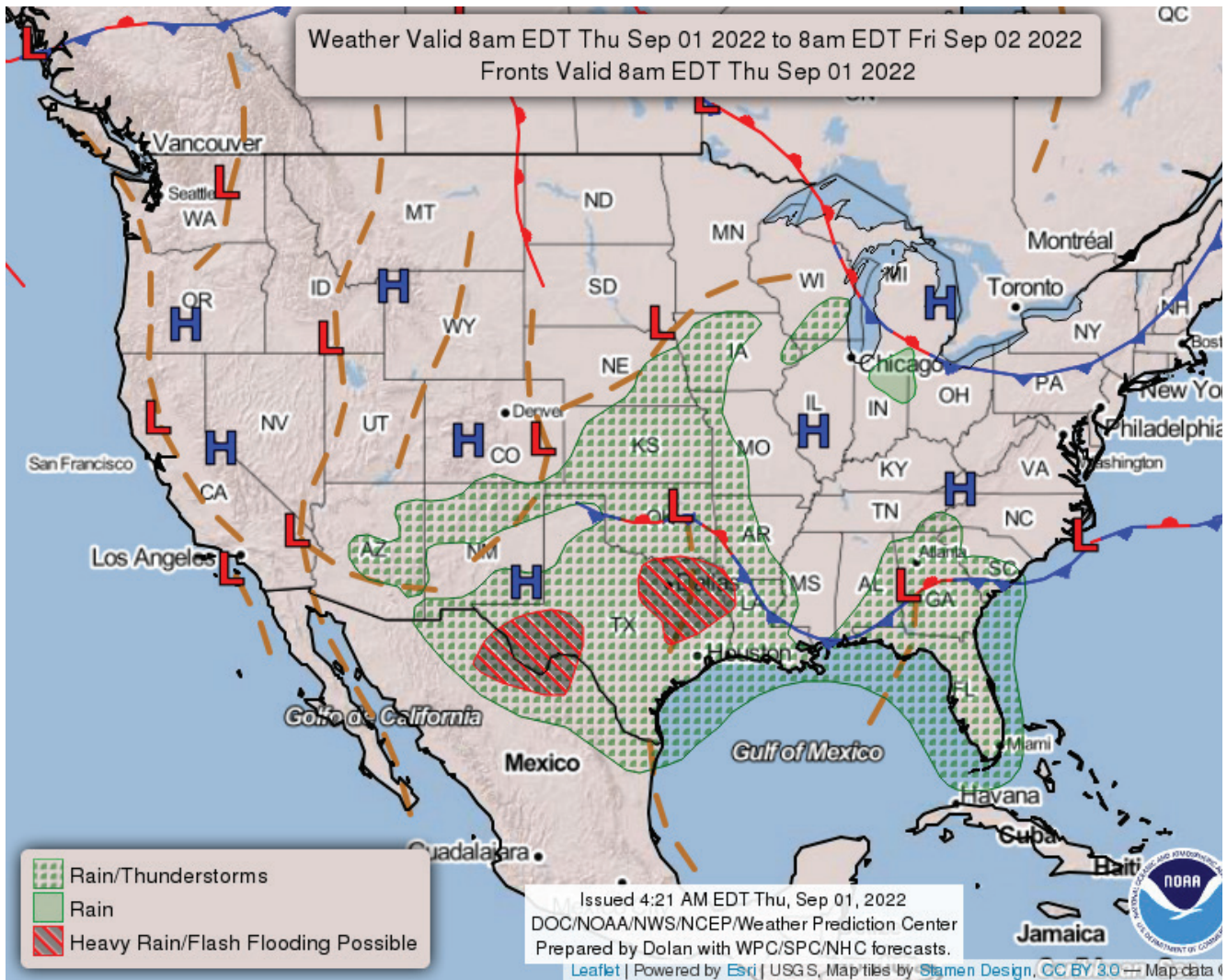
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 87 °F at 5:10 PM
Low Temp: 56 °F at 4:38 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 4:04 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 19 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 102 in 1970
Record Low: 30 in 1893
Average High: 80°F
Average Low: 52°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 0.07
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 16.41
Precip Year to Date: 15.96
Sunset Tonight: 8:11:52 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:53:58 AM



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Today in Weather History

September 1, 1990: Several severe thunderstorms in northwest South Dakota dropped from penny to softball size hail during the afternoon and early evening hours. The hail caused a good deal of structural damage to houses and farm buildings. The largest hailstone of 4 inches in diameter was reported at Sorum in Perkins County. There was also a wind gust to 86 mph measured at Buffalo during a severe thunderstorm.

September 1, 2010: A couple of weak tornadoes touched down briefly in the late evening west of Tulare with no damage occurring.

1859: One of the largest geomagnetic storms on record occurred on this day in 1859

1862: The Battle of Ox Hill (or Chantilly) is also known as the only major Civil War battle to have been fought during a storm. "A severe thunderstorm erupted, resulting in limited visibility and an increased dependence on the bayonet, as the rain soaked the ammunition of the infantry and made it useless." From Taylor, Paul. *He Hath Loosed the Fateful Lightning: The Battle of Ox Hill (Chantilly), September 1, 1862.*

1869: Cleveland Abbe issued the first Weather Bulletin for the city of Cincinnati, Ohio. It contained a few observations telegraphed from distant observers and the "probabilities" for the next day. The bulletin was written by hand.

1894: The Great Hinckley Fire, which burned an area of at least 200,000 acres or perhaps more than 250,000 acres including the town of Hinckley, Minnesota occurred on this day. The official death count was 418 though the actual number of fatalities was likely higher. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the History Channel.

1897 - Hailstone drifts six feet deep were reported in Washington County, IA. (The Weather Channel)

1914 - The town of Bloomington, MI, was deluged with 9.78 inches of rain in 24 hours to establish a state record. (31st-1st) (The Weather Channel)

1928: Leslie Gray from the Weather Bureau in San Francisco was the first weather forecaster to be deployed to a wildfire.

1952: A cold front brought damaging winds to Fort Worth, Texas, including the Carswell Air Force Base where thirty-five B-36 planes received damage. The anemometer indicated 90 mph winds before being smashed by debris.

1955 - The temperature at Los Angeles, CA, soared to an all-time high of 110 degrees during an eight day string of 100 degree weather. (David Ludlum)

1961: An F4 tornado traveled through parts of Butler and Bremer Counties in Iowa. Unfortunately, there is limited information in the Storm Data entry about this event. Per Thomas Grazulis in *Significant Tornadoes*, the tornado began NW of Dumont and ended NE of Horton. Several farms along the path were "leveled". It was reported at one farm that fruit jars were "sucked out of the basement" after the house was swept away. There were 7 injuries reported with this event and zero fatalities.

1974: Lt. Judy Neuffer became the first female to fly a Hurricane Hunter aircraft through the eye of a hurricane.

1979 - A home in Centerville TN was hit by lightning and totally destroyed. It marked the third time that the house had been hit by lightning since being built in 1970. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Cool Canadian air invaded the Midwest. Six cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Indianapolis IN with a reading of 44 degrees. Hot weather continued in the northwestern U.S. Five cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Hanover WA, where the mercury soared to 106 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced heavy rain in the Upper Mississippi Valley. Ely, MN, was drenched with three inches of rain in two hours, and pelted with one inch hail. The heavy rain flooded streets and basements, and the high water pressure which resulted blew the covers off manholes. (The National Weather Summary)(Storm Data)

2017: The temperature at Downtown San Francisco reached 106° setting their all-time record high. The previous record was 103° on June 14th, 2000.



When We Gather Together

Scripture: Hebrews 10:19–25 (NIV)

A Call to Persevere in Faith

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching..

Insight By: Bill Crowder

While the author of the letter to the Hebrews is anonymous, we're given solid ideas about its intended audience. As the title of the book suggests, the first readers were Hebrews—in particular, Jews who'd come to faith in Jesus and were then scattered abroad due to persecution. Their Jewish identity is, in part, seen in the author's use of temple and sacrifice imagery related to Judaism—then showing how the law was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. But in examining the text of the letter, many scholars are convinced that, in addition to the audience being Jewish believers in Christ, they also were wavering in their faith. The presence of some strident “warning” passages seems to support that contention. However, in a number of passages the writer invites his readers to join him in the journey of faith, repeatedly using the phrase “let us” to express that invitation (see Hebrews 4:1,11,14,16; 10:22–24; 12:1,28; 13:13,15)..

Comment By: Kirsten Holmberg

Denmark is among the happiest countries in the world, according to the World Happiness Report. The Danes weather their lengthy, dark winters by gathering with friends to share a warm drink or a gracious meal. The word they use for the feelings associated with those moments is *hygge* (hoo-gah). *Hygge* helps them offset the impact of enjoying less sunlight than their counterparts at lower latitudes. By circling around a simple table with loved ones, their hearts are nourished.

The writer of Hebrews encourages gathering together as a community. He acknowledges that there will be difficult days—with challenges far more significant than the weather—requiring those who follow Christ to persevere in faith. Though Jesus has made certain our acceptance by God through our faith in the Savior, we may struggle against shame or doubt or real opposition. By gathering together, we have the privilege of encouraging one another. When we're sharing company, we're able to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds,” which bolsters our faith (Hebrews 10:24).

Gathering with friends doesn't assure us of a ranking on a “happiness report.” It is, however, something the Bible offers as a means to bear us up in faith under the common frustrations of life. What a wonderful reason to seek out the community of a church or to open our homes—with an attitude of Danish simplicity—to nourish one another's hearts!.

Reflect and Prayer: How has gathering together with others encouraged you? Who can you encourage with an open heart?

Thank You, God, that I can encourage other believers and be encouraged by them when we gather together.

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2022-23 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

01-14-17-23-31

(one, fourteen, seventeen, twenty-three, thirty-one)

Estimated jackpot: \$42,000

Lotto America

04-22-41-43-52, Star Ball: 4, ASB: 2

(four, twenty-two, forty-one, forty-three, fifty-two; Star Ball: four; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,930,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 169,000,000

Powerball

07-08-19-24-28, Powerball: 1, Power Play: 2

(seven, eight, nineteen, twenty-four, twenty-eight; Powerball: one; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$148,000,000

Chargers' Pipkins turns it around to win right tackle job

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

COSTA MESA, Calif. (AP) — One year ago, Trey Pipkins III was struggling to maintain his place on the Los Angeles Chargers' roster.

Today, he is their starting offensive right tackle.

Pipkins' progress over the past year and consistent training camp helped him win the starting spot over Storm Norton going into the regular-season opener against the Las Vegas Raiders on Sept. 11.

"I'm really proud of Trey. He deserves full credit because he's the one that invested so much in his game," coach Brandon Staley said. "His coaches, his teammates on the O-line, have really helped him get to where he's at today."

Pipkins is finally showing why he was only the second player drafted out of Sioux Falls when the Chargers took him in the third round in 2019. He beat out Norton, who started 15 games at right tackle last season after Bryan Bulaga suffered a season-ending back injury during the first half of the opener.

Pipkins and Norton both got plenty of snaps during the preseason, but Pipkins ended up getting more with the first team, especially the last two weeks of training camp.

"A lot of validation. I don't know if validation in myself, but more that it felt good to get the belief of everybody around me," Pipkins said about winning the starting job. "That was a cool experience, just to put that work in and come back and have people see it, respect it, things like that."

Pipkins — who has appeared in 38 games with 10 starts — began turning things around late last season. After struggling as an extra lineman in jumbo packages the first six games, he was inactive for four straight games.

When Rashawn Slater landed on the COVID-19/reserve list before a Week 15 Thursday night game against Kansas City, Pipkins stepped in and had one of the better games of his career. He didn't allow a quarterback pressure two weeks later in a start at right tackle against Denver.

Offensive coordinator Joe Lombardi also noticed a difference in Pipkins after being benched.

"We saw him perform in a consistent fashion and a successful fashion," Lombardi said. "I don't know if I saw it right away, because we're back in practice and it's not the same kind of evaluation. But then when he went into the games and played well, I think we saw like, 'Hey, this guy has grown up a little bit.'"

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During the past offseason, Pipkins went to Dallas and worked with offensive line coach Duke Merriweather, who works with a number of NFL linemen, including Slater.

Pipkins said his biggest areas of improvement after working with Merriweather was his sets in pass protection and where he places his hands in run-blocking.

"There have been a lot of different areas. I think just in the technical side of my game, there's just so much more that I've learned and so many big things that I've added to my game that have helped me a ton," Pipkins said.

Pipkins' progress is also a positive note for a 2019 Chargers draft class that hasn't made much of an impact. Defensive tackle and first-round pick Jerry Tillery did not have his fifth-year option picked up while safety Nasir Adderley, a second-round selection, has also been inconsistent.

The Chargers' offensive line has completely flipped over in just two seasons. Center Corey Linsley and left guard Matt Feiler were signed as free agents last year with left tackle Slater being selected in the first round. The Bolts addressed the line again in the first round this year with the selection of right guard Zion Johnson.

While Pipkins might wish he could have made progress quicker, he isn't regretting his journey so far.

"It all led to here, so I can't complain about where I'm at now," he said. "There are times that I look back and I'm like, 'Oh, I wish that I played a little better here,' obviously, things like that. But it all led me to where I'm at now, and I'm ready to take advantage of it."

Deadly bird flu returns to Midwest earlier than expected

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Bird flu has returned to the Midwest earlier than authorities expected after a lull of several months, with the highly pathogenic disease being detected in two commercial turkey flocks in western Minnesota and a hobby flock in Indiana, officials said Wednesday.

The disease was detected after a farm in Meeker County reported an increase in mortality last weekend, the Minnesota Board of Animal Health said. The flock was euthanized to stop the spread. The board later reported that a second flock in the county tested positive Tuesday evening.

They were the first detections of avian influenza in Minnesota since May 31, when a backyard flock was struck in Becker County. Indiana's case was its first since a backyard flock there tested positive June 8, which had been the last detection in the Midwest before this week.

However, there have been several detections in western states in July and August, including California, where a half-dozen commercial farms have had to kill more than 425,000 chickens and turkeys since last week. There have also been cases in Washington, Oregon and Utah, plus a few in some eastern states.

"While the timing of this detection is a bit sooner than we anticipated, we have been preparing for a resurgence of the avian influenza we dealt with this spring," said Dr. Shauna Voss, the board's senior veterinarian. "HPAI is here and biosecurity is the first line of defense to protect your birds."

The Indiana State Board of Animal Health reported that a small hobby flock of chickens, ducks and geese in northern Indiana's Elkhart County tested presumptively positive on Tuesday, though final confirmation from a federal lab was pending.

Across the country, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 414 flocks in 39 states have been affected since February, costing producers over 40 million birds, mostly commercial turkeys and chickens. The disease has struck 81 Minnesota flocks this year, requiring the killing of nearly 2.7 million birds.

Minnesota produces more turkeys annually than any other state.

This year's outbreak contributed to a spike in egg and meat prices, and killed an alarming number of bald eagles and other wild birds. It also affected some zoos. It appeared to be waning in June, but officials warned then that another surge could take hold this fall.

The disease is typically carried by migrating birds. It only occasionally affects humans, such as farm workers, and the USDA keeps poultry from infected flocks out of the food supply. A widespread outbreak in 2015 killed 50 million birds across 15 states and cost the federal government nearly \$1 billion.

To China's fury, UN accuses Beijing of Uyghur rights abuses

By KEN MORITSUGU and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The U.N. accused China of serious human rights violations that may amount to “crimes against humanity” in a long-delayed report examining a crackdown on Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim ethnic groups. Beijing on Thursday denounced the assessment as a fabrication cooked up by Western nations.

For several years, human rights groups have accused China of sweeping a million or more people from the minority groups into detention camps in a ruthless campaign against extremism that has struck fear into large segments of the population in the far western province of Xinjiang.

The assessment from the Geneva-based U.N. human rights office largely corroborated earlier reporting by researchers, advocacy groups and the news media, and it added the weight of the world body to the conclusions. But it was not clear what impact it would have.

Still, among Uyghurs who have fled overseas, there was a palpable sense of relief that the report had finally seen the light of day since many worried that it would never be published. Several saw it as a vindication of their cause and of years of advocacy work.

“The report is pretty damning, and a strong indictment on China’s crimes against humanity,” said Rayhan Asat, a Uyghur lawyer whose brother is imprisoned in Xinjiang. “For years, the Chinese government has said the Uyghurs are terrorists. Now, we can point to them and say, you’re the terrorists.”

Human rights groups, Japan and Germany also quickly welcomed the report, which had become caught up in a tug-of-war between China and major Western nations as well as human rights groups that have criticized the repeated delays in releasing the document. Many Geneva diplomats believe it was nearly complete a year ago.

The assessment released late Wednesday concluded that China has committed serious human rights violations under its anti-terrorism and anti-extremism policies and calls for “urgent attention” from the U.N., the world community and China itself to address them.

Human rights groups renewed calls for the U.N. Human Rights Council, which meets next month, to set up an independent international body to investigate the allegations. But China showed no sign of backing off its blanket denials or portraying the criticism as a politicized smear campaign.

“The assessment is a patchwork of false information that serves as political tools for the U.S. and other Western countries to strategically use Xinjiang to contain China,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said. “It again shows that the U.N. Human Rights Office has been reduced to an enforcer and accomplice of the U.S. and other Western countries.”

In a sign of China’s fury, it issued a 122-page rebuttal, entitled “Fight against Terrorism and Extremism in Xinjiang: Truth and Facts,” that was posted by the U.N. along with the report.

Its findings were drawn in part from interviews with former detainees and others familiar with conditions at eight detention centers.

The report said that descriptions of the detentions were marked by patterns of torture and other cruel and inhumane treatment and that allegations of rape and other sexual violence appeared credible.

“The extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention of members of Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim groups ... in (the) context of restrictions and deprivation more generally of fundamental rights ... may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity,” the report said.

It made no mention of genocide, which some countries, including the United States, have accused China of committing in Xinjiang.

The rights office said it could not confirm estimates that a million or more people were detained in the internment camps in Xinjiang, but added it was “reasonable to conclude that a pattern of large-scale arbitrary detention occurred” at least between 2017 and 2019.

Beijing has closed many of the camps, which it called vocational training and education centers, but hundreds of thousands of people continue to languish in prison, many on vague, secret charges.

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The report called on China to release all individuals arbitrarily detained and to clarify the whereabouts of those who have disappeared and whose families are seeking information about them.

Japan, which has recently become more vocal in its criticism of China's conduct in Xinjiang, was one of the first foreign governments to comment on the report.

"Japan is highly concerned about human rights conditions in Xinjiang, and we believe that it is important that universal values such as freedom, basic human rights and rule of law are also guaranteed in China," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said.

A German Foreign Ministry statement also welcomed the publication of the report, saying it confirms there is cause for the "greatest concern." It called for the immediate release of all those arbitrarily detained and said that Germany was working with the EU to combat the use of forced labor — as has been alleged in the production of goods from Xinjiang that eventually are sold around the world.

Human Rights Watch said the report laid a solid foundation for further U.N. action to establish accountability for the abuses.

"Never has it been so important for the U.N. system to stand up to Beijing, and to stand with victims," said John Fisher, the deputy director of global advocacy for the group.

That the report was released was in some ways as important as its contents.

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said she had to resist pressure both to publish and not publish. The report was published just minutes before her tenure officially ended.

She had announced in June that the report would be released by end of her four-year term on Aug. 31, triggering a swell in back-channel campaigns — including letters from civil society, civilians and governments on both sides of the issue.

"To be perfectly honest, the politicization of these serious human rights issues by some states did not help," said Bachelet.

Critics had said a failure to publish the report would have been a glaring black mark on her tenure.

"The inexcusable delay in releasing this report casts a stain" on the record of the U.N. human rights office, said Agnès Callamard, the secretary-general of Amnesty International, "but this should not deflect from its significance."

Woman arrested after accusing Taliban official of rape

By RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — The Taliban announced they have arrested and will soon sentence an Afghan woman who appeared in a video on social media earlier this week and said a senior Taliban official forced her into marriage and raped her repeatedly.

In the video, the woman, who identified herself only by her first name Elaha, wept as she described being beaten and raped by former Taliban Interior Ministry spokesman Saeed Khosti. She said she was speaking from an apartment in Kabul where the Taliban had confined her after she tried to escape the country, and she pleaded for rescue.

"These may be my last words. He will kill me, but it is better to die once than to die every time," she said.

Late Wednesday, a day after the video surfaced, the Taliban-run Supreme Court said in a tweet that Elaha had been arrested for defamation on orders of the chief justice Abdul Hakeem Haqqani. Without mentioning any trial taking place, it said she would "soon be sentenced according to Sharia law."

"No one is allowed to harm the name of Mujahideen or defame the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the 20-years of holy jihad," it said, referring to the Taliban and their war against U.S.-led troops and the U.S.-allied government, which the hardline insurgents toppled just over a year ago.

Since the Taliban takeover of the country in August 2021, Afghan women activists, as well as Amnesty International, have reported an increase in forced marriages of women — including cases where Taliban officials coerced women into marriage by intimidating them or their families.

In the video, Elaha identified herself as a medical student at Kabul University and the daughter of an intelligence service general under the former government. She said Khosti had forced her into marriage

six months ago, when he still held the spokesman post. Khosti tried to marry her sister to another Taliban official, but her family successfully fled, she said.

"Saeed Khosti beat me a lot. Every night he raped me," she said, breaking into tears.

She said she tried to escape to neighboring Pakistan, but the Taliban arrested her at the border crossing and brought her back to Kabul and confined her to an apartment there. After they brought her back, she heard a Taliban member telling Khosti that she had lived under the former government for 20 years and should be stoned to death as an infidel, she said.

In tweets Wednesday, Khosti confirmed that he had married Elaha, but he denied mistreating her. "I assure you that I have not done anything illegal," he wrote. In recent months, Khosti was transferred out of his spokesman post and it is not clear what his new position is.

Khosti said he divorced her after finding she "has a problem in her faith" and he accused her of insulting Islam's holy book, the Quran.

Elaha's video was widely shared on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp groups, sparking a wave of calls for help and denunciations of the Taliban from women activists.

Since seizing power, the Taliban have imposed increasing restrictions on women. They have prevented many women from working, barred teenage girls from school and required women in public to cover themselves completely except for their eyes. The world has refused to recognize the Taliban's rule, demanding it respect human rights and show tolerance for other groups.

New online dashboard helps flyers with delays, cancellations

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Amid months of mass flight cancellations and delays, the Department of Transportation has launched a customer service dashboard to help vacationers ahead of the travel-heavy Labor Day weekend.

Starting Thursday, travelers will be able to check the dashboard and see what kinds of guarantees, refunds or compensation the major domestic airlines offer in case of flight delays or cancellations. It's designed to allow travelers to shop around and favor those airlines that offer the best compensation.

The dashboard is part of an extended pressure campaign from Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who has publicly challenged the major carriers to improve service and transparency after a summer marred by cancellations and flight delays. As summer travel returned to nearly pre-coronavirus pandemic levels, airlines struggled to keep pace, with mass cancellations being blamed on staffing shortages, particularly among pilots.

"Passengers deserve transparency and clarity on what to expect from an airline when there is a cancellation or disruption," Buttigieg said in a statement Wednesday. The new tool, he said, will help travelers to "easily understand their rights, compare airline practices, and make informed decisions."

The dashboard compares all the major domestic airlines' policies on issues such as which offer meals for delays of more than three hours and which offer to rebook flights on the same or different airlines at no additional charge. It focuses on what it calls "controllable" cancellations or delays — meaning those caused by mechanical issues, staffing shortages or delays in cleaning, fueling or baggage handling. Delays or cancellations caused by weather or security concerns do not count.

The Department of Transportation is hoping that the dashboard will encourage competition among airlines to offer the most transparency and the best protections for customers.

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

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

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China demands US drop tech export curbs after Nvidia warning

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — The Chinese government on Thursday called on Washington to repeal its technology export curbs after chip designer Nvidia Corp. said a new product might be delayed and some work might be moved out of China.

The latest controls add to mounting U.S.-Chinese tension over technology and security. American officials say they need to limit the spread of technology that can be used to make weapons.

Nvidia said it was told Friday it needs a U.S. government license to export any product with performance equal to its A100 graphics processing chips or better to China, Hong Kong or Russia. It said buyers of the A100 and development of the newer H100 might be affected.

China's Commerce Ministry accused Washington of abusing export controls to limit semiconductor sales to China. It said trade curbs would disrupt supply chains and global economic recovery.

"China firmly opposes this," said a ministry spokesperson, Shu Jueting. "The U.S. side should immediately stop its erroneous practices, treat companies from all countries equally, including from China, and do more to contribute to world economic stability."

U.S. officials increasingly worry about Chinese technology development as both a strategic threat and a potential challenge to American industrial leadership.

Washington has tightened controls and lobbied allies to limit Chinese access to the most advanced chips and tools to develop its own. China is spending heavily to develop its fledgling producers but cannot make high-end chips used in the most advanced smartphones and other devices.

Nvidia said it may be required to "transition certain operations out of China." The company said it was asking the U.S. government for exemptions for its development and support activities.

It said it would try to meet Chinese customer needs with products that aren't subject to license requirements. It said the company may seek a license for customers that need them but "has no assurance" the U.S. government will agree.

EXPLAINER: Why is China so angry over UN report on Xinjiang?

BEIJING (AP) — China has responded furiously to a United Nations report on alleged human rights abuses in its northwestern Xinjiang region targeting Uyghurs and other mainly Muslim ethnic minorities.

The report has been in the works for years and was released despite Chinese efforts to delay or block it, aware of how it could validate claims that more than 1 million ethnic minority members were forcibly sent to centers it says were for vocational training.

Those who were held, their relatives and monitoring groups describe them as prison-like reeducation centers where inmates were forced to denounce Islam and their traditional culture, while swearing fidelity to the ruling Communist Party.

The camps have been part of a widespread campaign of repression in Xinjiang, allegedly including involuntary sterilizations of women, forced labor, the demolition of mosques and other religious sites, the separation of Muslim children from their families and the harassment of minority members living abroad.

WHERE IS XINJIANG AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CHINA?

Xinjiang is a vast but sparsely populated region of mountains, forests and deserts in far northwestern China that borders Russia, Pakistan and several Central Asian nations. The ancient Silk Road ran through parts of it and various nationalities and Chinese empires controlled its cities and oases over the centuries, with the Communist Party taking complete control following its 1949 victory in the Chinese civil war.

The region contains a wealth of natural resources, including oil, gas and rare earth minerals, but perhaps its most important value is as a strategic buffer that extends China's influence westward. While China and Russia have largely aligned their foreign policies in recent years, Xinjiang was on the front line of their Cold War rivalry and remains important as an assertion of Chinese influence in Moscow's back yard.

WHAT PROMPTED CHINA'S CRACKDOWN ON MINORITIES?

Xinjiang's Uyghurs, along with the closely related Kazakh and Kyrgyz, are predominantly Turkic Muslims

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who are culturally, religiously and linguistically distinct from China's dominant Han ethnic group. Repression under Communist rule, particularly during the violent and xenophobic 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution, stirred deep animosity in Xinjiang toward the government, aggravated further by the migration of Han to the region and their domination of political and economic life.

Uyghurs established two short-lived independent governments in Xinjiang prior to the Communist Party's seizure of power, and the desire for self-rule endured and was nurtured by resentment against heavy-handed Chinese rule. A protest movement began in the 1990s and remained at a relatively low level until simmering anger exploded in a 2009 riot in the regional capital of Urumqi that left an estimated 200 people dead. More violence followed within Xinjiang and as far away as Beijing, prompting Chinese leader Xi Jinping to order a massive crackdown starting in 2014.

WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR THE UN ACCUSATIONS?

With Xi's blessing, Xinjiang's hard-line leader, Chen Quanguo, who took office in 2016, began sending Uyghurs and others into a vast network of fortified camps without legal due process. It remains unclear what criteria were used to determine if a person needed to be sent for what the authorities called retraining or de-radicalization, but those who showed religious tendencies, the well-educated and anyone with foreign connections were especially susceptible.

Conditions in the camps have been described as overcrowded and unhygienic, with those inside forced to renounce their religion and culture and praise Xi and the Communist Party. Harsh punishments were meted out for those who refused to comply and the length of sentences were indeterminate. While China says it has closed the camps, many of those held have since received lengthy prison terms within a system that remains overwhelmingly opaque. The U.S. and others have labeled China's policies against Xinjiang minorities as "genocide."

WHAT HAS BEEN CHINA'S RESPONSE?

China has always denied targeting Uyghurs and others for their religion and culture, denouncing the accusations as a confection of lies by the West and saying its crackdown was aimed at quashing separatism, terrorism and religious extremism. It has said camp attendance was voluntary and no human rights were abused, although internal Chinese documents have frequently contradicted such claims.

Beijing has also cited carefully choreographed visits by journalists, diplomats and, most recently, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, as validating its claims. Some observers say the tide of criticism may have prompted Beijing to wind down the detentions earlier than planned to salvage its reputation among Muslim nations and in the developing world.

In a note accompanying the U.N. report, China's diplomatic mission in Geneva registered its strong opposition to the findings, which it said ignore human rights achievements in Xinjiang and the damage caused by terrorism and extremism to the population.

"Based on the disinformation and lies fabricated by anti-China forces and out of presumption of guilt, the so-called 'assessment' distorts China's laws, wantonly smears and slanders China, and interferes in China's internal affairs," the note said in part.

WHAT WILL BE THE OUTCOME FOR CHINA?

China's authoritarian leaders have outwardly defied criticism of their policies in Xinjiang, but have been unsuccessful in thwarting international sanctions on officials who were involved and bans on cotton and other commodities from the region. The report's release comes despite China's growing influence within the U.N. and its pressure campaign against critics in the human rights community.

China has maintained its defiance and appears to believe its policies have been effective and should continue, despite any costs to its international reputation. On Thursday, its Foreign Ministry scoffed at the U.N. report, saying it was "orchestrated and produced by the U.S. and some Western forces and is completely illegal and void."

"It is a patchwork of false information that serves as political tool for the U.S. and other Western countries to strategically use Xinjiang to contain China," ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said.

China locks down 21 million in Chengdu in COVID-19 outbreak

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese authorities have locked down Chengdu, a southwestern city of 21 million people, following a spike in COVID-19 cases.

Residents have been ordered to stay home, and about 70% of the flights have been suspended to and from the city, which is a major transit hub in Sichuan province and a governmental and economic center.

The start of the new school term has been delayed, although public transport continues to operate and citizens are permitted to leave the city if they can show a special need.

Under the rules announced Thursday, just one member of each family who can show a negative virus test within the past 24 hours is allowed out per day to buy necessities.

No word was issued on when the lockdown would be lifted.

Similar measures have seen millions of people confined to their homes in the northeastern city of Dalian, as well as Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei province that borders the capital Beijing.

Chengdu has reported around 1,000 cases in the latest outbreak and no deaths from the latest round of domestic transmission, but the extreme measures reflect China's rigid adherence to its "zero-COVID" policy that has exacted a major toll on the economy, with lockdowns, business closures and mass testing requirements.

China says the measures are necessary to prevent a wider spread of the virus, which was first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019. The fear of being caught in a lockdown situation or sent to a quarantine facility for even being in proximity with a person who tested positive has severely constrained people's work, consumption and travel habits.

UN inspectors head to Ukraine nuclear plant despite fighting

By DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The company that oversees Ukraine's nuclear power plants said shelling by Russian forces triggered a shutdown at one of the reactors at the Zaporizhzhia plant, underscoring the risks faced by a team of U.N. inspectors that was heading there Thursday to assess its safety.

A team from the International Atomic Energy Agency, led by its director Rafael Grossi, set off for the Russia-held nuclear power plant — Europe's largest — despite the heavy shelling for which Ukraine and Russia trade blame.

Ukraine's Enerhoatom said Russian mortar shelling led to the shutdown of one of its reactors by its emergency protection system. Shelling also damaged a backup power supply line used for in-house needs, and one of the plant's reactors that wasn't operating was switched to diesel generators, the company said.

"There has been increased military activity, including this morning until very recently," Grossi said, adding that after being briefed by the Ukrainian military he decided to get moving despite the inherent risks. "But weighing the pros and cons and having come so far, we are not stopping."

He noted that the risks are "very, very high" in the so-called grey zone between Ukrainian and Russian positions, but "we consider that we have the minimum conditions to move."

A spokesman for the IAEA later said that the mission has been delayed on the Ukrainian-controlled side of the frontline for some three hours, adding that Grossi "has personally negotiated with Ukrainian military authorities to be able to proceed and he remains determined that this important mission reaches the ZNPP today."

The Zaporizhzhia plant has been occupied by Russian forces but run by Ukrainian engineers since the early days of the 6-month-old war. Ukraine alleges Russia is using the plant as a shield, storing weapons there and launching attacks from around it, while Moscow accuses Ukraine of recklessly firing on the area.

Fighting in early March caused a brief fire at its training complex, and in recent days, the plant was temporarily knocked offline because of damage, heightening fears of a radiation leak or a reactor meltdown. Officials have begun distributing anti-radiation iodine tablets to nearby residents.

"We have a very important mission to accomplish," Grossi said, adding that "we are going to start immediately an assessment of the security and the safety situation at the plant."

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"I am going to consider the possibility of establishing a continued presence of the IAEA at the plant, which we believe is indispensable to stabilize the situation and to get regular, reliable, impartial, neutral updates of what the situation is there," he said.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Ukrainian forces unleashed an artillery barrage of the area and then sent a group of up to 60 scouts to try to seize control of the nuclear plant.

It said the Ukrainian troops arrived in seven speedboats, landing three kilometers northeast of the plant on the left bank of the Dnieper River and tried to seize it. The ministry said Russian forces "took steps to destroy the enemy," engaging warplanes. Russia's military said its forces also destroyed two barges carrying Ukrainian troops who attempted to land near the plant.

"The provocation by the Kyiv regime is intended to derail the arrival of the IAEA's group at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant," a ministry statement said.

Alexander Volga, head of the Russia-installed Enerhodar city administration, also said the Ukrainian troops that attempted to land were "blocked and destroyed." The administration also said at least three local residents were killed and one injured early Thursday from Ukrainian shelling.

He said the fighting had since abated and no "objective obstacles" remained to prevent the visit by the IAEA team, which had crossed a checkpoint in Russia-controlled territory and was expected to soon arrive in Enerhodar.

Ukrainian authorities, meanwhile, accused Russia of shelling Enerhodar and the territory of the nuclear power plant in a false flag attack intended to derail the arrival of the IAEA's team.

"We are demanding that Russia stop provocations and offer the IAEA unhindered access to the Ukrainian nuclear facility," said Zaporizhzhia Gov. Oleksandr Starukh.

Neither side's version of events could immediately be independently verified.

The fighting came as war-torn Ukraine endeavored Thursday to start the new academic year in the best way possible, with civilian areas still under threat of artillery fire and other weaponry — and children still among the victims. Just over half of schools in Ukraine were reopening to in-person education despite the risks.

In other developments:

- A U.S. intelligence assessment said Russia was facing severe manpower shortages as President Vladimir Putin's 6-month campaign in Ukraine rages on.

- North Korea said it was considering sending construction workers to help rebuild parts of Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine that have been battered by the fighting.

- The emergencies agency under the Russia-backed separatist government in the eastern region of Donetsk said 13 emergency responders were killed and nine others were wounded Thursday by Ukrainian shelling in Rubtsi, a village to the east of the city of Izyum in neighboring Kharkiv province. Much of the fighting in recent weeks and months has centered on the area.

AP-NORC poll: 2 in 10 report experience with gun violence

By COREY WILLIAMS and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — About 2 in 10 U.S. adults say they or someone close to them has had a personal experience with gun violence, according to a recent poll that shows Black and Hispanic adults are especially likely to have had their lives touched by it.

The poll by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 54% of Black Americans and 27% of Hispanic Americans reported that they or a close friend or family member experienced gun violence in the last five years, compared with 13% of white Americans. Overall, 21% of U.S. adults reported a personal tie to gun violence, such as being threatened by a gun or being a victim of a shooting.

Ebony Brown, a 39-year-old accountant in Atlanta, is among those who has seen gun violence touch those close to her. Her brother was shot to death in 2002 in Jacksonville, Florida, while visiting from college.

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"He was at the right place at the wrong time," said Brown, who is Black.

An acquaintance of a friend pulled a gun during an attempted robbery at a home and shot several people, including Brown's brother, who she said died instantly. Another person also was slain.

Brown said she doesn't consider herself a gun lover, but she's worried enough about becoming a victim of gun violence herself that she's considering getting a handgun.

"I'm really getting ready to get one. I've been to the range," Brown said. "My dad is a police officer and he wants me to have it."

The survey was conducted after a stretch of mass shootings across the U.S., from a grocery store in New York, an elementary school in Texas and a Fourth of July parade in Illinois — along with a smattering of incidents of gun violence in cities across the U.S. that don't always make national news but leave local communities on edge.

Professor Jens Ludwig, who is director of the University of Chicago's Crime Lab, said the 1 in 5 people with a friend or family member who was a victim of violence was a "strikingly high number."

It shows that those who experience gun violence "aren't the only victims," he said.

Ludwig compared the way gun violence affects entire communities to the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that the people who died or became very ill from COVID-19 weren't the only ones affected; kids were kept home from school, businesses closed, and people couldn't see loved ones.

The same is true with gun violence, Ludwig said. "People are changing the way they live," he said.

For example, he said, when people who can afford to leave cities where gun violence is a big problem move out in droves, it hurts everyone still there.

He cited Detroit as one example. Gun-related homicides increased from 2016 to 2020, from a rate of 37.6 per 100,000 people to 45.4 per 100,000 people, according to FBI data collected by the pro-gun control group Everytown for Gun Safety. Black people were 2.1 times more likely to die by gun homicides than white people, according to the data.

Following a particularly violent summer weekend in Detroit that saw two dozen nonfatal shootings and seven homicides, Police Chief James White denounced the rising gun violence in the city and across the nation.

"We understand these numbers make media headlines, but to us they represent people," White told reporters. "These represent families. This represents children. This represents husbands, wives, brothers and sisters. Our Detroit families are in pain. Neighbors near the gunfire are shaken and lives have been forever changed."

While most Americans say they feel gun violence has increased nationwide and in their states, 59% of Black Americans and 45% of Hispanics said that gun violence is on the rise in their communities, compared with 34% of white Americans. Similarly, people living in urban areas are more likely to say gun violence is rising in their communities than those in suburban or rural areas, 51% to 39% to 27%.

That is in line with recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The data has shown a spike in gun violence since the pandemic, with gun-related homicides increasing across the country in large and small metro areas and in rural areas. The data found Black people are disproportionately impacted by gun violence and are more likely to be the victims of gun crimes or homicides.

Brittany Samuels, a 31-year-old in Detroit, says she still carries physical scars from being shot at age 14 by her uncle, who she said was bipolar and schizophrenic, and fatally shot her grandmother, one of his coworkers and himself.

She said it has also shaped the way she thinks about gun violence and gun ownership, and she feels it is too easy for guns to get into the wrong hands.

Samuels, who is Black, said gun violence in her community has made her rethink where and when to go places, like skipping Detroit's downtown entertainment district or certain gas stations at certain times.

"You don't know if someone is going to rob you at gunpoint or if they are going to have a shootout in the middle of the gas station," she said. "I don't go when it's dark — even if it's in the morning. And you really won't catch me at a gas station that's not lit up."

Diego Saldana, 30, of Baldwin Park, California, in the Los Angeles metro area, said he found himself

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facing a 9mm handgun during an attempted robbery six months ago. He feels gun violence is on the rise and believes it's likely he will be a victim of gun violence again in the next five years.

"I think it's due to the (poor) economy — people are desperate for easy money," said Saldana, who is Mexican. "People ... are stressing about stuff and expressing it with violence. Everybody is on edge."

History's bookends: Putin reversed many Gorbachev reforms

By ANDREW KATELL Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — One stood for freedom, openness, peace and closer ties with the outside world. The other is jailing critics, muzzling journalists, pushing his country deeper into isolation and waging Europe's bloodiest conflict since World War II.

Such are history's bookends between Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union's last leader, and Vladimir Putin, Russia's president.

In many ways, Gorbachev, who died Tuesday, unwittingly enabled Putin. The forces Gorbachev unleashed spun out of control, led to his downfall and the Soviet Union's collapse.

Since coming to power in 1999, Putin has been taking a hard line that resulted in a near-complete reversal of Gorbachev's reforms.

When Gorbachev came to power as Soviet leader in 1985, he was younger and more vibrant than his predecessors. He broke with the past by moving away from a police state, embracing freedom of the press, ending his country's war in Afghanistan and letting go of Eastern European countries that had been locked in Moscow's communist orbit. He ended the isolation that had gripped the USSR since its founding.

It was an exciting, hopeful time for Soviet citizens and the world. Gorbachev brought the promise of a brighter future.

He believed in integration with the West, multi-lateralism and globalism to solve the world's problems, including ending armed conflicts and reducing the danger of nuclear weapons.

In marked contrast, Putin's worldview holds that the West is an "empire of lies," and democracy is chaotic, uncontrolled and dangerous. While mostly refraining from direct criticism, Putin implies that Gorbachev sold out to the West.

Returning to a communist-style mindset, Putin believes the West is imperialistic and arrogant, trying to impose its liberal values and policies on Russia and using the country as a scapegoat for its own problems.

He accuses Western leaders of trying to restart the Cold War and restrain Russia's development. He seeks a world order with Russia on equal footing with the United States and other major powers, and in some respects is trying to rebuild an empire.

Gorbachev sometimes bowed to Western pressure. Two years after U.S. President Ronald Reagan implored him to "tear down this wall" in a speech at the Berlin Wall, Gorbachev did so, indirectly, by not intervening in populist anti-communist revolutions in Eastern Europe. The dropping of the Iron Curtain and end of the Cold War followed.

At home, Gorbachev introduced two sweeping and dramatic policies — "glasnost" or openness — and "perestroika," a restructuring of Soviet society. Previously taboo subjects could now be discussed, in literature, the news media and society in general. He undertook economic reforms to allow private enterprise, moving away from a state-run economy.

He also loosened up on the dreaded police state, freed political prisoners such as Andrei Sakharov, and ended the Communist Party's monopoly on political power. Freer foreign travel, emigration and religious observances were also part of the mix.

Putin has veered away from Gorbachev's changes. He focused on restoring order and rebuilding the police state. An increasingly severe crackdown on dissent has involved jailing critics, branding them traitors and extremists, including for merely calling the "special military operation" in Ukraine a war. He sees some critics as foreign-funded collaborators of Russia's enemies.

In his quest for control, he's shut down independent news organizations and banned human rights and humanitarian organizations. He demands complete loyalty to the state and emphasizes traditional Russian

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family, religious and nationalistic tenets.

Gorbachev's leadership was not without failures. His more liberal policies were uneven, such as a bloody 1991 Soviet crackdown on the independence movement in the Soviet Baltic republic of Lithuania and the attempted early coverup of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster.

By 1988, he realized that trying to hide bad events wasn't working, so when a massive earthquake hit Armenia in December 1988, he opened the borders to emergency international help and allowed transparency about the destruction.

After nearly a decade of fighting in Afghanistan, Gorbachev ordered the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989, entered into multiple arms-control and disarmament agreements with the United States and other countries, and helped end the Cold War. For those efforts, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990.

But at home, Gorbachev's economic reforms didn't go well. Freeing industries from state control and allowing private enterprise too quickly and haphazardly created widespread shortages of food and consumer goods, worsened corruption and spawned a class of oligarchs.

The burgeoning independence movements in Soviet republics and other problems so angered Communist Party hard-liners that they attempted a coup against him in August 1991, further weakening his grip on power and leading to his resignation four months later.

In the end, many in Russia felt Gorbachev had left them with broken promises, dashed hopes and a weakened, humiliated country.

One who felt that way was Putin. For him, much of what Gorbachev did was a mistake. The biggest was the Soviet Union's collapse, what Putin called "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century."

The Soviet Union was disrespected, defeated and broken into pieces – 15 countries. For Putin, it was also personal, because as a KGB officer stationed in East Germany, he watched in horror as massive crowds staged the popular uprising that led to the removal of the Berlin Wall and Germany's reunification, at one point besieging his KGB office in Dresden.

To this day, Putin's perceptions about threats to his country and popular revolutions color his foreign policy and his deep mistrust of the West. They underpin his decision to invade Ukraine on Feb. 24.

As one justification for the war, he cites what he believes was a broken U.S. promise to Gorbachev – a supposed 1990 pledge that NATO would not expand into Eastern Europe. U.S. officials have denied making such a pledge, but Putin believes NATO's expansion, and specifically the prospect of neighboring Ukraine joining the alliance, pose an existential threat to Russia.

Critics allege that Putin distorts the facts and ignores local sentiments to claim Ukrainians want to be liberated from the Kyiv government and align with Moscow.

He has also embarked on a massive effort to modernize and expand Russia's military might, moving away from arms-control accords that Gorbachev agreed to.

Putin's war in Ukraine, his human rights violations and the 2014 annexation of Crimea have drawn massive international sanctions that are reversing the cultural and economic ties that Gorbachev fostered. But for a few allies, Russia is isolated.

While one might expect Gorbachev to have been more critical of Putin, he did condemn NATO's eastward expansion and said the West bungled the chance offered by the Cold War's end. He even supported Russia's annexation of Crimea.

But in many other ways, the historic bookends between the two leaders are far apart.

Before Gorbachev rose to power, Reagan in 1983 famously branded Russia an "evil empire." Five years later, he recanted the description at a summit with the Soviet leader.

Fast forward to today, when the current U.S. president, Joe Biden, has called Putin a "killer," a "butcher" and a "war criminal" who "cannot remain in power."

The Cold War that Gorbachev helped end is back.

Peltola beats Palin, wins Alaska House special election

By BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

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JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — Democrat Mary Peltola won the special election for Alaska's only U.S. House seat on Wednesday, besting a field that included Republican Sarah Palin, who was seeking a political comeback in the state where she was once governor.

Peltola, who is Yup'ik and turned 49 on Wednesday, will become the first Alaska Native to serve in the House and the first woman to hold the seat. She will serve the remaining months of the late Republican U.S. Rep. Don Young's term. Young held the seat for 49 years before his death in March.

"I don't think there will be another birthday like today," Peltola said.

"Really I'm just so grateful to Alaskans and all the Alaskans who put their faith in me to fill out the remainder of Congressman Young's term," she said in an interview. "My desire is to follow in Congressman Young's legacy of representing all Alaskans, and I'm just looking forward to getting to work."

Peltola's victory, in Alaska's first statewide ranked choice voting election, is a boon for Democrats, particularly coming off better-than-expected performances in special elections around the country this year following the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. She will be the first Democrat to hold the seat since the late U.S. Rep. Nick Begich, who was seeking reelection in 1972 when his plane disappeared. Begich was later declared dead and Young in 1973 was elected to the seat.

Peltola ran as a coalition builder while her two Republican opponents — Palin and Begich's grandson, also named Nick Begich — at times went after each other. Palin also railed against the ranked voting system, which was instituted by Alaska voters.

All three - Peltola, Palin and Begich - are candidates in the November general election, seeking a two-year term that would start in January.

The results came 15 days after the Aug. 16 election, in line with the deadline for state elections officials to receive absentee ballots mailed from outside the U.S. Ranked choice tabulations took place Wednesday after no candidate won more than 50% of the first choice votes, with state elections officials livestreaming the event. Peltola was in the lead heading into the tabulations, followed by Palin and then Begich.

State elections officials plan to certify the election by Friday.

Alaska Democratic Party leaders cheered Peltola's win.

"Alaskans have made clear they want a rational, steadfast, honest and caring voice speaking for them in Washington D.C., not opportunists and extremists associated with the Alaska Republican Party," state Democratic party chair Michael Wenstrup said in a statement.

Wednesday's results were a disappointment for Palin, who was looking to make a political comeback 14 years after she was vaulted onto the national stage when John McCain selected her to be his running mate in the 2008 presidential election. In her run for the House seat, she had widespread name recognition and won the endorsement of former President Donald Trump.

After Peltola's victory was announced, Palin called the ranked voting system "crazy, convoluted, confusing."

"Though we're disappointed in this outcome, Alaskans know I'm the last one who'll ever retreat," Palin said in a statement.

Begich in a statement congratulated Peltola while looking forward to the November election.

During the campaign, critics questioned Palin's commitment to Alaska, citing her decision to resign as governor in July 2009, partway through her term. Palin went on to become a conservative commentator on TV and appeared in reality television programs, among other pursuits.

Palin has insisted her commitment to Alaska never wavered and said ahead of the special election that she had "signed up for the long haul."

Peltola, a former state lawmaker who most recently worked for a commission whose goal is to rebuild salmon resources on the Kuskokwim River, cast herself as a "regular" Alaskan. "I'm not a millionaire. I'm not an international celebrity," she said.

Peltola has said she was hopeful that the new system would allow more moderate candidates to be elected.

During the campaign, she emphasized her support of abortion rights and said she wanted to elevate issues of ocean productivity and food security. Peltola said she got a boost after the June special primary

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when she won endorsements from Democrats and independents who had been in the race. She said she believed her positive messaging also resonated with voters.

"It's been very attractive to a lot of people to have a message of working together and positivity and holding each other up and unity and as Americans none of us are each other's enemy," she said. "That is just a message that people really need to hear right now."

Alaska voters in 2020 approved an elections process that replaced party primaries with open primaries. Under the new system, ranked voting is used in general elections.

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

In Alaska, voters last backed a Democrat for president in 1964. The number of registered voters who are unaffiliated with a party is greater than the number of registered Republicans or Democrats combined, according to statistics from the Division of Elections.

The last Democratic member of Alaska's congressional delegation was Mark Begich, Nick Begich's uncle, who served one term in the U.S. Senate and lost his 2014 reelection bid.

Alaska's U.S. senators, Republicans Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, congratulated Peltola.

Murkowski said Peltola "has a long track record of public service to our great state." Murkowski and Peltola were in the state Legislature together.

It's back to school in Ukraine -- but far from normal

By HANNA ARHIROVA and YESICA FISCH Associated Press

MYKHAILO-KOTSYUBYNSKE, Ukraine (AP) — The first day of school in Ukraine on Thursday won't include children sharing memories of fun vacations with their families. Their stories are of surviving war. For many, their last day of school was the day before the Feb. 24 Russian invasion of their country.

At least 379 children have been killed since the war began, while the whereabouts of 223 others are unknown, according to Ukraine's General Prosecutors office. Another 7,013 children were among Ukrainians forcibly transferred to Russia from Russian-occupied areas.

Some children were forced to flee their hometowns to avoid bombardment, some spent weeks in basements. And while those in so-called "safe" regions sometimes managed to study online, classes were frequently interrupted by air raid sirens. Six months of war damaged 2,400 schools across the country, including 269 that were destroyed, according to Ukrainian officials.

"It does become kind of the new normal for children, which I think, as I said, (is) very concerning as well because that's not the way children should go through life, thinking that they are going to get attacked at any moment," UNICEF Executive Director Catherine M. Russell, told The Associated Press.

Civilian areas and schools continue to be hit, and children keep being killed. But after the first months of shock, 51% of schools in Ukraine, despite the risk, are reopening to in-person education, with an option to study online if the parents prefer.

Russell said she'd never before seen schools functioning entirely underground to protect students.

"You know, usually you have windows, you can see outside. These kids don't have that luxury and they are just, they are becoming accustomed to that lifestyle of having to be sheltered from possible attack and that's not, that's not what any child should have to face," she said.

But the safety of children remains the priority. Schools that don't have quick access to shelters or are located close to the borders with Belarus and Russia, or near active military zones will only have online study.

That's the case for the 7th graders in Mykhailo-Kotsyubynske, just 20 miles (35 kilometers) from the Belarus border, who gathered at their badly damaged school Tuesday to pick up textbooks for studying online. While waiting, they played a version of "Truth or Lie," where players tried to guess whether their opponent's assertion about the number of missiles they saw from their window was true or false.

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"We haven't seen each other for such a long time. You all have grown so much," said their teacher, Olena Serdiuk, standing in a corner of the classroom, where windows were covered with thick black polythene instead of glass.

Oleksii Lytvyn, 13, remembers very well the day Russian missiles hit the school twice. It was March 4, and he was in the school's bomb shelter with his family and dozens of other people.

Just minutes before the blast, he had been playing with a friend. After the loud explosion, the walls began shaking and he couldn't see anything but a huge cloud of dust. One person was killed, a woman who worked at the school.

"We were sleeping in the corridor, and there was a corpse of a dead person behind the wall," Oleksii recalled. His family stayed one more night before fleeing town, though they have since returned for the start of the school year.

Oleksii's classmates shared similar stories about that day and the monthlong Russian occupation of Mykhailo-Kotsyubynske that followed.

"When I'm at school, I think about the person who died in the debris. I feel deeply sorry for her," 12-year-old Mykola Kravchenko said.

Their school, the biggest in the area with 407 students from Mykhailo-Kotsyubynske and nearby villages, is still badly damaged. Debris fills the second floor, and the roof and heating system still need to be repaired — money the school doesn't have.

Even though they will be studying online, the students had to undergo security training Tuesday. Serdiuk told the class to follow her to the same bomb shelter where many survived the blast in March.

In the dimly lit shelter were water supplies and lines of long benches with labeled seats for each classroom. When the children took the seats assigned to their class, Serdiuk told them they had to go there whenever they heard a short bell ring.

She said many parents tell her their children are begging them to return to school, but for now that isn't allowed because of the danger of being so close to the Belarus border.

"Ukrainian children are acutely aware that the world is unstable and it could be a terrible place. That brings ... a loss of a basic sense of safety," said UNICEF spokesperson James Elder, adding that the uncertainty can impact their learning and emotional and social development.

Schools in the Kyiv, Lviv, and Chernivtsi regions are among those welcoming students back to classrooms Thursday. However, it's up to parents whether they send their children to school or opt for online education. The Kyiv and Lviv regions will host more than 7,300 displaced students who were forced to flee their hometowns and escape life under constant fire, officials said.

Minister of Education Serhiy Shkarlet welcomed students and staff back as the new school year got underway.

"Today, we face a new important task — to ensure the acquisition of education in a safe environment and psychological stability," he said in a video posted on Telegram. "I wish for strength, perseverance and indomitability in the desire to be an educated nation!"

In Kramatorsk in the Donetsk region, there is no hope for schools to open their doors to students. The city has been under constant shelling since the beginning of the war.

In one city school, the first-grade classroom was all ready: tables, chairs, a clean blackboard, the alphabet and numbers hanging on the wall, and Ukrainian flags ready to be distributed to the kids. The only thing missing was the students.

Seated in the middle of the empty room was Oleksandr Novikov, 55, the school's director for 12 years and a teacher for more than 20.

"It is very depressing, it is very unpleasant to feel that you come to an empty school," he said. "There will be no children laughing at school, no one will be running here" when the school year begins Thursday.

While Ukraine tries to defend itself from the Russian invasion, Novikov dreams of better times.

"I would like a real first bell, a real meeting with children and teachers, a real lesson, when eyes look at you with inspiration, trust and a desire to hear something new, to learn something new."

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"This is what I would like to see," he said.

'Crushed' by 2 papacies, John Paul I's death eclipsed life

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The moment that the black wall telephone rang early on the morning of Sept. 29, 1978, in Stefania Falasca's Rome apartment is imprinted in her mind. Then 15, Falasca remembers her father answering and hearing the voice of her uncle, a priest who worked at the Vatican, coming through the receiver: "The pope is dead!"

"But he's already dead!" Falasca recalled her bewildered father exclaiming.

Like countless others around the globe, her father struggled to comprehend how 65-year-old John Paul I, elected as pontiff barely a month earlier — on Aug. 26, 1978 — could be dead, and confusedly first thought of Pope Paul VI, who had died in early August at age 80.

John Paul I, born Albino Luciani, is widely remembered more for his sudden, mystery-dogged death than for his life. Falasca, an Italian journalist for a Catholic publication, has toiled for more than a decade to change that and to convince the Vatican that he deserves to be a saint for how he lived his faith, as a priest, bishop, cardinal and, so briefly, as pontiff.

On Sunday, Pope Francis will beatify John Paul I, the last formal step before possible sainthood.

Formal efforts aimed at beatification can begin five years after a pontiff dies. For John Paul II, that rule was waived a few weeks after his death in 2005, in response to cries of "sainthood immediately!" rising up from the faithful during his funeral.

But it took 25 years for the beatification process for John Paul I to begin.

John Paul I "was a figure crushed between two pontificates," Falasca said, speaking down the block from St. Peter's Square. She was referring to his successor, John Paul II, one of history's longest-reigning popes, and his predecessor, Paul VI, whose 15-year papacy saw him preside over Vatican Council II with its modernizing reforms. Both have been made saints.

In Luciani's case, "no historian was interested in the pope. Like he was passing briefly through time, forgotten," Falasca said.

But writers seeing a best-selling who-done-it were interested.

The abrupt demise of Luciani, whose body was found in his bedroom of the Apostolic Palace and who was dubbed the "smiling pope" for his cheerful countenance, spawned instant suspicions.

In the first hours after his death, the Vatican offered differing versions, first saying that a male secretary found him, then admitting that the pontiff was found lifeless by the nuns who bring his morning coffee.

"They could have immediately said that it was the nuns and it wouldn't have sparked any doubts, on the contrary, it would have given more guarantees," Falasca said. One nun, Sister Vincenza, was well known to Luciani's family.

The nuns later recounted they were told by the Vatican not to say they found him out of concerns it would seem improper for a woman to enter the pope's bedroom.

At the same time, a monster financial scandal was growing involving an Italian bank that had links to the Vatican's own bank. There were murky ties between a U.S. born prelate, now deceased, who was chairman of the Vatican bank and an Italian financier, dubbed "God's Banker," whose body in 1982 was found hanging under a London bridge in what was ruled a homicide.

Was Luciani about to crack down on officials linked to the Holy See's secretive finances? Was he planning to root out corruption in Vatican bureaucracy?

"In God's Name: An Investigation into the Murder of Pope John Paul I," a 1984 book by David A. Yallop, sold millions of copies. The Vatican concluded that Luciani was felled by a heart attack, after suffering chest pains he played down just before going to bed his last night. But Yallop, noting that no autopsy was performed, concluded he was poisoned by plotters connected to a secret Masonic lodge with links to the Vatican and its bank.

In 1987, another British journalist, John Cornwell, came to the Vatican to research claims of apparitions

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of the Virgin Mary in what was then Yugoslavia. Instead, a Vatican bishop asked him to write the "truth" of John Paul I's death and promised him access to the pope's doctor, his embalmers and others.

Writing his own best-seller, "A Thief in the Night," Cornwell concluded that Luciani had "died of neglect."

"In the very heart of the Vatican, this was neglect that was psychological," Cornwell said in a phone interview from the English countryside. "They put too much work on him without proper help. They didn't look properly after his health."

"In other words, they had no respect for him, they thought he was a derisory pope, they said he was like Peter Sellers," Cornwell said, referring to the English comic actor who often played bumbling roles.

Cornwell said some people were disappointed he found no evidence of murder, including one bishop. "I came across people inside the Vatican who were convinced" there was a conspiracy to eliminate Luciani.

Falasca says John Paul I "is not being beatified because he was pope."

"He lived with exemplary method, faith, hope, charity," she said. "He's a model for everyone, precisely because he had borne witness to the essential virtues."

John Paul I also broke molds, referring to himself as "I" in papal speeches, instead of the more impersonal traditional "we."

"He was like a light breeze sweeping away centuries" of formalities, Falasca said. "His choice of being colloquial was a theological choice."

She marveled that among his most cherished books was secular literature —by Mark Twain, Willa Cather and G.K. Chesterton, a British author famed for his character of a sleuthing priest.

For a Catholic to be beatified, the pope must approve a miracle attributed to prayerful intercession. In Luciani's case, that miracle was the medically unexplained recovery in 2011 of an 11-year-old girl hospitalized in Buenos Aires with brain inflammation and septic shock.

Her parents pleaded with a priest from a nearby parish to come. As he rushed to her bedside, the Rev. Juan Jose' Dabusti wondered to whom he should pray for her to live. Inspiration struck. He prayed to John Paul I.

But why invoke the name of a largely forgotten pontiff? Falasca said Dabusti told her that when he was 15, he heard the newly elected John Paul I speak and decided to become a priest himself, because Luciani was "very simple and very happy."

Hezbollah at 40 stronger than ever but has more enemies

By BASSEM MROUE Associates Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Forty years since Hezbollah was founded at the height of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the group has morphed from a ragtag organization to the largest and most heavily armed militant group in the Middle East.

The Iranian-armed and funded Hezbollah, which has marked the anniversary with ceremonies in its strongholds in recent weeks, dominates Lebanon's politics and plays an instrumental role in spreading Tehran's influence throughout the Arab world.

But the Shiite powerhouse, once praised around the Arab world for unrelentingly standing against Israel, faces deep criticism on multiple fronts.

At home in Lebanon, a significant part of the population opposes its grip on power and accuses it of using the threat of force to prevent change. Across the region, many resent its military interventions in Iraq and in Syria's civil war, where it helped tip the balance of power in favor of President Bashar Assad's forces.

There is no specific date on when Hezbollah was founded, starting as a small, shadowy group of fighters helped by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. But the group says it happened during the summer of 1982.

The 40th anniversary comes this year as Hezbollah officials have warned of a possible new war with Israel over the disputed gas-rich maritime border between Lebanon and Israel.

Over the years, Hezbollah has boosted its military power. It boasts of having 100,000 well-trained fighters. And now its leader says they have precision-guided missiles that can hit anywhere in Israel and prevent

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ships from reaching Israel's Mediterranean coast, as well as advanced drones that can either strike or gather intelligence.

"Hezbollah has evolved tremendously in the past four decades in its organizational structure, global reach, and regional involvements," says Middle East analyst Joe Macaron.

Hezbollah's biggest achievement over the past 40 years was its guerrilla war against Israeli forces occupying parts of southern Lebanon. When Israel's army was forced to withdraw in May 2000 — without a peace deal like the ones it reached with Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians — the victory brought Hezbollah praise from around the Middle East.

"Who would have imagined that our enemy could be defeated?" Hezbollah's chief spokesman Mohammed Afif said at a press conference held in July to mark the anniversary.

But since the withdrawal, the controversy over Hezbollah has steadily grown as its role has changed.

In 2005, Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the most powerful Sunni politician in the country at the time, was killed in a massive truck bomb in Beirut. A U.N.-backed tribunal accused three Hezbollah members of being behind the assassination. Hezbollah denies the charges.

Hezbollah was blamed for other assassinations that followed, mostly targeting Christians and Sunni Muslim politicians and intellectuals critical of the group. Hezbollah denies the accusations.

"Hezbollah's danger to Lebanon is huge," says journalist and former Cabinet minister May Chidiac who lost an arm and a leg in a 2005 assassination attempt with explosives placed in her car. She said Hezbollah has been expanding Iran's influence in Lebanon, "and this is a long-term plan that they have been working on for 40 years."

Asked if Hezbollah is to blame for the attempt on her life, Chidiac said: "Of course. There is no doubt about that. All these assassinations are linked."

Lebanese have been sharply divided by Hezbollah's determination to keep its weapons since Israel's withdrawal. Some call for its disarmament, saying only the state should have the right to carry weapons. Others support the group's stance that it must continue to be able to defend against Israel.

Hezbollah fought Israel to a draw in a 34-day war in the summer of 2006. Israel today considers Hezbollah its most serious immediate threat, estimating that the militant group has some 150,000 rockets and missiles aimed at it.

In early July, the Israeli military shot down three unmanned aircraft launched by Hezbollah heading toward an area where an Israeli gas platform was recently installed in the Mediterranean Sea. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned that Israel will not be allowed to benefit from its gas fields in the disputed maritime border area before a deal is reached with Lebanon.

Maj. Gen. Ori Gordin, the incoming head of Israel's Northern Command, described Hezbollah as a "serious threat," due to both its proximity to Israel and its arsenal.

"This is a very strong terror army," he told The Associated Press in Jerusalem. "Not as strong as the Israeli military, not as strong as the Israeli air force. We are in a completely different place when it comes to our military capabilities. But it can do some significant damage. I have to say that."

Afif, the Hezbollah spokesman, said that "as long as there is an aggression, there will be resistance."

In 2008, the government of Western-backed Prime Minister Fouad Saniora decided to dismantle Hezbollah's telecommunications network. Hezbollah responded by capturing by force Sunni neighborhoods in Beirut. It was the worst internal fighting since the 1975-90 civil war ended and marked a breach in Hezbollah's pledge never to use its weapons at home.

Perhaps the most controversial decision Hezbollah has made was by sending thousands of fighters to Syria since 2013 to back Assad against opposition fighters, as well as against al-Qaida-linked fighters and the Islamic State group.

The intervention "meant becoming entangled in the internal conflict of a neighboring Arab country rather than fulfilling Hezbollah's claimed mandate of resistance against Israel," Macaron said.

Across the Arab world, it cemented an image of Hezbollah as a sectarian Shiite force fighting mainly Sunni insurgents and spreading Iran's power.

Hezbollah was also accused of helping Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, leading at least six Arab

countries to list the group as a terrorist organization.

Within Lebanon, Hezbollah has used its powerful support among the Shiite community and tough tactics to gain political dominance.

In 2016, it secured the election of its Christian ally Michel Aoun as president, then it and its allies won a parliament majority in subsequent elections.

But that also sealed its role as part of a governing system whose decades of corruption and mismanagement have been blamed for Lebanon's economic collapse, starting in late 2019. With the currency crumbling and much of the population thrown into poverty, the political elite, which has been running Lebanon since the 1975-90 civil war ended, has resisted reforms.

Massive protests demanding the removal of those politicians began in late 2019, and days afterward, hundreds of Hezbollah supporters attacked the protesters in downtown Beirut, forcing them to flee. In October, Hezbollah supporters and a rival militia had an armed clash in Beirut over investigations into the 2020 devastating explosion at Beirut's port.

Voters punished Hezbollah and its allies in this year's elections, making them lose their parliamentary majority.

One former senior figure in Hezbollah, Sobhi Tufaili, pointed to the new image of the group as part of the system in a recent interview with a local TV station.

"There is a ship full of thieves," he said, "and Hezbollah is its captain and protector."

Tech tool offers police 'mass surveillance on a budget'

By GARANCE BURKE AND JASON DEAREN Associated Press

Local law enforcement agencies from suburban Southern California to rural North Carolina have been using an obscure cellphone tracking tool, at times without search warrants, that gives them the power to follow people's movements months back in time, according to public records and internal emails obtained by The Associated Press.

Police have used "Fog Reveal" to search hundreds of billions of records from 250 million mobile devices, and harnessed the data to create location analyses known among law enforcement as "patterns of life," according to thousands of pages of records about the company.

Sold by Virginia-based Fog Data Science LLC, Fog Reveal has been used since at least 2018 in criminal investigations ranging from the murder of a nurse in Arkansas to tracing the movements of a potential participant in the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol. The tool is rarely, if ever, mentioned in court records, something that defense attorneys say makes it harder for them to properly defend their clients in cases in which the technology was used.

The company was developed by two former high-ranking Department of Homeland Security officials under ex-President George W. Bush. It relies on advertising identification numbers, which Fog officials say are culled from popular cellphone apps such as Waze, Starbucks and hundreds of others that target ads based on a person's movements and interests, according to police emails. That information is then sold to companies like Fog.

"It's sort of a mass surveillance program on a budget," said Bennett Cyphers, a special advisor at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital privacy rights advocacy group.

This story, supported by the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, is part of an ongoing Associated Press series, "Tracked," that investigates the power and consequences of decisions driven by algorithms on people's everyday lives.

The documents and emails were obtained by EFF through Freedom of Information Act requests. The group shared the files with The AP, which independently found that Fog sold its software in about 40 contracts to nearly two dozen agencies, according to GovSpend, a company that keeps tabs on government spending. The records and AP's reporting provide the first public account of the extensive use of Fog Reveal by

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local police, according to analysts and legal experts who scrutinize such technologies.

"Local law enforcement is at the front lines of trafficking and missing persons cases, yet these departments are often behind in technology adoption," Matthew Broderick, a Fog managing partner, said in an email. "We fill a gap for underfunded and understaffed departments."

Because of the secrecy surrounding Fog, however, there are scant details about its use and most law enforcement agencies won't discuss it, raising concerns among privacy advocates that it violates the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which protects against unreasonable search and seizure.

What distinguishes Fog Reveal from other cellphone location technologies used by police is that it follows the devices through their advertising IDs, unique numbers assigned to each device. These numbers do not contain the name of the phone's user, but can be traced to homes and workplaces to help police establish pattern-of-life analyses.

"The capability that it had for bringing up just anybody in an area whether they were in public or at home seemed to me to be a very clear violation of the Fourth Amendment," said Davin Hall, a former crime data analysis supervisor for the Greensboro, North Carolina Police Department. "I just feel angry and betrayed and lied to."

Hall resigned in late 2020 after months of voicing concerns about the department's use of Fog to police attorneys and the city council.

While Greensboro officials acknowledged Fog's use and initially defended it, the police department said it allowed its subscription to expire earlier this year because it didn't "independently benefit investigations."

But federal, state and local police agencies around the U.S. continue to use Fog with very little public accountability. Local police agencies have been enticed by Fog's affordable price: it can start as low as \$7,500 a year. And some departments that license it have shared access with other nearby law enforcement agencies, the emails show.

Police departments also like how quickly they can access detailed location information from Fog. Geofence warrants, which tap into GPS and other sources to track a device, are accessed by obtaining such data from companies, like Google or Apple. This requires police to obtain a warrant and ask the tech companies for the specific data they want, which can take days or weeks.

Using Fog's data, which the company claims is anonymized, police can geofence an area or search by a specific device's ad ID numbers, according to a user agreement obtained by AP. But, Fog maintains that "we have no way of linking signals back to a specific device or owner," according to a sales representative who emailed the California Highway Patrol in 2018, after a lieutenant asked whether the tool could be legally used.

Despite such privacy assurances, the records show that law enforcement can use Fog's data as a clue to find identifying information. "There is no (personal information) linked to the (ad ID)," wrote a Missouri official about Fog in 2019. "But if we are good at what we do, we should be able to figure out the owner."

Federal oversight of companies like Fog is an evolving legal landscape. On Monday, the Federal Trade Commission sued a data broker called Kochava that, like Fog, provides its clients with advertising IDs that authorities say can easily be used to find where a mobile device user lives, which violates rules the commission enforces. And there are bills before Congress now that, if passed, would regulate the industry.

Fog's Broderick said in an email that the company does not have access to people's personal information, and draws from "commercially available data without restrictions to use," from data brokers "that legitimately purchase data from apps in accordance with their legal agreements." The company refused to share information about how many police agencies it works with.

"We are confident Law Enforcement has the responsible leadership, constraints, and political guidance at the municipal, state, and federal level to ensure that any law enforcement tool and method is appropriately used in accordance with the laws in their respective jurisdictions," Broderick said.

Kevin Metcalf, a Washington County, Arkansas prosecutor, said he has used Fog Reveal without a warrant, especially in "exigent circumstances." In these cases, the law provides a warrant exemption when a

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crime-in-process endangers people or an officer.

Metcalf also leads the National Child Protection Task Force, a nonprofit that combats child exploitation and trafficking. Fog is listed on its website as a task force sponsor and a company executive chairs the nonprofit's board. Metcalf said Fog has been invaluable to cracking missing children cases and homicides.

"We push the limits, but we do them in a way that we target the bad guys," he said. "Time is of the essence in those situations. We can't wait on the traditional search warrant route."

Fog was used successfully in the murder case of 25-year-old nurse Sydney Sutherland, who had last been seen jogging near Newport, Arkansas before she disappeared, Metcalf said.

Police had little evidence to go on when they found her phone in a ditch, so Metcalf said he shared his agency's access to Fog with the U.S. Marshals Service to figure out which other devices had been nearby at the time she was killed. He said Fog helped lead authorities to arrest a farmer in Sutherland's rape and murder in August 2020, but its use was not documented in court records reviewed by AP.

Cyphers, who led EFF's public records work, said there hasn't been any previous record of companies selling this kind of granular data directly to local law enforcement.

"We're seeing counties with less than 100,000 people where the sheriff is using this extremely high tech, extremely invasive, secretive surveillance tool to chase down local crime," Cyphers said.

One such customer is the sheriff's office in rural Rockingham County, North Carolina, population 91,000 and just north of Greensboro, where Hall still lives. The county bought a one-year license for \$9,000 last year and recently renewed it.

"Rockingham County is tiny in terms of population. It never ceases to amaze me how small agencies will scoop up tools that they just absolutely don't need, and nobody needs this one," Hall said.

Sheriff's spokesman Lt. Kevin Suthard confirmed the department recently renewed its license but declined to offer specifics about the use of Fog Reveal or how the office protects individuals' rights.

"Because it would then be less effective as criminals could be cognizant that we have the device and adjust their commission of the crimes accordingly. Make sense?" Suthard said.

Fog has aggressively marketed its tool to police, even beta testing it with law enforcement, records show. The Dallas Police Department bought a Fog license in February after getting a free trial and "seeing a demonstration and hearing of success stories from the company," Senior Cpl. Melinda Gutierrez, a department spokeswoman, said in an email.

Fog's tool is accessed through a web portal. Investigators can enter a crime scene's coordinates into the database, which brings back search results showing a device's Fog ID, which is based on its unique ad ID number.

Police can see which device IDs were found near the location of the crime. Detectives or other officers can also search the location for IDs going forward from the time of the crime and back at least 180 days, according to the company's user license agreement. But, Fog's data can go back as far as June 2017, according to emails from a Fog representative to Florida and California law enforcement agencies.

While the data does not directly identify who owns a device, the company often gives law enforcement information it needs to connect it to addresses and other clues that help detectives figure out people's identities, according to company representatives' emails.

It is unclear how Fog makes these connections, but a company it refers to as its "data partner" called Venntel, Inc. has access to an even greater trove of users' mobile data.

Venntel is a large broker that has supplied location data to agencies such as Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the FBI. The Department of Homeland Security's watchdog is currently investigating how U.S. border agents used Venntel data to track people's locations inside the U.S. without a search warrant. The company also has faced congressional inquiries about privacy concerns tied to federal law enforcement agencies' use of its data.

Venntel and Fog work closely together to aid police detectives during investigations, emails show. Their marketing brochures are nearly identical, too, and Venntel staff has recommended Fog to law enforcement, according to the emails. Venntel said "the confidential nature of our business relationships" prevented them from responding to AP's specific questions, and Fog would not comment on the relationship.

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While Fog says in its marketing materials that it collects data from thousands of apps, like Starbucks and Waze, companies are not always aware of who is using their data. Venntel and Fog can collect billions of data points filled with detailed information because many apps embed invisible tracking software that follow users' behavior. This software also lets the apps sell customized ads that are targeted to a person's current location. In turn, data brokers' software can Hoover up personal data that can be used for other purposes. Fog did not specifically say how it got the data from Starbucks and Waze.

For their part, Starbucks and Waze denied any relationship to Fog. Starbucks said it had not given permission to its business partners to share customer information with Fog.

"Starbucks has not approved Ad ID data generated by our app to be used in this way by Fog Data Science LLC. In our review to date, we have no relationship with this company," said Megan Adams, a Starbucks spokesperson.

"We have never had a relationship with Fog Data Science, have not worked with them in any capacity, and have not shared information with them," a Waze spokesperson said.

Fog Data Science LLC is headquartered in a nondescript brick building in Leesburg, Virginia. It also has related entities in New Jersey, Ohio and Texas.

It was founded in 2016 by Robert Liscouski, who led the Department of Homeland Security's National Cyber Security Division in the George W. Bush era. His colleague, Broderick, is a former U.S. Marine brigadier general who ran DHS' tech hub, the Homeland Security Operations Center, during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. A House bipartisan committee report cited Broderick amongst others for failing to coordinate a swift federal response to the deadly hurricane. Broderick resigned from DHS shortly thereafter.

In marketing materials, Fog also has touted its ability to offer police "predictive analytics," a buzzword often used to describe high-tech policing tools that purport to predict crime hotspots. Liscouski and another Fog official have worked at companies focused on predictive analytics, machine learning and software platforms supporting artificial intelligence.

"It is capable of delivering both forensic and predictive analytics and near real-time insights on the daily movements of the people identified with those mobile devices," reads an email announcing a Fog training last year for members of the National Fusion Center Association, which represents a network of intelligence-sharing partnerships created after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Fog's Broderick said the company had not invested in predictive applications, and provided no details about any uses the tool had for predicting crime.

Despite privacy advocates' concerns about warrantless surveillance, Fog Reveal has caught on with local and state police forces. It's been used in a number of high-profile criminal cases, including one that was the subject of the television program "48 Hours."

In 2017, a world-renowned exotic snake breeder was found dead, lying in a pool of blood in his reptile breeding facility in rural Missouri. Police initially thought the breeder, Ben Renick, might have died from a poisonous snake bite. But the evidence soon pointed to murder.

During its investigation, emails show the Missouri State Highway Patrol used Fog's portal to search for cellphones at Renick's home and breeding facility and zeroed in on a mobile device. Working with Fog, investigators used the data to identify the phone owner's identity: it was the Renicks' babysitter.

Police were able to log the babysitter's whereabouts over time to create a pattern of life analysis.

It turned out to be a dead-end lead. Renick's wife, Lynlee, later was charged and convicted of the murder.

Prosecutors did not cite Fog in a list of other tools they used in the investigation, according to trial exhibits examined by the AP.

But Missouri officials seemed pleased with Fog's capabilities, even though it didn't directly lead to an arrest. "It was interesting to see that the system did pick up a device that was absolutely in the area that day. Too bad it did not belong to a suspect!" a Missouri State Highway Patrol analyst wrote in an email to Fog.

In another high-profile criminal probe, records show the FBI asked state intelligence officials in Iowa for help with Fog as it investigated potential participants in the events at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

"Not definitive but still waiting to talk things over with a FOG rep," wrote Justin Parker, deputy director

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of the Iowa Department of Public Safety, in an email to an FBI official in September 2021. It was unclear from the emails if Fog's data factored into an arrest, and neither the FBI nor Iowa officials would comment.

Metcalf, the Arkansas prosecutor, has argued against congressional efforts to require search warrants when using technologies like Fog Reveal.

He believes Americans have given up any reasonable expectation of privacy when they use free apps and likens EFF's objections to tech like Fog to a "cult of privacy."

"I think people are going to have to make a decision on whether we want all this free technology, we want all this free stuff, we want all the selfies," he said. "But we can't have that and at the same time say, 'I'm a private person, so you can't look at any of that.' That just seems crazy."

Although he is not an official Fog employee, Metcalf said he would step in to lead training sessions including the tool for federal prosecutors, federal agencies and police, including the Chicago Police Department, the emails show.

That kind of hands-on service and word-of-mouth marketing in tight-knit law enforcement circles seems to have helped increase Fog's popularity.

The Maryland State Police is among the many agencies that have had contracts for Fog Reveal, and records show investigators believed it had a lot of potential.

"Companies have receptors all over. Malls, shopping centers, etc. They're all around you," wrote Sgt. John Bedell of the Criminal Enforcement Division, in an email to a colleague. The agency purchased a year of access to Fog in 2018.

"Picture getting a suspect's phone then in the extraction being able to see everywhere they'd been in the last 18 months plotted on a map you filter by date ranges," wrote Bedell. "The success lies in the secrecy."

Elena Russo, a spokesperson for the agency, confirmed it had a Fog license previously but that it had lapsed. "Unfortunately, it was not helpful in solving any crimes," she wrote in an email.

Still, as more local policing agencies sign up for Fog, some elected officials said they have been left in the dark. Several officials said there wasn't enough information to grasp what services Fog actually provides.

"Who is this company? What are the track records? What are the privacy protections?" asked Anaheim council member Jose Moreno, remembering his confusion about Fog during a 2020 council meeting. "That night our chief had very little information for us."

In Anaheim, the Fog license was paid for by a federal "Urban Area Security Initiative," DHS grants that help localities fund efforts to prevent terrorism. A police spokesman said the department has not used it.

Defense attorneys worry there are few legal restrictions on law enforcement's use of location data.

It's a gap police agencies exploit, and often don't disclose in court, said Michael Price, litigation director of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers' Fourth Amendment Center.

"(Fog) is exceedingly rare to see in the wild because the cops often don't get warrants," said Price.

"Even if you do ask for (information) sometimes they say 'We don't know what you are talking about.'"

Privacy advocates worry Fog's location tracking could be put to other novel uses, like keeping tabs on people who seek abortions in states where it is now illegal. These concerns were heightened when a Nebraska woman was charged in August with helping her teenage daughter end a pregnancy after investigators got hold of their Facebook messages.

Government's use of location data is still being weighed by the courts, too. In 2018, the Supreme Court ruled that police generally need a warrant to look at records that reveal where cellphone users have been.

Nearly two years after walking off the crime data supervisor job with the Greensboro police force, Davin Hall still worries about police surveillance in neighboring communities.

"Anyone with that login information can do as many searches as they want," Hall said. "I don't believe the police have earned the trust to use that, and I don't believe it should be legal."

Microsoft's Activision Blizzard deal gets global scrutiny

By MATT O'BRIEN and KELVIN CHAN AP Technology Writers

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Microsoft's plan to buy video game giant Activision Blizzard for \$68.7 billion could have major effects on the gaming industry, transforming the Xbox maker into something like a Netflix for video games by giving it control of many more popular titles.

But to get to the next level, Microsoft must first survive a barrage of government inquiries from New Zealand to Brazil, and from U.S. regulators emboldened by President Joe Biden to strengthen their enforcement of antitrust laws.

More than seven months after Microsoft announced the deal, only Saudi Arabia has announced its approval, although an upcoming decision from the United Kingdom to close or escalate its antitrust probe could signal what's to come. That decision is expected Thursday.

"A growing number of countries are subjecting major global transactions to deeper scrutiny," said William Kovacic, a former chairman of the five-member U.S. Federal Trade Commission. "Many of the jurisdictions that are exercising that scrutiny are significant economies and can't be brushed off."

Microsoft has faced antitrust scrutiny before, mostly notably more than two decades ago when a federal judge ordered its breakup following the company's anticompetitive actions related to its dominant Windows software. That verdict was overturned on appeal, although the court imposed other, less drastic, penalties on the company.

In recent years, however, Microsoft has largely escaped the more intense regulatory backlash its Big Tech rivals such as Amazon, Google and Facebook's parent company Meta have endured. But the sheer size of the Activision Blizzard merger has drawn global attention.

The all-cash deal is set to be the largest in the history of the tech industry. It would give Microsoft, maker of the Xbox console and gaming system, control of popular game franchises such as Call of Duty, World of Warcraft and Candy Crush. There's also a growing sense that past review of Big Tech mergers was too lax — such as when Facebook bought Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014.

"Collectively, that means that the kinds of concessions you're going to have to make become more difficult," Kovacic said.

The possibility of Microsoft gaining control of Call of Duty has been particularly worrisome to Sony, maker of the PlayStation console that competes with Microsoft's Xbox. In a letter to Brazilian regulators, Sony emphasized Call of Duty as an "essential" game — a blockbuster so popular and ingrained that it would be impossible for a competitor to develop a rival product even if they had the budget to do so.

One solution could be a settlement in which Microsoft agrees to ensure that console-making rivals such as Sony or Nintendo won't be cut off from popular Activision Blizzard games. Microsoft has already publicly signaled its openness to that concept.

Microsoft's president, Brad Smith, has said the company committed to Sony to make Activision games like Call of Duty "available on PlayStation beyond the existing agreement and into the future" -- although many are skeptical about how long those promises would last if not set into regulatory consent decrees.

On the other hand, Microsoft also has a much better reputation in Washington than it did in 2000. It is "seen as more reasonable and sensible" on issues such as data privacy, Kovacic said.

Microsoft has also been working to win over skeptics in the U.S., starting with a labor union that's been trying to organize Activision Blizzard employees. Democratic lawmakers have also expressed concern about allegations of Activision's toxic workplace culture for women, which led to employee walkouts last year as well as discrimination lawsuits brought by California and federal civil rights enforcers.

In March, the Communications Workers of America had issued a call seeking tougher oversight of the deal from the U.S. Department of Justice, the FTC and state attorneys general. But a June 30 letter from the union to the FTC said it had switched to supporting the deal after Microsoft agreed "to ensure the workers of Activision Blizzard have a clear path to collective bargaining."

Gaming represents a growing portion of Microsoft's business, despite the company's efforts to portray itself and Activision Blizzard as "small players in a highly fragmented publishing space," per a document filed with New Zealand's Commerce Commission.

In 2021, Microsoft spent \$7.5 billion to acquire ZeniMax Media, the parent company of video game publisher Bethesda Softworks, which is behind popular video games The Elder Scrolls, Doom and Fallout.

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Microsoft's properties also include the hit game Minecraft after it bought Swedish game studio Mojang for \$2.5 billion in 2014.

The Redmond, Washington, tech giant has said the gaming acquisitions will help beef up its Xbox Game Pass game subscription service and its mobile offerings, particularly from Activision Blizzard's King division, which makes Candy Crush.

Dutch game developer Rami Ismail said Microsoft's subscription-based service has thus far been a positive for smaller game studios trying to get their content to users. But he's unsure about the long-term impact of the merger.

"Xbox Game Pass as a product has been really good in getting interesting, creative games funded that might not have the normal market reach to be successful," Ismail said. "On the flip side, as power consolidates, there is less of an incentive to do anything like that."

Microsoft rivals are also consolidating. Sony in July closed on a \$3.6 billion deal to buy Bungie Inc., maker of the popular game franchise Destiny and the original developer of Xbox-owned Halo. Take-Two Interactive, maker of Grand Theft Auto and Red Dead Redemption, in May completed a \$12.7 billion deal to acquire mobile gaming company Zynga, maker of FarmVille and Words With Friends.

Watering while Black: anatomy of a pastor's Alabama arrest

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

CHILDERSBURG, Ala. (AP) — Michael Jennings wasn't breaking any laws or doing anything that was obviously suspicious; the Black minister was simply watering the flowers of a neighbor who was out of town.

Yet there was a problem: Around the corner, Amber Roberson, who is white, thought she was helping that same neighbor when she saw a vehicle she didn't recognize at the house and called police.

Within minutes, Jennings was in handcuffs, Roberson was apologizing for calling 911 and three officers were talking among themselves about how everything might have been different.

Harry Daniels, an attorney representing Jennings, said he plans to submit a claim to the city of Childersburg seeking damages and then file a lawsuit. "This should be a learned lesson and a training tool for law enforcement about what not to do," he said.

A 20-minute video of the episode recorded on one of the officers' body cameras shows how quickly an uneventful evening on a quiet residential street devolved into yet another potentially explosive situation involving a Black man and white law enforcement authorities.

"Whatcha doing here, man?" Officer Chris Smith asked as he walked up to Jennings, who held a hose with a stream of water falling on plants beside the driveway outside a small, white house.

"Watering flowers," Jennings replied from a few feet away. Lawn decorations stood around a mailbox; fresh mulch covered the beds. It was more than an hour before sunset on a Sunday in late May, the kind of spring evening when people often are out tending plants.

Smith told Jennings that a caller said she saw a strange vehicle and a person who "wasn't supposed to be here" at the house. Jennings told him the SUV he was talking about belonged to the neighbor who lives there.

"I'm supposed to be here," he added. "I'm Pastor Jennings. I live across the street."

"You're Pastor Jennings?"

"Yes. I'm looking out for their house while they're gone, watering their flowers," said Jennings, still spraying water.

"OK, well, that's cool. Do you have, like, ID?" Smith asked.

"Oh, no. Man, I'm not going to give you ID," Jennings said, turning away.

"Why not?" Smith asked.

"I ain't did nothing wrong," the pastor replied.

Jennings, 56, was born in rural Alabama just three years after George C. Wallace pledged "segregation forever" at the first of his four inaugurations as governor. His parents grew up during a time when racial

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segregation was the law and Black people were expected to act with deference to white people in the South. "I know the backdrop," Jennings said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Meanwhile, the officers who confronted him on May 22 work for a majority-white town of about 4,700 people that's located 55 miles (88 kilometers) southeast of Birmingham down U.S. 280. White people control city hall and the police department.

Jennings went into the ministry not long after graduating from high school and hasn't strayed far from his birthplace of nearby Sylacauga, where he leads Vision of Abundant Life Ministries, a small, nondenominational church, when not doing landscaping work or selling items online. In 1991, he said, he worked security and then trained to be a police officer in a nearby town but left before taking the job full time.

"That's how I knew the law," he said.

Alabama law allows police to ask for the name of someone in a public place when there's reasonable suspicion the person has committed or is about to commit a crime. But that doesn't mean a man innocently watering flowers at a neighbor's home must provide identification when asked by an officer, according to Hank Sherrod, a civil rights lawyer who reviewed the full police video at the request of the AP.

"This is an area of the law that is pretty clear," said Sherrod, who has handled similar cases in north Alabama, where he practices.

Cuffed and seated between two shrubs on the front stoop of his neighbor's home, Jennings told Smith and Gable how his son, a university athletics administrator, had been wrongly "arrested and profiled" in Michigan after a young woman at a cheerleading competition said a Black man had hugged her.

Jennings said he felt "anger and fear" during his interaction with the Alabama police officers not only because of what happened to his son but due to the accumulated weight of past police killings — George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others — plus lower-profile incidents and shootings in Alabama.

"That's why I didn't resist," he said.

Jennings was already in the back of a patrol car by the time Roberson, the white woman who called police, emerged. Jennings, she told officers, was a neighbor and a friend of the home's owner, Roy Milam. "OK. Does he have permission here to be watering flowers?" Smith asked.

"He may, because they are friends," she replied. "They went out of town today. He may be watering their flowers. It would be completely normal."

Milam told the AP that was exactly what happened: He'd asked Jennings to water his wife's flowers while they were camping in the Tennessee mountains for a few days.

A few moments later, officers told Roberson that a license plate check showed the gold sport-utility vehicle that prompted her call in the first place belonged to Milam. They got Jennings out of the patrol car and he told them his first and last name.

"I didn't know it was him," Roberson told police. "I'm sorry about that."

The officers spent much of their remaining time on the scene in a discussion that began with a question from Smith: "What are we going to do with him?"

After weighing different options, they settled on a charge of obstructing governmental operations that was thrown out within days in city court. The police chief who sought the dismissal after reviewing the 911 call and bodycam video, Richard McClelland, resigned earlier this month. City officials haven't said why he quit, but city attorney Reagan Rumsey said it had nothing to do with what happened to Jennings.

Childersburg's interim police chief, Capt. Kevin Koss, didn't return emails seeking comment.

Michael Jennings is still friends with Milam, the neighbor with the flowers. Milam, who is white, said he feels bad about what happened, and the two men will continue watching out for each other's homes, just as they've done for years.

"He is a good neighbor, definitely. No doubt about it," Milam said.

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Jennings also recently spoke with Roberson for the first time since the arrest.

The pastor, who lives less than a third of a mile from the police station, said he has not seen any of the three officers who were involved in his arrest since that day. He believes all three should be fired or at least disciplined.

"I feel a little paranoid," he said.

Nonetheless, he still waves at police cars passing through his neighborhood, partly out of the Christian call to be kind to others.

"You're supposed to love your neighbor, no matter what," he said. "But you've heard the saying, 'Keep your enemies close to you, too.'"

Reading, math scores fell sharply during pandemic, data show

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Math and reading scores for America's 9-year-olds fell dramatically during the first two years of the pandemic, according to a new federal study — offering an early glimpse of the sheer magnitude of the learning setbacks dealt to the nation's children.

Reading scores saw their largest decrease in 30 years, while math scores had their first decrease in the history of the testing regimen behind the study, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, a branch of the U.S. Education Department.

The declines hit all regions of the country and affected students of most races. But students of color saw some of the steepest decreases, widening the racial achievement gap.

Much of the nation's standardized testing didn't happen during the early days of the pandemic, so the findings released Thursday gave an early look at the impact of pandemic learning disruptions. Broader data is expected to be released later this year as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as the Nation's Report Card.

"These are some of the largest declines we have observed in a single assessment cycle in 50 years of the NAEP program," said Daniel McGrath, the acting associate commissioner of NCEs. "Students in 2022 are performing at a level last seen two decades ago."

The study reflects two years of upheaval in American education as schools shut down for months at a time amid COVID-19 outbreaks. Many students spent a year or more learning from home, and virus outbreaks among staff and students continued the disruption even after kids returned to the classroom.

In math, the average score for 9-year-old students fell 7 percentage points between 2020 and 2022, according to the study. The average reading score fell 5 points.

The pandemic's upheaval especially hurt students of color. Math scores dropped by 5 percentage points for white students, compared with 13 points for Black students and 8 points for Hispanic students. The divide between Black and white students widened by 8 percentage points during the pandemic.

Decreases were more uniform in reading: Scores dropped 6 points for white, Black and Hispanic students.

For Asian American students, Native American students and students of two or more races, there was little change in reading or math between 2020 and 2022, the study found.

Geographically, all regions saw decreases in math, but declines were slightly worse in the Northeast and Midwest compared with the West and South. Outcomes were similar for reading, except that the West had no measurable difference compared with 2020.

Although it marks a sharp drop since 2020, the average reading score was 7 points higher than it was in 1971, and the average math score was 15 points higher than in 1978, the study found.

Overall, the results paint a "sobering picture" of schooling during the pandemic, said Peggy Carr, commissioner of the NCEs.

Federal officials say this is the first nationally representative study to compare student achievement before the pandemic and in 2022, when most students had returned to in-person learning. Testing was completed in early 2020, soon before the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and in early 2022.

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 of New York's Times Square, city authorities are posting 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."

However, the law 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.

A federal judge let the new rules go forward Wednesday evening, hours before they were to take effect. Despite writing that the arguments for granting a preliminary injunction to stop the rules were persuasive, Judge Glenn Suddaby said the plaintiffs — an upstate New York resident and three gun rights organizations — didn't have standing to bring the legal action. Suddaby said he came to that decision partly because the man, a legal gun owner, couldn't demonstrate he was at risk of a credible threat of prosecution under the new guidelines, among other factors.

In a tweet, New York Attorney General Letitia James called the ruling a major victory "against baseless attacks by the gun lobby." In an emailed statement, Erich Pratt, senior vice president of Gun Owners of America, one of groups that filed the challenge, said Suddaby's opinion "contains a silver lining for New Yorkers and the nation," and said his group would continue to fight "against clear violations of the Second Amendment."

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.

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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."

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."

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 requiring gun permit applicants to undergo personal interviews with a licensing authority.

New Jersey required people to get training before receiving a permit, and would make new residents register guns they bring 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 doesn't 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.

Serena beats No. 2 seed Kontaveit at US Open to reach 3rd Rd

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Serena Williams can call it "evolving" or "retiring" or whatever she wants. And she can be coy about whether or not this U.S. Open will actually mark the end of her playing days. Those 23 Grand Slam titles earned that right.

If she keeps playing like this, who knows how long this farewell will last?

No matter what happens once her trip to Flushing Meadows is over, here is what is important to know after Wednesday night: The 40-year-old Williams is still around, she's still capable of terrific tennis, she's still winning — and, like the adoring spectators whose roars filled Arthur Ashe Stadium again — she's ready for more.

Williams eliminated No. 2 seed Anett Kontaveit 7-6 (4), 2-6, 6-2 in the U.S. Open's second round to ensure that she will play at least one more singles match at what she's hinted will be the last tournament of her illustrious career.

"There's still a little left in me," Williams said with a smile during her on-court interview, then acknowledged during her post-match news conference: "These moments are clearly fleeting."

After beating 80th-ranked Danka Kovinic in straight sets Monday, then collecting her 23rd victory in her past 25 matches against someone ranked Nos. 1 or 2 against Kontaveit on Wednesday, the six-time champion at Flushing Meadows will play Friday for a spot in the fourth round.

Her opponent will be Ajla Tomljanovic, a 29-year-old Australian who is ranked 46th. They've never met, but Tomljanovic, who said she considers herself a Williams fan, figures she knows what to anticipate from the American — and from those in the seats.

"I was playing on Court 7 both of my matches so far at the same time as her, and I could hear the crowd. I'm like, 'Court 7 isn't that close.' I kept thinking, 'Oh, my God, that's annoying me and I'm not

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even playing against her," Tomljanovic said. "I don't know how I'm going to do it."

Making Williams' potential path possibly simpler if she can get past Tomljanovic: 2021 U.S. Open runner-up Leylah Fernandez and 2021 French Open champion Barbora Krejckova both lost.

On Wednesday, Williams hit serves at up to 119 mph, stayed with Kontaveit during lengthy exchanges of big swings from the baselines and conjured up some of her trademark brilliance when it was needed most.

After pulling out a tight first set, then faltering in the second, Williams headed to the locker room for a bathroom break before the third.

Something had to give, someone had to blink.

When they resumed, it was Williams who lifted her level and emerged as the better player.

Just as she's done so many times, on so many stages, with so much at stake.

"I'm just Serena. After I lost the second set, I thought, 'Oh, my goodness, I better give my best effort because this could be it,'" Williams said, surely echoing the thoughts of everyone paying any attention.

"I never get to play like this — since '98, really," she said. "Literally, I've had an 'X' on my back since '99," the year she claimed her first Grand Slam title at the U.S. Open at age 17.

Whatever rust accumulated when Williams missed about a year of action before returning to the tour in late June appears to have vanished. She was 1-3 in 2022 entering the U.S. Open.

"Now it's kind of coming together," Williams said. "I mean, it had to come together today."

Williams has doubles to play, too. She and her sister, Venus, have won 14 major championships as a team and will begin that event Thursday night.

Kontaveit, a 26-year-old from Estonia, is a powerful hitter in her own right, the sort that spread across women's tennis over the past two decades after a pair of siblings from Compton, California, changed the game.

But there's a caveat attached to Kontaveit's ranking: She has never won so much as one quarterfinal match at any Grand Slam tournament in 30 career appearances.

So maybe that's why, much like with Kovinic 48 hours earlier, Williams' opponent was introduced just by her name, and Kontaveit walked out to a smattering of applause. Williams, in contrast, got the full treatment: highlight video, a listing of her many accolades and a loud greeting from folks part of the largest U.S. Open attendance ever at a night session, 29,959, eclipsing the record set Monday.

"It was her moment," said Kontaveit, who began crying during the Estonian portion of her news conference and cut it short. "Of course, this is totally about her."

As strident a competitor as tennis, or any sport, has seen, as rightly self-confident in her abilities as any athlete, Williams was not about to think of this whole exercise as merely a celebration of her career.

She came to New York wanting to win, of course.

Wearing the same glittery crystal-encrusted top and diamond-accented sneakers — replete with solid gold shoelace tags and the word "Queen" on the right one, "Mama" on the left — that she sported Monday, Williams was ready for prime time.

The match began with Kontaveit grabbing the first five points, Williams the next five. And on they went, back and forth. Kontaveit's mistakes were cheered — even faults, drawing an admonishment for the crowd from chair umpire Alison Hughes about making noise between serves.

Early in the third set, Kontaveit hit a cross-court forehand that caught the outermost edge of a sideline. A video on the stadium screens showed just how close it was, confirming that the ball did, indeed, land in. That brought out boos from the stands. Williams raised her arm and wagged a finger, telling her backers not to cause a fuss.

If anything, Kontaveit received more acknowledgment from the player trying to defeat her than anyone else, as Williams would respond to great shots with a nod or a racket clap.

"They were not rooting against me. They just wanted Serena to win so bad," Kontaveit said, calling the treatment she received "fair," even if it was "something I never experienced before."

Williams broke for a 5-4 edge when Kontaveit pushed a backhand long, spurring yelling spectators to rise to their feet — and Williams' husband, Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian, jumped right in, too, waving

his arms in her direction, in front of where Venus and Tiger Woods were two seats apart.

Eventually they went to a tiebreaker, and at 3-3, a chant of "Let's go, Serena!" broke out, accompanied by rhythmic clapping. Soon, Williams delivered a 101 mph service winner and a 91 mph ace to seal that set.

To Kontaveit's credit, she raced to a 3-0 edge in the second with 10 winners and zero unforced errors.

In the third, after a swinging forehand volley winner put Williams a game from victory, she raised both arms, then clenched her left fist.

One game, and five minutes later, it was over — and her stay at the U.S. Open could proceed.

Asked whether she's a title contender, Williams answered: "I can not think that far. I'm having fun and I'm enjoying it."

White House to encourage COVID boosters, flu shot this fall

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration hopes to make getting a COVID-19 booster as routine as going in for the yearly flu shot.

That's at the heart of its campaign to sell the newly authorized shot to an American public that has widely rejected COVID-19 boosters since they first became available last fall.

Shots of the updated boosters, specifically designed by Pfizer and Moderna to respond to the omicron strain, could start within days. The U.S. government has purchased 170 million doses and is emphasizing that everyone will have free access to the booster.

White House COVID-19 coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha said this latest round of shots will offer protection during the busy cold and flu season, with the hope of transitioning people to get the vaccine yearly. Typically, at least half of U.S. adults get a flu shot.

"We expect them to provide more durable protection over time," Jha said in an interview Wednesday with The Associated Press. "The goal very much is to get to a point where people get their COVID shot on a regular basis, the way they do their flu shot."

Community health workers in North Carolina, home to the country's lowest COVID-19 booster rate, like the strategy, especially because of confusion among some people about vaccine schedules.

"I believe in keeping things simple," said Marty Stamey, an outreach coordinator for the Mountain Area Health Education Center in western North Carolina. "I've heard a lot of people say, 'I think I'll just wait and try to do it like the flu shots.'"

The White House plan also relies in part on local health departments, providers and community groups to reach out and encourage people to get the updated booster. Pharmacies, health providers and state or local health departments are preparing to send text messages to millions of people that will encourage them to get a booster this fall, White House officials said.

Jha said he recommends most Americans get the booster by the end of October.

Still, this latest vaccination campaign faces several challenges.

A majority of Americans got their first and second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine when it was released last year but they've been more reluctant to get a booster jab, with less than half getting their first booster since it became available late last year.

Congress also has not moved forward on President Joe Biden's \$22.5 billion request earlier this year for the COVID-19 response. Republicans criticized the request, pointing to the \$1.9 trillion already spent on responding to the pandemic. Running short on funds, the government announced it would stop shipping COVID-19 tests to people's homes after Friday.

And COVID-19 funding is drying up for many of the community groups that received millions of federal tax dollars to hire workers who spent months reaching deep into neighborhoods with door knocks, mobile vaccine clinics and posters encouraging people to inoculate against COVID-19.

White House officials say those local leaders deserve a lot of credit for stamping out misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine and convincing many around the country that the shot will protect them.

"Those are the really critical messengers," Jha said.

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That on-the-ground work has been crucial to getting people vaccinated in the rural, Spanish- and Haitian-speaking communities that the Migrant Clinicians Network has reached throughout Texas, California and Maryland with its \$8.5 million federal grant.

"Simply having the vaccines available is one thing, but getting the shots in the arms is another," said Amy Liebman, a chief program officer for the nonprofit group.

Some of those local health organizations, too, are now stretched as they work to get low vaccination rates among children under 12 up. Only a third of 5- to 11-year-olds received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine since becoming eligible late last year. Meanwhile, just 7% of children under 5 have gotten a first dose since it was made available this summer.

Dr. Niharika Khanna at the University of Maryland School of Medicine has just started making progress on convincing new mothers that the vaccine is safe and effective for their babies.

Her program, which has hired more than 269 health workers and administered more than 12,000 vaccinations and boosters across Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia, isn't quite ready to transition back to pushing COVID-19 boosters.

"All of these people, all of these relationships we've carefully cultivated are at risk for falling apart," Khanna said. "Today if you were to say to me switch to booster, I'd say no. I need another two to three weeks to really get these people going."

UN cites possible crimes vs. humanity in China's Xinjiang

By JAMEY KEATEN and EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — China's discriminatory detention of Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim ethnic groups in the western region of Xinjiang may constitute crimes against humanity, the U.N. human rights office said in a long-awaited report Wednesday, which cited "serious" rights violations and patterns of torture in recent years.

The report seeks "urgent attention" from the U.N. and the world community to rights violations in Beijing's campaign to root out terrorism.

U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet, facing pressure on both sides, brushed aside multiple Chinese calls for her office to withhold the report, which follows her own, much-criticized trip to Xinjiang in May. Beijing contends the report is part of a Western campaign to smear China's reputation.

The report has fanned a tug-of-war for diplomatic influence with the West over the rights of the region's native Uyghurs and other ethnic groups.

The report, which Western diplomats and U.N. officials said had been all but ready for months, was published with just minutes to go in Bachelet's four-year term. It was unexpected to break significant new ground beyond sweeping findings from researchers, advocacy groups and journalists who have documented concerns about human rights in Xinjiang for several years.

But the 48-page report comes with the imprimatur of the United Nations and its member countries — notably including rising superpower China itself. The report largely corroborates earlier reporting by advocacy groups and others and injects U.N. heft behind the outrage that victims and their families have expressed about China's policies in Xinjiang.

"Beijing's repeated denial of the human rights crisis in Xinjiang rings ever-more hollow with this further recognition of the evidence of ongoing crimes against humanity and other human rights violation in the region," Agnes Callamard, Amnesty International's secretary-general, said in a statement.

The run-up to the report's release fueled a debate over China's influence at the world body and epitomized the on-and-off diplomatic chill between Beijing and the West over human rights, among other sore spots.

China shot back, saying the U.N. rights office ignored human rights "achievements" made together by "people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang."

"Based on the disinformation and lies fabricated by anti-China forces and out of presumption of guilt, the so-called 'assessment' distorts China's laws, wantonly smears and slanders China, and interferes in China's internal affairs," read a letter from China's diplomatic mission in Geneva issued in response to the

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U.N. report.

China released a 122-page report titled "Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism in Xinjiang: Truth and Facts" that defended its record and was distributed by the U.N. with its assessment.

The U.N. report says "serious human rights violations" have been committed in Xinjiang under China's policies to fight terrorism and extremism, which singled out Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim communities, between 2017 and 2019.

The report cites "patterns of torture" inside what Beijing called vocational training centers, which were part of its reputed plan to boost economic development in region, and it points to "credible" allegations of torture or ill-treatment, including cases of sexual violence.

Above all, perhaps, the report warns that the "arbitrary and discriminatory detention" of such groups in Xinjiang, through moves that stripped them of "fundamental rights ... may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity."

The report called on China to release all individuals arbitrarily detained and to clarify the whereabouts of individuals who have disappeared and whose families are seeking information about them.

The report was drawn in part from interviews with former detainees and others familiar with conditions at eight detention centers. Its authors suggest China was not always forthcoming with information, saying requests for some specific sets of information "did not receive formal response."

The rights office said it could not confirm estimates of how many people were detained in the internment camps in Xinjiang, but added it was "reasonable to conclude that a pattern of large-scale arbitrary detention occurred" at least between 2017 and 2019.

According to investigations by researchers and journalists, the Chinese government's mass detention campaign in Xinjiang swept an estimated million or more Uyghurs and other ethnic groups into a network of prisons and camps over the past five years.

Beijing has closed many of the camps, but hundreds of thousands continue to languish in prison on vague, secret charges.

The report said that reports of sharp increases in arrests and lengthy prison sentences in the region strongly suggested a shift toward formal incarceration as the principal means for large-scale imprisonment and deprivation of liberty — instead of the use of the "vocational training centers" once touted by Beijing.

"This is of particular concern given the vague and capacious definitions of terrorism, 'extremism' and public security related offenses under domestic criminal law," the report said, saying it could lead to lengthy sentences, "including for minor offenses or for engaging in conduct protected by international human rights law."

Some countries, including the United States, have accused Beijing of committing genocide in Xinjiang. The U.N. report made no mention of genocide.

In Tokyo, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno welcomed the publication of the report and said, "We will continue asking China to explain with transparency as well as requesting them to make a clear positive move."

Bachelet said in recent months that she received pressure from both sides to publish — or not publish — the report and resisted it all, treading a fine line while noting her experience with political squeeze during her two terms as president of Chile.

In June, Bachelet said she would not seek a new term as rights chief and promised the report would be released by her departure date on Aug. 31. That led to a swell in back-channel campaigns — including letters from civil society, civilians and governments on both sides of the issue. She hinted last week her office might miss her deadline, saying it was "trying" to release it before her exit.

Bachelet had set her sights on Xinjiang on taking office in September 2018, but Western diplomats voiced concern in private that over her term, she did not challenge China enough when other rights monitors had cited abuses against Uyghurs and others in Xinjiang.

In a statement from her office early Thursday, Bachelet said she had wanted to take "the greatest care" to deal with responses and input received from the Chinese government last week. Such reports are typi-

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cally shared with the concerned country before final publication, but generally to check facts — not to allow vetting or influence of the final report.

"I said that I would publish it before my mandate ended and I have," she said after the report was published.

Critics had said a failure to publish the report would have been a glaring black mark on her tenure, and the pressure from some countries made her job harder.

"To be perfectly honest, the politicization of these serious human rights issues by some states did not help," said Bachelet, who early on staked out a desire to cooperate with governments.

"I appeal to the international community not to instrumentalize real, serious human rights issues for political ends, but rather to work to support efforts to strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights," she added.

Her trip to the region in May was widely criticized by human rights groups, the U.S. administration and other governments as a public relations exercise for China.

Hours before the publication, the spokesman for U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Stephane Dujarric, said the U.N. chief had "no involvement" in how the report was drafted or handled, citing his commitment to Bachelet's independence.

Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch, said Bachelet's "damning findings explain why the Chinese government fought tooth and nail to prevent the publication of her Xinjiang report, which lays bare China's sweeping rights abuses."

Richardson urged the 47-member Human Rights Council, whose next session is in September, to investigate the allegations and hold those responsible to account.

Obstruction now a major focus in Trump documents probe

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI investigation into top-secret government information discovered at Mar-a-Lago is zeroing in on the question of whether former President Donald Trump's team criminally obstructed the probe. A new document alleges that government records had been concealed and removed and that law enforcement officials were misled about what was still there.

The allegation does not necessarily mean that Trump or anyone else will ultimately face charges. But it could pose the most direct legal threat to Trump or those in his orbit, in part because the Justice Department has historically viewed obstruction as an aggravating factor that tilts in favor of bringing charges in investigations involving the mishandling of classified information.

"It goes to the heart of trying to suborn the very integrity of our criminal justice system," said David Laufman, who once oversaw the same Justice Department counterintelligence section now responsible for the Mar-a-Lago investigation.

The latest Justice Department motion in the case is focused less on the removal last year of classified information from the White House to Mar-a-Lago and more on the events of this past spring. That's when law enforcement officials tried — unsuccessfully — to get all documents back and were assured, falsely, that everything had been accounted for after a "diligent search."

The Justice Department issued a grand jury subpoena in May for the records, and officials visited Mar-a-Lago on June 3 to collect them. When they got there, Tuesday's department document says, they were handed by a Trump lawyer a "single Redweld envelope, double-wrapped in tape" containing documents.

A custodian for the records presented a sworn certification to the officials saying that "any and all responsive documents" to the subpoena had been located and produced. A Trump lawyer said that all records that had come from the White House had been held in one location — a storage room — and that there were none in any private space or other spot at the house.

But the FBI came to doubt the truth of those statements and obtained a search warrant to return on Aug. 8.

Officials had "developed evidence that government records were likely concealed and removed from

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the Storage Room and that efforts were likely taken to obstruct the government's investigation," the new Justice Department filing says.

In their August search, agents found classified documents not only in the storage room but also in the former president's office, including three classified documents in an office desk, according to the Justice Department. In some instances, the agents and attorneys conducting the review of seized documents required additional clearances since the material was so highly classified.

"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.

In its own filing Wednesday night, Trump's lawyers decried the search as having taken place in "the midst of the standard give-and-take" between a former president and the National Archives and Records Administration over presidential records. It said the department had "gratuitously" made public certain information, including a photograph of classified documents taken from the home.

The Justice Department has stated in court filings that, besides investigating crimes related to the mishandling of national defense information and other documents, it is also looking into whether anyone committed obstruction.

It is not clear from Tuesday's filing how much of that inquiry might center on Trump, who has repeatedly insisted that his team was cooperative with the FBI, as opposed to any of his lawyers or representatives who were directly involved in making the representations to the department. It's also unclear what role Trump himself had in those representations.

Obstruction matters because it's one of the factors investigators look for in weighing whether to bring charges. For instance, in his July 2016 announcement that the FBI would not be recommending criminal charges against Hillary Clinton in an investigation involving handling of her emails, FBI Director James Comey cited the absence of obstruction as one of the reasons.

When the Justice Department charged former CIA Director David Petraeus in 2015 with sharing classified information with his biographer, it made a point of including in court documents details about false statements prosecutors said he made during an FBI interview.

It is also not the first time that an obstruction investigation has surfaced in connection with Trump. Special Counsel Robert Mueller investigated whether Trump had obstructed an inquiry into whether his 2016 presidential campaign had colluded with Russia, and though Mueller did not recommend charges against the then-sitting president, he also pointedly declined to exonerate him.

In the current case, federal investigators are likely evaluating why Trump representatives provided statements about the status of classified information at Mar-a-Lago that proved easily contradicted by the evidence, as well as which individuals were involved in removing boxes and why.

Sarah Krissoff, a New York lawyer and former federal prosecutor, said the detailed information in this week's filing tells its own tale.

"Reading between the lines of what they were saying here, it suggests that they had very direct information from a source regarding the location of classified documents within Mar-a-Lago and essentially the concealment of, or lack of cooperation with, the prior efforts to recover those documents," she said.

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 to return to him certain seized property. U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon is to hear arguments on the matter Thursday.

Trump's lawyers responded Wednesday night by saying that a special master was needed for the sake of fairness, asserting that "left unchecked, the DOJ will impugn, leak, and publicize selective aspects of their investigation."

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

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and identified a "limited set of materials that potentially contain attorney-client privileged information." It said Tuesday that a special master was therefore unnecessary and that the presidential records that were taken from the home do not belong to Trump.

Jackson water crisis forces residents to find alternatives

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — The water pressure at James Brown's home in Jackson was so low the faucets barely dripped. He couldn't cook. He couldn't bathe. But he still had to work.

The 73-year-old tree-cutter hauled bags of ice into his truck at a gas station on his way to a job Wednesday after several days without water.

"What can I do? I'm just a pawn in a chess game," he said during one of multiple trips to and from the store. "All I've got to do is just try and live."

People waited in lines for water to drink, bathe, cook and flush toilets Wednesday in Mississippi's capital. The city water system partially failed early this week after Pearl River flooding exacerbated longstanding problems in one of two water-treatment plants.

President Joe Biden late Tuesday approved an emergency declaration for the state of Mississippi. On Wednesday, he called Jackson Mayor Chokwe Lumumba to discuss response efforts, including support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers. The mayor also said he had a separate telephone conversation with Vice President Kamala Harris.

Beyond addressing the immediate crisis, Biden said he wants to provide federal support for the long-term effort to rebuild Jackson's aging water infrastructure, which has been unreliable for years.

Lumumba said Jackson's water system is troubled by short staffing and "decades of deferred maintenance." He said the influx of water from torrential rain changed the chemical composition needed for treatment, which slowed the process of pushing water out to customers.

A city news release said the main water-treatment plant had "challenges with water chemistry" Wednesday, which led to a drop in output of water. That caused depletion of water tanks and a sharp decrease in water pressure.

Even before the service disruption, Jackson's 150,000 residents had been boiling their drinking water for the past month because officials said it could cause digestive problems.

Brown said Wednesday that he'd stopped at the grocery store to buy four cases of water before picking up the ice. A lifelong Jackson resident, he said people there have been living without access to consistent water for years — even when there is pressure, residents often have to boil it to drink and cook.

A cold snap in 2021 left tens of thousands of people without running water after pipes froze. Similar problems happened again early this year, on a smaller scale.

"It will get right one day," Brown said. "When, I have no idea."

Like many cities, Jackson faces water system problems it can't afford to fix. Its tax base has eroded the past few decades as the population decreased — the result of mostly white flight to suburbs that began after public schools integrated in 1970. The city's population is now more than 80% Black, with about 25% of its residents living in poverty.

Lumumba said Tuesday that fixing Jackson's water system could run to "quite possibly the billions of dollars." Mississippi is receiving \$75 million to address water problems as part of a bipartisan infrastructure bill. Jackson is receiving about \$31 million through the EPA's revolving loan funds for treatment and distribution system improvements.

During a Wednesday news conference, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the EPA is deploying personnel to Jackson for an emergency assessment of the treatment plants and to streamline the delivery of repair equipment. FEMA has personnel at the state emergency operations center and is coordinating with the state emergency management team to identify needs, she said.

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves declared a state of emergency for Jackson's water system Tuesday. The

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state will try to help resolve problems by hiring contractors to work at the O.B. Curtis water treatment plant — the facility at the root of Jackson's water woes. The plant was operating at diminished capacity with backup pumps after the main pumps failed "some time ago," Reeves said.

In a video posted to Twitter, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency said an emergency rental pump had been installed Wednesday at the O.B. Curtis. Broken pumps at the plant resulted in decreased water pressure and some outages.

In a news conference Wednesday, Lumumba said city officials expected water pressure to start increasing later in the evening.

Bobbie Fairley, who has lived in Jackson her entire life, owns Magic Hands Hair design in south Jackson. The 59-year-old said she had to cancel five appointments Wednesday because she needs high water pressure to wash chemicals out of hair during treatments.

She has had to purchase water to shampoo hair to try fit in whatever appointments she can. When clients aren't coming in, she's losing money.

"That's a big burden," she said. "I can't afford that. I can't afford that at all."

Jackson State University had to bring in temporary restrooms for students and was waiting on the delivery of portable showers Wednesday, President Thomas Hudson said.

Hudson said the city's water issues have been an ongoing challenge for the historically Black university as it has worked to attract students.

"It does make it difficult in terms of what we're trying to do, our core mission, which is education," Hudson said.

He said the university is starting work on a plan for a standalone water supply system using some of the federal funding made available to historically Black colleges and universities.

Shannon Wilson, whose daughter just started her sophomore year at Jackson State, said her daughter's dorm regained some pressure, but the water coming out is brown. Her daughter left to stay with a friend off campus. But Wilson, who lives in St. Louis, can't help but worry about her.

"We are feeling helpless," Wilson said. "Being over 500 miles away from Jackson, there is nothing I can do but worry."

Leaky battleship in Texas completes trip for \$35M repairs

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

LA PORTE, Texas (AP) — It's the only surviving battleship that served in both world wars, having fought in Europe during World War I and against the Nazis and the Japanese Army during World War II. But the greatest challenge in recent years for the USS Texas has been a leaky, rusty hull that at times forced workers to pump out about 2,000 gallons (7,570 liters) of water per minute from the 110-year-old ship.

To ensure the historic vessel, commonly known to Texas residents as the Battleship Texas, doesn't sink and can continue hosting visitors, the foundation in charge of its care successfully towed the ship on Wednesday from its longtime home along the Houston Ship Channel to a shipyard in Galveston for repairs.

Tony Gregory, president of the Battleship Texas Foundation, said the process of pulling the ship by tugboats and getting it on its way went perfectly. He said any problems would have happened in the first 15 minutes and there were no issues.

"It went smoother than we thought and quicker than we thought ... and she's gone, down the channel," he said Wednesday morning.

About nine hours later at around 4 p.m., the ship arrived in Galveston to cheering crowds of spectators. Four tugboats had pulled the vessel at a pace of about 5 knots.

Travis Davis, the foundation's vice president of ship operations and who was aboard the vessel during its trip, said Battleship Texas did really well during its journey and the organization never had to implement any of its emergency plans.

"She's been a champ the whole time," Davis said in a video from the ship just before it arrived in Galveston.

The 40-mile (64 kilometer) journey from its longtime berth at the San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site in the Houston suburb of La Porte is part of a \$35 million project to repair the hull and ultimately

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restore the ship to its former glory.

The foundation plans to eventually resettle it in a new location in Texas, possibly in one of three nearby cities, including Galveston, to attract more visitors and increase revenue.

Moving the vessel is "the major step in getting the ship back to tiptop shape," Gregory said Tuesday as he stood aboard it while workers made final preparations.

Since 1948, the USS Texas has been at the state historic site where the decisive battle in the Texas Revolution was fought. There, it's served as a museum and tourist attraction. The battleship was previously taken to the same shipyard in Galveston for repairs in 1988.

For the last three years, the ship has been closed to the public as the foundation has been preparing for the repairs. In 2019, the Texas Legislature approved the funds to fix the hull. The foundation plans to make other fixes that it's paying for. All the repairs are expected to take up to a year to complete.

Tricia Thomas, 50, who was one of the people invited to watch as the ship was unmoored early Wednesday morning, said she became emotional and teared up as she saw it begin its journey and heard its whistle sound. As the ship started moving, Thomas said, people clapped and cheered.

"It's amazing to see a ship that's 100 years old out on the water again, moving like she did for so many years. It was exciting," said Thomas, who lives in the Houston suburb of Kingwood.

Thomas said it's important to preserve the ship so future generations can learn its history and it can remind people how they can come together for a common cause that's greater than them.

"I think that's probably the biggest story she can tell," Thomas said.

At the Texas City Dike, a 5-mile-long (8-kilometer-long) levee that stretches into Galveston Bay, several hundred people gathered on Wednesday for a chance to see the ship go by.

Members of the Texas history group Lone Star Volunteers fired blanks from a cannon five times in salute of the ship as it floated by. Many of the Texas flags that flew in the state during its history, including the Texas Navy flag, were planted in ground near the cannon, nicknamed "Rolling Thunder."

"We're not going to shoot a projectile," said Lone Star Volunteers member Mike Wilson, who wore a loose-fitting red shirt, white linen-type pants and black riding boots, designed to be an approximation of what volunteers in the Texas Army might have worn. "They might turn the guns of the USS Texas back on us."

"The USS Texas, it represents freedom," Wilson said.

Todd Homman, another member of Lone Star Volunteers, said the ship's journey brought back fond memories of visiting the vessel with friends as a teenager and hiding and staying aboard after hours.

"We didn't do the teenage stuff," he said. "We cleaned, picked up, polished the brass. We beautified her and cleaned her up."

Homman said the ship inspired his brother to join the Navy.

Chris Fleming, 67, from nearby Dickinson, waited four hours in hot, humid weather to watch the ship float by the Texas City Dike.

"It's history in the making... I just wanted to see it float. I just wanted to see it go by. It was neat. I enjoyed it," Fleming said.

Michigan election board rejects abortion rights initiative

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and SARA BURNETT Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — A Michigan elections board on Wednesday rejected an abortion rights initiative after its two Republican board members voted against putting the proposed constitutional amendment on the November ballot.

The two Democrats on the Board of State Canvassers voted in favor, but getting the measure on the ballot required at least three votes of the four-member board. The Reproductive Freedom for All campaign, which gathered signatures to get the measure on the ballot, is expected to appeal to the Democratic-leaning Michigan Supreme Court in the coming days and expressed confidence it would prevail.

The board's administrative and clerical work on elections was once carried out in obscurity, but it drew national attention in 2020 when Donald Trump pressured Republican members not to certify Joe Biden's

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electoral win in the state. Its partisan split was evident on another issue Wednesday, when it deadlocked 2-2 on a measure to expand voting, with Democrats for it and Republicans against.

Abortion rights have become a powerful motivator for voters since Roe was overturned. In conservative Kansas, voters overwhelmingly defeated a ballot measure that would have allowed the Republican-controlled Legislature to tighten restrictions or ban the procedure outright, 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.

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. The meeting drew hundreds of people, who packed the hearing room and overflow rooms for a chance to comment. Abortion opponents also protested outside.

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."

Darci McConnell, a spokeswoman for Reproductive Freedom for All, the group backing the measure, said she remains confident.

"We had more than 730,000 people who read, signed and understood what they signed. The board was supposed to do one thing today and affirm that we had the signatures, their own bureau said we did. So we're still optimistic that we'll be on the ballot in November," McConnell said.

Supporters of the other initiative, to expand voting including adding ballot drop boxes, also are expected to appeal to the Supreme Court. Groups have seven business days to appeal and the ballot must be finalized by Sept. 9.

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.

Abortion opponents protested noisily outside as the meeting got underway Wednesday. Their muffled yells could be heard inside the hearing room, and the Republican board chairman at one point asked security to tell them to stop banging on the windows.

During the public comment period, Dr. Jessica Frost, an obstetrician and gynecologist in Lansing, told the board "we must restore the reproductive protections lost when Roe was overturned."

Opponents said the ballot language was confusing. Several called abortion immoral and warned board members against approval.

"I can't imagine a more important decision that you have to ever make in your life, because I know that you and I will kneel before Christ someday and answer for the decision you make today," Billy Putman said.

The Bureau of Elections verified last Thursday that the abortion 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.

On Wednesday, Mary Ellen Gurewitz, a Democratic canvasser, said the board had "no authority to reject this petition due to challenges to the content of the petition." But Tony Daunt, a Republican canvasser, said errors in some petition language were "egregious."

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

Trump's pressure in 2020 led one member, who has since resigned, to abstain from certifying Biden's win. The other GOP board member, who voted to certify, wasn't nominated again by the state GOP party and was replaced by Daunt, the board chairman.

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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.

Reported sexual assaults across US military increase by 13%

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Reports of sexual assaults across the U.S. military jumped by 13% last year, driven by significant increases in the Army and the Navy as bases began to move out of pandemic restrictions and public venues reopened, The Associated Press has learned.

Mirroring the increase in those reports is the disclosure that close to 36,000 service members said in a confidential survey that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact — a dramatic increase over the roughly 20,000 who said that in a similar 2018 survey, U.S. defense and military officials said.

The latest numbers are certain to anger lawmakers on Capitol Hill who have been critical of the Pentagon's efforts to get a handle on sexual crimes and misconduct.

According to officials, the overall increase is largely fueled by a nearly 26% jump in reports involving Army soldiers. It's the largest increase for that service since 2013, when such reports went up by 51%.

The increase in Navy reports was about 9%, the Air Force was a bit more than 2% and the Marine Corps was less than 2%, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the reporting has not yet been made public.

The big increase is especially troublesome for the Army, which is struggling to meet its recruiting goals and is expected to miss the target by at least 10,000 — or by anywhere from 18% to 25% — at the end of September. Army leaders have acknowledged that it is important for parents and others who influence recruits to feel comfortable that their son or daughter is safe and will be taken care of in the service.

Army officials said the numbers are alarming and that they certainly could have an impact on recruiting, if parents believe their youth are at risk of assaults. They said Army leaders saw the growing numbers last year and began trying to implement new programs. Already, they said, some programs are working and the sexual harassment and assault numbers have been coming down this year.

COVID-19 and the pandemic restrictions make year-to-year comparisons complicated. Officials said they do not have enough data to determine if — or how much — the pandemic played a role in the higher reporting and survey numbers.

The Pentagon and the military services have long struggled to come up with programs to prevent sexual assaults and to encourage reporting. While the military has made inroads in making it easier and safer for service members to come forward, it has had far less success reducing the assaults, which have increased nearly every year since 2006.

Army leaders said they've seen some results with a training program that soldiers get when they report to their first duty station. It is rolled out right away, and has soldiers acting out dangerous situations and emphasizes training on how to respond. They also said they are improving evaluation programs that grade unit leaders, including randomly picking peers and others to do the assessments.

The double-digit overall increase comes after two years of relatively small increases in reports filed by or involving service members. In the budget year ending September 2020, reports of sexual assault and unwanted sexual contact edged up by 1%, as much of the world largely shut down due to the pandemic. The previous year, reports went up by about 3% — a substantial improvement over 2018, which also saw a 13% increase.

The widespread restrictions on travel and movement for the military continued during fall 2020 and the early part of 2021, and many businesses, restaurants and bars were shut down or had limited service. Things began to open up as more people were vaccinated in the summer and fall, but it's also not clear whether that greater freedom contributed to the increase in assault reports.

The Pentagon releases a report every year on the number of sexual assaults reported by or about troops. But because sexual assault is a highly underreported crime, the department began to do a confidential

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survey every two years to get a clearer picture of the problem. The 2018 survey found that more than 20,000 service members said they experienced some type of sexual assault, but only one-third of them filed a formal report.

The latest report, expected to be publicly released Thursday, estimates that about 35,800 service members experienced some type of sexual assault in the previous year, based on the confidential survey. That means that only about one in every five service members reported an incident that happened in the previous year.

Every year as many as 10% of the assaults that service members reported happened before they joined the military.

Officials familiar with the findings said survey respondents also reported increases in hostility in the workplace, as well as more sexual harassment, which can sometimes lead to other sexual assaults or misconduct. They said the survey revealed that about 8% of all women and 1.5% of men in the service said they had experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact.

Officials said the survey suggested that, based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a woman's chance of being sexually assaulted in the military was about the same as a woman in the general population. But for men, the risk for those in the military is much lower than in U.S. society.

Defense officials have argued that an increase in reported assaults is a positive trend because so many people are reluctant to report it, both in the military and in society as a whole. Greater reporting, they say, shows there is more confidence in the reporting system and greater comfort with the support for victims.

It's unclear, however, whether the increased reports last year actually represent a growing problem or whether those who say they were assaulted were just more willing to come forward.

The Pentagon has been under persistent pressure from Congress to improve prevention and prosecutions. Lawmakers acted late last year to take some prosecution authority out of the hands of commanders and instead use independent prosecutors.

Victims rights advocates and others have argued that service members don't trust the system and are often unwilling to go to their commanders with a complaint for fear of retribution. They also worry that commanders may not press ahead with some cases if they know the accused. Members of Congress argued that using independent prosecutors would make the process more fair, and make victims more comfortable coming forward.

Judge nixes no-prison deal in 2018 limo crash that killed 20

By MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

SCHOHARIE, N.Y. (AP) — A judge rejected a plea agreement that would have meant no prison time for the operator of a limousine company involved in a crash that killed 20 people in upstate New York. Wednesday's turnabout drew applause and tears from victims' relatives and plunged limo company boss Nauman Hussain into legal uncertainty.

State Supreme Court Justice Peter Lynch, who was not presiding over the case when the deal was reached a year ago in Hussain's case, called the agreement "fundamentally flawed."

It would have spared Hussain prison time, angering the families of the people killed when brake failure sent a stretch limo full of birthday revelers hurtling down a hill in 2018.

The judge's rejection caught lawyers and relatives off-guard. Family members who, moments earlier, were testifying about their grief and anger over no one being accountable for the deadly crash clapped and dabbed their eyes after the judge's announcement.

"I can't even put into words how I feel. Totally unexpected. Thank God," said Jill Richardson-Perez, the mother of limo crash victim Matthew Coons, while leaving court. "I'm in a better place now."

Kevin Cushing, who lost his son Patrick in the crash, said the families "have a hope for a bit of justice to be served in the future, where we didn't have any justice served in the past."

Defense attorney Chad Seigel said they were "shocked" and that the judge's move was "unheard of."

Hussain, who operated Prestige Limousine, had been charged with 20 counts each of criminally negligent homicide and second-degree manslaughter in what was the deadliest U.S. transportation disaster in

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a decade.

The agreement had called for Hussain to plead guilty only to the homicide counts, resulting five years of probation and 1,000 hours of community service. Lawyers for both sides said last year the plea agreement assured a resolution in a case that would have faced an uncertain outcome if presented to a jury.

Lynch noted that a state Department of Transportation out-of-service sticker had been placed on the limousine a month before the crash. State police recovered the sticker from Hussain's personal car after his arrest. Prosecutors have argued that Hussain took the sticker off the limo's windshield so that he could use it for more jobs.

To the judge, Hussain's actions showed he knew the risk of putting the limousine on the road the day of the crash, and a guilty plea to only criminally negligent homicide does not reflect that. Second-degree manslaughter charges are filed when a defendant is accused of being aware of the risk of death and disregarding it. Lynch called the deal "completely disingenuous and unacceptable to this court."

Lynch gave Hussain's lawyers the choice of accepting a sentence of 1 1/3 to four years in prison or withdrawing his guilty plea. They chose the latter.

Seigel said afterward that the DOT sticker had "absolutely nothing to do with defective brakes."

"Collectively, we made a decision that it would be in the best of all all involved — not only our client, but the members of the community — to put this matter behind them. A little monkey wrench was thrown in that," Seigel said. "So the judge forced our hand and we're ready for trial."

District Attorney Susan Mallery left court without commenting.

Hussain, who sat with his head lowered for much of the proceeding, declined comment afterward.

While the National Transportation Safety Board concluded the crash was likely caused by Prestige Limousine's "egregious disregard for safety" that resulted in brake failure, the board said ineffective state oversight contributed.

Attorneys for Hussain say he tried to maintain the limousine and relied on what he was told by state officials and a repair shop that inspected it.

Axel Steenburg rented the 2001 Ford Excursion limousine for wife Amy's 30th birthday on Oct. 6, 2018. The party group, ranging in age from 24 to 34, included Axel's brother, Amy's three sisters and two of their husbands, and close friends.

En route to a brewery, the limo's brakes failed on a downhill stretch of road in Schoharie, west of Albany. The vehicle blew through a stop sign at over 100 mph (160 kph) and crashed into a small ravine.

The crash killed the limo driver, 17 passengers, and two bystanders outside the store.

Mallery's office has said Hussain allowed passengers to ride in the limo despite having received "multiple notices of violations" from the state and having been told repairs were inadequate. State police said the vehicle should have been taken out of service because of brake problems identified in an inspection a month before the crash.

The next court date has been set for Sept. 14. Hussain, who had completed a year of interim probation, was allowed to leave the court, but the judge ordered he be subject to GPS monitoring.

Lynch revealed his decision only after several relatives spoke about their enduring pain and sense of loss. Sheila McGarvey told the court that her 30-year-old son Shane McGowan was just beginning his life with new wife, Erin McGowan, who was also riding in the limo.

"I call out my son Shane's name all the time," McGarvey said, "but no one answers."

US clears updated COVID boosters targeting newest variants

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. on Wednesday authorized its first update to COVID-19 vaccines, booster doses that target today's most common omicron strain. Shots could begin within days.

The move by the Food and Drug Administration tweaks the recipe of shots made by Pfizer and rival Moderna that already have saved millions of lives. The hope is that the modified boosters will blunt yet another winter surge — and help tamp down the BA.5 omicron relative that continues to spread widely.

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"These updated boosters present us with an opportunity to get ahead" of the next COVID-19 wave, said FDA Commissioner Dr. Robert Califf.

Until now, COVID-19 vaccines have targeted the original coronavirus strain, even as wildly different mutants emerged. The new U.S. boosters are combination, or "bivalent," shots. They contain half that original vaccine recipe and half protection against the newest omicron versions, BA.4 and BA.5, that are considered the most contagious yet.

The combination aims to increase cross-protection against multiple variants.

"It really provides the broadest opportunity for protection," Pfizer vaccine chief Annaliesa Anderson told The Associated Press.

The updated boosters are only for people who have already had their primary vaccinations, using the original vaccines. Doses made by Pfizer and its partner BioNTech are for anyone 12 and older while Moderna's updated shots are for adults — if it has been at least two months since their last primary vaccination or their latest booster. They're not to be used for initial vaccinations.

There's one more step before a fall booster campaign begins: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention must recommend who should get the additional shot. An influential CDC advisory panel will debate the evidence Thursday — including whether people at high risk from COVID-19 should go first.

The U.S. has purchased more than 170 million doses from the two companies. Pfizer said it could ship up to 15 million of those doses by the end of next week. Moderna didn't immediately say how many doses are ready to ship but that some will be available "in the coming days."

The big question is whether people weary of vaccinations will roll up their sleeves again. Just half of vaccinated Americans got the first recommended booster dose, and only a third of those 50 and older who were urged to get a second booster did so.

Here's the rub: The original vaccines still offer strong protection against severe disease and death from COVID-19 for generally healthy people, especially if they got that important first booster dose. It's not clear just how much more benefit an updated booster will bring — beyond a temporary jump in antibodies capable of fending off an omicron infection.

Still, "people have to realize this is a different kind of booster than was previously available. It will work better at protecting against omicron," said virologist Andrew Pekosz of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Even people who had an earlier omicron version still can get reinfected so "you should definitely go for the booster even if you've been infected in the last year," added Pekosz. He thinks "if we can get good buy-in to use this, we might really be able to make a dent" in COVID-19 cases.

The FDA cleared the modifications ahead of studies in people, a step toward eventually handling COVID-19 vaccine updates more like yearly changes to flu shots.

FDA vaccine chief Dr. Peter Marks stressed the agency considered "the totality" of evidence. Pfizer and Moderna have previously brewed vaccine doses updated to match earlier mutants — including the omicron strain named BA.1 that struck last winter — and tested them in people. Those earlier recipe changes were safe, and the BA.1 version substantially boosted virus-fighting antibodies — more than another dose of the original vaccine — although fewer that recognized today's genetically distinct BA.4 and BA.5 strains.

But instead of using those BA.1 shots, FDA ordered the companies to brew even more up-to-date doses that target those newest omicron mutants, sparking a race to roll them out. Rather than waiting a few more months for additional human studies of that very similar recipe tweak, Marks said animal tests showed the latest update spurs "a very good immune response."

"One needs to refresh the immune system with what is actually circulating," Marks said. That's why FDA also is no longer authorizing boosters made with the original recipe for those 12 and older.

The hope, Marks said, is that a vaccine matched to currently spreading variants might do a better job fighting infection, not just serious illness, at least for a while.

What's next? Even as modified shots roll out, Moderna and Pfizer are conducting human studies to help assess their value, including how they hold up if a new mutant comes along.

And for children, Pfizer plans to ask FDA to allow updated boosters for 5- to 11-year-olds in early October.

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It's the first U.S. update to the COVID-19 vaccine recipe, an important but expected next step -- like how flu vaccines get updated every year.

And the U.S. isn't alone. Britain recently decided to offer adults over 50 a different booster option from Moderna, a combo shot targeting that initial BA.1 omicron strain. European regulators are considering whether to authorize one or both of the updated formulas.

Calm before storms? Oddly quiet Atlantic despite forecasts

By SETH BORENSTEIN AND REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — It's been quiet — too quiet — this Atlantic hurricane season, meteorologists and residents of storm-prone areas whisper almost as if not to tempt fate.

A record-tying inactive August is drawing to a close and no storms have formed, even though it is peak hurricane season and all experts' pre-season forecasts warned of an above normal season. Nearly all the factors that meteorologists look for in a busy season are there.

Warm ocean water for fuel? Check.

Not a lot of wind shear that decapitates storms? Check.

La Nina, the natural cooling of the central Pacific that changes weather patterns worldwide and increases Atlantic storm activity? Check.

Yet zero storms formed. Surprised experts point to unusual persistent dry air and a few other factors. But each time they and computer simulations think something is brewing, nothing comes of it.

"It has been surprisingly and freakishly quiet in the Atlantic," University of Miami hurricane researcher Brian McNoldy said, pointing out that weak Tropical Storm Colin fizzled out on July 2 and there's been nothing since.

It'll be the first time since 1941 that the Atlantic has gone from July 3 to the end of August with no named storm, Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach said. Since 1950, only 1997 and 1961 had no named storms in August and 1961 then went hyperactive in September, including deadly Carla, he said.

In Lake Charles, Louisiana, one of the more weather-battered cities in the past decade, residents have noticed how quiet the hurricane season is so far and it's almost "testing fate" to bring it up, Mayor Nic Hunter said. From August 2020 to August 2021, the city was hammered by two hurricanes — Laura and Delta — only six weeks apart, a deep freeze and spring flooding. Residents still have blue tarps on their roofs.

"I think there's a lot of knocking on wood. There's a lot of prayers," Hunter said. "Until the season is over, I don't think anybody's going to have any sighs of relief."

Certainly not 74-year-old Shirley Verdin, who lives about 200 miles (320 kilometers) away in Bayou Point-Au-Chien, where Hurricane Ida ripped through on Aug. 29 last year. She now lives in a Federal Emergency Management Agency trailer next to her gutted home that will be demolished down to the pilings this weekend so it can be rebuilt.

There are wisps of potential storm systems swirling in the Atlantic that meteorologists are following and so is Verdin. Closely.

"I know there's something out there right now," she said.

The National Hurricane Center is watching three thunderstorm systems in the Atlantic and gives them all at least a 50% chance of becoming a named tropical storm, with one of them a likely sounding 80%. But Colorado State's Klotzbach has seen this before this year and isn't counting on them.

Just late last week, the computer forecast models predicted three maybe four storms forming, including one becoming a major hurricane with winds of more than 110 mph (177 km/h), Klotzbach said.

Then nothing.

For the past month and a half, thunderstorms that could be seeds of hurricanes power off Africa looking strong enough "but then they encounter a lot of dry air that's just sitting over the Atlantic," University of Albany atmospheric scientist Kristen Corbosiero said. "The dry air has really been the main thing that's

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been stopping storms from really getting going.”

Relative humidity is about 15% below normal and there’s been Saharan dust in there making it drier, McNoldy and Klotzbach said.

The dry air does a couple things, Corbosiero said. Those thunderstorms become more potent and get their energy as warm moist air rises off the ocean. The ocean is warm enough, but the dry air causes that water to evaporate, cool and go down, not up, she said.

That dry air also helps create cross winds about 2 miles up (3 to 4 kilometers) “that can really do damage to a storm trying to form,” Corbosiero said.

Matthew Rosencrans, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s lead hurricane outlook forecaster, said he sees signs that the dry air is ending and normal moisture will be returning, which could mean more storms. Rosencrans also says crosswinds at other heights, especially in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico also were a factor in dampening storm activity until now.

Other factors include a patch of sinking air over the Atlantic, a poorly located high pressure system also connected to the European heat wave and dust, the scientists said.

It’s been weird in the tropics, too, but in a different way, Klotzbach said. Before this year, the north Indian Ocean has had only one named storm in August; this year there are two, he said. And in the Pacific, Supertyphoon Hinnamnor is not only the most powerful storm on Earth this year, but it’s moving southwest when these type storms usually move west to east, Klotzbach said.

“There’s some odd stuff going on,” Klotzbach said.

But in the Atlantic nothing’s really going on and victims of past years’ storms don’t want to jinx it.

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful?” Louisiana resident Thomas Halko asked about whether the so-far quiet hurricane season will continue. Halko lives in southeastern Louisiana’s Jefferson Parish, in an area hammered by Hurricane Ida last year. A house on his property shifted clear off its foundation and had to be demolished.

“We made it through the week and it looks like we’re in relatively good shape for the next five days or so,” he said of the upcoming weather report.

But it’s hard to appreciate the quiet when he feels a “nervous anticipation of doom” thinking about the ongoing hurricane season.

“There is this foreboding that really won’t go away,” he said.

Hurricane season peaks around Sept. 10 and stretches through Nov. 30.

“It is important to remember the lessons of Hurricane Andrew, which devastated South Florida and Louisiana in an otherwise quiet year,” National Hurricane Center acting Director Jamie Rhome said in an email. “It only takes one landfalling hurricane to make it a bad season for you, and we still have many months to go in the hurricane season.”

UN inspectors head to Ukraine nuclear plant in war zone

By DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A team of U.N. inspectors made its way toward Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant Wednesday on a perilous, long-sought mission to safeguard the site and prevent a catastrophe from the fighting raging around it.

Underscoring the danger, Kyiv and Moscow again accused each other of shelling the area around the complex overnight. Zaporizhzhia is the biggest nuclear plant in Europe.

Fighting in early March caused a brief fire at its training complex, and in recent days, the plant was temporarily knocked offline because of damage, heightening fears of a radiation leak or a reactor meltdown. Officials have begun distributing anti-radiation iodine tablets to nearby residents.

The complex has been occupied by Russian forces but run by Ukrainian engineers since the early days of the 6-month-old war. Ukraine alleges Russia is using the plant as a shield, storing weapons there and launching attacks from around it, while Moscow accuses Ukraine of recklessly firing on the place.

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

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The U.N. convoy of vans and SUVs finally set out from Kyiv early Wednesday and arrived in the afternoon in the city of Zaporizhzhia, still some 120 kilometers (70 miles) by road from the plant. Ukrainian authorities said the team would stay in the city overnight and attempt to enter the plant on Thursday.

IAEA chief and mission leader Rafael Grossi said the "real work" will start on Thursday. He underscored the challenges ahead.

"It's a mission that seeks to prevent a nuclear accident and to preserve this important — the largest, the biggest — nuclear power plant in Europe," he said.

He said an initial tour will take a few days, after which "we will have a pretty good idea of what's going on." Grossi said he had received "explicit guarantees" from Russia that the 14 experts would be able to do their work.

Grossi said he is hoping the IAEA will be able to establish a "continued presence" at the plant to safeguard it against an accident.

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

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

While the inspectors were on their way, Russia-backed local authorities accused Ukrainian forces of repeatedly shelling the plant grounds and city where it is situated, Enerhodar. They said drone strikes hit the plant's administrative building and training center.

Yevhen Yevtushenko, head of the administration in the Ukrainian-held city of Nikopol, across the Dnieper River from the plant, charged that the attacks were carried out by the Russians in a bid to make Ukraine look like the culprit.

Kyiv is seeking international assistance in taking 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 said.

In other developments:

— Russia's Gazprom stopped the flow of natural gas through a major pipeline to Western Europe early Wednesday for what it said would be a three-day shutdown for routine maintenance. German authorities cast doubt on that explanation.

— EU countries agreed to make it more time-consuming and costly for Russian citizens to get visas to enter the 27-nation bloc. They failed to reach a consensus on an outright tourist ban in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

— Ukrainian officials said automatic weapons fire was heard on the streets of southern Kherson and claimed Russian soldiers were searching homes for anti-Russian partisans. A surge in fighting in the region this week stirred speculation early that Ukraine was beginning a counteroffensive to retake territory.

Russian forces heavily shelled military and civilian sites in over a dozen towns and villages in Kherson and the neighboring Zaporizhzhia region, according to Yaroslav Yanushevych, the Ukrainian governor of the Kherson region.

— Four people were killed and two wounded in Russian rocket attacks in the past day in the Donetsk region in the east, Ukrainian authorities said.

AP Emmy pundits call a win for 'Succession,' split on comedy

By LYNN ELBER and MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writers

So many TV shows, so few nominees who will end up clutching trophies at the Primetime Emmy Awards. A total of 25 awards will be presented during the Sept. 12 ceremony, including in the glamour categories of acting and best comedy, drama and limited series. Past winners Jean Smart ("Hacks") and Bill Hader ("Barry") are among the contenders.

The overall field is highly competitive, with an unprecedented twist: Netflix's South Korean phenomenon "Squid Game" is the first non-English language drama to be nominated for an Emmy.

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While predicting victors this year is like one of those daunting "Squid Game" contests, Associated Press Television Writer Lynn Elber and AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy foolishly soldier on.

DRAMA SERIES

Nominees: "Better Call Saul"; "Euphoria"; "Ozark"; "Severance"; "Squid Game"; "Stranger Things"; "Succession"; "Yellowjackets."

KENNEDY:

Should win: "Severance," the vicious satire of office culture could not have asked for better timing, just as many white-collar workers were making their first tentative steps back — and questioning why. It is just brilliant, unpredictable and haunting.

Will win: Although both my innie and my outie think it should be "Severance," the winner will be "Succession." Not a bad step, just an easy one.

ELBER:

Should win: "Severance" captures the zeitgeist of worker discontent, but let's consider "Squid Game" and its take on soul-destroying poverty. It's wholly original and, yes, gruesome. That didn't hurt four-time winner "Game of Thrones."

Will win: "Succession" won the last time it competed, in 2020, and the antics of the rich and scheming Roy family are as engrossing a peep show as ever.

COMEDY SERIES

Nominees: "Abbott Elementary"; "Barry"; "Curb Your Enthusiasm"; "Hacks"; "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel"; "Only Murders in the Building"; "Ted Lasso"; "What We Do in the Shadows."

KENNEDY:

Should win: The mockumentary "Abbott Elementary," a true workplace comedy in the vein of "The Office" or "Superstore." How it is so specific to a group of underfunded teachers in Philadelphia and yet universal is the magic.

Will win: "Only Murders in the Building," an uncontroversial and uninspired choice, as safe as an Upper West Side doorman building. Who can look at Martin Short, Steve Martin and Selena Gomez and tell them they get no Emmy?

ELBER:

Should win: Raise your hand if you know the answer. "Abbott Elementary" is the rare sitcom that clicked from the start, with its characters, stories and heart all in the right place.

Will win: "Abbott Elementary," despite the odds against an old-school network entry winning against flashier cable and streaming rivals. It hasn't happened since "Modern Family" won in 2014.

ACTRESS, DRAMA

Nominees: Jodie Comer, "Killing Eve"; Laura Linney, "Ozark"; Melanie Lynskey, "Yellowjackets"; Sandra Oh, "Killing Eve"; Reese Witherspoon, "The Morning Show"; Zendaya, "Euphoria."

KENNEDY:

Should win: Linney hasn't won for "Ozark" and she deserves it for going from dutiful wife to a cunning mastermind over the four seasons.

Will win: Oh, who richly deserves her first Emmy after four years of "Killing Eve." Comer and Zendaya have their statuettes; TV academy voters will bid Oh goodbye with one, too.

ELBER:

Should win and will win: Versatile, long-admired actor Lynskey gets her first Emmy for her role as Shauna, who has umm, meaty secrets. Zendaya's second win for her gutsy work in "Euphoria" is deserved, but voters favor change in this category.

ACTOR, DRAMA SERIES

Nominees: Jason Bateman, "Ozark"; Brian Cox, "Succession"; Lee Jung-jae, "Squid Game"; Bob Odenkirk, "Better Call Saul"; Adam Scott, "Severance"; Jeremy Strong, "Succession."

KENNEDY:

Should win: Scott for playing two roles on "Severance," a worker bee and a grieving widow. The former "Parks and Recreation" star is here an everyman, just sputtering through his day, with damage lurking

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beneath the suit and tie.

Will win: Odenkirk, never nominated for "Breaking Bad," should have at least one Emmy at home for "Better Call Saul." Or Cox, who had a rip-roaring season on "Succession."

ELBER:

Should win and will win: A category of heavyweights for sure, with all the above worthy. But Cox triumphs as the wily magnate scrabbling to control his empire and out-manuever his equally venal brood.

ACTRESS, COMEDY SERIES

Nominees: Rachel Brosnahan, "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel"; Quinta Brunson, "Abbott Elementary"; Kaley Cuoco, "The Flight Attendant"; Elle Fanning, "The Great"; Issa Rae, "Insecure"; Jean Smart, "Hacks."

ELBER:

Should win: Brunson's idealistic young schoolteacher is endearing and, as she begins to learn how to survive bureaucracy, growing before our eyes. Plus, teachers deserve respect.

Will win: Smart. Back-to-back wins have become rare in the age of peak TV (read: unending stream of shows), but her portrayal of a veteran comedian refusing to say uncle reached new levels of vulnerability and grit.

KENNEDY:

Should win and will win: Smart, her character vicious in anger, driven in her career, but this season also sowing a maternal and soft side. Besides, her other Emmy for "Hacks" is lonely.

ACTOR, COMEDY SERIES

Nominees: Donald Glover, "Atlanta"; Bill Hader, "Barry"; Nicholas Hoult, "The Great"; Jason Sudeikis, "Ted Lasso"; Steve Martin, "Only Murders in the Building"; Martin Short, "Only Murders in the Building."

ELBER:

Should win: Can we get a twofer for Martin and Short, whose chemistry and playfulness makes the series? (With a nod to co-star Selena Gomez; her droll tolerance of the pair adds the perfect note.)

Will win: Hader's portrayal of a hitman-turned-actor who can't escape his past is the core of a viciously satirical, addictive brew. A third Emmy is his reward.

KENNEDY:

Should win: Hoult, playing a vain, unpredictable, glass-breaking, headbutting and unethical Peter III of Russia in "The Great," sucking the oxygen from every scene. It's a frat-boy role but hard to nail like Hoult. "Let us hope my seed has found purchase," he says after an encounter with the queen, and I agree.

Will win: Hader. Everyone loves Hader.

LIMITED SERIES

Nominees: "Dopesick"; "The Dropout"; "Inventing Anna"; "The White Lotus"; "Pam & Tommy."

ELBER:

Should win: "Dopesick" is a granular dissection of the roots of America's devastating opioid crisis focused on both its victims and villains. Television at its relevant best.

Will win: "The Dropout." Let's face it: Seeing a Silicon Valley's high-flier brought down a peg or further is a guilty pleasure, and the story of Theranos founder Elizabeth Holmes' spectacular fall is punchily told.

KENNEDY:

Should win: "The Dropout," agreed, a rise and fall — as well as a trip back to her teenage years — so well told that viewers could almost feel sorry for Holmes, or at least understand how her fraud could happen.

Will win: "The White Lotus," a satire of wealth, entitlement and privilege was this cycle's lite "Big Little Lies," and it was the splashiest show about rich white people being horrible, which weirdly all the nominees this time had elements of.

ACTOR, LIMITED SERIES

Nominees: Colin Firth, "The Staircase"; Andrew Garfield, "Under the Banner of Heaven"; Oscar Isaac, "Scenes from a Marriage"; Michael Keaton, "Dopesick"; Himesh Patel, "Station Eleven"; Sebastian Stan, "Pam & Tommy."

ELBER:

Should win and will win: Michael Keaton, for his restrained portrayal of a small-town doctor who's ensnared

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by opioids at incalculable cost, to him and his patients. The Oscar-winning star is a gift to the small screen.

KENNEDY:

Should win: Isaac, who in "Scenes from a Marriage" whipsaws from being tightly controlled to impulsive, a little befuddled, liable to snap and always human as his heart broke.

Will win: Keaton, who always it seems is an underestimated talent, shining in a role perfectly suited to him: a sweet local doctor gradually understanding the horror he has helped create. A little too perfect, but, hey.

ACTRESS, LIMITED SERIES

Nominees: Toni Collette, "The Staircase"; Julia Garner, "Inventing Anna"; Lily James, "Pam & Tommy"; Sarah Paulson, "Impeachment: American Crime Story"; Margaret Qualley, "Maid"; Amanda Seyfried, "The Dropout."

ELBER:

Should win: Qualley did justice to a rarely seen screen character — a struggling, blue-collar single mom — with a nuanced, breakout performance in "Maid."

Will win: Seyfried, whose portrayal of an ill-fated Silicon Valley whiz kid in "The Dropout" was a pull-out-the-stops barn burner.

KENNEDY:

Should win and will win: We'll no doubt see all these actors again at the Emmys, but this year it is all about Seyfried, who played a fraudster with a Yoda-loving, Mandarin-speaking, munching-on-a-scorpion and dancing poorly essence.

Kremlin offers mixed view of Gorbachev's historic role

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The Kremlin treaded carefully Wednesday reacting to Mikhail Gorbachev's death, praising his prominent role in reshaping 20th-century history but noting his "romantic" view of the West.

The Kremlin's ambivalence was reflected in the uncertainty about funeral arrangements. An iconic central venue chosen for Saturday's farewell ceremony has been used for state funerals since Soviet times, but Russian media reported that Gorbachev won't be given that honor.

The hesitant stance was mirrored by state television broadcasts, which paid tribute 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 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," but noted what he described as his idealistic view of the West.

"Gorbachev gave an impulse for ending the Cold War and he sincerely wanted to believe that it would be over and an eternal romance would start between the renewed Soviet Union and the collective West," Peskov said. "This romanticism failed to materialize. The bloodthirsty nature of our opponents has come to light, and it's good that we realized that in time."

Peskov wouldn't say if Gorbachev would be given a state funeral and whether Putin would attend any ceremony held for the late Soviet leader.

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 became a major irritant in Russia-West ties for decades and fomented tensions that exploded

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when the Russian leader sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Sergei Naryshkin, the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), a top KGB successor agency, observed that while Gorbachev's "perestroika became history, we still have to deal with its consequences today." He added that Gorbachev faced numerous challenges to which "no proper answers were found."

Members of the Kremlin-controlled parliament followed a similar path, hailing Gorbachev's historic role but lamenting the Soviet collapse in 1991.

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 noted that his 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, noted 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."

Others in Russia 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 during 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."

On another flank, Grigory Yavlinsky, the leader of the liberal Yabloko party, praised Gorbachev for "offering freedom to hundreds of millions in Russia, its neighborhood and half of Europe."

"It's our responsibility how we in Russia have used that freedom, that great opportunity," he said.

Imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said he learned about Gorbachev's death from prison radio, adding sarcastically that "it perfectly reflects a sharp turn the country has made."

"Gorbachev has remained one of the very few who didn't use power and the opportunities it offered for personal gain," he said on his messaging app channel. "I'm sure that our descendants will have a far more favorable view of his life than his contemporaries."

Dmitry Muratov, last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner who served as the editor of Russia's top independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta until it shut under official pressure in March after the Kremlin sent troops into Ukraine, praised Gorbachev as a man who put an end to the war in Afghanistan, released political prisoners and ended the Cold War-era arms race.

"He even told me once that he refused to press a nuclear button even during an exercise," he said.

Gorbachev's aides were devastated by the loss.

"His fearlessness in the initiatives, the changes that he started in this country, our country, in the Soviet Union, in Russia, predetermined the irreversibility of many of these changes," said Pavel Palazhchenko, who worked as Gorbachev's official interpreter during his tenure as the Soviet leader and then worked for Gorbachev's foundation.

"Not everything was successful, of course, to our great regret," he told The Associated Press. "Much was trampled on. But I think that this was the project that will definitely be revived."

Vladimir Polyakov, Gorbachev's press secretary for three decades, described working alongside him as "the best years."

Gorbachev will be buried on Saturday at Moscow's Novodevichy cemetery next to his wife Raisa. Gorbachev's foundation said a farewell ceremony will be held at the Pillar Hall of the House of the Unions, a historic mansion near the Kremlin that has served as the venue for state funerals since Soviet times.

The Kremlin said that no decision has been made yet on funeral arrangements, but the Interfax news agency reported that Gorbachev won't be given a state funeral.

Indiana abortion clinics sue to block ban set to take effect

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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 question of whether the Indiana Constitution protects abortion rights is undecided.

Ken Falk, legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana, which filed the lawsuit, 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 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."

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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."

Gorbachev's funeral, burial will reflect his varied legacy

MOSCOW (AP) — The funeral and burial plans for Mikhail Gorbachev sum up the crosscurrents of his legacy — final farewells are to be said in the same place where his rigid Soviet predecessors also lay, but he will be buried near men who broke the Soviet mold.

Gorbachev, the Nobel Peace Prize winner who died Tuesday, is to lie in state on Saturday in Moscow's House of Unions. The building located between the Bolshoi Theater and the Duma, the lower house of parliament, for decades held the bodies of deceased Soviet leaders, including Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko.

All them were then interred outside the Kremlin walls — the mummified Lenin in an enormous mausoleum and the others in the nearby necropolis.

But Gorbachev is to be buried in the cemetery of Novodevichy Convent, the resting place for the ousted Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, who had criticized Stalin's "cult of personality," and for Boris Yeltsin, the Russian president who became the ex-USSR's dominant leader.

He is to be buried next to his wife Raisa, a demonstration of their public affection, which was such a contrast to the other leaders' barely visible personal lives.

The Kremlin has not announced whether it will be a state funeral. Gorbachev was a divisive, often-detested figure in Russia, and the state he led — the Soviet Union — no longer exists.

Gorbachev was praised Tuesday by some world leaders, including U.S. President Joe Biden, for being open to democratic changes. Others criticized efforts by Soviet authorities to crush dissent in their countries under his leadership.

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.

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. Many pregnant women living in flood-affected areas were also exposed to risks.

The development has forced the government to deploy additional medical teams, dispatch medicine and provide 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.

According to the U.N. Population Fund, about 650,000 pregnant women in flood-affected areas require maternal health services to ensure a safe pregnancy and childbirth.

"Up to 73,000 women expected to deliver next month will need skilled birth attendants, newborn care, and support," it said in a statement.

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

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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. Floods in the past 24 hours damaged about 70,000 more homes in the country's northwest and southern Sindh province, according to National Disaster Management Authority.

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.

New rules make star college football players millionaires

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

Glance around the parking lot of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center at The Ohio State University this fall and you might come across a \$200,000 palace on wheels, the kind of luxury ride more likely to be found in the garages of movie stars, music moguls and titans of business than on a college campus.

That's assuming Buckeyes quarterback C.J. Stroud hasn't swapped out his silver Mercedes-Benz G-Wagon for a Bentley or a Porsche, which his name, image and likeness deal with Sarchione Auto Gallery allows him to do every 45 days.

"It's definitely changed my life for the future," Stroud said of the several NIL deals to flow his way over the past year, "and I think it's a jump-start to being a businessman before you get to the NFL, if that's

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your path.”

More than a year ago, the NCAA lifted long-standing restrictions on players profiting from their celebrity status, and in some cases it turned elite players such as Stroud and Alabama quarterback Bryce Young into instant millionaires. But the financial benefits for some athletes are being weighed against the possibility that such deals will divide locker rooms, create tension within programs, produce an uneven playing field across college athletics and overwhelm students stretched for time.

“As far as NIL goes in the locker room, you see stuff, but no one ever talks about it,” Oklahoma wide receiver Marvin Mims admitted. “It’s never like, a competition, like, ‘Oh, I got this much more money than you did. I’ve got this deal. You couldn’t get this deal.’ But you do notice the NIL deals that other guys are getting.”

College football has witnessed the biggest impact from NIL legislation, though athletes in all sports have tapped into the sudden cash flow. Of the estimated \$1.14 billion that will be poured into the pockets of athletes in Year 2, the NIL platform Opendorse predicts nearly half of it will be spent on the gridiron.

The largest and most prominent deals are going to individual athletes who have successfully leveraged their exceptional ability, potential, influence and exposure: Young’s portfolio is believed to have exceeded \$1 million before he ever took a snap for the Crimson Tide, while Alabama teammate Will Anderson signed an NIL deal that allows one of the nation’s best linebackers to drive a \$120,000 Porsche Cayenne GTS.

At Texas, running back Bijan Robinson has deals with Raising Cane’s restaurants, C4 Energy drinks and sports streaming platform DAZN, while also forging a partnership with an auto dealership for the use of a Lamborghini. At Notre Dame, tight end Michael Mayer has parlayed his first-round draft stock into deals with clothing brands Levi’s and Rhoback.

They are precisely the types of endorsement contracts, and cozy relationships with boosters and businesses, that once landed players on suspension and programs on probation.

“I feel bad for the older players that didn’t have the opportunity to get money from this, like Braxton Miller, Cardale Jones, Justin (Fields),” Stroud said of the Ohio State quarterbacks who came before him.

“They should have made a killing,” added Stroud, who also works with Value City Furniture, Designer Shoe Warehouse and the trading card company Onyx Authenticated. “It’s just good that players have control now when it comes to money.”

Along with deals signed by individual athletes, collectives have become a major player in the NIL landscape. Some are organized by schools and others by boosters acting on their own, but both distribute money gathered from businesses and donors for everything from endorsements to meet-and-greets and charitable work.

The Foundation, a third-party collective at Ohio State, says it has raised more than \$500,000 for Stroud, running back TreVeyon Henderson, wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba and cornerback Denzel Burke. Texas Tech boosters have formed The Matador Club collective, which says it is signing all 85 scholarship players and 20 walk-ons to \$25,000 contracts this season in return for appearing at club events and doing a certain amount of community service.

“I think we are well into the seven figures with all of our collectives,” said Morgan Frazier, a former gymnast at Florida and now the general counsel for Student Athlete NIL, which operates collectives at Penn State and several other schools.

Asked where the majority of money is going, she replied: “Overall, definitely football.”

It’s almost impossible to determine how much players are earning from NIL deals, in part because reporting rules differ from state to state. The vast majority are relatively modest — perhaps \$50 for a tweet or \$100 for an autograph signing on platforms such as Cameo, vidsig and Engage. Rarely do deals exceed \$1,000.

But for premier position players at marquee programs, with NFL potential and huge social media followings, the money on the table can be life-changing. Twelve college players have a valuation of at least \$1 million entering this season, according to On3, a platform that uses an algorithm to factor such things as social media reach to project NIL worth.

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More than 50 players have a valuation of at least \$500,000, with most of those playing in the SEC and Big Ten.

"Having an opportunity to change other peoples' lives, that's what's cool about NIL," said Penn State quarterback Sean Clifford, who founded Limitless NIL, which is believed to be the first agency created by an athlete to help other athletes. Its clients include Nittany Lions receiver Ji'Ayir Brown.

"It's not what we're doing or what I'm doing," Clifford said, "it's about what Ji'Ayir came from to now where he's at, being able to impact a dude like that. And I'm proud to be able to say he was our first guy to jump on board."

The spoils can come at a price. For one thing, players who may have already struggled to juggle classes and study halls with practice and film sessions now must balance meet-and-greets, autograph sessions and other work.

"If you want to monetize or be compensated for all the hard work (and) sacrifice that you're doing, this is part of it," said Kansas State's Deuce Vaughn, a preseason All-American. "I've learned how to read a contract. I have a marketing agent. I've learned how to talk to companies, how to get on conference calls and things like that."

Vaughn also acknowledged the additional pressure to perform: "With that money comes expectations."

Then there's the often-combustible locker room atmosphere, where lines have always existed between haves and have nots. In the past, those might have been between walk-ons and scholarship players. Now, they could be between players driving exotic cars or wearing expensive jewelry and those trying to scrape together rent.

"I know it could be a distraction," Robinson said, when asked what it's like driving his Lamborghini to practice. "If a teammate would bring it up, I would just joke around, be like, 'Oh, man, but it's not like what you're getting out there right now.' Just to not make it about yourself, because it's not about you."

"If you're not winning," Robinson said, "none of us can get these NIL deals."

Gorbachev mourned as rare world leader but some still bitter

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER and PATRICK QUINN Associated Press

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

But the man who died Tuesday at 91 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 Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has tried for the past quarter-century to restore Russia to its former glory and beyond.

U.S. President Joe Biden praised Gorbachev for being open to democratic changes. Gorbachev won the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in ending the Cold War.

"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," Biden said.

Biden 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."

Although Gorbachev was 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.

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Reactions from Russian officials and lawmakers were 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 Russia's current war in Ukraine.

Lech Walesa, the leader of Poland's pro-democracy Solidarity movement in the 1980s and the country's president from 1990-1995, had a more nuanced view of Gorbachev. He said he "admired, even liked him, but did not understand (him)."

"He believed to the last that communism could be reformed, but I, on the contrary, did not believe it was possible," Walesa told the Wirtualna Polska media.

Walesa added: "He knew that the Soviet Union could not last much longer and he was doing everything he could to prevent the world from bringing Russia to account for communism. And he was successful there."

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

In Germany, where Gorbachev is considered one of the fathers of the country's reunification in 1990 and is popularly referred to as "Gorbi," former Chancellor Angela Merkel saluted him as "a unique world politician."

"Gorbachev wrote world history. He exemplified how a single statesman can change the world for the better," she said, recalling how she had feared that Russian tanks might roll into East Germany, where she lived, as the Berlin Wall fell in 1989.

Current German Chancellor Olaf Scholz praised Gorbachev for paving the way for his country's reunification, though he 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," Scholz said.

Other European leaders picked up on that contrast between Gorbachev's fame for peace-making and Putin's attack on Ukraine.

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

Gorbachev's "desire for peace, his opposition to an imperialist vision of Russia, earned him a Nobel prize," Italian Premier Mario Draghi said. "They are messages that are even more relevant in the face of the tragedy of the invasion of Ukraine."

Others in Europe challenged the positive recollections of Gorbachev.

Gabrielius Landsbergis, Lithuania's top diplomat who is also 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 more than 140 others 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.

But another Baltic leader, Latvian President Egils Levits, noted that Gorbachev's policies enabled the eventual independence of the three Baltic countries.

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.

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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.

Calling Gorbachev "a brave leader and great statesman," Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid said the last Soviet leader "opened the gates of the Soviet Union for the great wave of Jewish immigration to Israel in the 1990s."

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

China 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.

Fans of Princess Diana gather to mark her death 25 years ago

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Fans of the late Princess Diana placed tributes outside the gates of her Kensington Palace home on Wednesday, marking the 25th anniversary of her death in a Paris car accident.

An arrangement of white chrysanthemums spelling out "Princess Diana" sat among dozens of photos and messages left by admirers, some of whom said they make annual pilgrimages to the spot to remember the tragedy.

"We just come here, do the memorial and, you know, we just chat about things that she used to do, you know, to ... let people know that we will never forget the princess, we will never forget what she's done," said Julie Cain, 59, who traveled 300 miles (480 kilometers) from Newcastle in northern England. "We just want her legacy kept, like, going as long as possible."

Diana died on Aug. 31, 1997, at the age of 36, stunning people around the world who felt they knew the princess after seeing her successes and struggles play out on TV screens and newspaper front pages for 17 years. The tributes left outside Kensington Palace on Wednesday were a small reminder of the mountains of flowers piled there in the days after Diana's death.

Diana was the focus of constant media attention from the moment she was engaged to marry Prince Charles until the night she died. Her fairytale wedding, ugly divorce and efforts to build a new life all made headlines.

The public watched as she blossomed from a shy teenager into an international style icon who befriended AIDS patients, charmed Nelson Mandela and walked through a minefield to promote the drive to eradicate landmines. Along the way, she showed the royal family, particularly her sons William and Harry, how to connect with people and be relevant in the 21st century.

On Wednesday morning, Cain and her friend Maria Scott, 51, paid their respects to Diana as dawn broke over the palace, just as they do every year.

"There was just something about that girl that really stood out. And of course, I watched the wedding, the fairy-tale princess," Scott said. "And, you know, you see, she was like part of your life because you were seeing that every day on the television. She was in newspapers, magazines. She was all over. And you felt like she was part of your life."

Olivia Wilde in the spotlight with 'Don't Worry Darling'

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

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"Don't Worry Darling" has been in the spotlight since the beginning. And this was long before Harry Styles got involved.

It was a film everyone wanted to make — some 18 studios and streaming services were courting Wilde for the chance to partner with her on her sophomore feature as a director: A mid-century psychological thriller about a housewife, Alice (Florence Pugh), who starts to question her picture-perfect life and the mysterious company that her husband Jack (Styles) works for.

But it hasn't stopped making headlines in two years, from Shia LaBeouf's abrupt departure (he was replaced by Styles) to the paparazzi-stoked intrigue around Wilde and Styles' off-camera relationship. Then there was the bizarre moment earlier this year when Wilde was served custody papers, from ex Jason Sudeikis with whom she shares two children, in the middle of a presentation to thousands of exhibitors in Las Vegas.

Even this past week, LaBeouf, who is heading to court next year on abuse allegations from his ex, FKA twigs, decided to contest the two-year-old narrative that he'd been fired. He gave the entertainment trade Variety emails and texts to prove his case that he quit. It's resulted in buzz you can't buy, but also incessant tabloid and TikTok gossip — all for a film that isn't even out yet.

But soon the conversation will go back to the film itself: "Don't Worry Darling" will have a glamorous debut at the Venice International Film Festival on Sept. 5 before opening in theaters nationwide on Sept. 23. Besides, Wilde doesn't care what gets people into the theater — as long as they go.

Wilde spoke to The Associated Press recently about her vision, her disagreement with the ratings board and why Alice is the heroine we need right now. Remarks have been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: What were some of the big ideas you wanted to explore?

WILDE: I wanted to make what (screenwriter) Katie (Silberman) and I always describe as a Trojan Horse movie: Something that on the outside is beautiful and entertaining but once you crawl inside, it is actually much more complex and potentially really interesting and challenging. I also just really understood that this would be an opportunity for an actress to really flex. It was a heroine I wanted to see on screen. I wanted to create a character with an actress that would represent the kind of woman that I feel like our society needs.

AP: You had originally intended to play the part of Alice. Were you glad about that decision to step back and take a supporting role?

WILDE: Oh yeah. There's no part of me that would want it any other way. I think what Florence did with this role is singularly brilliant. This character is a heroine for the ages. And she, as an actress, is this rare combination of dramatically skillful, comedically brilliant and an action hero who can run like Tom Cruise. Like what actress can do stunts and pull off these incredible emotional acrobatics and do it so effortlessly in an accent that's not even theirs? Like, come on. It's like juggling upside down on the wing of an airplane.

AP: You've spoken about some of your stylistic influences, from the photography of Slim Aarons to the erotic thrillers of Adrian Lyne. What were some other touchstones?

WILDE: I am a big fan of the iconography of the 1950s and a lot of the art, architecture, cars, music. This was an opportunity to just really play in that world. The architectural influence of (Richard) Neutra is all over the film. (Cinematographer) Matty Libatique and I were really inspired by Alex Prager and her photography and the idea of creating anxiety through framing and this artificial world that would be incredibly alluring until you look very closely.

And I always make endless playlists and watch lists and reading lists. It was a really funny assortment of material. People were like, what is this movie? You want me to watch "Requiem for a Dream" and "The Truman Show" and "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," and you want me to read "The Feminine Mystique," but also Jordan Peterson?

AP: "Booksmart" dealt with female sexuality in a very frank way and "Don't Worry Darling" is already provoking conversations around some of the sex acts shown in the trailer. Was that a fight to even include that?

WILDE: Oh, yeah. There's a lot that had to be taken out of the trailer. The MPA came down hard on me and the trailer at the last second and I had to cut some shots, which I was upset about because I thought

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they it took it up another notch. But of course we still live in a really puritanical society. I do think the lack of eroticism in American film is kind of new. Then when it comes to female pleasure, it's something that we just don't see very often unless you're talking about queer cinema. You know, it's interesting because in a lot of queer films, the female characters are allowed to have more pleasure. Audiences aren't as puritanical as corporations think they are. And yet people get upset. I mean, people are upset with me already over this. I think it's a testament to the film. We want to be provocative. The idea is not to make you feel safe.

AP: This is also a film that has had a spotlight on it from the beginning, resulting in both buzz and gossip. What has that been like for you as a filmmaker?

WILDE: Every filmmaker longs for people to see their film. That's all you want is for people to see it. If people are excited about a film, for whatever reason, what you hope is that it gets them in the door. Whether you are a 1950s car fanatic and that's what's going to get you into this movie, or if you are simply going because you're a fan of our incredible cast, all I care about is that you have the chance to see it, and I hope that people then have the instinct to share it. What I really hope is that people see it again. I think that it's a real second watch film. There's a lot of Easter eggs in there.

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 says classified documents were “likely concealed and removed” from a storage room at former President Donald Trump’s Florida estate as part of an effort to obstruct the federal investigation into the discovery of the government records.

The FBI also seized boxes and containers holding 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 late Tuesday 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, in Palm Beach, Florida. 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 with colored cover sheets indicating their classified status, perhaps as a way to rebut suggestions that whoever packed them or handled them at Mar-a-Lago 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, 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.

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Though Trump insisted again Wednesday that he had declassified 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,” the Justice Department said.

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 16 documents marked secret and 17 marked top secret.

The investigators were permitted to visit the storage room but were not allowed to open or look inside any of the boxes, “giving no opportunity for the government to confirm that no documents with classification markings remained,” the Justice Department says.

During that visit, the document says, Trump’s lawyers told investigators that all the records that had 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 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 to return to him certain seized property. 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” and that the presidential records that were taken from the home do not belong to Trump.

Ambitious ‘Lord of the Rings’ prequel hopes to slay dragons

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The return of dragons on the small screen has been a huge hit. Now it’s time for the return of the elves and dwarves.

Amazon Studios is launching “The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power,” an ambitious, years-in-the-making and very expensive salvo that will go head-to-head with another costly streaming fantasy epic: HBO’s “Game of Thrones” spinoff “House of the Dragon,” which recently became the most-watched series premiere in HBO history.

The series is based on J.R.R. Tolkien’s writings and asides about Middle-earth’s Second Age, which preceded the Third Age’s “Lord of the Rings” and “Hobbit” films and books. Tolkien’s grandson, Simon

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Tolkien, was a creative consultant.

"We say Tolkien sort of left a series of stars in the sky. Our job was to connect the dots and form the constellation and then sort of draw in between the constellations to give a little more specificity to it," said J.D. Payne, a showrunner and executive producer.

Amazon Prime Video will debut both the first two "The Rings of Power" episodes on Friday. After that, the remaining six episodes arrive weekly on Friday.

The hour-long episodes are stuffed with action and humor but buckle up: Payne and his co-showrunner Patrick McKay plan to use a 50-hour canvas to explore their nuanced characters and complex histories. These first eight episodes are like an appetizer.

Early ones shift across the various regions of Middle-earth, our planet's imagined mythological past. Here, some 4,000 years before "The Hobbit," are elves involved with royal intrigue, dwarves who mine inside mountains, hobbitlike harfoots who are pastoral, humans who seem unusually prone to violence, and evil orcs.

Despite being set centuries before the books and films that make up the Tolkien's canon, fans of "The Lord of the Rings" will notice some familiar characters, based on the long lifespan of some of the creatures, including Galadriel, Elrond and Isildur. Sauron, the evil force, is unseen in the first two episodes but a malevolent presence throughout.

Morfydd Clark grew up in Wales to parents who adored Tolkien's epic book series and her dad read her "The Hobbit" when she was 9. The films came out when she was 11, accelerating the obsession. Now she finds herself playing a young Galadriel, a powerful elf played later in the films by Cate Blanchett.

"I think there's a lot of hope in Tolkien's world, and with hope comes bravery to stand up and have courage for what you think is valuable," she said. "The world needs to be safe enough for the smallest and most vulnerable. And I think that's something that's important to remind yourself — just because something suits you, it doesn't suit everybody."

That sense of hope is something that distinguishes the series from "House of the Dragon," which revels in a cynical, bloody view of mankind. McKay notes that Tolkien emerged from World War I with a complex fairy story, unlike many of his literary peers who were writing about wastelands and darkness.

"Middle-earth is a fundamentally optimistic and hopeful place. He was writing about positive values and friendship and brotherhood and underdogs," McKay said. "He was telling you that in the darkest, deep of Mordor — in his wasteland — friendship could win the day and good could triumph over evil."

The show's tone shifts depending on which place is being visited. Harfoots, who have Irish accents, are whimsical, communal and clever, while dwarves have Scottish accents, are fond of a drink and are a little rough. Elves are elegant and elite, with upper English class accents and a fondness for billowing cloaks and long, elaborate ceremonies.

The cast — a massive ensemble of 22 actors — is multiethnic and composed of actors of different ages and fame, from Tony-nominated Benjamin Walker to up-and-coming Charlie Vickers, who graduated from drama school in 2017.

"It's a very heterogenous world and if it wasn't, we'd be dealing with dystopia," said Trystan Gravelle, who plays a royal advisor in an Atlantis-like kingdom. "I think it's very fitting as well in 2022 that we reflect that as well. And I think it enriches everything. The world's a richer place for it."

The cast filmed in New Zealand during the pandemic and were away from loved ones for almost two years. The actors rarely visited the sets of rival fictional races, but all gathered for potluck lunches and holidays, often at Walker's house where a mean fried chicken was served. "I got a bunch of babysitters out of it," he joked.

"What that did is it sort of forced us to lean on each other and that is a bonding experience like no other," said Nazanin Boniadi, who plays a human healer and single mother. "That fellowship that you see on screen was forged very much behind the scenes."

The production — rated TV-14 for violence versus the "Game of Thrones" prequel which is TV-MA for violence, language, and nudity — is one of the most expensive in history, with Amazon spending at least

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\$465 million on the first season in New Zealand, where the series employed 1,200 people directly and another 700 indirectly. In total, the season has reportedly cost \$1 billion.

Choir music swells during breathtaking panoramas and the dialogue is thunderous and portentous. "There can be no friendship between hammer and rock. One will surely break," one dwarf leader says. In another scene, an elf counsels another who is confused: "Sometimes we cannot know unless we touch the darkness."

The new series debuts in the long shadow left by Peter Jackson, whose film trilogy adaptation of Tolkien's books won critical and commercial praise in the early 2000s and claimed the best picture Oscar for "Return of the King." For the series, there was more freedom to create as long as it was true to the author.

"We really tried to just go back to Tolkien. That was our mantra from the beginning: 'Just go back to the books, go back to the books, go back to the books,'" said Payne. "We always have Tolkien at the base of what we're doing."

The new series has lots of big themes to chew on, including overcoming racial differences, environmentalism, the power of friendship, women's strength and how even the smallest person can change the world.

"A show like this that has definitely dark themes — darkness within oneself, the fight to do what's right, battling great forces greater than you — but it also just has themes of friendship and loyalty and love and hope," said Sara Zwangobani, who plays the new character Marigold Brandyfoot.

The series will have to thread a careful needle by enchanting hard-core fans of Tolkien who will be searching for connections to the universe, attracting those who have hazy memories of the books and don't want to be burdened with tons of new material, and young people whose perhaps last epic adventure series was "Harry Potter."

"It's kind of the gateway for new fans in that it's kind of the first chapter, the adolescence of Middle-earth, where the films you could imagine are the adulthood of Middle-earth," said Walker. "So we're seeing all these characters we know and love — and some that we're being introduced to — take the first steps on their journey in becoming their destined selves."

UN weather agency predicts rare 'triple-dip' La Nina in 2022

GENEVA (AP) — The U.N. weather agency is predicting that the phenomenon known as La Nina is poised to last through the end of this year, a mysterious "triple dip" — the first this century — caused by three straight years of its effect on climate patterns like drought and flooding worldwide.

The World Meteorological Organization on Wednesday said La Nina conditions, which involve a large-scale cooling of ocean surface temperatures, have strengthened in the eastern and central equatorial Pacific with an increase in trade winds in recent weeks.

The agency's top official was quick to caution that the "triple dip" doesn't mean global warming is easing.

"It is exceptional to have three consecutive years with a La Nina event. Its cooling influence is temporarily slowing the rise in global temperatures, but it will not halt or reverse the long-term warming trend," WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said.

La Nina is a natural and cyclical cooling of parts of the equatorial Pacific that changes weather patterns worldwide, as opposed to warming caused by the better-known El Nino — an opposite phenomenon. La Nina often leads to more Atlantic hurricanes, less rain and more wildfires in the western United States, and agricultural losses in the central U.S.

Studies have shown La Nina is more expensive to the United States than the El Nino.

Together El Nino, La Nina and the neutral condition are called ENSO, which stands for El Nino Southern Oscillation, and they have one of the largest natural effects on climate, at times augmenting and other times dampening the big effects of human-caused climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas, scientists say.

Silver lining: Northeast drought benefits some businesses

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By MARK PRATT Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — There is a silver lining to the drought affecting the northeastern U.S. that has frustrated farmers, dried up rivers and reservoirs, and brought water use restrictions and brush fires to the region.

The arid conditions have benefited amusement parks, minor league baseball teams, construction contractors and other businesses that need warm, dry weather to attract paying customers and get jobs completed on time.

While several factors have affected the bottom line this summer, including inflation, staffing shortages, and supply chain issues, some businesses say, yes, things are generally going well, in part because of the weather.

“Sunny days at the ballpark are the best days,” said Geoff Iacuesa, president and general manager of the Portland Sea Dogs minor league baseball team, which is seeing fewer rainouts and higher attendance.

Large tracts of the Northeast from Pennsylvania to Maine are experiencing drought conditions, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. A swath of the region from southern New Hampshire, across much of eastern Massachusetts and including nearly all of Rhode Island and into eastern Connecticut is suffering from extreme drought conditions, the fourth worst out of five drought stages.

In some areas, rainfall amounts in the last 90 days are about 6 inches (15 centimeters) lower than normal, according to the Drought Monitor.

The Sea Dogs, the Maine-based Double-A affiliate of the Boston Red Sox, have averaged more than 5,700 fans per game, and while season-to-season attendance comparisons are imprecise, that’s about 100 more per game than in the pre-pandemic years of 2018 and 2019, Iacuesa said. The 2020 season was canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic and home field capacity was limited at the start of last season.

Another advantage of hot weather: beer, water and ice cream sales soar.

At Groundskeeper Inc., an Ashland, Massachusetts, commercial landscape design company, the dry weather has allowed the crew to get a lot more work done, especially when it comes to so-called hard-scaping — the installation of patios, walkways, retaining walls and the like — company president Brian Churchill said.

Working with concrete, mortar, and brick adhesives is nearly impossible during a steady rain, he said.

“I would say it has been a very productive year,” said Churchill, who is also the past president of the Massachusetts Association of Landscape Professionals. “No rain days, no delays in the schedule. We’re able to work five days a week and get a lot of work done.”

And that benefits everyone.

“When you meet schedule and the developers can meet closing dates, they’ve got happy clients, they get the money in the bank, we get money in the bank, and that means everyone’s happy,” he said.

There is a downside for landscapers during the drought, however, said Miriam Hellweg, director of maintenance at a Blade of Grass LLC, a Sudbury, Massachusetts, landscape design company.

“The drought is stressful for plants, so first we have more plants dying,” she said. “The other piece is with a drought the plants aren’t growing as much, so we’re not doing as much mowing.”

The weather, along with an increase in the self-imposed capacity restrictions put in place to prevent overcrowding, has helped pull more people to Santa’s Village, a Christmas-themed amusement park in Jefferson, New Hampshire, said Jim Miller, a spokesperson for the 15-acre family-owned facility.

“Everybody likes the perfect weather, and we’ve been at capacity on most days,” he said.

The park founded in 1953 only sells advance tickets online, so when families are checking the weather forecast several days out before booking their visit, all they have seen this summer is blue skies, he said.

The drought has been a mixed bag for Tom Bukowski, owner of Safari Golf, a miniature golf course in Berlin, Connecticut. Yes, dry weather is good for business, but brutal heat can be a detriment. Connecticut had a six-day stretch in July when temperatures were 90 degrees Fahrenheit or higher and another eight-day stretch in early August with 90-degree plus temperatures.

“If it gets too hot, not many people play, but it’s still better than rain, because when it rains, no one comes out,” he said.

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Business this year has been tempered by inflation, he said. In the past, the whole family would play. He's noticed that this year, parents are paying for their kids, but sitting out themselves to save a little.

Today in History: September 1, Titanic wreckage is found

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Sept. 1, the 244th day of 2022. There are 121 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 1, 1983, 269 people were killed when a Korean Air Lines Boeing 747 was shot down by a Soviet jet fighter after the airliner entered Soviet airspace.

On this date:

In 1715, following a reign of 72 years, King Louis XIV of France died four days before his 77th birthday.

In 1897, the first section of Boston's new subway system was opened.

In 1923, the Japanese cities of Tokyo and Yokohama were devastated by an earthquake that claimed some 140,000 lives.

In 1939, World War II began as Nazi Germany invaded Poland.

In 1942, U.S. District Court Judge Martin I. Welsh, ruling from Sacramento, California, on a lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of Fred Korematsu, upheld the wartime detention of Japanese-Americans as well as Japanese nationals.

In 1945, Americans received word of Japan's formal surrender that ended World War II. (Because of the time difference, it was Sept. 2 in Tokyo Bay, where the ceremony took place.)

In 1969, a coup in Libya brought Moammar Gadhafi to power.

In 1972, American Bobby Fischer won the international chess crown in Reykjavik (RAY'-kyuh-vik), Iceland, as Boris Spassky of the Soviet Union resigned before the resumption of Game 21. An arson fire at the Blue Bird Cafe in Montreal, Canada, claimed 37 lives.

In 1985, a U.S.-French expedition located the wreckage of the Titanic on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean roughly 400 miles off Newfoundland.

In 2005, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin issued a "desperate SOS" as his city descended into anarchy amid the flooding left by Hurricane Katrina.

In 2009, Vermont's law allowing same-sex marriage went into effect.

In 2015, invoking "God's authority," Rowan County, Kentucky, Clerk Kim Davis denied marriage licenses to gay couples again in direct defiance of the federal courts, and vowed not to resign, even under the pressure of steep fines or jail. (Davis would spend five days in jail; she was released only after her staff issued the licenses on her behalf but removed her name from the form.)

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama ridiculed the just-completed Republican National Convention as better-suited to an era of black-and-white TV and "trickle-down, you're on your own" economics, and declared that Mitt Romney "did not offer a single new idea" for fixing the economy. Lyricist Hal David, 91, who teamed with Burt Bacharach on dozens of timeless songs for movies, television and a variety of recording artists in the 1960s and beyond, died in Los Angeles.

Five years ago: A line of cars stretched more than a mile at a water distribution center set up on a high school football field in Beaumont, Texas, which had been left without drinking water by flooding from Hurricane Harvey. The mayor of Houston announced that ongoing releases of water from two swollen reservoirs could keep thousands of homes flooded for up to 15 days. Comedian Shelley Berman died at his California home at the age of 92.

One year ago: Relentless rain from the remnants of Hurricane Ida sent the New York City area into a state of emergency, as water poured into homes and subway stations and left vehicles nearly submerged on major roadways, the storm would leave nearly 50 people dead in six Eastern states. Three days after Ida battered Louisiana and parts of Mississippi as the fifth-most-powerful hurricane to strike the U.S., about a million homes and businesses still had no electricity, and hundreds of thousands of people lacked running

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water. Three suburban Denver police officers and two paramedics were indicted on manslaughter and other charges in the 2019 death of Elijah McClain, a 23-year-old Black man who was put into a chokehold and injected with a powerful sedative in a fatal encounter that provoked national outcry. President Joe Biden played host to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office, and sought to reassure him that the U.S. remained squarely behind the Eastern European nation.

Today's Birthdays: Actor George Maharis is 94. Conductor Seiji Ozawa (SAY'-jee oh-ZAH'-wah) is 87. Attorney and law professor Alan Dershowitz is 84. Comedian-actor Lily Tomlin is 83. Actor Don Stroud is 79. Conductor Leonard Slatkin is 78. Singer Archie Bell is 78. Singer Barry Gibb is 76. Rock musician Greg Errico is 74. Talk show host Dr. Phil McGraw is 72. Singer Gloria Estefan is 65. Jazz musician Boney James is 61. Singer-musician Grant Lee Phillips (Grant Lee Buffalo) is 59. Country singer-songwriter Charlie Robison is 58. Retired NBA All-Star Tim Hardaway is 56. Actor Ricardo Antonio Chavira is 51. Actor Maury Sterling is 51. Rock singer JD Fortune is 49. Actor Scott Speedman is 47. Country singer Angaleena Presley (Pistol Annies) is 46. Actor Boyd Holbrook is 41. Actor Zoe Lister-Jones is 40. Rock musician Joe Trohman is 38. Actor Aisling (ASH'-ling) Loftus is 32.