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3

SEAS Confession: 3:45-4:15 p.m., SEAS Mass: 4:30 p.m.

11 a.m.: Girls Soccer at Tea Area. JV game to follow.

4

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

Methodist: Communion in Worship, 8:30am Conde Worship, 9:30am Coffee Hour, 10:30am Groton Worship

Emmanuel: 9 am Worship/Communion

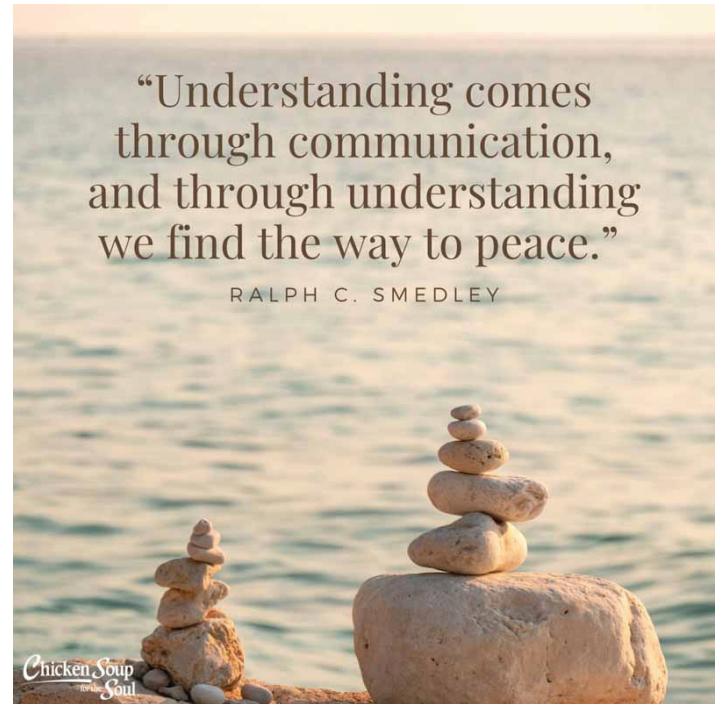
Worship w/Holy Communion: St. John's 9:00 am, Zion 11:00 am

5 - LABOR DAY

NO SCHOOL

Emmanuel: 6:30 am Bible Study

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



“Understanding comes through communication, and through understanding we find the way to peace.”

RALPH C. SMEDLEY

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

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Groton Area shuts out Dakota Hills

Five players scored for the Tigers as Groton Area defeated Dakota Hills in football action Friday in Groton, 57-0. The game ended at halftime.

Andrew Marzahn had a 31 yard run, Teylor Diegel had runs of 14 and 38 yards and had a 48 yard catch, Lane Tietz had two runs of five yards, Brevin Fliehs had a one yard run and Korbin Kucker had a 21 yard run. Kobin Kucker had four PAT kicks and one run and Tietz connected with Diegel for a PAT.

Groton had 17 first downs, had 20 carries for 321 yards, Tietz completed six of eight passes for 125 yards, had one fumble and three penalties for 35 yards. Receivers were Tate Larson with four catches for 75 yards, Teylor Diegel had one for 48 yards and Ethan Gengerke had one for six yards. Rushing leaders were Diegel for 67 yards, Marzahn for 39, Christian Ehresmann for 38 yards, Tietz for 28 yards, Tristin McGannon for 23 yards, Kucker for 22 yards, Fliehs for eight yards, Ryder Johnson for four yards and Karsten Jeschke for 27 yards.

On the defense, Colby Dunker had 13 tackles, one sack and one fumble recovery, Logan Ringgenberg seven tackles, Korbin Kucker five tackles, Karter Moody one sack and one fumble recovery and Nick Morris one interception.

Dakota Hills had one first down, minus two yards rushing, 25 yards passing, lost two fumbles and had five penalties for 19 yards.

Groton Area is now 1-2 on the season and will travel to Clark on Friday. Dakota Hills, now 0-3, will host Aberdeen Roncalli at Wilmot.

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#551 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

The trends continue. As of midday today, we continue to decrease in all metrics. The seven-day, new-case average has now dipped below 90,000 to 89,730 with a pandemic total of 94,450,400. This means we've passed another million cases.

March 3 – 79 million – 15 days

March 31 – 80 million – 28 days

April 27 – 81 million – 27 days

May 11 – 82 million – 14 days

May 20 – 83 million – 9 days

May 31 – 84 million – 11 days

June 8 – 85 million – 8 days

June 17 – 86 million – 9 days

June 27 – 87 million – 10 days

July 7 – 88 million – 10 days

July 14 – 89 million – 7 days

July 21 – 90 million – 7 days

July 29 – 91 million – 8 days

August 8 – 92 million – 10 days

August 17 – 93 million – 9 days

August 29 – 94 million – 12 days

Something to think about is that 40 percent of all Covid-19 cases reported since the pandemic began in February 2020 have been reported in the 8 months of this year. Hospitalizations are below 40,000 at an average of 39,453. Deaths have taken a small uptick to a seven-day average of 413. We just don't seem to be able to get away from that 500 mark. The pandemic total for deaths is 1,042,880.

I'm not nuts about the latest subvariant report. We've talked in the past about one called BA.4.6 which has gained some ground in other countries against BA.5, but didn't seem to be doing much here. Well, those days may be gone; it's showing some gains in the US now. This subvariant has been around since May, but remained below two percent of new cases until July. Since then, it's been rising slowly until this week, it sits at 7.5 percent. The thing is, this is looking different in different parts of the country. For example, in the CDC's Region 9 (Hawaii, California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico), it's only at 2.8 percent (1.5 percent in LA county of California) while BA.5 is at 93 percent and still increasing, whereas in Region 7 (Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Missouri), it has just about doubled since August 1 from 8.7 to 17.2 percent while BA.5 has dropped for the first time since it turned up on the scene from 80 to 78.5 percent. One analysis shows BA.4.6 has a growth advantage over BA.5 of 16 percent; this would not be great news. No one seems to know what to make of the regional variation. Maybe climate or population density or weather or vaccination status plays a role, but no one actually knows. In other countries where BA.4.6 has shown significant increases, it was quickly supplanted by another new subvariant, BA.2.75, which has barely registered in the US at all; the CDC's dashboard combines this one with the now pretty much defunct BA.2 and lists them together at zero percent presently. A couple of other subvariants which seem to sometimes accompany BA.2.75 include BF.7 and BA.5.2.1.7. All of these newcomers on the scene have new mutations, and at this point it's going to be very difficult to predict what winter's going to bring and what that will represent in terms of transmissibility, severity, and immune escape potential. I guess we'll see, but this is probably a good time to go get that new booster and remain vigilant.

We should note that the Southern Hemisphere's flu season, which generally serves as a preview for our upcoming one, has been pretty rough. That probably means we're looking at a relatively bad winter with it too. For the record, the new crop of flu vaccine is available starting this month; while you can do yourself some good getting a shot at any time during the season, the optimal time to go in for one would be in September or October. You can get it when you go in for your Covid-19 booster; there are no con-

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traindications to receiving both on the same day, one in each arm.

I've read a summary of work done with respect to long-Covid, that collection of lingering symptoms persisting long after the acute infection has resolved. The data aren't settling into a clear pattern, but there are some things here we should note.

First, there is uncertainty about whether Omicron infections are less likely than earlier variants to result in long-Covid or how severe that is likely to be. Various studies show a decrease somewhere between 24 and 50 percent. There is a study that finds long-Covid is less likely after Omicron infection; but there is another that shows the same rate of neurologic problems. It could be that, overall, long-Covid is less likely, but that neurologic manifestations are not. That remains to be seen.

There is evidence the proportion of patients affected by long-Covid is as low as four or five percent in the vaccinated-and-boosted, but as high as 50 percent in the unvaccinated. Other work places the reduction in risk from vaccination from anywhere around 15 percent to over 50 percent. One of the difficulties in sorting all of this out is that there is no standard definition for long-Covid, so we're probably not comparing apples to apples. It does appear clear, however, that the risk for long-Covid drops with each dose of vaccine.

What is also pretty clear is that the huge numbers of infections we've seen this year are going to yield a whole lot of long-Covid cases. And here's another worrisome piece of information: There's a recent study involving 5.4 million patients in the VA system that indicates reinfections significantly increase the risk of serious long-Covid, even when acute symptoms are mild. It found people with reinfections are twice as likely to die or have a heart attack as people in a first infection and that they were more likely to have long-Covid problems six months later that involve the lungs, kidneys, and digestive system. Given that VA patients trend male, older, and sicker, we're going to need other studies in a different population; but this looks pretty bad.

Given upwards of 80 percent of the US population has already been infected at least once, reinfections are going to be increasingly relevant as we go along. Most cases are going to be reinfections, and that risk for reinfection depends on what folks are doing to prevent infection—vaccination, boosters, masking, distancing, and such. Most of us are doing nothing, and so most of us are going to get sick over and over again, likely each time increasing our risk for long-term, maybe permanent kinds of damage. The only certain way to prevent long-Covid is to avoid getting infected in the first place. That is becoming ever more difficult as the virus mutates and we all get more reckless.

This week's major news is that the FDA has given emergency use authorization (EUA) to the reformulated bivalent booster vaccine from both Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna. This is the first vaccine change in this pandemic from the original vaccine which was based on the wild-type virus from the Wuhan outbreak where this whole thing started. The new Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine booster will be available to persons 12 and older; the new Moderna vaccine booster is authorized for those 18 and older. These are booster vaccines only; they will require first receiving the primary series of two doses of one of the original vaccines. Bivalent means the vaccines contain two different variants, in this case the wild-type virus and the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants of Omicron, the currently-dominant variants in circulation.

These bivalent vaccines have been tested in animals, but not yet in humans, that is, human trials are underway, but not yet yielding data. In addition to lab and animal-testing results, the FDA had access to human data on an earlier BA.1 permutation of these vaccines. This follows pretty closely the model for authorization of each year's new influenza vaccine, so the FDA is experienced with this authorization procedure.

The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices met on Wednesday and recommended both boosters be made available to anyone in the age groups authorized by the FDA whose last booster was at least two months ago. CDC director, Rochelle Walensky, signed off on those guidelines on Thursday. We should note that some experts recommend waiting longer than two months, more like four to six months because it may be your body doesn't generate much of an immune response when you've been too-recently boosted; if you receive a booster too soon after an earlier dose of vaccine, it could be your body will simply

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eliminate the antigens in the booster vaccine before you have a chance to mount an effective immune response against it. Although I am not a vaccinologist or a physician, I tend to agree with these folks; I think I'd wait at least four months before receiving this booster. Whichever vaccine you have received in the past, you may receive either of these two boosters. These will be the only boosters available to those in the approved age groups whose primary vaccination series is completed; EUA for the original vaccines as boosters has been withdrawn for those folks. It appears these bivalent boosters will become available in some places over the weekend and pretty much everywhere over the next week or two.

This new booster will be available at no cost across the country, at least until the government's initial purchase of 171 million doses runs out. In the absence of additional funding from Congress for pandemic response, that pretty much depletes the available budget. As a result, there will be no more free tests made available either by mail or at community center locations, no more free masks, and a very limited budget for education and promotion of the new boosters. After this, the costs for Covid-19 will be shifted to individuals' insurance; those without insurance probably will find themselves in the same sort of spot they've been in dealing with any other health challenge and society will be limited in its ability to spot trends in transmission. That's not great for those folks, and it's worse for public health writ large, especially going into another winter when we all move indoors; but here we are.

We talked back in December about a new vaccine, Corbevax, being made available with no patent protection or licensing fees to wherever in the world it was needed. This means manufacturers can produce it locally and distribute it without making any sort of payment to the developers who are essentially giving it to the world. It has no particular storage requirements and would be available for something like \$1.00 to \$1.50 per dose. You can check out my post about that in my Update #500 posted December 30, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/pfbid02GSy1aRCEMXBmfLTrfGY13BMJB6Dwv9a3Ue-hdAcmfcuY8fbtt8qG4ojKeqo1Z7x4kl>. The vaccine, developed by Peter Hotez and Maria Elenna Botazzi at the Center for Vaccine Development at Texas Children's Hospital, is being distributed in various countries around the world. In India, some 70 million doses have been administered. It is looking very safe and seems to confer immunity of a good duration. Because it is completely vegan, it will be acceptable to any cultural, religious, or ethnic group who needs it, whatever their dietary restrictions. Indonesia has a company interested, and now African countries are getting into the act too. The team who developed it is working on newer subvariant-specific versions for boosters; but it appears to be off to a strong start. I'll repeat what I've said many times before: No one is safe until we all are safe. This represents real progress.

And on that happy note, I'll sign off for today. I hope you are keeping yourself safe and well. We'll talk again.

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Wolves Roll From Sioux Falls, Defeating Dragons and Bulldogs

Sioux Falls, S.D. – The (RV) Northern State University volleyball team went 2-0 from the opening day of the Augustana Volleyball Classic with sweeps of MSU Moorhead and Truman State. The Wolves tallied 89 kills on the day, hitting above .300 in both matches.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score Match 1: NSU 3, MSUM 0

Final Score Match 2: NSU 3, TSU 0

Records: NSU 4-2, MSUM 2-3, TSU 0-6

HOW IT HAPPENED vs MSU MOORHEAD

- The Wolves blew past the Dragons with set scores of 25-12, 25-10, and 25-9
- Northern hit .356 in the win, giving up just nine attack errors in 90 attempts
- In total, NSU recorded 41 kills, 37 assists, 44 digs, nine aces, and three blocks
- Defensively they held MSUM to a -.045 hitting percentage with 14 kills and 18 attack errors in 88 attempts
- Two Wolves tallied double figure kills, with all five hitters notching an attack percentage above .300
- In addition, two members of the defense recorded double figure digs

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Taylor Buckley: 11 kills, .318 attack%, 8 digs, 2 aces
- Sally Gaul: 10 kills, .360 attack%
- Hanna Thompson: 8 kills, .400 attack%
- Abby Brooks: 5 kills, .400 attack%, 2 blocks
- Kennedy Gravelle: 5 kills, .455 attack%
- Keri Walker: 34 assists, 4 digs, 2 kills
- Laura Ochsner: 12 digs
- Madison Langlie: 10 digs, 4 aces

HOW IT HAPPENED vs TRUMAN

- The Wolves bested the Bulldogs with set scores of 25-22, 25-16, and 25-15
- Northern hit .318 in the contest with 49 kills, while holding Truman to a .093 hitting percentage with 30 kills
- NSU added a match high 59 digs, 45 assists, nine blocks, and five aces as well
- Two Wolves tallied double figure kills as Keri Walker dished out 13.67 assists per set in the win
- Madison Langlie had a day on defense, notching a career high 24 digs, averaging 8.00 per set

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Sally Gaul: 15 kills, .448 attack%, 10 digs, 2 blocks
- Hanna Thompson: 10 kills
- Taylor Buckley: 9 kills, 9 digs, 2 blocks
- Abby Brooks: 7 kills, .538 attack%
- Kennedy Gravelle: 6 kills, 6 blocks (career high)
- Keri Walker: 41 assists, 7 digs, 3 blocks
- Madison Langlie: 24 digs, 3 assists, 1 ace

UP NEXT

The Wolves are back in action today taking on South Dakota Mines and Augustana at 11:15 a.m. and 6 p.m. from the Sanford Pentagon. Tournament information can be found on the schedule page.

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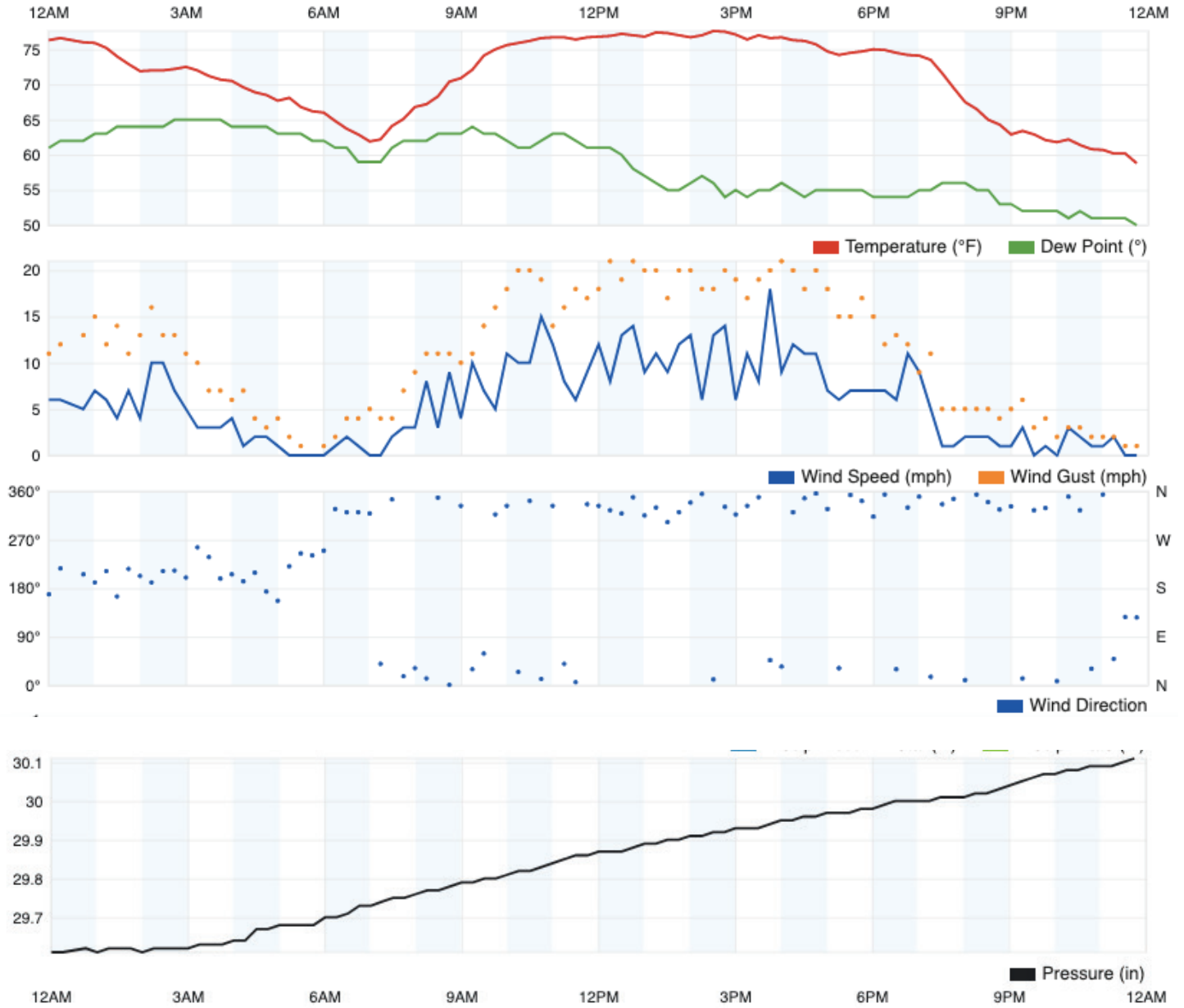
Work is beginning on the pickleball and tennis court this morning. Now before everyone gets excited, there is a glitch. The poles for the nets are currently not available. They have been on order, but as with many things, there is a delay in production and delivery. There is no date set for when they will be available. The plan is to get the court surfaced and the holes dug so when the poles come in, they will come back to install the poles and nets.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 76 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 48 °F

Sunday



Sunny

High: 81 °F

Sunday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 56 °F

Labor
Day



Sunny

High: 85 °F

Today



Sunny

HIGHS: 75-85°

Sunday



Sunny

Prairie Coteau Region HIGHS: 75-80°

Missouri River Valley HIGHS: 85-90°

Very high fire danger across north central South Dakota.

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



weather.gov/abr

9/3/2022 4:39 AM

A dry, sunny Labor Day weekend is in store. Southerly winds will increase on Sunday, especially over parts of north central South Dakota. This will cause very high fire danger.

ABERDEEN

August 2022 Review
Records since 1893

RAINFALL

 **1.59"**

Most on a single day was 0.64" on the 26th

45th Driest August on Record

0.65" Below Normal / 71% of Normal


Measurable Rainfall on 7 Days – Normal is 8 Days

WIND

 **58mph**

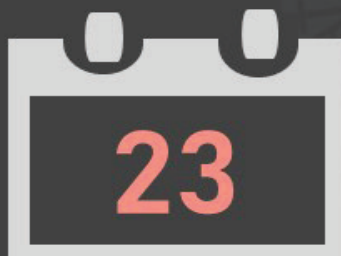
Peak Gust
Recorded on
August 5th

TEMPERATURE

 **71.4°** Average

Tied 47th Warmest August on Record

1.7° Above Normal



Days with Above
Normal Temperatures

98° Warmest Day -
August 5th

48° Coldest Low -
August 8, 30th

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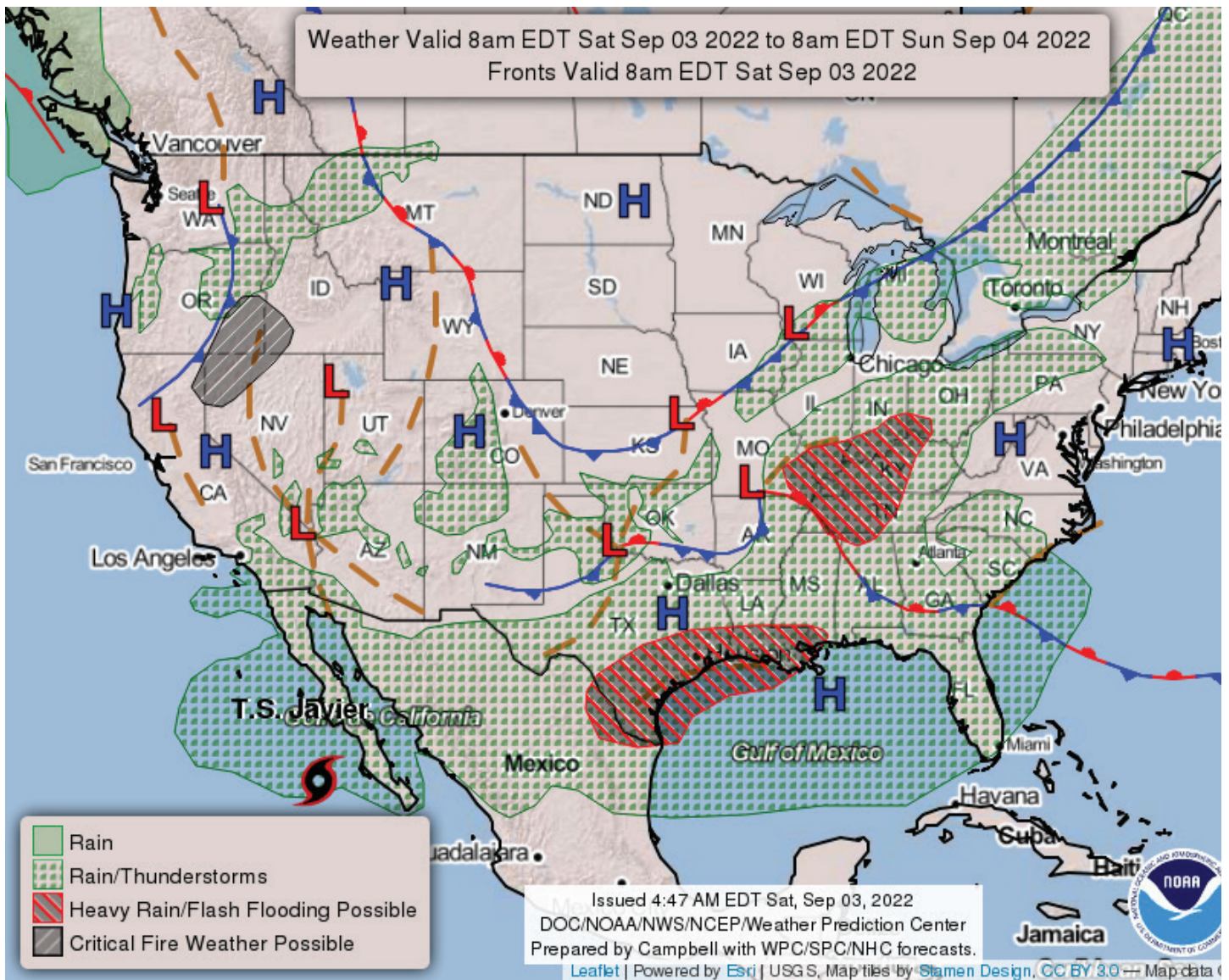
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 94 °F at 4:54 PM
Low Temp: 58 °F at 5:59 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 3:52 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 12 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 102 in 1897
Record Low: 31 in 1974
Average High: 79°F
Average Low: 52°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 0.21
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 16.55
Precip Year to Date: 15.96
Sunset Tonight: 8:08:08 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:56:24 AM



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Today in Weather History

September 3, 1974: An early freeze occurred across Minnesota and Wisconsin as temperatures fell into the upper 20s to the lower 30s. The cold was the earliest freeze on record in some parts of the state ending the growing season. The most significant damage was to the soybean and corn crop. Damage estimates were more than \$100 million.

September 3, 1999: Training thunderstorms resulted in extensive flash flooding in a 30 to 40-mile wide band from Fort Pierre in southeast Stanley County to Hecla in northeast Brown County. Rainfall amounts in this corridor ranged from 3 to 7 inches. As a result, the communities of Blunt in Hughes County and Onida in Sully County were severely flooded. Most of the homes and businesses were inundated throughout Blunt and Onida causing severe damage. Only a few houses in these communities were spared from receiving water in their basements. Most homes also experienced sewer backup. The sewer systems in both Onida and Blunt were flooded and shut down. Many people had to go to temporary shelters as a result of the flooding. Aberdeen and Fort Pierre had a lot of street flooding resulting in road closures and detours. Also, several basements in Aberdeen and Fort Pierre had the sewer backup. The torrential rains flooded many township and county roads along with several state and U.S. highways. Sections of Highways 14, 20, 83, and 1806 along with many other roads in central and northeast South Dakota had to be closed due to the flooding. Many of the township and county roads had massive amounts of gravel washed away. Some bridges received minor damage with some culverts also lost. A few pets and livestock were also lost as a result of the flooding. Many acres of crops were flooded throughout the area. Some rainfall amounts included 3 inches at Fort Pierre, 4 inches at Hecla and in the Aberdeen Area, 5 inches at the Sand Lake Wildlife Refuge and Blunt, 6 inches at Seneca, 7 inches 10 miles southeast of Gettysburg and at Onida.

1821: Known as the 1821 Norfolk Long Island Hurricane, this storm ripped up the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast coast September 3 and 4 – coinciding with Labor Day (before the holiday was established).

1834: A strong hurricane made landfall near Georgetown, South Carolina.

1930: A Category 4 hurricane devastates the Dominican Republic on this day. This storm killed more than 8,000 individuals, which is it the fifth deadliest Atlantic hurricane on record.

1953 - The temperature at Erie PA reached 99 degrees, and Stroudsburg PA established a state record for September with a reading of 106 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1961 - Denver, CO, received 4.2 inches of snow, their earliest snow of record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1970: During the early evening hours, amid a severe hailstorm at Coffeyville, Kansas, a stone 17.5 inches in circumference and nearly two pounds in weight was recovered. Average stone size from the storm was five inches in diameter, with another stone reportedly eight inches in diameter. This hailstone is currently the third-largest hailstone in the U.S.

1979: Hurricane David made landfall in south Florida as a Category 2 storm. It caused 15 deaths in the US. Hurricane David was a Category 5 over the Dominican Republic where over 2,000 people died.

1987 - Temperatures dipped into the 40s and 50s for morning lows across much of the eastern half of the country, with eleven cities reporting record lows for the date. Pellston MI tied Gunnison CO for honors as the cold spot in the nation with a low of 30 degrees. Smoke from forest fires darkened skies in southern Oregon and northern California. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Sixteen cities in the northwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Highs of 89 degrees at Stampede Pass WA and 116 degrees at Redding CA established records for the month of September. Readings of 98 degrees at Spokane WA and 100 degrees at Yakima WA equalled records for September. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Sixteen cities in the northwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Highs of 89 degrees at Stampede Pass WA and 116 degrees at Redding CA established records for the month of September. Readings of 98 degrees at Spokane WA and 100 degrees at Yakima WA equalled records for September. (The National Weather Summary)

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Our Daily Bread. | Love God. Love Others.

Rooted in Love

Scripture: Ruth 2:5–13 (NIV)

5 Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, "Who does that young woman belong to?"

6 The overseer replied, "She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. 7 She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter."

8 So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. 9 Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled."

10 At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?"

11 Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. 12 May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

13 "May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord," she said. "You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants."

Insight By: Adapted from Understanding the Bible: [The History Books](#).

The book of Ruth is set during the period of the judges (Ruth 1:1). But rather than a dark story of sin and judgment, we read an uplifting account of loving loyalty. While the books of Judges and Ruth are different in many ways, they share one similarity. Just as the book of Judges leads us to think about the kingship, so does Ruth—in this case King David specifically. As we read this account today, we understand that kingship in general and King David in particular would eventually take us to Jesus, David's greater son (see Luke 20:41–44)..

Comment By: Xochitl Dixon

I arrived at the cancer care center, where I'd be serving as my mom's live-in caregiver, feeling alone and afraid. I'd left my family and support system more than 750 miles behind me. But before I could even touch my luggage, Frank, a man with a huge grin, offered to help. By the time we reached the sixth floor, I'd made plans to meet his wife, Lori, who cared for him during his treatments. The couple soon became like family as we leaned on God and each other. We laughed, vented, cried, and prayed together. Though we all felt displaced, our connection to God and each other kept us rooted in love as we supported one another.

When Ruth committed to caring for her mother-in-law, Naomi, she left the security of familiarity behind. Ruth "entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters" (Ruth 2:3). The overseer told the landowner, Boaz, that Ruth "came into the field" and "remained" working "except for a short rest in the shelter" (v. 7). Ruth found a safe place with people willing to care for her as she cared for Naomi (vv. 8–9). And God provided for Ruth and Naomi through Boaz's generosity (vv. 14–16).

Life's circumstances can provide roads to unexpected places far beyond our comfort zones. As we remain connected to God and each other, He'll keep us rooted in love as we support one another..

Reflect and Prayer: How has God comforted you when you felt alone? How has He used other people to support you through a community rooted in His love?

Loving Father, thank You for promising to be with me and for providing all I need.

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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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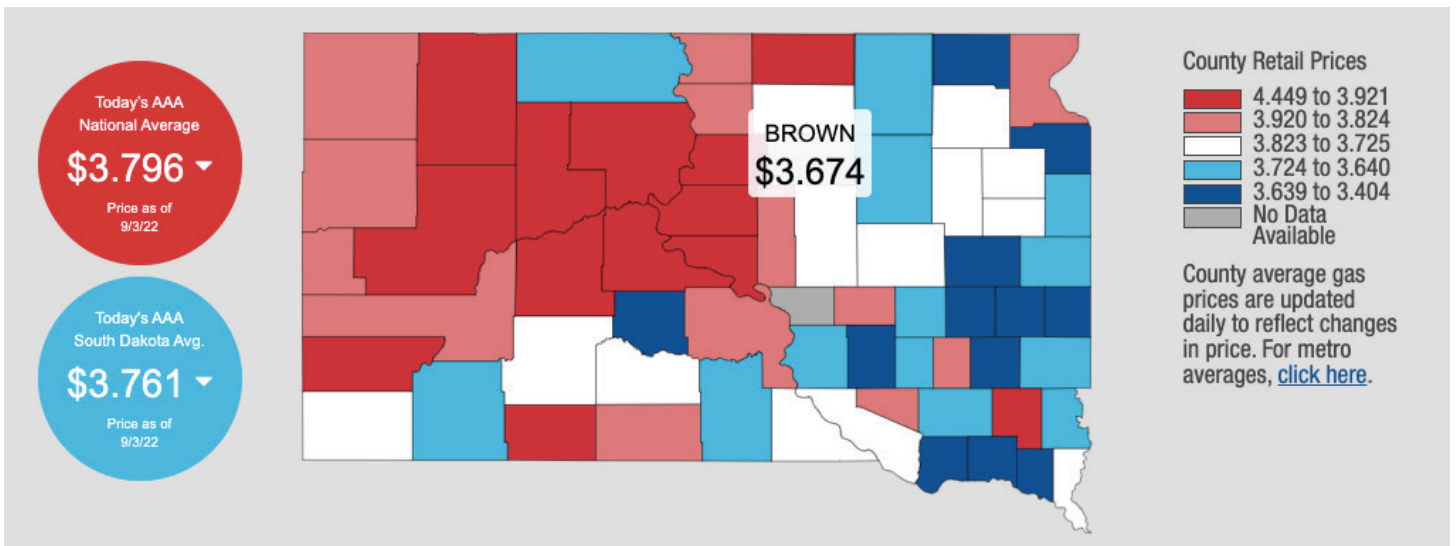
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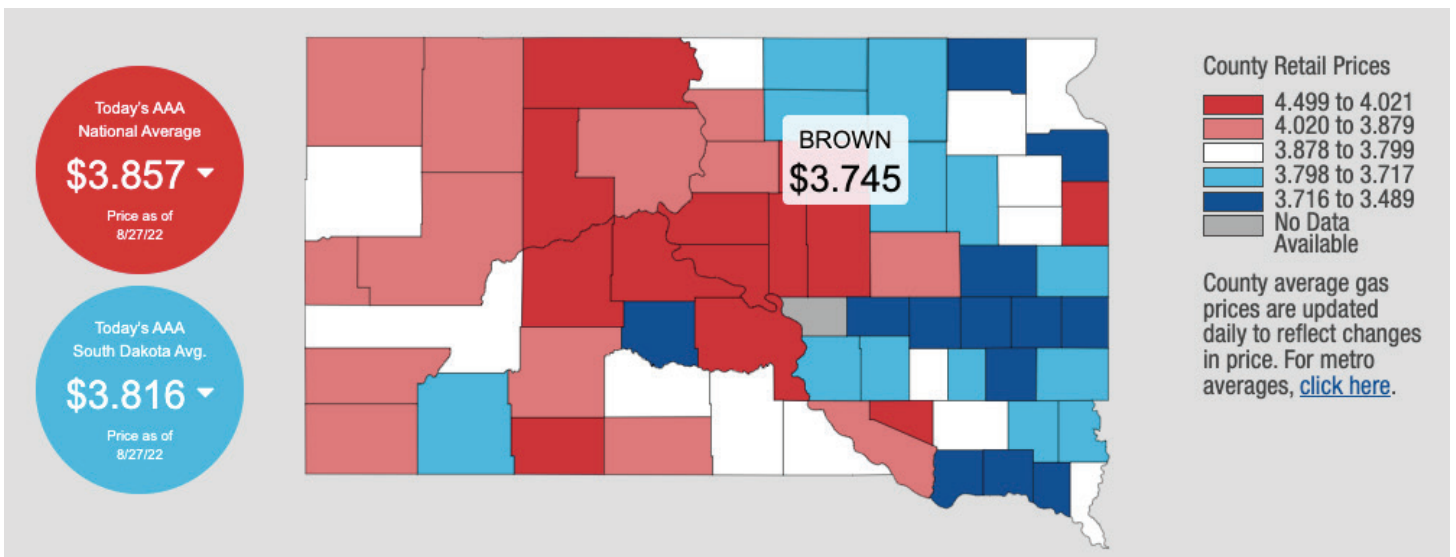
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

Current Avg.	\$3.761	\$3.936	\$4.399	\$4.897
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.779	\$3.945	\$4.431	\$4.898
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.816	\$3.984	\$4.465	\$4.825
Month Ago Avg.	\$4.150	\$4.327	\$4.813	\$5.020
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.154	\$3.269	\$3.635	\$3.240

This Week



Last Week



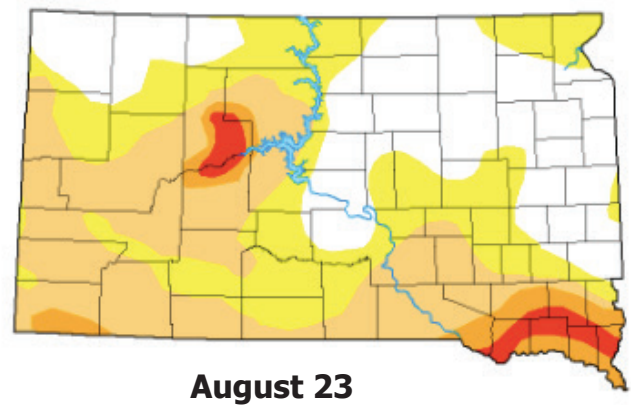
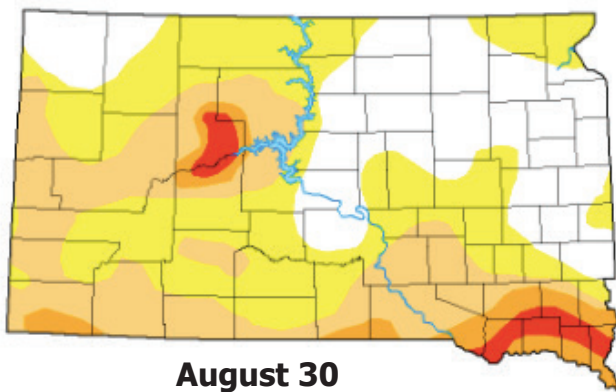
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



Warm, dry conditions continued across much of the region with the Dakotas, Nebraska and Kansas seeing some areas of worsening conditions. In Nebraska and Kansas, all levels of drought expanded as short-term precipitation deficits, on top of long-term dryness, continued to deplete soil moisture and stress vegetation. Exceptional (D4) drought expanded in the southwest where rainfall deficits of over 3.5 inches have occurred over the last 90 days. Extreme (D3), severe (D2) and moderate (D1) drought expanded in the eastern half of Nebraska where rainfall deficits of 3 to nearly 7 inches have occurred over the last 90 days. Other areas of Nebraska seeing degradations include north-central Nebraska, where D2 expanded, and the Panhandle, where D1 expanded. Similarly, Kansas also saw large areas of deterioration. In the western half of the state, D1, D2, D3 and D4 expanded where rainfall deficits near 5 inches occurred over the last 90 days. In the east, improvements were made to D1 where the heaviest rain fell over the last 2 weeks. Improvements were also made in eastern South Dakota to D1 along a band of heavy rain last week.

News from the Associated Press

GOP escalates fight against citizen-led ballot initiatives

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of people signed petitions this year backing proposed ballot initiatives to expand voting access, ensure abortion rights and legalize recreational marijuana in Arizona, Arkansas and Michigan.

Yet voters might not get a say because Republican officials or judges have blocked the proposals from the November elections, citing flawed wording, procedural shortcomings or insufficient petition signatures.

At the same time, Republican lawmakers in Arkansas and Arizona have placed constitutional amendments on the ballot proposing to make it harder to approve citizen initiatives in the future.

The Republican pushback against the initiative process is part of a several-year trend that gained steam as Democratic-aligned groups have increasingly used petitions to force public votes on issues that Republican-led legislatures have opposed. In reliably Republican Missouri, for example, voters have approved initiatives to expand Medicaid, raise the minimum wage and legalize medical marijuana. An initiative seeking to allow recreational pot is facing a court challenge from an anti-drug activist aiming to knock it off the November ballot.

Some Democrats contend Republicans are subverting the will of the people by making the ballot initiative process more difficult.

“What is happening now is just a web of technicalities to thwart the process in states where voters are using the people’s tool to make an immediate positive change in their lives,” said Chris Melody Fields Figueredo, executive director of the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, which has worked with progressive groups sponsoring the blocked initiatives.

“That is not the way our democracy should work,” she added

Republicans who have thrown up hurdles to initiative petitions contend they are protecting the integrity of the lawmaking process against well-funded interest groups trying to bend state policies in their favor.

“I think the Legislature is a much purer way to get things done and it represents the people much better, rather than having this jungle where you just throw it on the ballot,” said South Dakota state Rep. Tim Goodwin, who has perennially targeted the initiative process with restrictions.

About half the states allow citizen initiatives, in which petition signers can bypass a legislature to place proposed laws or constitutional changes directly before voters. But executive or judicial officials often still have some role in the process, typically by certifying that the ballot wording is clear and accurate and that petition circulators gathered enough valid signatures of registered voters.

In Michigan this past week, two Republican members of the bipartisan Board of State Canvassers blocked initiatives to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution and expand opportunities for voting. Each measure had significantly more than the required 425,000 signatures. But GOP board members said the voting measure had unclear wording and the abortion measure was flawed because of spacing problems that scrunched some words together.

Supporters have appealed both decisions to the Michigan Supreme Court, which consists of a majority of Democratic-appointed judges.

The Arkansas Supreme Court, whose justices run in nonpartisan elections, is weighing an appeal of an August decision blocking an initiative that would legalize recreational marijuana for adults.

The State Board of Election Commissioners, which has just one Democrat among its many Republicans, determined that the ballot title was misleading because it failed to mention it would repeal potency limits in an existing medical marijuana provision. Because the deadline has passed to certify initiative titles, the Supreme Court has allowed the measure on the general election ballot while it decides whether the votes will be counted.

A lawsuit by initiative supporters contends a 2019 law passed by the Republican-led Legislature violates

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the Arkansas Constitution by allowing the board to reject ballot titles.

"The (initiative) process in Arkansas has gotten consistently harder each cycle, as the Legislature adds more and more requirements," said Steve Lancaster, a lawyer for Responsible Growth Arkansas, which is sponsoring the marijuana amendment.

It would get even harder if voters support a legislatively referred amendment on the November ballot that would require a 60% vote to approve citizen-initiated ballot measures or future constitutional amendments.

In Arizona, the primarily Republican-appointed Supreme Court recently blocked a proposed constitutional amendment that would have extended early voting and limited lobbyist gifts to lawmakers. The measure also would have specifically prohibited the Legislature from overturning the results of presidential elections, which some Republicans had explored after then-President Donald Trump's loss in 2020.

After a lower court initially ruled the measure could appear on the November ballot, Arizona's high court instructed the judge to reconsider. Then it upheld a subsequent ruling throwing out enough petition signatures to prevent the initiative from qualifying for the ballot.

Still on the ballot are several other amendments referred by Arizona's Republican-led Legislature. Those measures would limit initiatives to a single subject, require a 60% supermajority to approve tax proposals and expand the Legislature's authority to change voter-approved initiatives.

Those proposals come after Arizona Republicans have spent the past decade enacting laws making it more difficult to get citizen initiatives on the ballot. State laws now require petition sheets to be precisely printed and ban the use of a copy machine to create new ones. Other laws require paid circulators to include their registration number on each petition sheet, get it notarized and check a box saying they were paid.

"The effect is to make it much harder, much more expensive to get the signatures to put one of these propositions on the ballot," said Terry Goddard, a Democrat who served as the state's attorney general from 2003 through 2011.

After years of trying, Goddard finally succeeded this year in getting an initiative on the ballot that would require nonprofit groups that spend large amounts on elections to reveal their donors.

Earlier this summer, South Dakota voters defeated a measure that would have made it harder to pass initiatives on taxes and spending. The proposal from the Republican-led Legislature would have required a 60% vote to raise taxes or spend over a certain amount of money. Voters rejected the measure by 67%.

"This just seems like a way to suppress voters. honestly," Joshua Matzner, a Democrat, said after voting against it.

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 23, Redfield 6

Alcester-Hudson 30, Burke 8

Avon 34, Freeman/ Marion/ Freeman Academy Co-op 24

Beresford 7, Canton 6

Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 18, Clark/Willow Lake 7

Britton-Hecla 52, Waverly-South Shore 14

Castlewood 54, Arlington 0

Corsica/Stickney 50, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 16

Dakota Valley 40, Chamberlain 8

DeSmet 52, Dell Rapids St. Mary 8

Dell Rapids 45, Belle Fourche 20

Deubrook 24, Great Plains Lutheran 6

Deuel 47, Sisseton 12

Elk Point-Jefferson 50, Sioux Valley 0

Faulkton 64, Potter County 16

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Flandreau 8, Parker 2
Gregory 27, Platte-Geddes 6
Groton Area 57, Dakota Hills 0
Hamlin 49, Garretson 0
Harding County/Bison Co-op 46, Faith 6
Herreid/Selby Area 60, Lemmon/McIntosh 6
Hitchcock-Tulare 36, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 6
Hot Springs 54, Lakota Tech 0
Howard 9, Kimball/White Lake 6
Irene-Wakonda 38, Centerville 28
Jim River 18, Miller/Highmore-Harrold 0
Jones County 53, White River 20
Lennox 21, Vermillion 12
Little Wound 46, St. Francis Indian 6
Lyman 64, Kadoka Area 14
Madison 41, Milbank 6
McCook Central/Montrose 54, Baltic 0
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 50, Tripp-Delmont/Armour/Andes Central/Dakota Christian 0
Parkston 40, Wolsey-Wessington 21
Philip 58, Bennett County 26
Pierre 48, Brookings 0
Rapid City Stevens 66, Douglas 8
Red Cloud 34, McLaughlin 0
Sioux Falls Jefferson 49, Sioux Falls Washington 0
Sioux Falls Lincoln 56, Rapid City Central 14
St. Thomas More 27, Rapid City Christian 14
Stanley County 46, Dupree 29
Sully Buttes 52, Langford 16
Timber Lake 38, Newell 20
Tiospa Zina Tribal 54, Crazy Horse 0
Todd County 58, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 6
Tri-Valley 43, Custer 0
Viborg-Hurley 20, Canistota 14
Wall 62, New Underwood 12
Warner 28, Ipswich 20
Watertown 34, Huron 19
West Central 27, Sioux Falls Christian 24
Winner 62, Webster 8
Yankton 38, Spearfish 0

PREP VOLLEYBALL

Mobridge-Pollock def. Belle Fourche, 25-20, 20-25, 25-23, 15-9

Gillette Invite=

Pool A=

Rapid City Stevens def. Campbell County, Wyo., 28-26, 25-21

Pool B=

Newcastle, Wyo. def. St. Thomas More, 23-25, 25-21, 26-24

Pool C=

Rapid City Christian def. Wheatland, Wyo., 25-20, 25-19

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Pool D=

Casper Kelly Walsh, Wyo. def. Rapid City Central, 25-11, 25-9

Rapid City Central def. Douglas, Wyo., 25-20, 25-15

Pool E=

Spearfish def. Glenrock, Wyo., 25-18, 25-16

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

39-40-52-60-67, Mega Ball: 20, Megaplier: 2

(thirty-nine, forty, fifty-two, sixty, sixty-seven; Mega Ball: twenty; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$191,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 148,000,000

\$1 billion in federal economic grants headed coast to coast

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government will send \$1 billion worth of federal grants for manufacturing, clean energy, farming, biotech and more to 21 regional partnerships across the nation, President Joe Biden and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo announced Friday.

The 21 were chosen from 529 initial applicants vying for grants that were part of last year's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package. The Biden administration has repeatedly laid out a vision for the economy that is more self-sufficient and driven by high-tech manufacturing and the development of renewable energy.

"We designed this program by thinking about people and places," Biden said at a White House event. "This is about jobs in their communities for them, not having to leave or not having to go on unemployment."

Unlike much of the pandemic aid that was meant to address immediate needs, the grants are part of a longer-term effort to revitalize parts of the country that have needed an economic jolt. The money will include funds for existing industries and capital for new ventures. The grants are the largest ever for local economic development provided by the Commerce Department, Raimondo said.

She said the effort is personal for her. Her father lost his job at a watch factory in Rhode Island

"The whole point of this is we're not going to let you get left behind as we transition to a more digital economy, to a more technical economy, to a green economy," Raimondo said in an interview.

The grants include \$65.1 million for California to improve farm production and \$25 million for a robotics cluster in Nebraska. Georgia gets \$65 million for artificial intelligence. There is \$63.7 million for lithium-based battery development in New York. Coal counties in West Virginia would receive \$62.8 million to help with the shift to solar power and find new uses for abandoned mines.

"I can't tell you how much this means to our hardworking people in West Virginia," said that state's Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin, who attended the announcement virtually.

Raimondo estimated that the investments, which will be provided over five years as reimbursements, will result in at least 100,000 jobs.

Solidly Republican states such as Oklahoma and South Dakota received funding, and money also is going ahead of November's midterm elections toward political battlegrounds that could decide control of Congress. There is \$44 million for regenerative medicine in New Hampshire, where Democrat Maggie Hassan is defending her U.S. Senate seat. Pennsylvania, which has an open Senate seat, is set to receive \$62.7 million for robotics and artificial intelligence.

Raimondo said the winners were chosen based on merit rather than politics

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"Let me ask you: How is this going to play out on the political scene?" Biden asked the Pennsylvania team attending Friday's event virtually.

Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, a Democrat, quickly answered with a campaign ready line: "President Biden continues to invest in people and in jobs and in our future."

The massive amount of coronavirus aid at the start of Biden's tenure helped to accelerate job growth as the U.S. recovered from the pandemic. But accompanying the hiring was a burst of inflation that hit a 40-year peak this summer, crushing consumer sentiment and putting the administration on the defensive to show how its policies are helping the economy.

Even as much of the coronavirus money has been disbursed, the administration has said it still needs more to contain the disease and its variations. On Friday, the White House said it would seek \$7.1 billion for additional vaccines and personal protective equipment as well as \$2 billion for free at-home coronavirus tests as part of a broader emergency funding request.

Biden had earlier sought \$22.5 billion from Congress to address and prevent outbreaks, a figure that lawmakers reduced to \$10 billion in negotiations. But that additional funding was never passed by Congress despite confirmed cases that are now averaging about 90,000 daily.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre tried to minimize the lack of funding after the Food and Drug Administration on Wednesday approved modified booster shots of the vaccines. Jean-Pierre said booster shots would be available after the Labor Day holiday as the administration has worked with local partners.

The grants for economic development indicate that the relief package could have a multidecade impact that goes beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The New Orleans area will receive \$50 million to use hydrogen produced by wind power that does not cause carbon emissions, a meaningful change in Louisiana, a state that has long depended on fossil fuels.

"With clean hydrogen, we can remain an energy state — but become an energy state of the future that has less impact on the environment," said Michael Hecht, president and CEO of Greater New Orleans Inc., an economic development nonprofit. "When money and morality come together, you get stuff done."

South Dakota AG clears Sioux Falls officer in June shooting

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Attorney General Mark Vargo announced Friday that his office had cleared a Sioux Falls police officer for shooting at a fleeing man who had pointed a gun toward the officer.

"The video and audio recordings of this incident clearly show that the suspect, Asa Wooden Knife, possessed a handgun and pointed it at the officer," Vargo said in a statement.

The Division of Criminal Investigation found police officers were investigating a stolen car that had pulled into a motel parking lot on June 22. Wooden Knife, who had been driving the car, fled from the officers, according to the Division of Criminal Investigation's report. As he fled, Wooden Knife pointed a pistol over his shoulder, and the officer then fired twice, but missed him, according to the report.

Wooden Knife appeared to drop the pistol and was arrested after running into the street, the report found. A police officer used a Taser on Wooden Knife as he struggled with the police officers, according to the report.

"Wooden Knife posed a clear and present danger and the officer's actions were appropriate," Vargo said.

Police: Plane circling Mississippi city threatens to crash

TUPELO, Miss. (AP) — A stolen airplane circled over north Mississippi on Saturday morning, and police said they evacuated a Walmart store after the pilot threatened to crash into it.

The Tupelo Police Department said in a Facebook post that the Walmart and a nearby convenience store had been evacuated. The plane started circling over Tupelo, Mississippi, about 5 a.m.. It was still in the air about four hours later, but had flown away from Tupelo and was circling over another community nearby.

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Police said they have made contact with the pilot directly.

"Citizens are asked to avoid that area until an all clear is given," the police wrote. "With the mobility of an airplane of that type the danger zone is much larger than even Tupelo."

Authorities believe the aircraft was stolen and are working to determine whether the pilot threatening to crash the plane is an employee of a local airport, two people briefed on the matter told The Associated Press. Multiple federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, are now involved in the investigation and are working to discern a motive, the people said.

Investigators were continuing to monitor the flight's path and have been in communication with the pilot, the people said.

Law enforcement told the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal shortly after 8 a.m. that the plane had left the airspace around Tupelo and was flying near a Toyota manufacturing plant in nearby Blue Springs.

An online flight tracking service showed the plane meandering in the sky and following a looping path.

"State law enforcement and emergency managers are closely tracking this dangerous situation," Gov. Tate Reeves wrote on Twitter. "All citizens should be on alert and aware of updates from the Tupelo Police Department."

Leslie Criss, a magazine editor who lives in Tupelo, woke up early and was watching the situation on TV and social media. Several of her friends were outside watching the plane circle overhead.

"I've never seen anything like this in this town," Criss told The Associated Press. "It's a scary way to wake up on a Saturday morning."

Former state Rep. Steve Holland, who is a funeral director in Tupelo, said he had received calls from families concerned about the plane.

"One called and said, 'Oh, my God, do we need to cancel mother's funeral?'" Holland said. "I just told them, 'No, life's going to go on.'"

Trump rallies for Oz, Mastriano in Pa. amid midterm worries

By MARC LEVY and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

MYERSTOWN, Pa. (AP) — Larry Mitko voted for Donald Trump in 2016. But the Republican from Beaver County in western Pennsylvania says he has no plans to back his party's nominee for Senate, Dr. Mehmet Oz — "no way, no how."

Mitko doesn't feel like he knows the celebrity heart surgeon, who only narrowly won his May primary with Trump's backing. Instead, Mitko plans to vote for Oz's Democratic rival, Lt. Gov. John Fetterman, a name he's been familiar with since Fetterman's days as mayor of nearby Braddock.

"Dr. Oz hasn't showed me one thing to get me to vote for him," he said. "I won't vote for someone I don't know."

Mitko's thinking underscores the political challenges facing Trump and the rest of the Republican Party as the former president heads to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, on Saturday for his first rally of the general election season.

While Trump's endorsed picks won many Republican primaries this summer, many of the candidates he backed were inexperienced and polarizing figures now struggling in their November races. That's putting Senate control — once assumed to be a lock for Republicans — on the line.

Among those candidates are Oz in Pennsylvania, author JD Vance in Ohio, venture capitalist Blake Masters in Arizona and former football star Herschel Walker in Georgia.

"Republicans have now nominated a number of candidates who've never run for office before for very high-profile Senate races," said veteran Republican pollster Whit Ayres. While he isn't writing his party's chances off just yet, he said, "It's a much more difficult endeavor than a candidate who had won several difficult political races before."

The stakes are particularly high for Trump as he lays the groundwork for an expected 2024 presidential run amid a series of escalating legal challenges, including the FBI's recent seizure of classified documents from his Florida home. Investigators also continue to probe his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020

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election.

This past week, President Joe Biden gave a prime-time speech in Philadelphia warning that Trump and other "MAGA" Republicans — the acronym for Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign slogan — posed a threat to U.S. democracy. Biden has tried to frame the upcoming vote, as he did the 2020 election, as a battle for the "soul of the nation." Biden's Labor Day visit to Pittsburgh will be his third to the state within a week, a sign of Pennsylvania's election-year importance.

While Republicans were once seen as having a good chance of gaining control of both chambers of Congress in November amid soaring inflation, high gas prices and Biden's slumping approval ratings, Republicans have found themselves on defense since the Supreme Court overturned the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision protecting abortion rights.

Some candidates, like Doug Mastriano, the GOP's hard-line nominee for governor in Pennsylvania, are sticking with their primary campaign playbooks, hoping they can win by turning out Trump's loyal base even if they alienate more moderate voters.

Mastriano, who wants to outlaw abortion even when pregnancies are the result of rape or incest or endanger the life of the mother, played a leading role in Trump's effort to overturn the 2020 election and was seen outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, as pro-Trump rioters stormed the building.

But others have been trying to broaden their appeal, scrubbing from their websites references to anti-abortion messaging that is out of step with the political mainstream. Masters, for instance, removed language from a policy section of his website that labeled him "100% pro-life," as well as language saying, "if we had had a free and fair election, President Trump would be sitting in the Oval Office today." Others have played down Trump endorsements that were once featured prominently.

The shifting climate has prompted rounds of finger-pointing in the party, including from Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who last month cited "candidate quality" as he lowered expectations that Republicans would recapture control of the Senate in November.

Florida Sen. Rick Scott, who leads the National Republican Senatorial Committee, said those who complain about the party's nominees have "contempt" for the voters who chose them.

"It's an amazing act of cowardice, and ultimately, it's treasonous to the conservative cause," he wrote in an op-ed in the *Washington Examiner*.

Trump, too, fired back, calling McConnell a "disgrace" as he defended the party's candidate roster.

"There's some very good people," he said in a radio interview. "You know, takes a lot of courage to run and they spend their wealth on it and they put their reputations on the line."

Democrats have also piled on.

"Senate campaigns are candidate versus candidate battles and Republicans have put forward a roster of deeply flawed recruits," said David Bergstein, the Senate Democratic campaign committee's communication director. He credited Trump with deterring experienced Republicans from running, elevating flawed candidates and forcing them to take positions that are out of step with the general electorate.

"All those factors have contributed to the weakness of the slate of Republican candidates they've been left with," he said. A Trump spokesman did not respond to requests for comment.

In Pennsylvania, Republicans are hoping Oz's shortcomings as a candidate will be overshadowed by concerns about Fetterman, who suffered a stroke just days before the primary and has been sidelined for much of the summer. He continues to keep a light public schedule and visibly struggled to speak at a recent event.

Republicans acknowledge that Oz struggles to come off as authentic and was slow to punch back as Fetterman spent the summer trolling him on social media and portraying him as an out-of-touch carpet-bagger from New Jersey.

While Fetterman, whom Republicans deride as "Bernie Sanders in gym shorts," leads Oz in polls and fundraising, Republicans say they expect the money gap to narrow and are pleased to see Oz within striking distance after getting hammered by \$20 million in negative advertising during the primaries.

The National Republican Senatorial Committee is helping finance a new round of Oz's television ads,

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and the Senate Leadership Fund, a McConnell-aligned super political action committee, says it added \$9.5 million to its TV buy — boosting its overall commitment to \$34.1 million by Election Day.

“Regardless of what people may have heard in the primary, they’re going to realize that Oz is the best choice for Pennsylvania,” said Pennsylvania Republican National Committeeman Andy Reilly.

A super PAC aligned with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., says it has made \$32 million in television ad reservations in the state.

Oz has won over some once-skeptical voters, like Glen Rubendall, who didn’t vote for the TV doctor in his seven-way primary — a victory so narrow it went to a statewide recount — but said he’s come around.

“I’ve been listening to him speak, and I have a pro-Oz view now,” said Rubendall, a retired state corrections officer.

Traci Martin, a registered independent, also plans to vote for Oz because she opposes abortion, despite ads that aired during the primary featuring past Oz statements that seemed supportive of abortion rights.

“I hope he is (anti-abortion),” Martin said, “but the sad part is we live in an age when we see politicians say one thing and do another.”

Octogenarian brothers make popular hand-drawn posters

By CLAUDIA TORRENS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — For years, Miguel and Carlos Cevallos made a living by drawing posters for neighborhood nightclubs, taco trucks and restaurants in Queens, painting in the businesses’ basements or on their tables and attracting clients by word of mouth.

Until an Instagram account changed a lot of that.

Now, hip Brooklyn ice cream shops and Manhattan retro diners wait their turn to get one of the brothers’ colorful signs. They’re in demand in San Francisco music stores, national restaurant chains, bars in Belgium and bakeries in South Korea.

It doesn’t matter that the brothers are more than 80 years old or that the two, born in Ecuador and raised in Colombia, speak limited English. They have embraced their new customers and draw all day in the Manhattan apartment they have shared for nearly 20 years.

“Destiny is like this. Sometimes one finds success later in life,” Carlos Cevallos said recently, while sipping a tea in an empty Manhattan diner. Dressed in suits and ties, as they are every day, the brothers shared a muffin.

Recent commissions have come from a bagel shop in Manhattan’s Little Italy neighborhood, a newsstand in Manhattan’s West Village, an Oregon-based restaurant chain and a Los Angeles pop-up veggie burger shop. NYCgo, the city’s official guide for tourists and New Yorkers, recently asked the brothers to draw Queens’ iconic Unisphere, the giant metal globe built for the 1964 World’s Fair.

“They have a special touch, so nice and colorful,” said Marina Cortes, manager of the West Village diner La Bonbonniere. The brothers’ “Breakfast All Day!” sign is displayed on the restaurant’s terrace.

“A Life Without Anything Good, Is Bad” reads a poster the brothers drew for Van Leeuwen Ice Cream. “Daily Special. Pick Any Two Sandwiches and Pay For Both!” reads another they did for Regina’s Grocery on Manhattan’s Lower East Side.

Done with acrylic paints, the Cevallos brothers’ playful, childlike posters have big letters and a nostalgic look. Miguel does the drawings and Carlos the coloring, together crafting about six posters per week.

The brothers field five to 20 requests weekly for their work.

The family moved from Ecuador to Colombia to follow an uncle who was a Catholic priest and worked in Bogota. Used to drawing since they were kids, Carlos, Miguel and their oldest brother, Victor, opened an art studio and poster shop in Bogota’s Chapinero neighborhood.

Victor moved to New York in 1969, and Carlos joined him in 1974. For years, they worked at a studio in Times Square until rent increases prompted a shift to Queens.

In the 1980s, they drew posters that announced performances at a Queens club called La Esmeralda.

“They would pay so little per poster. It was sad,” Carlos said. The posters featured such artists as Mexi-

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can singer Armando Manzanero and Chilean Lucho Gatica.

Miguel, meanwhile, took care of their mother until she died at age 101. He moved to New York in 2005 to join his siblings. Victor, a mentor to his younger brothers, died in 2012.

Eventually, Aviram Cohen, who builds and installs audiovisual art at museums, saw the brothers' posters in Queens and tracked them down to request one for his wife's new yoga studio. In 2018, he opened their Instagram account, @cevallos_bros, which became a lifeline for the brothers after the coronavirus pandemic hit.

"I did it out of admiration for their work, and after meeting them, I understood that it would all disappear. Most of the businesses would throw away the posters," said Cohen, 42. "I felt strongly that different kinds of people and subcultures could enjoy their art."

He was right. The account now has more than 25,000 followers and has become an archive of their work, as well as a source of orders.

"I just love their story," said Happy David, who manages the Instagram accounts of La Bonbonniere and Casa Magazines, a Manhattan newsstand for which she has also commissioned the brothers' work. It reminds her of signs seen in her native Philippines.

In a digital world, "a lot of people are going back to craft," David said. "We want to connect, and we want to feel that there are hands that made these."

When asked whether they plan to retire soon, the Cevallos brothers answer with a quick "no."

Where do they get their energy from?

"We eat healthy," they respond with a smile.

How Archives went from 'National Treasure' to political prey

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It was the setting for "National Treasure," the movie in which Nicolas Cage's character tries to steal the Declaration of Independence. It has long been among the most trafficked tourist destinations in the nation's capital.

But what the National Archives and Records Administration has never been — until now — is the locus of a criminal investigation of a former president.

Yet that's exactly where the agency finds itself after sending a referral to the FBI stating that 15 boxes recovered from former President Donald Trump's Florida home in January contained dozens of documents with classified markings.

"I don't think Donald Trump has politicized the National Archives," said Tim Naftali, the first director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. "I think what Donald Trump did was cross red lines that civil servants had to respond to."

Those government workers operate out of the public eye, behind the marble façade of the Archives building in downtown Washington. It's there, beyond the Hollywood plotlines, where a crucial component of the federal bureaucracy resides, with dozens of employees acting as the custodians of American history, preserving records that range from the mundane to the monumental.

A closer look at the National Archives, its history and how it ended up in the middle of a political maelstrom:
A MASSIVE COLLECTION

The mission of the National Archives, which was founded by Congress in 1934, sounds straightforward: to be the nation's record-keeper. It's a daunting task that has only grown more complex over time.

While the Archives safeguards precious national documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, that's only the public face of their sprawling collection, which spans 13 billion pages of text and 10 million maps, charts and drawings, as well as tens of millions of photographs, films and other records.

In addition to its work in Washington, the Archives oversees 13 presidential libraries and 14 regional archives across the country.

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ARCHIVIST FOR A NATION

The Archivist of the United States is responsible for running the agency. The last-Senate confirmed leader was David Ferriero, who stepped down in April after serving 12 years under three presidents.

Ferriero recalled in an April interview with The Washington Post how he watched from the windows of the Archives building on Jan. 6, 2021, as the crowd of Trump supporters marched past on their way to breach the Capitol. He called it the worst day of his life.

More than a year later he decided to retire, in part, because of fears about the nation's political trajectory. "It's important to me, that this administration replace me," he told the Post. "I'm concerned about what's going to happen in 2024. I don't want it left to ... the unknowns of the presidential election."

His deputy, Debra Steidel Wall, is serving as the acting archivist while President Joe Biden's nominee, Colleen Joy Shogan, awaits a Senate confirmation process this fall. The archivist serves in the role until deciding to retire.

'NO SUCH THINGS AS MEMENTOS'

The Archives serves as the final resting spot for the work of every White House.

After the Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation, Congress passed a law in 1978 to ensure that all presidential records — written, electronic material created by the president, the vice president, or any other member of the executive branch in an official capacity — are preserved and turned over to the Archives at the end of an administration. The law states that a president's records are not his or her own, but are the property of the federal government and must be treated as such.

When a new administration begins, White House staff receive a brochure on the law and step-by-step instructions on how to preserve records. The preservation requirements cover a wide range of items, including presents and letters from foreign leaders. "There are no such things as mementos," said Lee White, the executive director of the National Coalition for History.

In addition, the law requires that even while in office, the president or any member of that administration must first seek the advice of the archivist before destroying any record, a practice Trump and his aides reportedly ignored throughout his four years in office.

"Everything he writes down is essentially a presidential record. It's not his property," White said. "It is so basic to the whole concept of why the Presidential Records Act was created."

"At noon on Inauguration Day, the custody transfers to the archivist. Period. There is no maybe. It's the law," he added.

AN UNPRECEDENTED DECISION

The rules of the Presidential Records Act are central to the FBI's investigation of Trump.

After Trump left office, the Archives discovered that records from his White House were missing. What followed was a yearlong back-and-forth between the Archives' legal counsel and Trump's lawyers that resulted in the voluntary return of 15 boxes of presidential records. Upon opening the boxes, the agency discovered that 14 of them contained classified documents and information.

Recognizing a potential crime, the agency made the unprecedented decision to refer the matter to the Justice Department. That move culminated in the search of Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in August. FBI agents recovered more than 100 classified records, including some that were stashed in the former president's office among personal items.

Since the Aug. 8 search, the Archives and its employees have been bombarded with threats and accusations. The acting archivist in an email to the agency's staff noted their work is nonpartisan and urged them to hold steadfast to their mission.

"The National Archives has been the focus of intense scrutiny for months, this week especially, with many people ascribing political motivation to our actions," Wall wrote in an Aug. 24 letter. "NARA has received messages from the public accusing us of corruption and conspiring against the former President, or congratulating NARA for 'bringing him down.'"

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"Neither is accurate or welcome," she added.

Wall has worked for more than three decades at the Archives, starting as an archivist trainee and advancing to second in line. She said in her letter that despite the political storm surrounding the agency, staff must continue their work "without favor or fear, in the service of our democracy."

AN ARCHIVIST CONFIRMATION BATTLE?

Five days before the Mar-a-Lago search, Biden announced he was nominating Shogan, an executive at the White House Historical Association who previously spent a decade working at the Library of Congress, as the next archivist.

Nominees for the post are typically confirmed without controversy or fanfare. But that's unlikely this time.

Shogan faces a charged confirmation process as Republicans demand answers about the Justice Department's investigation and the Archives' role in facilitating it. A confirmation hearing this fall has not yet been scheduled but could end up being unusually contentious.

Republicans in the House and Senate have pushed for more information about how the Archives made the decision to refer Trump's case to federal investigators.

Rep. James Comer of Kentucky, the top Republican on the House Oversight and Reform Committee, sent a letter Thursday demanding that the Archives' watchdog provide documents and communications about the case.

"Transparency is particularly important in the post-pandemic era when Americans are lacking trust in our institutions," Comer wrote.

So far, the National Archives has denied requests from both Democrats and Republicans on the committees that oversee the agency, instead referring them to the Justice Department where the investigation is now unfolding.

Gorbachev buried in Moscow in funeral snubbed by Putin

By JIM HEINTZ and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who launched drastic reforms that helped end the Cold War and precipitated the breakup of the Soviet Union, was buried Saturday after a farewell ceremony attended by thousands of mourners but snubbed by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Kremlin's refusal to formally declare a state funeral reflects its uneasiness about the legacy of Gorbachev, who has been venerated worldwide for bringing down the Iron Curtain but reviled by many at home for the Soviet collapse and the ensuing economic meltdown that plunged millions into poverty.

On Thursday, Putin privately laid flowers at Gorbachev's coffin at a Moscow hospital where he died. The Kremlin said the president's busy schedule would prevent him from attending the funeral.

Asked what specific business will keep Putin busy on Saturday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the president will have a series of working meetings, an international phone call and needs to prepare for a business forum in Russia's Far East he's scheduled to attend next week.

Gorbachev, who died Tuesday at the age of 91, was buried at Moscow's Novodevichy cemetery next to his wife Raisa, following a farewell ceremony at the Pillar Hall of the House of the Unions, an opulent 18th-century mansion near the Kremlin that has served as the venue for state funerals since Soviet times.

At the ceremony Saturday, mourners passed by Gorbachev's open casket flanked by honorary guards, laying flowers as solemn music played. Gorbachev's daughter, Irina, and his two granddaughters sat beside the coffin.

The grand, chandeliered hall lined by columns hosted balls for the nobility under the czars and served as a venue for high-level meetings and congresses along with state funerals during Soviet times. Upon entering the building, mourners saw honor guards flanking a large photo of Gorbachev standing with a broad smile, a reminder of the cheerful vigor he brought to the Soviet leadership after a series of dour, ailing predecessors.

The turnout was large enough that the viewing was extended for two more hours beyond the stated

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two hours.

Despite the choice of the prestigious site for the farewell ceremony, the Kremlin stopped short of calling it a state funeral, with Peskov saying the ceremony will have "elements" of one, such as honorary guards, and the government's assistance in organizing it. He wouldn't describe how it will differ from a full-fledged state funeral.

Saturday's ceremony had all the trappings befitting a state funeral except the name, including the national flag draping Gorbachev's coffin. with goose-stepping guards firing shots in the air and a small band playing the Russian anthem, which uses the same melody as the Soviet anthem.

But officially declaring a state funeral for Gorbachev would have obliged Putin to attend it and would have required Moscow to invite foreign leaders, something that it was apparently reluctant to do amid soaring tensions with the West after sending troops to Ukraine.

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by Putin who served as Russia's president in 2008-2012, showed up at the farewell ceremony. He then released a post on a messaging app channel, referring to the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and accusing the U.S. and its allies of trying to engineer Russia's breakup, a policy he described as a "chess game with Death."

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who often has been critical of the Western sanctions against Russia, attended the farewell on Saturday. The U.S., British, German and other Western ambassadors also attended.

The relatively modest ceremony contrasted with a lavish 2007 state funeral given to Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first post-Soviet leader who anointed Putin as his preferred successor and set the stage for him to win the presidency by stepping down.

Yeltsin was also buried at the Novodevichy cemetery, which holds the graves of an array of many prominent Russians, including Dmitry Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev and Anton Chekhov. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, who was ousted from power in 1964, is among those who were buried there.

The farewell viewing was shadowed by the awareness that the openness Gorbachev championed has been stifled under Putin.

"I want to thank him for my childhood of freedom, which we don't have today," said mourner Ilya, a financial services worker in his early 30s who declined to give his last name.

"I am a son of perestroika," he said, using the Russian word for Gorbachev's reform, or reconstruction, initiatives.

"I'd like us to have more people like him in our history," said another mourner, Yulia Prividennaya. "We need such politicians to settle the situation in the world when it's on the verge of World War III."

Grigory Yavlinsky, the leader of the liberal Yabloko party who worked on economic reform plans under Gorbachev, hailed him for "offering people an opportunity to say what they thought – something that Russia never had before."

Putin, who once lamented the collapse of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century," has avoided explicit personal criticism of Gorbachev but has repeatedly blamed him for failing to secure written commitments from the West that would rule out NATO's expansion eastward. The issue has marred Russia-West relations for decades and fomented tensions that exploded when the Russian leader sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24.

In a carefully phrased letter of condolence released Wednesday avoiding explicit praise or criticism, Putin described 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."

The Kremlin's ambivalence about Gorbachev was reflected in state television broadcasts, which described his worldwide acclaim and grand expectations generated by his reforms, but held him responsible for plunging the country into political turmoil and economic woes and failing to properly defend the country's interests in talks with the West.

Border Patrol: 9 migrants found dead in Rio Grande at Texas

By TERRY WALLACE Associated Press

At least nine migrants were found dead in the Rio Grande after dozens of people attempted a hazardous crossing near Eagle Pass, Texas, officials said.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Mexican officials made the discovery Thursday while responding to a large group of people crossing the river following days of heavy rains that had resulted in particularly swift currents. U.S. officials recovered six bodies, while Mexican teams recovered three, according to a CBP statement.

The agency said U.S. crews rescued 37 others from the river and detained 16 more, while Mexican officials took 39 migrants into custody. Officials on both sides of the border continue searching for victims, the border agency said.

CBP did not say what country or countries the migrants were from and did not provide any additional information on rescue and search operations. Local agencies in Texas that were involved did not immediately respond to requests for additional information.

The Border Patrol's Del Rio sector, which includes Eagle Pass, is fast becoming the busiest corridor for illegal crossings. Agents stopped migrants nearly 50,000 times in the sector in July, with Rio Grande Valley a distant second at about 35,000.

The area draws migrants from dozens of countries, many of them in families with young children. About 6 of 10 stops in the Del Rio sector in July were migrants from Venezuela, Cuba or Nicaragua.

The sector, which extends 245 miles (395 kilometers) along the Río Grande, has been especially dangerous because river currents can be deceptively fast and change quickly. Crossing the river can be challenging even for strong swimmers.

In a news release last month, CBP said it had discovered bodies of more than 200 dead migrants in the sector from October through July.

Surveys by the U.N. International Organization for Migration and others point to rising fatalities as the number of crossing attempts have soared. In the last three decades, thousands have died attempting to enter the United States from Mexico, often from dehydration or drowning.

In June, 53 migrants were found dead or dying in a tractor-trailer on a back road in San Antonio in the deadliest tragedy to claim the lives of migrants smuggled across the border from Mexico.

Ukraine's nuclear plant goes offline amid fighting

By YESICA FISCH and JOANNA KOZLOWSKA Associated Press

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's and Europe's largest nuclear plant has stopped supplying Ukrainian-held territories with electricity, Kremlin-backed authorities said Saturday, as a team of inspectors from the U.N. nuclear watchdog continued their mission at the site.

The Russian-appointed city administration in Enerhodar, where the Zaporizhzhia plant is located, blamed an alleged Ukrainian shelling attack on Saturday morning, which they said had destroyed a key power line.

"The provision of electricity to the territories controlled by Ukraine has been suspended due to technical difficulties," the municipal administration said in a post on its official Telegram channel. It wasn't clear whether electricity from the plant was still reaching Russian-held areas.

Vladimir Rogov, a member of the Kremlin-appointed regional administration said on Telegram that a shell had struck an area between two reactors. His claims could not be immediately verified.

Over the past weeks, Ukraine and Russia have traded blame over shelling at and near the plant, while also accusing each other of attempts to derail the visit from U.N. experts, who arrived at the plant Thursday. The International Atomic Energy Agency's mission is meant to help secure the site.

Russia's Defense Ministry said that Ukrainian troops launched another attempt to seize the plant late Friday, despite the presence of the IAEA monitors, sending 42 boats with 250 special forces personnel

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and foreign "mercenaries" to attempt a landing on the bank of the nearby Kakhovka reservoir.

The ministry said that four Russian fighter jets and two helicopter gunships destroyed about 20 boats and the others turned back. It added that the Russian artillery struck the Ukrainian-controlled right bank of the Dnieper River to target the retreating landing party.

The ministry claimed that the Russian military killed 47 troops, including 10 "mercenaries" and wounded 23. The Russian claims couldn't be independently verified.

Russia reported earlier that about 60 Ukrainian troops previously tried to land near the plant on Thursday and Russian forces thwarted that attempt.

As of Saturday morning, neither the Ukrainian government nor the country's nuclear energy operator, Enerhoatom, had commented on these allegations.

The plant has repeatedly suffered complete disconnection from Ukraine's power grid since last week, with Enerhoatom blaming mortar shelling and fires near the site.

Local Ukrainian authorities accused Moscow of pounding two cities that overlook the plant across the Dnieper river with rockets, also an accusation they have made repeatedly over the past weeks.

In Zorya, a small village about 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the Zaporizhzhia plant, residents on Friday could hear the sound of explosions in the area.

It's not the shelling that scared them the most, but the risk of a radioactive leak in the plant.

"The power plant, yes, this is the scariest," Natalia Stokoz, a mother of three, said. "Because the kids and adults will be affected, and it's scary if the nuclear power plant is blown up."

Oleksandr Pasko, a 31-year-old farmer, said "there is anxiety because we are quite close." Pasko said that the Russian shelling has intensified in recent weeks.

During the first weeks of the war, authorities gave iodine tablets and masks to people living near the plant in case of radiation exposure.

Recently, they've also distributed iodine pills in Zaporizhzhia city, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) from the plant.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan offered to take the role of "facilitator" on the issue of the Zaporizhzhia plant, in a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin Saturday, according to a statement from the Turkish presidency.

The Ukrainian military on Saturday morning reported that Russian forces overnight pressed their stalled advance in the country's industrial east, while also trying to hold on to areas captured in Ukraine's north-east and south, including in the Kherson region cited as the target of Kyiv's recent counteroffensive.

It added that Ukrainian forces repelled around half a dozen Russian attacks across the Donetsk region, including near two cities singled out as key targets of Moscow's grinding effort to capture the rest of the province. The Donetsk region is one of two that make up Ukraine's industrial heartland of the Donbas, alongside Luhansk, which was overrun by Russian troops in early July.

Separately, the British military confirmed in its regular update Saturday morning that Ukrainian forces were conducting "renewed offensive operations" in the south of Ukraine, advancing along a broad front west of the Dnieper and focusing on three axes within the Russian-occupied Kherson region.

"The operation has limited immediate objectives, but Ukraine's forces have likely achieved a degree of tactical surprise; exploiting poor logistics, administration and leadership in the Russian armed forces," the UK Ministry of Defense said on Twitter.

Russian shelling killed an 8-year-old child and injured at least four others in a southern Ukrainian town close to the Kherson region, Ukrainian officials said.

Fuel leak disrupts NASA's 2nd shot at launching moon rocket

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA's new moon rocket sprang another hazardous leak Saturday, as the launch team began fueling it for liftoff on a test flight that must go well before astronauts climb aboard.

For the second time this week, the launch team began loading nearly 1 million gallons of fuel into the

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322-foot (98-meter) rocket, the most powerful ever built by NASA. Monday's attempt was halted by a bad engine sensor and leaking fuel.

As the sun rose, an over-pressure alarm sounded and the tanking operation was briefly halted, but no damage occurred and the effort resumed. But minutes later, hydrogen fuel began leaking from the engine section at the bottom of the rocket. NASA halted the operation, while engineers scrambled to plug what was believed to be a gap around a seal in the supply line.

The countdown clocks continued ticking toward an afternoon liftoff; NASA had two hours Saturday to get the rocket off.

NASA wants to send the crew capsule atop the rocket around the moon, pushing it to the limit before astronauts get on the next flight. If the five-week demo with test dummies succeeds, astronauts could fly around the moon in 2024 and land on it in 2025. People last walked on the moon 50 years ago.

Forecasters expected generally favorable weather at Kennedy Space Center, especially toward the end of the two-hour afternoon launch window.

On Monday, hydrogen fuel escaped from elsewhere in the rocket. Technicians tightened up the fittings over the past week, but launch director Charlie Blackwell-Thompson stressed that she wouldn't know whether everything was tight until Saturday's fueling.

Even more of a problem on Monday, a sensor indicated one of the rocket's four engines was too warm, but engineers later verified it actually was cold enough. The launch team planned to ignore the faulty sensor this time around and rely on other instruments to ensure each main engine was properly chilled.

Before igniting, the main engines need to be as frigid as the liquid hydrogen fuel flowing into them at minus-420 degrees Fahrenheit (minus-250 degrees Celsius). If not, the resulting damage could lead to an abrupt engine shutdown and aborted flight.

Mission managers accepted the additional risk posed by the engine issue as well as a separate problem: cracks in the rocket's insulating foam. But they acknowledged other problems — like fuel leaks — could prompt yet another delay.

That didn't stop thousands from jamming the coast to see the Space Launch System rocket soar. Local authorities expected massive crowds because of the long Labor Day holiday weekend.

The \$4.1 billion test flight is the first step in NASA's Artemis program of renewed lunar exploration, named after the twin sister of Apollo in Greek mythology.

Twelve astronauts walked on the moon during NASA's Apollo program, the last time in 1972.

Artemis — years behind schedule and billions over budget — aims to establish a sustained human presence on the moon, with crews eventually spending weeks at a time there. It's considered a training ground for Mars.

GOP escalates fight against citizen-led ballot initiatives

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of people signed petitions this year backing proposed ballot initiatives to expand voting access, ensure abortion rights and legalize recreational marijuana in Arizona, Arkansas and Michigan.

Yet voters might not get a say because Republican officials or judges have blocked the proposals from the November elections, citing flawed wording, procedural shortcomings or insufficient petition signatures.

At the same time, Republican lawmakers in Arkansas and Arizona have placed constitutional amendments on the ballot proposing to make it harder to approve citizen initiatives in the future.

The Republican pushback against the initiative process is part of a several-year trend that gained steam as Democratic-aligned groups have increasingly used petitions to force public votes on issues that Republican-led legislatures have opposed. In reliably Republican Missouri, for example, voters have approved initiatives to expand Medicaid, raise the minimum wage and legalize medical marijuana. An initiative seeking to allow recreational pot is facing a court challenge from an anti-drug activist aiming to knock it off the November ballot.

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Some Democrats contend Republicans are subverting the will of the people by making the ballot initiative process more difficult.

"What is happening now is just a web of technicalities to thwart the process in states where voters are using the people's tool to make an immediate positive change in their lives," said Chris Melody Fields Figueredo, executive director of the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, which has worked with progressive groups sponsoring the blocked initiatives.

"That is not the way our democracy should work," she added

Republicans who have thrown up hurdles to initiative petitions contend they are protecting the integrity of the lawmaking process against well-funded interest groups trying to bend state policies in their favor.

"I think the Legislature is a much purer way to get things done and it represents the people much better, rather than having this jungle where you just throw it on the ballot," said South Dakota state Rep. Tim Goodwin, who has perennially targeted the initiative process with restrictions.

About half the states allow citizen initiatives, in which petition signers can bypass a legislature to place proposed laws or constitutional changes directly before voters. But executive or judicial officials often still have some role in the process, typically by certifying that the ballot wording is clear and accurate and that petition circulators gathered enough valid signatures of registered voters.

In Michigan this past week, two Republican members of the bipartisan Board of State Canvassers blocked initiatives to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution and expand opportunities for voting. Each measure had significantly more than the required 425,000 signatures. But GOP board members said the voting measure had unclear wording and the abortion measure was flawed because of spacing problems that scrunched some words together.

Supporters have appealed both decisions to the Michigan Supreme Court, which consists of a majority of Democratic-appointed judges.

The Arkansas Supreme Court, whose justices run in nonpartisan elections, is weighing an appeal of an August decision blocking an initiative that would legalize recreational marijuana for adults.

The State Board of Election Commissioners, which has just one Democrat among its many Republicans, determined that the ballot title was misleading because it failed to mention it would repeal potency limits in an existing medical marijuana provision. Because the deadline has passed to certify initiative titles, the Supreme Court has allowed the measure on the general election ballot while it decides whether the votes will be counted.

A lawsuit by initiative supporters contends a 2019 law passed by the Republican-led Legislature violates the Arkansas Constitution by allowing the board to reject ballot titles.

"The (initiative) process in Arkansas has gotten consistently harder each cycle, as the Legislature adds more and more requirements," said Steve Lancaster, a lawyer for Responsible Growth Arkansas, which is sponsoring the marijuana amendment.

It would get even harder if voters support a legislatively referred amendment on the November ballot that would require a 60% vote to approve citizen-initiated ballot measures or future constitutional amendments.

In Arizona, the primarily Republican-appointed Supreme Court recently blocked a proposed constitutional amendment that would have extended early voting and limited lobbyist gifts to lawmakers. The measure also would have specifically prohibited the Legislature from overturning the results of presidential elections, which some Republicans had explored after then- President Donald Trump's loss in 2020.

After a lower court initially ruled the measure could appear on the November ballot, Arizona's high court instructed the judge to reconsider. Then it upheld a subsequent ruling throwing out enough petition signatures to prevent the initiative from qualifying for the ballot.

Still on the ballot are several other amendments referred by Arizona's Republican-led Legislature. Those measures would limit initiatives to a single subject, require a 60% supermajority to approve tax proposals and expand the Legislature's authority to change voter-approved initiatives.

Those proposals come after Arizona Republicans have spent the past decade enacting laws making it more difficult to get citizen initiatives on the ballot. State laws now require petition sheets to be precisely

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printed and ban the use of a copy machine to create new ones. Other laws require paid circulators to include their registration number on each petition sheet, get it notarized and check a box saying they were paid.

"The effect is to make it much harder, much more expensive to get the signatures to put one of these propositions on the ballot," said Terry Goddard, a Democrat who served as the state's attorney general from 2003 through 2011.

After years of trying, Goddard finally succeeded this year in getting an initiative on the ballot that would require nonprofit groups that spend large amounts on elections to reveal their donors.

Earlier this summer, South Dakota voters defeated a measure that would have made it harder to pass initiatives on taxes and spending. The proposal from the Republican-led Legislature would have required a 60% vote to raise taxes or spend over a certain amount of money. Voters rejected the measure by 67%.

"This just seems like a way to suppress voters. honestly," Joshua Matzner, a Democrat, said after voting against it.

Who gets to tell the story of a historic civil rights site?

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

A library where Rosa Parks, John Lewis and other civil rights leaders forged strategies that would change the world is mired in controversy over who gets to tell its story.

On one side are preservationists who want to turn the Highlander Folk School library into a historic site. On the other, political organizers say Highlander never stopped pursuing social justice and should recover the building as a stolen part of its legacy.

Enraged by race-mixing at the Highlander Folk School in the 1950s, Tennessee officials confiscated the property and auctioned it off in pieces in a vain attempt at stifling the civil rights movement. The library is one of the few remaining campus buildings.

But Highlander as an institution never really closed — it just moved locations. It lives on today as the Highlander Research and Education Center, whose leaders are rallying opposition to listing the library in the National Register of Historic Places, saying they were frozen out of the process.

David Currey, a board member at the Tennessee Preservation Trust, has managed the library's restoration since the trust bought the site in 2014, saving it from redevelopment. He said his goal has always been to preserve the site so that visitors can learn about the momentous events that happened there in the first half of the 20th Century. There would be few books or movies if stories could only be told by those directly involved, he said, and "Nobody owns the past."

"It's a myth that they are best suited to tell our history," said Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson, Highlander's first Black co-director. "People who made that history are still alive."

A letter Highlander sent to the historic registry says the Trust is not fit to serve as stewards, stoking racial tension over a place that promoted a shared struggle for interracial harmony.

"Approving the nomination of the Highlander Folk School Library in its current form will allow an elite, white-led institution to coopt and control the historical narrative of a site most significant for its work with Black, multiracial, poor and working-class communities," states the letter, which also accuses trust members of having glorified the Confederacy.

Currey, who is white, frames the issue much differently. He says the trust stepped in to preserve the property when no one else would, and plans to celebrate Highlander's past accomplishments.

"Our cause from the start has been an honorable endeavor to recognize and pay tribute to the history and legacy of the early 20th century's social justice movements in Tennessee, including labor struggles and Civil Rights, and its leaders," Currey wrote in an email to the AP.

Founded in the 1930s as a center for union organizing, the school in Monteagle, Tenn., counted first lady Eleanor Roosevelt among its early supporters. Protest music was integral to its work, with Woody Guthrie leading singalongs to inspire future demonstrations, and Pete Seeger workshopping "We Shall Overcome" into an anthem sung by activists ever since.

Highlander's co-founder and longtime leader, Myles Horton, a white man, created a space almost unique

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in the Jim Crow South, where activists white and Black could build and strengthen alliances.

Parks attended a Highlander workshop a few months before refusing to move to the back of a segregated city bus in Montgomery, Alabama. "It was one of the few times in my life up to that point when I did not feel hostility from white people," she wrote in her autobiography.

Lewis had a similar experience, long before he became a civil rights icon and congressman. Highlander "was the first time in my life that I saw black people and white people not just sitting down together at long tables for shared meals, but also cleaning up together afterward, doing the dishes together, gathering together late into the night in deep discussion," he wrote in a memoir.

The school's success made it a target — labeled communist, investigated by the FBI and raided by the state of Tennessee, which eventually revoked its charter. Original buildings were destroyed. The library was converted to a single-family home.

But Highlander didn't disappear — it just moved three hours northeast to New Market, Tenn., near Knoxville.

"The property was stolen from us because it was bringing Black and white people together to preserve democracy," Henderson said. "The land should be repatriated, back to the Highlander Folk School, which is now the Highlander Research and Education Center."

The trust has spent seven years restoring the library to its original form. Local Grundy County donors contributed most of the funding, but Currey said he's also spent thousands of his own dollars. His vision is to spin off a nonprofit, separate from the trust, that would own and operate the library as both a historic site and community resource, and Highlander could run a program explaining its ongoing justice and education work.

Henderson said she's grateful the trust stepped in when the center couldn't afford to, but she doesn't see the old Folk School as separate from Highlander now, which is celebrating 90 years of organizing with a homecoming later this month. She said the center recently offered to buy the library from the trust, but got no definitive answer.

"If there's going to be a transfer, why wouldn't it be to Highlander?" Co-director Allyn Maxfield-Steele asked. If Highlander controlled the building, it would develop a plan for its use together with "folks on the ground in Grundy County," he said.

Currey still hopes the trust and center can work together to promote the legacy of a building both organizations see as incredibly important.

Getting listed in the National Registry would open up new sources of funding in a state that doesn't provide tax incentives for historic preservation, Currey said. He worries that the controversy over Highlander will make preservationists less likely to take on a similar project in the future.

"It's already so difficult in Tennessee to save some of our historic resources," Currey said. "This may be one of the most high-profile civil rights sites — as John Lewis told me — in the nation."

Pakistan appeals for more aid for 33M affected by flooding

By ZARAR KHAN Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan appealed Saturday to the international community for an "immense humanitarian response" to unprecedented flooding that has left at least 1,265 people dead. The request came even as planes carried supplies to the impoverished country across a humanitarian air bridge.

Federal planning minister Ahsan Iqbal called for an "immense humanitarian response for 33 million people" affected by monsoon rains that triggered devastating floods. International attention to Pakistan's plight has increased as the number of fatalities and homeless have risen. According to initial government estimates, the rain and flooding have caused \$10 billion in damage.

"The scale of devastation is massive and requires an immense humanitarian response for 33 million people. For this I appeal to my fellow Pakistanis, Pakistan expatriates and the international community to help Pakistan in this hour of need," he said at a news conference.

Multiple officials and experts have blamed the unusual monsoon rains and flooding on climate change,

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including U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who earlier this week called on the world to stop "sleepwalking" through the deadly crisis. He will visit Pakistan on Sept. 9 to tour flood-hit areas and meet with officials.

Earlier this week, the United Nations and Pakistan jointly issued an appeal for \$160 million in emergency funding to help the millions of people affected by the floods, which have damaged over 1 million homes.

Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority in its latest report Saturday counted 57 more deaths from flood-affected areas. That brought the total death toll since monsoon rains began in mid-June to 1,265, including 441 children.

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif's earlier appeal for aid got a quick response from the international community, which sent planes loaded with relief goods. A French aircraft carrying relief goods landed in Islamabad on Saturday and was received by Minister for National Health Services Abdul Qadir Patel.

That French plane's arrival followed the ninth flight from the United Arab Emirates and the first from Uzbekistan. Those flights were the latest to land in Islamabad overnight.

Patel said the relief goods sent by France included medicine and large dewatering pumps to reduce water levels. He said France has also sent a team of doctors and experts.

Pakistan has established a National Flood Response and Coordination Center to distribute the arriving aid among the affected population. Iqbal is supervising the army-led center.

The minister said rains this monsoon season have lashed most areas of Baluchistan and Sindh provinces as well as parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces. The Gilgit-Baltistan territory was also affected. The torrential rains and subsequent flash floods caused massive damage to infrastructure, roads, electricity and communications networks.

Iqbal said the government is working to bring normalcy back to the country as soon as possible but that the Pakistani government can't do it alone.

Maj. Gen Zafar Iqbal, head of the flood response center and no relation to the planning minister, said in the news conference that over the last four days, 29 planes loaded with relief goods arrived in Pakistan from Turkey, the UAE, China, Qatar, Uzbekistan, Jordan, Turkmenistan and other countries.

Military spokesman Maj. Gen Iftikhar Babar said rescuers supported by the military were continuing rescue and relief operations. He said army aviation, air force and navy troops were using boats and helicopters to evacuate people from remote regions and to deliver aid.

Babar said the army has established 147 relief camps sheltering and feeding more than 50,000 displaced people while 250 medical camps have provided help to 83,000 people so far.

Health officials have expressed concern about the spread of water borne diseases among the homeless people living in relief camps and in tents alongside roads.

Lt. Gen. Akhtar Nawaz, head of the disaster management authority, said areas of the country expected to receive 15% to 20% additional rains this year actually received in excess of 400% more. Collectively, the country has seen 190% more rain this monsoon season.

The U.S. military's Central Command has said it will send an assessment team to Islamabad to see what support it can provide. The United States announced \$30 million worth of aid for the flood victims earlier this week.

Two members Congress, Sheila Jackson and Tom Suzy, were expected to arrive in Pakistan on Sunday to visit the flood affected areas and meet officials.

Border Patrol: 8 migrants found dead in Rio Grande at Texas

By TERRY WALLACE Associated Press

At least eight migrants were found dead in the Rio Grande after dozens attempted a hazardous crossing near Eagle Pass, Texas, officials said Friday.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Mexican officials made the discovery Thursday while responding to a large group of people crossing the river following days of heavy rains that had resulted in particularly swift currents. U.S. officials recovered six bodies, while Mexican teams recovered two others, according

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to a CBP statement.

The agency said U.S. crews rescued 37 others from the river and detained 16 more, while Mexican officials took 39 migrants into custody. Officials on both sides of the border continue searching for any possible victims, the CBP said.

CBP did not say what country or countries the migrants were from and did not provide any additional information on the rescue or search. Local agencies in Texas that were involved did not immediately respond to requests for additional information.

The Border Patrol's Del Rio sector, which includes Eagle Pass, is fast becoming the busiest corridor for illegal crossings. Agents stopped migrants nearly 50,000 times in the sector in July, with Rio Grande Valley a distant second at about 35,000.

The area draws migrants from dozens of countries, many of them in families with young children. About 6 of 10 stops in the Del Rio sector in July were migrants from Venezuela, Cuba or Nicaragua.

The sector, which extends 245 miles (395 kilometers) along the Río Grande, has been especially dangerous because river currents can be deceptively fast and change quickly. Crossing the river can be challenging even for strong swimmers.

In a news release last month, CBP said it had discovered bodies of more than 200 dead migrants in the sector from October through July.

Surveys by the U.N. International Organization for Migration and others point to rising fatalities as the number of crossing attempts have soared. In the last three decades, thousands have died attempting to enter the United States from Mexico, often from dehydration or drowning.

In June, 53 migrants were found dead or dying in a tractor-trailer on a back road in San Antonio in the deadliest tragedy to claim the lives of migrants smuggled across the border from Mexico.

Octogenarian brothers make popular hand-drawn posters

By CLAUDIA TORRENS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — For years, Miguel and Carlos Cevallos made a living by drawing posters for neighborhood nightclubs, taco trucks and restaurants in Queens, painting in the businesses' basements or on their tables and attracting clients by word of mouth.

Until an Instagram account changed a lot of that.

Now, hip Brooklyn ice cream shops and Manhattan retro diners wait their turn to get one of the brothers' colorful signs. They're in demand in San Francisco music stores, national restaurant chains, bars in Belgium and bakeries in South Korea.

It doesn't matter that the brothers are more than 80 years old or that the two, born in Ecuador and raised in Colombia, speak limited English. They have embraced their new customers and draw all day in the Manhattan apartment they have shared for nearly 20 years.

"Destiny is like this. Sometimes one finds success later in life," Carlos Cevallos said recently, while sipping a tea in an empty Manhattan diner. Dressed in suits and ties, as they are every day, the brothers shared a muffin.

Recent commissions have come from a bagel shop in Manhattan's Little Italy neighborhood, a newsstand in Manhattan's West Village, an Oregon-based restaurant chain and a Los Angeles pop-up veggie burger shop. NYCgo, the city's official guide for tourists and New Yorkers, recently asked the brothers to draw Queens' iconic Unisphere, the giant metal globe built for the 1964 World's Fair.

"They have a special touch, so nice and colorful," said Marina Cortes, manager of the West Village diner La Bonbonniere. The brothers' "Breakfast All Day!" sign is displayed on the restaurant's terrace.

"A Life Without Anything Good, Is Bad" reads a poster the brothers drew for Van Leeuwen Ice Cream. "Daily Special. Pick Any Two Sandwiches and Pay For Both!" reads another they did for Regina's Grocery on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Done with acrylic paints, the Cevallos brothers' playful, childlike posters have big letters and a nostalgic look. Miguel does the drawings and Carlos the coloring, together crafting about six posters per week.

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The brothers field five to 20 requests weekly for their work.

The family moved from Ecuador to Colombia to follow an uncle who was a Catholic priest and worked in Bogota. Used to drawing since they were kids, Carlos, Miguel and their oldest brother, Victor, opened an art studio and poster shop in Bogota's Chapinero neighborhood.

Victor moved to New York in 1969, and Carlos joined him in 1974. For years, they worked at a studio in Times Square until rent increases prompted a shift to Queens.

In the 1980s, they drew posters that announced performances at a Queens club called La Esmeralda.

"They would pay so little per poster. It was sad," Carlos said. The posters featured such artists as Mexican singer Armando Manzanero and Chilean Lucho Gatica.

Miguel, meanwhile, took care of their mother until she died at age 101. He moved to New York in 2005 to join his siblings. Victor, a mentor to his younger brothers, died in 2012.

Eventually, Aviram Cohen, who builds and installs audiovisual art at museums, saw the brothers' posters in Queens and tracked them down to request one for his wife's new yoga studio. In 2018, he opened their Instagram account, @cevallos_bros, which became a lifeline for the brothers after the coronavirus pandemic hit.

"I did it out of admiration for their work, and after meeting them, I understood that it would all disappear. Most of the businesses would throw away the posters," said Cohen, 42. "I felt strongly that different kinds of people and subcultures could enjoy their art."

He was right. The account now has more than 25,000 followers and has become an archive of their work, as well as a source of orders.

"I just love their story," said Happy David, who manages the Instagram accounts of La Bonbonniere and Casa Magazines, a Manhattan newsstand for which she has also commissioned the brothers' work. It reminds her of signs seen in her native Philippines.

In a digital world, "a lot of people are going back to craft," David said. "We want to connect, and we want to feel that there are hands that made these."

When asked whether they plan to retire soon, the Cevallos brothers answer with a quick "no."

Where do they get their energy from?

"We eat healthy," they respond with a smile.

Thousands flee, several hurt as wildfire scorches California

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

WEED, Calif. (AP) — Thousands of people remained under evacuation orders Saturday after a wind-whipped wildfire raged through rural Northern California, injuring people and torching an unknown number of homes.

The fire that began Friday afternoon on or near a wood-products plant quickly blew into a neighborhood on the northern edge of Weed but then carried the flames away from the city of about 2,600.

Evacuees described heavy smoke and chunks of ash raining down.

Annie Peterson said she was sitting on the porch of her home near Roseburg Forest Products, which manufactures wood veneers, when "all of a sudden we heard a big boom and all that smoke was just rolling over toward us."

Very quickly her home and about a dozen others were on fire. She said members of her church helped evacuate her and her son, who is immobile. She said the scene of smoke and flames looked like "the world was coming to an end."

Suzi Brady, a Cal Fire spokeswoman, said several people were injured.

Allison Hendrickson, spokeswoman for Dignity Health North State hospitals, said two people were brought to Mercy Medical Center Mount Shasta. One was in stable condition and the other was transferred to UC Davis Medical Center, which has a burn unit.

Rebecca Taylor, communications director for Roseburg Forest Products based in Springfield, Oregon, said it is unclear if the fire started near or on company property. A large empty building at the edge of com-

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pany property burned she said. All employees were evacuated, and none have reported injuries, she said. The blaze, dubbed the Mill Fire, was pushed by 35-mph (56-kph) winds, and quickly engulfed 4 square miles (10.3 square kilometers) of ground.

The flames raced through tinder-dry grass, brush and timber. About 7,500 people in Weed and several nearby communities were under evacuation orders.

Dr. Deborah Higer, medical director at the Shasta View Nursing Center, said all 23 patients at the facility were evacuated, with 20 going to local hospitals and three staying at her own home, where hospital beds were set up.

Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency for Siskiyou County and said a federal grant had been received "to help ensure the availability of vital resources to suppress the fire."

At about the time the blaze started, power outages were reported that affected some 9,000 customers, and several thousand remained without electricity late into the night, according to an outage website for power company PacifiCorp, which said they were due to the wildfire.

It was the third large wildfire in as many days in California, which has been in the grip of a prolonged drought and is now sweltering under a heat wave that was expected to push temperatures past the 100-degree mark in many areas through Labor Day.

Thousands also were ordered to flee on Wednesday from a fire in Castaic, north of Los Angeles, and a blaze in eastern San Diego County, near the Mexican border, where two people were severely burned and several homes were destroyed. Those blazes were 56% and 65% contained, respectively, and all evacuations had been lifted.

The heat taxed the state's power grid as people tried to stay cool. For a fourth day, residents were asked to conserve power Saturday during late afternoon and evening hours.

The Mill Fire was burning about an hour's drive from the Oregon state line. A few miles north of the blaze, a second fire erupted Friday near the community of Gazelle. The Mountain Fire has burned more than 2 square miles (6 square kilometers) but no injuries or building damage was reported.

The whole region has faced repeated devastating wildfires in recent years. The Mill Fire was only about 30 miles (48 kilometers) southeast of where the McKinney Fire — the state's deadliest of the year — erupted in late July. It killed four people and destroyed dozens of homes.

Olga Hood fled her Weed home on Friday as smoke was blowing over the next hill.

With the notorious gusts that tear through the town at the base of Mount Shasta, she didn't wait for an evacuation order. She packed up her documents, medication and little else, said her granddaughter, Cynthia Jones.

"With the wind in Weed everything like that moves quickly. It's bad," Jones said by phone from her home in Medford, Oregon. "It's not uncommon to have 50 to 60 mph gusts on a normal day. I got blown into a creek as a kid."

Hood's home of nearly three decades was spared from a blaze last year and from the devastating Boles Fire that tore through town eight years ago, destroying more than 160 buildings, mostly homes.

Hood wept as she discussed the fire from a relative's house in the hamlet of Granada, Jones said. She wasn't able to gather photos that had been important to her late husband.

Scientists say climate change has made the West warmer and drier over the last three decades and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive. In the last five years, California has experienced the largest and most destructive fires in state history.

Rescued dolphins swim free from Indonesia sanctuary

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Three bottlenose dolphins were released into the open sea in Indonesia Saturday after years of being confined for the amusement of tourists who would touch and swim with them.

As red and white Indonesian flags fluttered, underwater gates opened off the island of Bali to allow Johnny, Rocky and Rambo to swim free.

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The trio were rescued three years ago from their tiny pool in a resort hotel to which they had been sold after spending years performing in a traveling circus.

They regained their health and strength at the Bali sanctuary, a floating pen in a bay that provided a gentler, more natural environment.

Lincoln O'Barry, who worked with the Indonesian government to set up the Umah Lumba Rehabilitation, Release and Retirement Center, said dolphins are wild animals that should live free.

"It was an incredibly emotional experience to see them go," O'Barry said.

The center was initiated in 2019 by the Bali Forestry Department and the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry. "Umah lumba" means "dolphin" in Indonesian.

For some time after the gates opened, the dolphins looked at the opening, uncertain of their next move. But after about an hour, they were on their way, sometimes jumping over choppy waves.

The Associated Press watched their release through an online livestream. O'Barry is documenting the release with drones and underwater footage for a film.

The Indonesian government supported the dolphins' rescue, working with Dolphin Project, founded by Lincoln's father Ric O'Barry, who was also at the release.

Ric O'Barry had been the dolphin trainer for the 1960s TV show "Flipper," but later came to see the toll exacted on the animals. He has since devoted his life to returning dolphins to the wild.

Center workers clapped as the dolphins swam out. Wahyu Lestari, rehabilitation coordinator at the center, said she was a bit sad to see them go.

"I'm happy they are free, and they are going back to their family," she said. "They should be in the wild because they are born in the wild."

The freed dolphins will be monitored out at sea with GPS tracking for a year. They can return for visits to the sanctuary, although it's unclear what they will do. They may join another pod, stay together, or go their separate ways.

Dolphins in captivity are carted from town to town, kept in chlorinated water, held in isolation or forced to interact with tourists, often leading to injuries.

Johnny, the oldest dolphin, had teeth that were worn down to below the gum line when he was rescued in 2019. Earlier this year, dentists provided him with dolphin-style dental crowns so that he can now clamp down on live fish.

Johnny was the first of the three dolphins to swim out to sea.

Ric and Lincoln O'Barry have spent half a century working on saving dolphins from captivity in locations from Brazil to South Korea and the U.S. Saturday's release was their first in Indonesia.

The Indonesian government's decision to rescue the dolphins followed a decade-long public education campaign that included billboards, artwork, school programs and a drive asking people not to buy tickets to dolphin shows.

A government minister was at hand to raise the gate at the sanctuary Saturday.

Lincoln O'Barry said the Indonesian sanctuary will continue to be used for other captive dolphins. Similar sanctuaries are in the works in North America and Europe, as more dolphin shows close. With virtual reality and other technology, appreciation of nature doesn't have to involve a zoo or a dolphin show, he said.

Yet dolphin shows are still popular in China, the Middle East and Japan.

In Japan, the father and son have drawn attention to the dolphin hunt in the town of Taiji, documented in the 2010 Oscar-winning film "The Cove." Every year, fishermen frighten and corral dolphins into a cove, capture some to sell to dolphin shows and kill others for food.

Whale and dolphin meat is considered a delicacy in Japanese culinary tradition. But Taiji has prompted protests by conservationists for years, including some Japanese.

The three dolphins released in Indonesia were soon miles (kilometers) away in the waters. But before their departure, they circled around the sanctuary.

"They turned back around and came back to us one more time, almost to say thank you and good-bye. And then they headed straight out to open ocean and disappeared," Lincoln O'Barry said.

"Where they head next, we don't know. But we wish them a good long life."

IAEA visit to Ukraine nuclear plant highlights risks

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency are used to risky missions — from the radioactive aftermath of the Fukushima disaster in Japan to the politically charged Iranian nuclear program. But their deployment amid the war in Ukraine to Zaporizhzhia takes the threat to a new level and underscores the lengths to which the organization will go in attempts to avert a potentially catastrophic nuclear disaster.

The 6-month war sparked by Russia's invasion of its western neighbor is forcing international organizations, not just the IAEA, to deploy teams during active hostilities in their efforts to impose order around Ukraine's nuclear power plants, pursue accountability for war crimes and identify the dead.

"This is not the first time that an IAEA team has gone into a situation of armed hostilities," said Tariq Rauf, the organization's former head of verification and security, noting that the IAEA sent inspectors to Iraq in 2003 and to former Soviet Republic Georgia during fighting. "But this situation in Zaporizhzhia, I think it's the most serious situation where the IAEA has sent people in ever, so it's unprecedented."

The IAEA's Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi highlighted the risks Thursday when he led a team to the sprawling plant in southern Ukraine.

"There were moments when fire was obvious — heavy machine guns, artillery, mortars at two or three times were really very concerning, I would say, for all of us," he said of his team's journey through an active war zone to reach the plant.

Speaking to reporters after leaving colleagues inside, he said the agency was "not moving" from the plant from now on, and vowed a "continued presence" of agency experts.

But it remains to be seen what exactly the organization can accomplish.

"The IAEA cannot force a country to implement or enforce nuclear safety and security standards," Rauf said in a telephone interview. "They can only advise and then it is up to ... the state itself," specifically the national nuclear regulator. In Ukraine, that is further complicated by the Russian occupation of the power station.

The IAEA is not the only international organization seeking to locate staff permanently in Ukraine amid the ongoing war.

International Criminal Court Prosecutor Karim Khan has visited Ukraine three times, set up an office in the country and sent investigators into a conflict zone to gather evidence amid widespread reports of atrocities. National governments including the Netherlands have sent expert investigators to help the court.

Khan told a United Nations meeting in April: "This is a time when we need to mobilize the law and send it into battle, not on the side of Ukraine against the Russian Federation or on the side of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, but on the side of humanity to protect, to preserve, to shield people ... who have certain basic rights."

The International Commission on Missing Persons, which uses a high-tech laboratory in The Hague to assist countries attempting to identify bodies, has already sent three missions to Ukraine and set up an office there.

Grossi, an Argentine diplomat, was previously a high-ranking official at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, an organization that, after he had left, also was forced to send inspectors to conflicts.

In April 2018, an OPCW team sent to collect evidence of a suspected chlorine attack in Douma, Syria, was forced to wait in a hotel for days because of security concerns in the town, which was at the time under the protection of Russian military police.

When a U.N. security team visited Douma, gunmen shot at them and detonated an explosive, further delaying the OPCW's fact-finding mission.

The IAEA's biggest operation to monitor any country's nuclear program is Iran, where it has been the key arbiter in determining the size, scope and aspects of Tehran's program during the decades of tensions

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over it. Since Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, the IAEA has had surveillance cameras and physical inspections at Iranian sites, even as questions persist over Iran's military nuclear program, which the agency said ended in 2003.

But that monitoring hasn't been easy. Since then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the deal in 2018, Iran has stopped the IAEA from accessing footage from its surveillance cameras. Other online monitoring devices have been affected as well.

In 2019, Iran alleged an IAEA inspector tested positive for suspected traces of explosive nitrates while trying to visit Iran's underground Natanz nuclear facility. The IAEA strongly disputed Iran's description of the incident, as did the U.S.

Another risky and challenging mission was in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster in Japan. About two weeks after the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami that caused reactor meltdowns and hydrogen explosions at reactor buildings, IAEA sent experts to monitor radiation, sample soil and check food safety, but they largely stayed outside of the plant. They returned later in full hazmat suits, masks, gloves and helmets to inspect the remains of the stricken Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The situation in Zaporizhzhia, with Russia and Ukraine trading accusations of shelling the area, has the potential to be just as devastating.

"Any time a nuclear power plant is in the middle of armed hostilities, shelling on its territory and nearby creates unacceptable risks," Rauf said. "So, you know, any misfired shell could hit one of the reactors or disable some system that can lead to much bigger consequences."

Gorbachev's marriage, like his politics, broke the mold

By JULIA RUBIN Associated Press

When Mikhail Gorbachev is buried Saturday at Moscow's Novodevichy Cemetery, he will once again be next to his wife, Raisa, with whom he shared the world stage in a visibly close and loving marriage that was unprecedented for a Soviet leader.

"They were a true pair. She was a part of him, almost always at his side," then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany said at Raisa's funeral in 1999, where Gorbachev wept openly. "Much of what he achieved is simply unimaginable without his wife."

Gorbachev's very public devotion to his family broke the stuffy mold of previous Soviet leaders, just as his openness to political reform did.

"He loved a woman more than his work. I think he wouldn't have been able to embrace her if his hands were stained with blood," wrote Nobel Peace Prize winner Dmitry Muratov, editor of Russia's leading independent newspaper, Novaya Gazeta. Co-owned by Gorbachev, it was forced to shut under official pressure after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"We should always remember," Muratov continued, "he loved a woman more than his work, he placed human rights above the state and he valued peaceful skies more than personal power."

Gorbachev's open attachment to his family also stands in stark contrast to the secrecy that surrounds the private life of Russia's current leader, President Vladimir Putin.

For her part, Raisa Gorbacheva cut a bold figure for Soviet first ladies — more visible, with a direct way of speaking, a polished manner and fashionable clothes. A sociologist by training, she had met Mikhail at a Moscow university where they both studied.

"One day we took each other by the hand and went for a walk in the evening. And we walked like that for our whole life," Gorbachev told Vogue magazine in 2013. Raisa accompanied him on his travels, and they discussed policy and politics together.

Her confident demeanor and prominent public role didn't sit well with many Russians, who had also soured on Gorbachev and blamed his policies for the subsequent breakup of the Soviet Union. The couple won sympathy, however, in 1999, when it was revealed that Raisa was dying of leukemia. Her husband spoke daily with television reporters, and the sometimes lofty-sounding politician of old was suddenly seen as an emotional, grieving family man.

For more than two decades after she was gone, Gorbachev kept Raisa's memory alive and embraced

his status as a lonely widower.

He released a CD of seven romantic songs, "Songs for Raisa," in 2009 on which he sang along with well-known Russian musician and guitarist Andrei Makarevich. Sales went to the charities Raisa had founded. A few years later, he published a book dedicated to her, "Alone with Myself."

Their marriage even became the subject of a popular play in Moscow in 2021, "Gorbachev." Its point was one noteworthy for Russia: that the country's leader was a human being who prioritized family, friends and personal obligations. One scene recounted a key moment in Gorbachev's career when he returned to Moscow after the failed communist coup against him in 1991. Raisa had had a stroke, and instead of immediately stepping back onto the political stage, he went to the hospital to be with her.

"I was not married to the country — Russia or the Soviet Union," Gorbachev wrote in his memoirs. "I was married to my wife, and that night I went with her to the hospital."

At the Moscow cemetery, a life-size statue of Raisa has stood for many years now over the grave intended for them both.

The Gorbachevs had a daughter, Irina, two granddaughters and a great-granddaughter. Despite his attachment to family, Gorbachev lived out his life in Russia while they live in Germany.

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a businessman in the early post-Soviet days who now lives in exile in London, tweeted this week that one of Gorbachev's great strengths was his ability to wash away "awe of the person on the throne," and that his attention to family was part of that.

"With this he changed my life. And also by his attitude toward Raisa Maximovna — a second important lesson," Khodorkovsky said, using Gorbacheva's patronymic. "He went to her. Rest in peace."

Serena Williams loses to Tomljanovic in US Open farewell

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Leave it to Serena Williams to not want to go quietly, to not want this match, this trip to the U.S. Open, this transcendent career of hers, to really, truly end.

Right down to what were, barring a change of heart, the final minutes of her quarter-century of excellence on the tennis court, and an unbending unwillingness to be told what wasn't possible, Williams tried to mount one last classic comeback, earn one last vintage victory, with fans on their feet in a full Arthur Ashe Stadium, cellphone cameras at the ready.

The 23-time Grand Slam champion staved off five match points to prolong the three-hours-plus proceedings, but could not do more, and was eliminated from the U.S. Open in the third round by Ajla Tomljanovic 7-5, 6-7 (4), 6-1 on Friday night in what is expected to be her final contest.

"I've been down before. ... I don't really give up," Williams said. "In my career, I've never given up. In matches, I don't give up. Definitely wasn't giving up tonight."

She turns 41 this month and recently told the world that she is ready to start "evolving" away from her playing days — she expressed distaste for the word "retirement" — and while she remained purposely vague about whether this appearance at Flushing Meadows definitely would represent her last hurrah, everyone assumed it will be.

"It's been the most incredible ride and journey I've ever been on in my life," Williams said, tears streaming down her cheeks shortly after one final shot landed in the net. "I'm so grateful to every single person that's ever said, 'Go, Serena!' in their life."

Asked during an on-court interview whether she might reconsider walking away, Williams replied: "I don't think so, but you never know."

A little later, pressed on the same topic at her post-match news conference, Williams joked, "I always did love Australia," the country that hosts the next Grand Slam tournament in January.

With two victories in singles this week, including over the No. 2 player in the world, Anett Kontaveit, on Wednesday, Williams took her fans on a thrill-a-minute throwback trip at the hard-court tournament that was the site of a half-dozen of her championships.

The first came in 1999 in New York, when Williams was a teen. Now she's married and a mother; her

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daughter, Olympia, turned 5 on Thursday.

"Clearly, I'm still capable. ... (But) I'm ready to be a mom, explore a different version of Serena," she said. "Technically, in the world, I'm still super young, so I want to have a little bit of a life while I'm still walking."

With 23,859 of her closest friends cheering raucously again Friday, Williams faltered against Tomljanovic, a 29-year-old Australian who is ranked 46th.

Williams gave away leads in each set, including the last, in which she was up 1-0 before dropping the final six games.

Tomljanovic is unabashedly a fan of Williams, having growing up watching her play on TV.

"I'm feeling really sorry, just because I love Serena just as much as you guys do. And what she's done for me, for the sport of tennis, is incredible," said Tomljanovic, who has never been past the quarterfinals at any major. "This is a surreal moment for me."

Then, drawing laughs, Tomljanovic added: "I just thought she would beat me. ... She's Serena. That's that's just who she is: She's the greatest of all time. Period."

Asked what she planned to do on the first day of the rest of her life Saturday, Williams said she'd rest, spend time with Olympia and then added: "I'm definitely probably going to be karaoke-ing."

Her performance with her racket Friday showed grit and featured some terrific serving, but it was not perfect.

On one point in the second set, Williams' feet got tangled and she fell to the court, dropping her racket. She finished with 51 unforced errors, 21 more than Tomljanovic.

Williams let a 5-3 lead vanish in the first set. She did something similar in the second, giving away edges of 4-0 and 5-2, and requiring five set points to finally put that one in her pocket. From 4-all in the tiebreaker, meaning Williams was three points from defeat, she pounded a 117 mph ace, hit a forehand winner to cap a 20-stroke exchange, then watched Tomljanovic push a forehand long.

Momentum appeared to be on Williams' side. But she could not pull off the sort of never-admit-defeat triumph she did so often over the years.

"Oh, my God, thank you so much. You guys were amazing today. I tried," Williams told the audience, hands on her hips, before mentioning, among others, her parents and her older sister, Venus, a seven-time major champion who is 42.

"I wouldn't be Serena if there wasn't Venus. So thank you, Venus," Williams said. "She's the only reason that Serena Williams ever existed."

They started in tennis as kids in Compton, California, coached by their father, Richard, who taught himself about the sport after watching on television while a player received a winner's check. He was the central figure in the Oscar-winning film "King Richard," produced by his daughters.

The siblings lost together in the first round of doubles on Thursday night, drawing another sellout. And on Friday, as during the younger Williams' other outings this week, there could be no doubt about which player the paying public favored.

When Tomljanovic broke to go up 6-5 as part of a four-game run to take the opening set, one person in her guest box rose to applaud — and he was pretty much on his own.

Otherwise, folks applauded when Tomljanovic double-faulted, generally considered a faux pas for tennis crowds.

They got loud in the middle of lengthy exchanges, also frowned upon.

They offered sympathetic sounds of "Awwwwww" when Williams flubbed a shot, and leapt out of their seats when she did something they found extraordinary. A rather routine service break was cause for a standing ovation.

Tomljanovic draped a blue-and-white U.S. Open towel over her head at changeovers, shielding herself from the noise and distractions.

"Just really blocked it out as much as I could. It did get to me a few times, internally. I mean, I didn't take it personally because, I mean, I would be cheering for Serena, too, if I wasn't playing her," Tomljanovic said. "But it was definitely not easy."

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After Williams struck a swinging backhand volley winner to take a 4-0 lead in the second set, her play improving with every passing moment, the reaction was earsplitting. Billie Jean King, a Hall of Famer with 39 total Grand Slam titles across singles, doubles and mixed doubles, raised her cellphone to capture the scene.

"You're everywhere!" yelled Williams' husband, Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian, from a courtside guest box that also contained power couple Ciara and Russell Wilson.

When Williams drove two consecutive forehand winners to lead 5-2 in the second set, she screamed and leaned forward after each.

She could not sustain that level.

Williams entered the night having won 19 times in a row in the U.S. Open's third round of singles competition, including reaching at least the semifinals in her most recent 11 appearances in New York.

Talk about a full-circle moment: The only other third-round loss she's ever had at Flushing Meadows (she is 42-0 in the first and second rounds) came in 1998, the year Williams made her tournament debut at age 16.

She would win her first major trophy 12 months later at the U.S. Open. And now she said goodbye in that same stadium.

"It's been a long time. I've been playing tennis my whole life," Williams said Friday night, after performing one last twirl-and-wave move usually reserved for victories. "It is a little soon, but I'm also happy because, I mean, this is what I wanted, what I want."

Reaction to Serena Williams' loss in her likely final match

By The Associated Press undefined

Reaction to Serena Williams' loss Friday night to Ajla Tomljanovic at the U.S. Open in what was expected to be the final match of her career:

"(at)serenawilliams you're literally the greatest on and off the court. Thank you for inspiring all of us to pursue our dreams. I love you little sis!!!!!!" — Tiger Woods, via Twitter.

"Congrats on an amazing career, (at)SerenaWilliams. How lucky were we to be able to watch a young girl from Compton grow up to become one of the greatest athletes of all time. I'm proud of you, my friend—and I can't wait to see the lives you continue to transform with your talents." — Michelle Obama, via Twitter.

"All heart. So much love." — Alexis Ohanian, Williams' husband, via Twitter.

"I think she embodies that no dream is too big and it doesn't matter where you come from, or the circumstances. You can do anything if you believe in yourself and you love what you do and have an incredible support system and family around you." — Tomljanovic, in her interview on the court after her victory.

"We just witnessed the last US Open for the greatest of all time, Serena Williams!! Serena has meant so much to sports, the game of tennis, the world, every little girl, and even more to every little Black girl across the globe." — Basketball Hall of Famer Magic Johnson, via Twitter.

"Serena, THANK YOU. It is because of you I believe in this dream. The impact you've had on me goes beyond any words that can be put together and for that I say thank you, thank you, thank you, GOAT!" — Coco Gauff, via Twitter.

"It's truly been fun to watch Serena not only change the sport of tennis, but more importantly, how she's helped empower the next generation. Her tennis accomplishments speak for themselves, but one of the things I admire about her is she simply doesn't quit. On or off the court." — Olympic swimming gold medalist Michael Phelps, via Twitter.

"I love you (at)serenawilliams. It's been the pleasure of a lifetime to watch you become what you have. Can't wait to see what you do next. Thank you my old friend." — Tennis Hall of Famer Andy Roddick, via Twitter.

"I feel like I really brought something, and bring something, to tennis. The different looks, the fist pumps, the just crazy intensity. I think that obviously the passion I think is a really good word. Yeah, yeah, just continuing through ups and downs. I could go on and on. But I just honestly am so grateful that I had

this moment and that I'm Serena." — Williams, in her press conference.

Northern California wildfire burns homes, causes injuries

By ADAM BEAM and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ undefined

WEED, Calif. (AP) — A fast-moving wildfire in rural Northern California injured several people Friday, destroyed multiple homes and forced thousands of residents to flee, jamming roadways at the start of a sweltering Labor Day weekend.

The blaze dubbed the Mill Fire started on or near the property of Roseburg Forest Products, a plant that manufactures wood veneers. It quickly burned through homes, pushed by 35-mph (56-kph) winds, and by evening had engulfed 4 square miles (10.3 square kilometers) of ground.

Annie Peterson said she was sitting on the porch of her home near the Roseburg facility when "all of a sudden we heard a big boom and all that smoke was just rolling over toward us."

Very quickly her home and about a dozen others were on fire. She said members of her church helped evacuate her and her son, who is immobile. She said the scene of smoke and flames looked like "the world was coming to an end."

Many places in the area were also without power. About 9,000 customers, many of them in Weed, were hit with electrical outages shortly before 1 p.m., according to electric power company PacifiCorp, which said they were due to the wildfire.

Suzi Brady, a Cal Fire spokeswoman, said several people were injured.

Allison Hendrickson, spokeswoman for Dignity Health North State hospitals, said two people were brought to Mercy Medical Center Mount Shasta. One was in stable condition and the other was transferred to UC Davis Medical Center, which has a burn unit.

Meanwhile, a second fire that erupted a few miles north of the Mill Fire near the community of Gazelle had burned 600 acres (243 hectares) acres and prompted some evacuations.

Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency for Siskiyou County and said a federal grant had been received "to help ensure the availability of vital resources to suppress the fire."

California is in the grip of a prolonged drought and now a brutal heat wave that is taxing the power grid as people try to stay cool. Residents have been asked for three consecutive days to conserve power during late afternoon and evening hours when energy consumption is highest.

Scientists say climate change has made the West warmer and drier over the last three decades and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive. In the last five years, California has experienced the largest and most destructive fires in state history.

Southern California saw two large fires break out earlier in the week. The last evacuation orders for those were being lifted around the time the Mill Fire started midday Friday. Flames spread fast and about 7,500 people were under evacuation orders that covered the small city of Weed and surrounding areas, which are about 250 miles (402 kilometers) north of San Francisco.

Dr. Deborah Higer, medical director at the Shasta View Nursing Center, said all 23 patients at the facility were evacuated, with 20 going to local hospitals and three staying at her own home, where hospital beds were set up.

Olga Hood heard about the fire on her scanner and stepped onto to the front porch of her Weed home to see smoke blowing over the next hill.

With the notorious gusts that tear through the town at the base of Mount Shasta, she didn't wait for an evacuation order. She packed up her documents, medication and little else, said her granddaughter, Cynthia Jones.

"With the wind in Weed everything like that moves quickly. It's bad," Jones said by phone from her home in Medford, Oregon. "It's not uncommon to have 50 to 60 mph gusts on a normal day. I got blown into a creek as a kid."

Hood's home of nearly three decades was spared from a blaze last year and from the devastating Boles Fire that tore through town eight years ago, destroying more than 160 buildings, mostly homes.

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Hood wept as she discussed the fire from a relative's house in the hamlet of Granada, Jones said. She wasn't able to gather photos that had been important to her late husband.

Willo Balfrey, 82, an artist from Lake Shastina, said she was painting Friday afternoon when her grandson, who is a member of the California Highway Patrol, called to warn her of the fast-spreading flames.

"He said, 'don't linger, grab your computer, grab what you need and get out of the house now. It's coming your way.' So I did," Balfrey said.

She grabbed a suitcase full of important documents, as well as water and her computer, iPhone and chargers, and headed out the door.

"I've reached the philosophy that if I have all my paperwork, what's in the house is not that important," she said.

She stopped to get her neighbor and they drove to a church parking lot in Montague, where about 40 other vehicles were also parked.

Rebecca Taylor, communications director for Roseburg Forest Products based in Springfield, Oregon, said it is unclear if the fire started near or on company property. A large empty building at the edge of company property burned she said. All employees were evacuated, and none have reported injuries, she said.

The plant employs 145 people, although not all were on shift at the time, Taylor said.

"We're just devastated to see this fire affecting the community in this way," she said.

In Southern California, firefighters were making progress Friday against two big wildfires.

Containment of the Route Fire along Interstate 5 north of Los Angeles increased to 56% and it remained at just over 8 square miles (21 square kilometers), a Cal Fire statement said. On Wednesday, seven firefighters working in triple-digit temperatures had to be taken to hospitals for treatment of heat illnesses. All were released.

In eastern San Diego County, the Border 32 Fire remained at just under 7 square miles (18 square kilometers) and containment increased to 65%. More than 1,500 people had to evacuate the area near the U.S.-Mexico border when the fire erupted Wednesday. All evacuations were lifted by Friday afternoon.

Two people were hospitalized with burns. Three homes and seven other buildings were destroyed.

Apparent assassination attempt against VP roils Argentina

By ALMUDENA CALATRAVA and DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — As Argentina's powerful Vice President Cristina Fernández stepped from her car outside her apartment building and began shaking hands with a throng of well-wishers, a man pushed forward with a gun, pointed it just inches from her face and pulled the trigger with a distinct click.

The loaded weapon evidently jammed.

Fernández's security detail seized the gunman and took him away, and the 69-year-old former president of Argentina was unhurt. But the apparent assassination attempt against the deeply divisive figure Thursday night shook Argentina — a country with a history of political violence — and worsened tensions in the sharply divided nation.

The gunman was identified as Fernando André Sabag Montiel, a 35-year-old street vendor and Brazilian citizen who has lived in Argentina since 1998 and had no criminal record, authorities said. He was arrested on suspicion of attempted murder.

Sabag Montiel wielded a .38-caliber semiautomatic handgun that was "capable of firing" and was "operating normally," according to a judicial official who was not authorized to discuss the case publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Authorities shed no light on a possible motive and were investigating whether he acted alone or was part of a larger plot.

The country's political leaders quickly condemned the attempted shooting as an assault on democracy and the rule of law, with President Alberto Fernández holding a late-night national broadcast to tell Argentines just how close the vice president came to being killed.

The president, who is not related to his vice president, said the gun was loaded with five bullets but

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“didn’t fire even though the trigger was pulled.”

The president declared a national holiday Friday in the wake of what he called “the most serious incident since we recovered democracy” in 1983 after a military dictatorship.

Tens of thousands of people packed the streets surrounding Government House in downtown Buenos Aires in the afternoon to show their support for the vice president and denounce the attempted shooting.

Some condemned the political opposition, saying its verbal attacks against the vice president motivated the gunman. Several political leaders similarly accused opposition politicians and media outlets of fomenting violence.

Demonstrator Andrés Casaola said: “That bullet represents hate speech.”

“We have to achieve ... respect between Argentines and to no longer promote hatred, because people start accumulating hate, and then that leads to a person like this,” Mabel Lescano, another protester, said of the gunman.

No politician awakens more passion in Argentina than Fernández, revered by some for her left-leaning social welfare policies and reviled by others as corrupt and power-hungry.

The left-of-center leader is on trial on corruption charges involving public works while she was president from 2007 to 2015. Some of her staunchest supporters had been gathering daily outside her apartment since Aug. 22, when a prosecutor called for a 12-year prison sentence for her and a ban on holding public office ever again. She has vehemently denied all charges and cast herself as a victim of political persecution.

“If you touch Cristina, what chaos we’ll make!” supporters had chanted.

Over the weekend, her followers clashed with police during an effort by law enforcement to clear the area, and the strong police presence around the apartment was then reduced, though her supporters kept coming.

In recent days, some of her allies charged that her detractors were trying to spark violence, with Security Minister Aníbal Fernández saying the opposition “is looking for someone to die on the street.”

Before the apparent attempt on her life, Fernández had made a habit of leaving her apartment every day around noon, greeting supporters and signing autographs before getting in her vehicle to go to the Senate. She had a similar routine every evening.

In Thursday’s incident, captured on video, it was not clear whether she understood what had just happened. Even as her security detail went into action, she continued greeting supporters in the upscale Recoleta neighborhood of Argentina’s capital.

The gunman illegally possessed the weapon, an example of the old and “obsolete” guns that circulate among small-time criminals in Argentina, said Gabriel González Da Silva, a prosecutor who leads an office that investigates weapons-related crimes.

Patricia Bullrich, president of the opposition Republican Proposal party, accused President Fernández of using the shooting attempt for political gain.

“Instead of seriously investigating a serious incident, he accuses the opposition and the press, decreeing a national holiday to mobilize activists,” she said.

Fernández has been at the center stage of Argentine political life for almost two decades. She was the country’s charismatic first lady during President Néstor Kirchner’s 2003-07 administration, then succeeded her husband.

As opposition to her rule began rising, Fernández increasingly portrayed herself as the victim of attacks from powerful special interests because of her defense of the poor and workers.

In one of the most dramatic incidents of her two-term presidency, a prosecutor who had accused Fernández of making a deal with Iran to cover up its alleged involvement in a 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires died shortly before he was set to present evidence against her in 2015.

Allies of the former president insist Alberto Nisman died by suicide. But the opposition has long contended that he was murdered or driven to kill himself.

In the country’s deeply polarized environment, the attempted shooting of the vice president quickly gave rise to new conspiracy theories, dividing those who say “the whole thing was staged and those who think

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it was real," said Mariel Fornoni, director of Management and Fit, a political consultancy.

Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who has frequently criticized the left-leaning Argentine government, weighed in Friday on the apparent assassination attempt.

"I lament it, and there are people already trying to blame me for that problem," Bolsonaro said. "It is good that the attacker didn't know how to use a gun, otherwise he would have been successful. "

Prosecutor: Trump ally arranged meeting with poll worker

By SUDHIN THANAWALA Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — After the 2020 election, a Georgia poll worker who was falsely accused of voting fraud by former President Donald Trump was pressured and threatened with imprisonment during a meeting arranged with the help of an ally of the Trump campaign, a prosecutor said in a court filing Friday.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis is investigating whether Trump and others illegally tried to influence the 2020 election in Georgia. As part of the probe, Willis filed court documents on Friday seeking testimony from Willie Lewis Floyd, a director of Black Voices for Trump, a group aimed at increasing the former president's support among Black voters.

In December 2021, Floyd was asked to arrange a meeting to discuss an "immunity deal" with Ruby Freeman, a Fulton County election worker whom Trump and his allies falsely accused of pulling fraudulent ballots from a suitcase, according to Willis.

Willis said Floyd arranged for Trevian Kutti — whom Willis described as a "purported publicist" based in Chicago — to meet with Freeman. The prosecutor has previously sought Kutti's testimony.

Kutti told Freeman that "an armed squad" of federal officers would approach her and her family within 48 hours and that Kutti had access to "very high-profile people that can make particular things happen in order to defend yourself and your family," according to Willis' court filing.

The district attorney cited video footage as evidence of those statements.

Kutti did not immediately respond to an email message seeking comment Friday. A message to Floyd's Instagram account was also not immediately returned.

Freeman and Kutti met at the Cobb County Police Department, where Kutti told Freeman that "freedom and the freedom of one or more of your family members" would be disrupted if Freeman declined her assistance. Kutti said Freeman was "a loose end for a party that needs to tidy up," according to Willis.

The meeting was captured in part by a body camera, Willis said.

Kutti also said she wanted to connect Freeman to Floyd, whom she described as a "Black progressive crisis manager, very high level, with authoritative powers to get you protection that you need," Willis said.

During a subsequent phone call with Kutti and Floyd, Freeman was pressured to reveal information under threat of imprisonment, Willis said.

Freeman and her daughter, Wandrea "Shaye" Moss, appeared in June before the House Jan. 6 committee and have told lawmakers how the lies about election fraud upended their lives. Moss was also a poll worker in Fulton County.

Willis has sought testimony from numerous witnesses with ties to Trump as part of her investigation, including former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham. Giuliani, who's been told he's a target of the investigation, testified before the special grand jury last month. A federal judge on Thursday ruled that constitutional protections don't shield Graham from testifying.

Trump has blamed voter fraud for his 2020 loss to Democrat Joe Biden. State officials and federal investigators, including Trump's own attorney general, have said there was no evidence of widespread fraud in the 2020 contest.

College Football Playoff to expand to 12 teams by '26 season

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

After 14 1/2 months of haggling over details and questioning motivations, a plan to expand the College Football Playoff to 12 teams was finally approved Friday, setting the stage for a multibillion-dollar tourna-

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ment as soon as the 2024 season.

What still needs to be determined is just how quickly the current four-team model can be converted and implemented, but it will happen no later than 2026. When it does, major college football's championship bracket will triple in size.

"This was a very historic day for college football," said Mississippi State President Mark Keenum, chairman of the CFP's Board of Managers that pressed ahead after a process that started in June 2021 with an ambitious plan was derailed for months by provincialism and mistrust.

In a unanimous vote that was necessary to pursue early expansion, the 11 university leaders who make up the board approved the original 12-team proposal. It calls for the six highest-ranked conference champions and six at-large picks — as determined by a selection committee — to make the playoff.

The top four seeds would be conference champions and receive byes into the second round. First-round games would be played on campuses and the rest at bowl sites.

A 12-team, 11-game postseason system to crown a champion could be worth as much as \$2 billion in media rights to the conferences that play major college football, starting in 2026.

"So our plans are to begin the 12-team format for sure beginning in the 2026 football season," Keenum said. "However, we have asked our (conference) commissioners on the management committee to explore the possibility of us beginning the 12-team playoff format before the 2026 seasons, in either 2024 or 2025. We as members of the board recognize there's some pretty substantial issues that have to be resolved."

If the new format can be implemented before the current 12-year contract with ESPN expires, the conferences could make an additional \$450 million over the final two years. The current deal pays about \$470 million per year.

CFP Executive Director Bill Hancock said ESPN under its contract would get the first bid on any new playoff inventory added in 2024 and '25.

Beyond 2025, there is no TV contract for a playoff. The plan is to take the new format to the open market and possibly involve multiple TV partners instead of just ESPN.

The conference commissioners and Notre Dame athletic director who comprise the CFP management committee are scheduled to meet Thursday in Dallas. Among the logistical hurdles that they need to clear are dates of games, host sites, available television windows and the impact on the regular-season schedule.

The committee also needs to determine how all that new revenue will be shared and then have that approved by the presidents.

Hancock announced in February that expanding for the 2024 and '25 seasons was off the table and attention would be turned to what the playoff would look like for 2026 and beyond. Last month, the CFP locked in sites and dates for the championship games to be played after the 2024 and 2025 seasons. In a 12-team playoff, those dates would have to be pushed back.

But the presidents ultimately decide what happens with the playoff, and they took matters into their own hands to move expansion forward.

"It was time for us to make a decision," Keenum said.

Even after the February announcement, there were signs early expansion was not dead. A June meeting of the commissioners in Utah renewed optimism differences could be settled.

"It actually wouldn't surprise me once we agree on the format, if it happens before the end of the current term," Pac-12 Commissioner George Kliavkoff said in July.

Kliavkoff was one of three relatively new Power Five commissioners, along with Kevin Warren (Big Ten) and Jim Phillips (ACC), whose various objections to the 12-team proposal last year stalled negotiations.

That 12-team plan had been worked on for more than two years by a subgroup of the management committee that included Greg Sankey of the Southeastern Conference. Skepticism rose between the new commissioners, who had not been part of a process that started in 2019, and the rest after it was revealed the SEC would be adding Texas and Oklahoma to the powerhouse conference by no later than 2025.

Now everybody is on board with the plan.

"The Pac-12 is strongly in favor of CFP expansion and welcomes the decision of the CFP Board," Kliavkoff

said in a statement. "CFP expansion will provide increased access and excitement and is the right thing for our student-athletes and fans. We look forward to working with our fellow conferences to finalize the important elements of an expanded CFP in order to launch as soon as practicable."

Trump search inventory reveals new details from FBI seizure

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Along with highly classified government documents, the FBI agents who searched former President Donald Trump's Florida estate found dozens of empty folders marked classified but with nothing inside and no explanation of what might have been there, according to a more detailed inventory of the seized material made public on Friday.

The agents also found more than 10,000 other government documents kept by Trump with no classification marked.

The inventory compiled by the Justice Department reveals in general terms the contents of 33 boxes and containers taken from Trump's office and a storage room at Mar-a-Lago during the Aug. 8 search. Though the inventory does not describe the content of the documents, it shows the extent to which classified information — including material at the top-secret level — was stashed in boxes at the home and mixed among newspapers, magazines, clothing and other personal items.

And the empty folders raise the question of whether the government has recovered all of the classified papers that Trump kept after leaving the White House.

The inventory makes clear for the first time the volume of unclassified government documents at the home even though presidential records were to have been turned over to the National Archives and Records Administration. The Archives had tried unsuccessfully for months to secure their return from Trump and then contacted the FBI after locating classified information in a batch of 15 boxes it received in January.

The Justice Department has said there was no secure space at Mar-a-Lago for sensitive government secrets, and has opened a criminal investigation focused on their retention there and on what it says were efforts in the past several months to obstruct the probe. It is also investigating potential violations of a law that criminalizes the mutilation or concealment of government records, classified or not.

Lawyers for Trump did not immediately return an email seeking comment Friday. Trump spokesman Taylor Budowich asserted that the FBI search was a "SMASH AND GRAB" — though the Justice Department had received court-authorized permission to search specific locations in the home.

The inventory was released as the Justice Department undertakes its criminal investigation, as intelligence agencies assess any risk to national security caused by mishandling of classified information and as a judge weighs whether to appoint a special master — essentially an outside legal expert — to review the records.

The inventory had been filed earlier under seal, but the Justice Department had said that given the "extraordinary circumstances," it did not object to making it public. Trump himself has previously called for the disclosure of documents related to the search. U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon said on Thursday that she planned to unseal the inventory and did so on Friday.

All told, the inventory shows, the FBI seized more than 100 documents with classification markings in August, including 18 marked top secret, 54 secret and 31 confidential. The FBI had identified 184 documents marked as classified in 15 boxes recovered by the Archives in January, and received additional classified documents in a single Redweld envelope during a June visit to Mar-a-Lago.

The Justice Department has said that it searched the property in August after developing evidence that documents were likely "concealed and removed" from the storage room as part of an effort to obstruct its probe.

The court filings have not offered an explanation for why Trump had kept the classified documents, and why he and his representatives did not return them when requested.

The inventory shows that 48 empty folders with classified banners were taken either from the storage room or office, along with additional empty folders labeled as "Return to Staff Secretary" or military aide.

It is not clear from the inventory list what might have happened to any of the documents that apparently had been inside.

Separately Friday, the Justice Department said in a court filing that it had reviewed the records seized during the recent search and had segregated those with classified markings to ensure that they were being stored according to proper protocol and procedure.

"The seized materials will continue to be used to further the government's investigation, and the investigative team will continue to use and evaluate the seized materials as it takes further investigative steps, such as through additional witness interviews and grand jury practice," the department said.

It added that "additional evidence pertaining to the seized items," including the manner in which they were stored, "will inform the government's investigation."

Timothée Chalamet, Taylor Russell play cannibals in love

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

VENICE, Italy (AP) — Timothée Chalamet was feeling cut off from the world in the early days of the pandemic. Then Luca Guadagnino, whom Chalamet saw as a father figure while filming "Call Me By Your Name," called with a new possible project. It would be another young romance set in the 1980s. But instead of Italy they'd be going to the American Midwest. And they'd be cannibals.

The film, "Bones and All" is having its world premiere Friday night at the Venice Film Festival, where it is among the competition titles. Chalamet and Guadagnino gathered before the premiere to discuss the film with the cast.

It's a significant departure for the Italian director of films like "A Bigger Splash" and "I Am Love," marking the first time Guadagnino has made an American film — something he's wanted to do for some time. Then his longtime collaborator, screenwriter David Kajganich, came to him with an adaptation of Camille DeAngelis' young adult novel and he saw in it an opportunity to make a film about identity and outcasts.

"I was dying to work with Luca again and tell a story that was grounded," said Chalamet, who took a break from filming "Dune 2" to appear in Venice. Swarms of fans gathered around the docks of the Hotel Excelsior to get a glimpse of the star, who even stopped to pose for a few selfies.

In "Bones and All," Chalamet did more than just act: He helped take his character Lee from an "alpha jock" to a "broken soul," which he said was very attractive to him, and got a producing credit on the film as well.

"Luca is fatherly with me and guided me in that process this time," he said. "I can't say that I was helpful organizing schedules or anything like that. But it's something I want to continue doing."

Chalamet's character is a supporting part to the film's lead Maren, who is coming to terms with her unsavory urges. She's played by "Waves" actor Taylor Russell, a newcomer to the Guadagnino family of regulars like Michael Stuhlbarg, as a creepy cannibal they meet on the road, and Chloë Sevigny.

"It's Taylor's movie, she does an incredible job carrying it," Chalamet said.

The discussion of their characters, and the loneliness they feel in the world, led both to think about what it means to be young at the moment.

"Can't imagine what it is to grow up with the onslaught of social media," Chalamet said. "I think it's tough to be alive now. I think societal collapse is in the air. It smells like it. And without being pretentious, I hope that's why these movies matter, because the role of the artist is to shine a light on what's going on."

Russell added that, "It's so scary. The hope is that you can find your own compass within all of it."

The film also features a new score by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross, whom Guadagnino challenged to "find the sound of a road trip" and "the sound of the American landscape." And it's full of 1980s music from Joy Division, New Order and even KISS, which were chosen from a box of cassette tapes that Kajganich found from when he was a teenager.

"The ones that either made me smile or cry made it in the script," Kajganich said.

"Bones and All" opens in North American theaters on Nov. 23.

IAEA to have 'full picture' of Ukraine nuclear plant in days

By YESICA FISCH Associated Press

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine (AP) — Fighting raged Friday near Europe's biggest nuclear power plant in a Russian-held area of eastern Ukraine, as inspectors from the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog agency expressed concern over the facility's "physical integrity" but didn't blame either warring side.

International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Grossi said he expects to produce a report "early next week, as soon as we have the full picture of the situation by the end of the weekend, more or less."

Speaking to reporters in Vienna after returning from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, he said he will brief the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday.

"We've seen what I requested to see — everything I requested to see," Grossi said, adding that his big concerns were the plant's "physical integrity," the power supply to the facility and the situation of the staff.

"The military activity and operations are increasing in that part of the country, and this worries me a lot," he said. "It is obvious that the statistical possibility of more physical damage is present."

He noted that shelling started in August and "it is quite clearly a more recent trend," but didn't apportion blame for damage that has been done so far.

The head of Ukraine's nuclear watchdog, Oleh Korikov, said Ukrainian officials "would like more decisive actions and statements" from the IAEA inspectors. "But let's wait until the mission is over," he added.

Local Russian-appointed authorities said Friday that staff at the plant restarted a key reactor just hours after shelling a day earlier forced it to shut down. Ukraine's nuclear energy operator, Energoatom confirmed on its Telegram channel that the reactivated reactor had been plugged back into the power grid.

Aleksandr Volga, the Kremlin-backed mayor of Enerhodar, where the Zaporizhzhia plant is located, told the Interfax news agency that the facility now had two working reactors, out of a total of six.

The head of Ukraine's powerful National Security Council, Oleksiy Danilov, said Ukrainian authorities weren't fully aware of the situation inside the plant for now — despite the presence of the IAEA team that went in Thursday.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Danilov — a key official in Ukraine's war effort — said: "I want to emphasize that this is a challenge for the whole world, how to make this nuclear facility not dangerous."

Russia and Ukraine traded blame for the shelling which led to Thursday's temporary shutdown of the reactor by its emergency protection system. Energoatom said the attack 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.

Britain's Defense Ministry said earlier Friday that shelling continued in the area near the plant, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office said Russian shelling damaged houses, gas pipelines and other infrastructure on the other bank of the Dnieper River — part of fighting in several areas of eastern and southern Ukraine overnight.

Russian-backed officials in Enerhodar claimed Russian forces had shot down an armed Ukrainian drone near the plant Friday.

"Ukrainian militants, apparently, continue to try to attack the plant despite the fact that there are IAEA employees there," the press service of the municipal administration said in a statement.

In its regular update on Friday evening, the Ukrainian military said it had carried out a "precision strike" in Enerhodar, but did not acknowledge or directly respond to the claims by Kremlin-backed officials. It said the attack destroyed three artillery systems, an ammunition depot and a company of personnel.

Russia and Ukraine traded accusations that the other side was trying to impede the work of the IAEA experts, or control the message.

Zelenskyy, in his nightly address on Thursday, had tough words for the IAEA delegation. While applauding its arrival at the plant, he said independent journalists were kept from covering the visit, allowing Russians to present a one-sided, "futile tour."

In a conference call with reporters on Friday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow considered "positively" the arrival of the mission, "despite all problems and difficulties caused by the Ukrainian side's

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provocative actions.”

The 14-member delegation arrived in a convoy of SUVs and vans after months of negotiations to enable the experts to pass through the front lines. They braved gunfire and artillery blasts along the route.

Grossi said Friday that six of the agency’s experts remain at the plant, and there will be a “permanent presence on site ... with two of our experts who will be continuing the work.” He wasn’t specific about how long exactly the two experts will stay.

“The difference between being there and not being there is like day and night,” he said.

The plant has been occupied by Russian forces but run by Ukrainian engineers since the early days of the 6-month war.

Grossi said there was a “professional *modus vivendi*” at the site. He said it was “admirable for the Ukrainian experts to continue to work in these conditions.”

“It’s not an easy situation; it’s a tense situation, it’s not an ideal situation, it’s a situation everybody is coping with,” he said.

Ukraine alleges Russia is using the plant as a shield to launch attacks. On Friday, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu rejected the Ukrainian allegations and said Russia has no heavy weapons either on the site or in nearby areas.

Shoigu said Ukrainian forces have fired 120 artillery shells and used 16 suicide drones to hit the plant, “raising a real threat of a nuclear catastrophe in Europe.”

Elsewhere in Ukraine on Friday, Zelenskyy’s office said four people were killed and 10 injured over the last day in the eastern Donetsk region, a key hub of the Russian invasion.

___ Joanna Kozłowska in London and Geir Moulson in Berlin contributed to this report.

Russia’s Gazprom keeps gas pipeline to Germany switched off

By GEIR MOULSON and JOANNA KOZŁOWSKA Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Europe’s energy crisis loomed larger Friday after Russian energy giant Gazprom said it couldn’t resume the supply of natural gas through a major pipeline to Germany for now. The company cited what it said was a need for urgent maintenance work to repair key components — in an announcement made just hours before it had been due to restart deliveries.

The Russian state-run energy company had shut down the Nord Stream 1 pipeline on Wednesday for what it said would be three days of maintenance.

It said in a social media post Friday evening that it had identified “malfunctions” of a turbine and added that the pipeline would not work unless those were eliminated.

The move was the latest development in a saga in which Gazprom has advanced technical problems as the reason for reducing gas flows through Nord Stream 1 — explanations that German officials have rejected as a cover for a political power play following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

European utilities have scrambled to find additional supply during the summer months to get ready for the winter’s heating demands, buying expensive liquefied gas that comes by ship, while additional supplies have come by pipeline from Norway and Azerbaijan.

Fears of a winter shortage have eased somewhat as storage has progressed, but a complete cutoff could present Europe with serious difficulties, analysts say. The European Union needs to step up efforts to reduce gas consumption, said energy policy expert Simone Tagliapietra at the Bruegel think tank in Brussels.

The continuing interruptions from Gazprom mean that “a winter with zero Russian gas is the central scenario for Europe,” he said. “There is only one way to prepare for that: reducing gas and electricity demand.”

Gazprom said it had identified oil leaks from four turbines at the Portovaya compressor station at the Russian end of the pipeline, including the sole operational one. It claimed to have received warnings from Russia’s industrial safety watchdog that the leaks “do not allow for safe, trouble-free operation of the gas turbine engine.”

“In connection with this, it is necessary to take appropriate measures and suspend further operation of the ... gas compressor unit in connection with the identified gross (safety) violations,” the company said.

Gazprom started cutting supplies through Nord Stream 1 in mid-June, blaming delays to the delivery

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of a turbine that had been sent to Canada for repair. Canada has since allowed the turbine's delivery to Germany, which has said that nothing stands in the way of it being sent to Russia other than Russia saying it wants the part.

In recent weeks, Nord Stream 1 has been running at only 20% of capacity.

Germany's Siemens Energy, which manufactured the turbines, said following Gazprom's announcement that "such a finding is not a technical reason for stopping operation."

"Such leakages do not usually affect the operation of a turbine and can be sealed on site," it said in a statement. It added that this "is a routine procedure during maintenance work" and that type of leakage didn't result in operations being shut down in the past.

Siemens Energy said it wasn't currently contracted for maintenance work, but was standing by. "Irrespective of this, we have already pointed out several times that there are enough additional turbines available at the Portovaya compressor station for Nord Stream 1 to operate," it added.

Russia, which before the reductions started accounted for a bit more than a third of Germany's gas supplies, has also reduced the flow of gas to other European countries which have sided with Ukraine in the war.

Natural gas is used to power industry, heat homes and offices, and generate electricity. Increasing the amount in reserve has been a key focus of the German government since Russia invaded Ukraine, to avoid rationing for industry as demand rises in the winter.

Germany's storage facilities are now over 84% full.

The head of Germany's network regulatory agency, Klaus Mueller, tweeted that the Russian decision to keep Nord Stream 1 switched off for now increases the significance of new liquefied natural gas terminals that Germany plans to start running this winter, gas storage and "significant needs to save" gas.

It is "good that Germany is now better prepared, but now it comes down to everyone," Mueller added.

Germany's Economy Ministry said it had "taken note" of Gazprom's latest announcement and wouldn't comment on it directly, but added that "we have already seen Russia's unreliability in recent weeks" and continued efforts to reduce the country's reliance on Russian energy imports.

"Of course these are difficult times but we will continue to strengthen provisions consistently," the ministry said in a statement. "Great efforts are still needed but we are on a good path to coping with the situation."

The European Union has just reached its goal of filling its gas storage to 80%, ahead of a Nov. 1 deadline, despite Russian supply cutbacks.

Barbara Ehrenreich, 'myth busting' writer and activist, dies

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Barbara Ehrenreich, the author, activist and self-described "myth buster" who in such notable works as "Nickel and Dimed" and "Bait and Switch" challenged conventional thinking about class, religion and the very idea of an American dream, has died at age 81.

Ehrenreich died Thursday morning in Alexandria, Virginia, according to her son, the author and journalist Ben Ehrenreich. She had recently suffered a stroke.

"She was, she made clear, ready to go," Ben Ehrenreich tweeted Friday. "She was never much for thoughts and prayers, but you can honor her memory by loving one another, and by fighting like hell."

She was born Barbara Alexander in Butte, Montana, and raised in a household of union supporters, where family rules included "never cross a picket line and never vote Republican." She studied physics as an undergraduate at Reed College, and received a PhD in immunology at Rockefeller University. Starting in the 1970s, she worked as a teacher and researchers and became increasingly active in the feminist movement, from writing pamphlets to appearing at conferences around the country. She also co-wrote a book on student activism, "Long March, Short Spring," with her then-husband, John Ehrenreich.

A prolific author who regularly turned out books and newspaper and magazine articles, Ehrenreich honed an accessible prose style that brought her a wide readership for otherwise unsettling and unsentimental ideas. She disdained individualism, organized religion, unregulated economics and what Norman Vincent

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Peale famously called "the power of positive thinking."

A proponent of liberal causes from unions to abortion rights, Ehrenreich often drew upon her own experiences to communicate her ideas. The birth of her daughter Rosa helped inspired her to become a feminist, she later explained, because she was appalled at the hospital's treatment of patients. Her battle with breast cancer years ago inspired her 2009 book "Bright-Sided," in which she recalled the bland platitudes and assurances of well wishers and probed the American insistence — a religion, she called it — on optimism, to the point of ignoring the country's many troubles.

"We need to brace ourselves for a struggle against terrifying obstacles, both of our own making and imposed by the natural world. And the first step is to recover from the mass delusion that is positive thinking," she wrote.

"Positive thinking has made itself useful as an apology for the crueler aspects of the market economy. If optimism is the key to material success, and if you can achieve an optimistic outlook through the discipline of positive thinking, then there is no excuse for failure. The flip side of positivity is thus a harsh insistence on personal responsibility."

For "Nickel and Dimed," one of her best known books, she worked in minimum wage jobs so she could learn firsthand the struggles of the working poor, whom she called "the major philanthropists of our society."

"They neglect their own children so that the children of others will be cared for; they live in substandard housing so that other homes will be shiny and perfect; they endure privation so that inflation will be low and stock prices high," she wrote. "To be a member of the working poor is to be an anonymous donor, a nameless benefactor, to everyone."

Ehrenreich wrote for The New York Times, The Nation, Vogue and many other publications, and her other books included "The Worst Years of Our Lives: Irreverent Notes from a Decade of Greed," "Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War" and "Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class."

Yoga sect allegedly exploited women to lure men like Domingo

By DANIEL POLITI, JOCELYN GECKER and ALMUDENA CALATRAVA Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES (AP) — An Argentina-based yoga group sexually exploited vulnerable women it called "geishas" to get money and influence from wealthy and powerful men around the world, including opera star Placido Domingo, who knew the organization's leaders for more than two decades, according to interviews with former members and local authorities.

A sprawling investigation into the sect-like Buenos Aires Yoga School, which operated for over 30 years in Argentina's capital, has uncovered what authorities are calling a criminal organization involved in sex trafficking, money laundering, involuntary servitude, illegal practice of medicine and other crimes. Nineteen members have been arrested in the investigation that reaches into the U.S., where six more suspects are sought.

Despite its name, the school did not offer yoga classes. Leaders are accused of preying on people to join its ranks with promises of eternal happiness and then exploiting them sexually and financially, according to charging documents.

Former members of the school and officials investigating the case told The Associated Press that the group forced female members to work as "geishas" who were assigned to make guests feel welcome at the school, with sex part of the expectations. Influential or wealthy men were matched up with members of the "Geishado VIP," one of many groups of women that were forced to have sexual encounters in exchange for money and influence that benefited sect leaders, according to the charging documents. Some of the women were sent to the United States and Uruguay to have sex with men, a practice that amounted to slavery, authorities said.

Former member Pablo Salum said his mother and sister were among the women exploited in Argentina, and described orgies and sexual abuse of children.

"When you reached 11 or 12 years old, the leader told you who you had to have sexual relations with," he said, adding that younger children were made to watch sexual activity. Salum says he was brought

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into the organization by his mother at age eight and left at 14. His accusations helped spark the current investigation.

Some members of the group were reduced to "a situation of slavery," forced to have sexual encounters and tasked with menial chores at the school like cleaning and cooking, according to the investigative documents and a police official. Male and female "slaves" were required to follow instructions without asking any questions, said a former member named Carlos, who asked to be identified only by his first name because he left the group many years ago and couldn't confirm details from the current investigation.

Domingo found himself embroiled in the scandal after law enforcement officers carried out dozens of raids in Buenos Aires in August targeting the school. The famed tenor was "a consumer of prostitution" but isn't accused of a crime because prostitution is legal in Argentina, said a law enforcement source in Argentina who, like other police and judicial sources in Buenos Aires, spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing.

Authorities released wiretapped phone conversations from earlier this year in which a man they identified as Domingo appears to be arranging a sexual meetup at his hotel in April in Buenos Aires with Susana Mendelievich, a concert pianist who prosecutors say was a sect leader in charge of the "Geishado VIP."

In one of the wiretaps, Mendelievich talks with another sect leader about how the group had tried unsuccessfully for years to use its music connections to recruit Domingo into the group but it was worth trying again while he was in Buenos Aires in April for a series of concerts. In another wiretap, Mendelievich asks sect leader Juan Percowicz if she can take Domingo to "the museum," the moniker used to refer to the top floor of their 10-story building where influential men had sex with group members. Mendelievich, 75, and Percowicz, 84, were detained in the raids in August; both were released this week to house arrest.

Domingo has publicly tried to distance himself from the group, which allegedly had multiple offices in the United States.

"Of course, I have nothing to do with that," Domingo, 81, said last week in reference to the organization's allegedly illegal activities. In comments to a television station in Mexico, where he was performing, Domingo did not deny he was the man in the wiretapped recordings but said he felt betrayed by musicians he had considered to be friends. "It makes me sad when you've had friends for many years and you realize you have been used."

Domingo has not responded to numerous requests through his representatives for an interview or comment from the AP.

In 2019, numerous women told the AP they were sexually harassed by Domingo, considered one of the greatest opera singers of all time. More than 20 women came forward to accuse Domingo of inappropriate and sexually charged conduct that included groping and other unwanted touching, persistent late night phone calls, stalking them in dressing rooms and pressuring them into sexual relationships by offering advancement in the opera world. Several of the women said he punished them professionally when they refused his advances.

The Spanish opera singer denied wrongdoing at the time, and he said it pained him to think he made women uncomfortable. Investigations by the American Guild of Musical Artists and the Los Angeles Opera, where Domingo had served as general director, found sexual harassment allegations against him to be credible. The allegations and subsequent findings halted Domingo's career in the United States, though he still performs in other parts of the world.

The revelations out of Argentina have again brought unwanted attention to the opera star.

The promoter of a concert in neighboring Chile announced last week that a Domingo concert scheduled for Oct. 16 at an arena in the capital, Santiago, was canceled, although the group said it was due to logistical reasons.

Authorities have not released names of other powerful men they say the group allegedly targeted. But investigators say they are poring over hard drives and "boxes and boxes" of erotic photographs and videotapes seized in the raids. Judicial officials say that many sexual encounters arranged by the group took place at its Buenos Aires school and were videotaped.

Carlos told the AP that he saw Domingo visit the school several times in the 1990s, including once as

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the guest of honor at a dinner party inside the school. Carlos said he was a waiter at the party, held in Domingo's honor, where the singer made a generous offer at the end of the evening to fly several of the group's leaders with him to Europe on an upcoming trip.

"At the dinner Placido Domingo said 'let's all go to Europe,'" said Carlos, who left the group after 10 years in 1999. "He was inviting them all, the whole table, to Europe."

At Domingo's table were classical musicians who police say were part of the group's leadership: Rubén D'Artagnan González, Verónica Iacono and Mendelievich among others, according to Carlos who said it was common knowledge at the school that the three accompanied Domingo on his trip.

González, who died in 2018, served as concertmaster of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 1986 until 1996 and is accused of playing a key role in the group's U.S. operations. Iacono was a New York-based soprano, who used the stage name "Loiacono," and is the subject of an international arrest warrant. Another alleged leader named Mariano Krawczyk, was an oboist who goes by the artistic name Mariano Krauz.

The extent of Domingo's professional or personal ties to the musicians in the group are not known, and he has declined comment on that. But Domingo has performed with several of the people who've been arrested, including at a 1996 concert that featured the three he allegedly invited to Europe and Krawczyk.

During that Buenos Aires concert, Domingo and Iacono sang a portion of "Marked Cards" an opera that Iacono, Mendelievich, González and Krawczyk wrote together based on a book by Percowicz, the founder and leader of the Buenos Aires Yoga School.

Sexual encounters were touted to members as a form of "healing" and offered a path to scaling the seven levels of the school's strict hierarchy that had Percowicz at the top, according to charging documents.

Former members interviewed by AP say Percowicz was known as "El Maestro." Others ranked at the seventh level were Iacono, Krawczyk and Mendelievich, according to prosecutors' documents. A judicial source says she has seen documents that show González was at a top level of the organization before he died. Krawczyk was among those arrested.

To advance quickly, members could also donate money and sign over assets. The group had revenues of around half a million dollars per month, according to a judicial official.

Cult members included lawyers and accountants who advised leaders on a complex money laundering network that included starting businesses and buying real estate in Argentina and the United States, the investigative documents said.

Members also allegedly sold medical treatments for several ailments, including AIDS and drug addiction, that involved "sleep cures," which essentially meant giving people drugs to help them sleep for days at a time. Authorities say the pseudo medical treatments were also done in the United States, where the group's clinic CMI Abasto, had subsidiaries.

EXPLAINER: Mississippi capital's water woes are extensive

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Mississippi's capital city is struggling with the near collapse of its water system, prompting emergency declarations from President Joe Biden and Gov. Tate Reeves.

Jackson has dangerously low water pressure this week, and many of the city's 150,000 residents have been without water flowing from their faucets.

Problems started days after torrential rain fell in central Mississippi, altering the quality of the raw water entering Jackson's treatment plants. That slowed the treatment process, depleted supplies in water tanks and caused a precipitous drop in pressure.

When water pressure drops, there's a possibility that untreated groundwater can enter the water system through cracked pipes, so customers are told to boil water to kill potentially harmful bacteria.

But even before the rainfall, officials said some water pumps had failed and a treatment plant was using backup pumps. Jackson had already been under a boil-water notice for a month because the state health department had found cloudy water that could make people ill.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF WATER PROBLEMS IN JACKSON?

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Jackson is the largest city in one of the poorest states in the U.S.

The city has a shrinking tax base that resulted from white flight, which began about a decade after public schools were integrated in 1970. Jackson's population is more than 80% Black, and about 25% of its residents live in poverty.

Like many American cities, Jackson struggles with aging infrastructure with water lines that crack or collapse. Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba, a Democrat in a Republican-led state, said the city's water problems come from decades of deferred maintenance.

Some equipment froze at Jackson's main water treatment plant during a cold snap in early 2020, leaving thousands of customers with dangerously low water pressure or no water at all. The National Guard helped distribute drinking water. People gathered water in buckets to flush toilets. Similar problems happened on a smaller scale earlier this year.

Jackson frequently has boil-water notices because of loss of pressure or other problems that can contaminate the water. Some of the mandates are in place for only a few days, while others last weeks. Some only affect specific neighborhoods, usually because of broken pipes in the area. Others affect all customers on the water system.

The state health department put the entire Jackson water system under a boil-water notice in late July because of a cloudy quality to the water. That mandate remains in effect, and officials have not indicated when it might end. Although boiling the water is intended to protect people's health, it also makes everyday tasks more time consuming.

WHERE DOES JACKSON GET ITS WATER?

Most of Jackson's water comes from the Ross Barnett Reservoir, which is just northeast of the city and is fed by the Pearl River. The city also takes some water from a well. In addition, hospitals and some state agencies have drilled their own wells to have water available in case of problems with the city system.

The water system serves about 150,000 residents in Jackson and about 11,500 residents of a suburb, Byram, plus businesses and government offices. About 80% of customers had little or no water Wednesday morning at the worst part of the current outage, and all customers had low pressure, a Jackson city spokeswoman said.

WHERE DOES JACKSON PROCESS ITS WATER?

Jackson has two water treatment plants. The newer and larger one is the O.B. Curtis plant near the reservoir. This plant has been the main source of the most recent problems. The governor said two pumps at Curtis stopped operating within the past month, so the plant had been operating on backup pumps. A temporary pump was installed Wednesday.

The Curtis plant is authorized to produce up to 50 million gallons (189,271 kiloliters) of water per day. According to the governor's office, it was producing 20 million gallons (75,708 kiloliters) Thursday. The older water treatment plant, J.H. Fewell, is authorized to produce 20 million gallons (75,708 kiloliters) of water per day, with the flexibility to go up to 30 million gallons (113,562 kiloliters). On Thursday, it was producing 20.5 million gallons (77,601 kiloliters).

DO ENOUGH PEOPLE WORK AT JACKSON'S WATER PLANTS?

Understaffing is a serious problem.

The mayor said the city has had difficulty finding and hiring enough Class A certified water operators. Federal law requires at least one such operator to be on duty at each water treatment plant at all times.

WLBT-TV requested emails from the city and found that the Curtis plant had one-sixth of the number of certified operators it needed to be fully staffed. The city engineer said in November that staff shortages were so severe that the city would have to shut down one of its plants if one more operator left. The documents also showed that operators were working massive amounts of overtime.

WHAT ABOUT WATER QUALITY?

The Environmental Protection Agency issued a notice in January that Jackson's system violates the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. The EPA noted that an April 2021 fire in the electrical panel at Curtis had caused all five pumps to be unavailable for service, causing low water pressure. An inspection six months later found the pumps remained out of service.

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In 2015, routine testing found higher than acceptable lead levels in Jackson water samples, and the city continues to publish public notices about water quality not meeting minimum standards.

In 2016, the state Health Department found an inadequate application of water treatment chemicals because of a failing corrosion control system at the Curtis plant. The EPA required the city to correct this problem. In 2017, the city began installation of corrosion control treatment.

A water quality notice published in July said the majority of tested samples showed lead levels "below the action level set by the EPA." But it also listed precautions from the state Health Department, including that baby formula should be made only with filtered or bottled water and that children younger than 5 should have lead screening and blood testing.

WHAT OTHER WATER PROBLEMS DOES JACKSON HAVE?

Jackson has also struggled with wastewater.

In 2012, the city entered into a consent decree with the EPA and the U.S. Department of Justice to bring its sewer system into compliance with federal water quality laws. The city remains out of compliance.

In late April, the city submitted a report to federal regulators showing that sewer failures caused the release of nearly 45 million gallons (170,344 kiloliters) of untreated wastewater into the environment between December and March.

WHAT WILL IT COST TO FIX JACKSON'S WATER PROBLEMS?

The mayor said fixing Jackson's water system could cost billions of dollars, and that is far beyond what the city can afford.

An infrastructure bill that Biden signed into law last year is designed to address problems like Jackson's, but it's unclear how much money the Mississippi capital will receive.

The Mississippi Legislature this year allocated \$3 million for repairs at Jackson's Fewell water plant. The Legislature also put \$400 million of federal pandemic relief money into a water infrastructure fund, and Jackson could apply for part of that. Cities or counties are required to match the grant money with local money. The application period opened Thursday.

EXPLAINER: 5 key takeaways from the August jobs report

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nation's job market last month delivered what the Federal Reserve and nervous investors had been hoping for: A Goldilocks-style hiring report.

Job growth was solid — not too hot, not too cold. And more Americans began looking for work, which could ease worker shortages over time and defuse some of the inflationary pressures that the Fed has made its No. 1 mission.

Employers added 315,000 jobs, roughly what economists had expected, down from an average 487,000 a month over the past year. The unemployment rate reached 3.7%, its highest level since February. But it rose for a healthy reason: Hundreds of thousands of people returned to the job market, and some didn't find work right away, which boosted the government's count of unemployed people.

The American economy has been a puzzle this year. Economic growth fell the first half of 2022, which, by some informal definitions, signals a recession.

But the job market is still surprisingly robust. Businesses remain desperate to find workers. They've posted more than 11 million job openings, meaning there are nearly two job vacancies, on average, for every unemployed American.

And inflation, which began to accelerate alarmingly in the spring of last year, remains close to a 40-year high. That's a sign that consumers' appetite for goods and services is still strong enough to allow businesses to raise prices.

The relentless rise in consumer prices has forced the Fed to raise interest rates aggressively to try to slow hiring and wage increases and drive down inflation. It's aiming to pull off a so-called soft landing — raising borrowing costs enough to slow growth and curb inflation without tipping the United States into a recession.

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So far, so good.

"Today's report answers the persistent recession question, at least for today: We are not in a recession," said AnnElizabeth Konkell, senior economist at the Indeed Hiring Lab. "The U.S. labor market remains strong with employers adding jobs and labor supply coming back online... The sun is still shining on the U.S. labor market."

Here are five takeaways from the August jobs report:

MAKING THE FED'S TASK EASIER

Friday's report from the government suggests that the Fed may find it a little easier to bring the economy in for a soft landing. Key to that daunting task is seeing hiring ease a bit — enough, anyway, to reduce the pressure on employers to raise pay. When they hand out raises, businesses typically increase prices for their customers to offset their higher labor costs, thereby feeding inflation.

Not only did August's job creation decelerate from July's breakneck pace — 526,000 added jobs — but the Labor Department also revised down its earlier estimate of the gains for June and July by a combined 107,000. In addition, average hourly pay rose just 0.3% last month from July, the lowest month-to-month gain since April.

"If the Fed were to design the (jobs) report, this is the kind of report they would have designed," said Megan Greene, chief economist at the Kroll Institute.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has made it clear — notably at a hawkish speech last week in Jackson Hole, Wyoming — that the central bank expects to impose further large rate hikes to try to tame inflation. And he warned that the Fed's continued tightening of credit will cause pain for many households and businesses as it slows the economy and potentially lead to job losses. The Fed has raised its benchmark short-term interest rate four times this year, including by a hefty three-quarters of a percentage point in both June and July.

Investors are anxiously anticipating what the Fed will do when it next meets Sept. 20-21.

"The slower pace of payroll gains in August, together with a big rebound in the labor force, and the more modest increase in wages, would seem to favor a smaller (half-point) rate hike from the Fed," said Michael Pearce, senior U.S. economist at Capital Economics.

Still, Fed policymakers will be watching to see whether inflation decelerated last month. One major barometer will be the government's report on consumer prices for August, to be issued Sept. 13.

HUH? HIGHER UNEMPLOYMENT IS GOOD NEWS?

Normally, an uptick the joblessness would be sobering news, even cause for worry. Not now.

The unemployment rate rose last month to 3.7% from 3.5%, which had tied a 50-year low. But the increase in August was welcome: The number of Americans either working or looking for work surged by 786,000 in August, the biggest one-month jump since January. And their share of the population — the so-called labor force participation rate — rose to 62.4% last month, its highest level since March.

To be counted as unemployed, people have to be actively seeking a job. So when they stay on the sidelines, as many have since COVID-19 struck, their absence from the labor force means they don't show up as unemployed. And the jobless rate can look artificially low.

Last month, the number of Americans who told the Labor Department they had jobs rose by 442,000. And the number who said they were unemployed also rose, by 344,000. That suggests that many people who started looking for a job didn't find one right away.

"The labor participation rate went up, and I would love to see that number continue to climb even if that means a 3.7%, 3.8%, 3.9% unemployment rate," said Labor Secretary Marty Walsh. "You have potentially 11 million open jobs. Having more people entering the workforce is good for the economy."

The idea is that the more Americans there are who are looking for work, the less pressure there is on employers to raise wages to attract applicants, increase prices and contribute to inflation.

BROAD JOB GAINS

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Last month's jobs gains were spread broadly across industries. Retailers added 44,000. Healthcare gained 48,000, including nearly 15,000 at hospitals.

Factories added 22,000 jobs despite a slowing global economy, a consumer shift away from manufactured goods and toward services like restaurant meals and a stronger dollar that makes U.S.-made goods pricier overseas.

But hiring in leisure and hospitality slowed sharply in August — to 31,000, including just 18,000 at bars and restaurants. Both gains were the weakest since December 2020.

FEWER HOURS

The average workweek slipped slightly last month to 34.5 hours. Those figures haven't changed much this year even as employers have complained about a worker shortage.

So why aren't they assigning more hours to the workers they have on hand?

Labor Secretary Walsh suspects that employees, especially in high-paying occupations, are more conscious of striking a balance between their work and their personal lives and balk at putting in ever more hours on the job. Employers are wary, having seen "people quitting their jobs because their work-life balance was off," Walsh suggested.

An increase in employees working from home, or splitting time between home and the workplace, may also limit the number of hours worked.

In the leisure and hospitality business, which includes restaurants and hotels, average hours worked peaked in April 2021 and has fallen more or less steadily since then. Thomas Feltmate, senior economist at TD Economics, said the drop might reflect a "softening in consumer demand in recent months for discretionary recreational services."

BLACK UNEMPLOYMENT

An increase in the unemployment rate of Black Americans last month couldn't be explained by an influx into the labor force.

The number of Black people working or looking for work fell by 51,000. And their labor participation rate dipped from 62% in July to 61.8% last month, the lowest point since December. The number of Black Americans reporting that they had jobs fell by 131,000 last month. And the number saying they were unemployed rose by 79,000.

The Black jobless rate rose from 6% in July to 6.4% in August, the highest level since February.

It isn't entirely clear what caused the uptick in Black unemployment, the second straight increase. The Labor Department's racial breakdown of employment numbers can be volatile from month to month. But the number of Black Americans in the labor force — and their participation rate — has now dropped for three straight months.

Knock, knock: Jehovah's Witnesses resume door-to-door work

By DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

Jehovah's Witnesses have restarted their door-to-door ministry after more than two and a half years on hiatus due to the coronavirus pandemic, reviving a religious practice that the faith considers crucial and cherished.

From coast to coast, members of the Christian denomination fanned out in cities and towns Thursday to share literature and converse about God for the first time since March 2020.

In the Jamaica Plain neighborhood on the south side of Boston, Dan and Carrie Sideris spent a balmy morning walking around knocking on doors and ringing bells. Dan Sideris said he had been apprehensive about evangelizing in person in "a changed world," but the experience erased any traces of doubt.

"It all came back quite naturally because we don't have a canned speech," he said. "We try to engage with people about what's in their heart, and what we say comes from our hearts."

The couple were surprised at how many people opened their doors and were receptive.

One man took a break from a Zoom call to accept their booklets and set up an appointment to con-

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tinue the conversation. At another home, a woman spoke of how many family members died in the last two years — something the Siderises could relate to, both of them having lost parents recently. Another woman was too busy at the moment but spoke to Carrie Sideris through the window and said she could come back Sunday.

"I've been looking forward to this day," she said. "When I rang the first doorbell this morning, a total calm came over me. I was back where I needed to be."

Jehovah's Witnesses suspended door-knocking in the early days of the pandemic's onset in the United States, just as much of the rest of society went into lockdown too. The organization also ended all public meetings at its 13,000 congregations nationwide and canceled 5,600 annual gatherings worldwide — an unprecedented move not taken even during the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918, which killed 50 million people worldwide.

Witnesses continued their ministry by writing letters and making phone calls, but it wasn't the same because it lacked a personal touch, said Robert Hendriks, national spokesperson for the denomination.

"To us, going door to door is an expression of our God's impartiality," he said. "We go to everyone and let them choose whether they want to hear us or not."

Even in pre-pandemic times, door-knocking ministry came with anxiety because Witnesses never knew how they would be received at any given home. In 2022 that's even more the case, and evangelizers are being advised to be mindful that lives and attitudes have changed.

"It's going to take an additional level of courage," Hendriks said.

The organization is not mandating masks or social distancing, leaving those decisions to each individual.

The denomination has cautiously been rebooting other activities: In April it reopened congregations for in-person gatherings, and in June it resumed public ministry where members set up carts in locations such as subway stations and hand out literature.

Getting back to door-knocking, considered not just a core belief but also an effective ministry, is a big step toward "a return to normal," Hendriks said.

However, other denominations such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have moved away from door-to-door ministry. Spokesman Sam Penrod said the church had already been doing so "for at least a decade" before COVID-19.

"Social media has become an effective way of reaching people interested in learning more about the Church in recent years and became invaluable in the early months of the pandemic," Penrod said via email, adding that missionaries continue to minister in person but do not go door to door.

But for Jehovah's Witnesses such as Jonathan Gomas of Milwaukee, who started door-knocking with his parents when he was "big enough to ring a doorbell," a spiritual life without it seems inconceivable.

"When you're out in the community, you have your hand on the pulse," he said. "We haven't had that close feeling with the community for more than two years now. It feels like we've all become more distant and polarized."

Gomas and his wife and two daughters have all learned Hmong in order to better reach out to members of that community, and residents are often pleasantly surprised to open their doors to fluent speakers of their language.

"I think it made them listen even closer," he said.

In Acworth, Georgia, Nathan Rivera said he has greatly missed seeing people's faces and reading their expressions.

"You see and appreciate these responses, and it's much more personal," he said. "You establish common ground and relationships that you can never develop over the phone or by writing a letter."

The son of Cuban refugees who came to the United States in the 1980s, Rivera said door-knocking is an important part of his spiritual identity and "feels Christ-like."

"We show respect for each person's right to hold a different belief," he said. "If they don't want to hear what we have to say, we politely thank them and move on, recognizing that we cannot judge anyone. We'll just keep on knocking."

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As teachers worry, kids at Ukraine cadet school wait for war

By DEREK GATOPOULOS and EFREM LUKATSKY Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The heavy rubber gas masks placed atop small wooden desks are nothing strange to these children as they file past the bomb shelter's iron door to attend classes in weapons theory.

Nearby, children giggle, trying to keep up with their English teacher as she sings and gestures "Head and shoulders, knees and toes. Knees and toes!" each repetition getting a little faster.

Unique in Ukraine, Volodymyr the Great school Number 23 on the outskirts of Kyiv trains children to become military cadets, starting at the age of 7.

They are sent to this weekday boarding school to learn discipline, but many now see the skills being taught here as essential to their survival, returning to class with the country at war.

The school officially reopens Friday for the first time since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Many of its 540 students took part in a rehearsal Thursday for the opening day ceremony, the boys in black and gold military uniforms, often a little oversized and reminiscent of the Soviet era, with broad hats and heavy shoulder boards.

In formation, the students carried tasseled frames of blue and yellow — the national colors — moving in time as the music alternated between children's songs and military marching anthems.

Many cadet schools were set up in Soviet republics, but students at Volodymyr the Great were all born long after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and were not in recent years pressured to join the military when they graduated.

Yaroslav, a 16-year-old student at the school, always wanted to study law and try life in Western Europe. But his school is only a few kilometers (miles) from where the Russian advance left neighborhoods pulverized by artillery fire, civilians thrown into mass graves, and attitudes hardened among ordinary Ukrainians.

"I'll be honest with you ... I want to fight in this war," Yaroslav says. "I always wanted to travel but that decision has changed. I want to become a military man."

Yaroslav's father, an army engineer, was killed after war first broke out in the east of the country in 2014.

"My father was not afraid to go to the front, and I want to be that way too," said Yaroslav.

Many of his classmates said they were inspired by the bravery displayed by Ukraine's armed forces during the five-week siege of Kyiv that ended with the Russian retreat.

"We are constantly getting stronger and becoming one of the best armies in Europe, that's how we can hold the Russians back," says Yaroslav's classmate Bohdan. "And it's thanks to those fighters who stand at the front line, that we can keep going."

Their English teacher Olha Kyrei, who has taught at the school for nine years, says she's seen a difference in her students since the war started.

"I think maybe in one month they became more serious," she said. "The eyes, when you look at the eyes, you don't look into the eyes of children. You look at the eyes of adults."

Kyrei keeps in touch with school graduates — referring to them as "my children" — who have been drafted into the military, sending them text messages "nearly every day." She hopes the war will be over by the time her current batch of students graduates.

"We are praying for our school leavers of the June 2023," she said. "We're praying that everything will be okay by then: That this situation, this awful situation, this war will be over."

School Principal Natalia Holovyhyna said two former students had already been killed in the war.

At school and during months of online classes Holovyhyna and her teachers say they try to keep the children occupied with additional homework and activities to stop them dwelling excessively on the war.

Teachers, she said, chose to stay in Kyiv when the fighting started, continuing classes online from their homes and volunteering to keep school facilities open so local residents could use its bomb shelters.

"I'm very proud of them," Holovyhyna says, pausing with emotion. "Our teachers are focused on making

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the studying process comfortable ... We're bringing them up to become professional engineers, doctors, teachers and soldiers as well."

'Monumental moment.' Billy Eichner on remaking the rom-com

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It doesn't take a genius to deduce that anyone who rants in New York's Madison Square Park about "Ratatouille" not getting enough respect or gets into a shouting match on 42nd Street about Denzel Washington's stage credits might have a complicated relationship with the entertainment industry.

For five seasons of "Billy on the Street," Billy Eichner was a hysterical roving commenter on Hollywood, proclaiming his tastes to any passerby he could corral with exaggerated disdain for those who dared to disagree with him and underlining fury with himself for caring so much.

"Show business, I was always so enamored and so infatuated with it. I was really intoxicated by it," says Eichner, who grew up in Queens with middle-class parents who encouraged his passion. "I love great acting. I love the movies that I love. And, yes, 'Billy on the Street' was a way of poking fun at my own obsession with the entertainment industry."

But as much as "Billy on the Street" seemed like Eichner as himself out in the real world of midtown Manhattan, his new movie, "Bros" (in theaters Sept. 30), is a far clearer picture of who Eichner is as a comedian, actor, screenwriter and gay man. And this fall movie season, it also happens to be a landmark comedy.

Eichner stars in and wrote the Universal Pictures release with director Nicholas Stoller. (Judd Apatow produces.) The initial germ was to go further with a "Billy on the Street" sketch where Eichner acted as a Jets jersey-wearing sports bro with Jason Sudeikis. But as it developed, "Bros" grew in a different direction. In the classic format of an adult, R-rated rom-com, Eichner depicts an uncommonly honest and insightful portrait of life as a single gay man.

Like "Billy on the Street," it's frequently laugh-out-loud funny and packed with keen observations about Hollywood — a Hollywood where, until now, a film like "Bros" was essentially an impossibility. "Bros" is the first gay rom-com from a major studio, and the first studio film of any genre both written by and starring an openly gay man. The cast is almost entirely LGBTQ.

"The history of it is thrilling. It really is a monumental moment," Eichner said in a recent interview. "I've been an openly gay actor and comedian my whole career, way before people knew me. I always wanted to be really successful, but I wanted it to be on my own terms, meaning as an openly gay person. That's not something that's easy to do. And that's true of every single cast member of this movie."

"Bros," which will premiere at the Toronto Film Festival, follows Bobby Lieber (Eichner) through modern issues of Tinder dating and monogamy struggles but also makes room for dialogue about how gay lives are depicted in film, and who gets to tell LGBTQ stories. Eichner plays the director of an LGBTQ museum in the film; history is very much on the movie's mind. Topics include "Bohemian Rhapsody," a pseudo "Brokeback Mountain" ("The Treasure Within"), a gay slur remembered from "The Hangover" and whether Lieber's biopic would star Benedict Cumberbatch.

"It's always been so funny to me as a gay person in Hollywood because, behind the scenes, it's really not so liberal," says Eichner. "It was never as progressive as it claimed to be. Just because you claim to be gay friendly or vote for a Democrat or say you're for marriage equality, that was never really reflected in the actual work that Hollywood was producing. When it came to what they were accountable and responsible for, they never gave us opportunities.

"And on the rare occasions when you did see LGBTQ characters front and center in a film or TV show, the vast majority of those roles were played by straight actors or actors who were not out of the closet, perhaps," adds Eichner.

Eichner, who co-starred with Julie Klausner in the series "Difficult People" and voiced Timon in 2019's "The Lion King," has mixed feelings about some of these issues. "Brokeback Mountain" he considers "a

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beautiful film" that moved him deeply when it came out. But 17 years later, if that movie was made again, Eichner thinks it would be a "more affecting and a more ethical production" if those characters were played by openly gay actors.

"That's not taking away from the fact that Heath Ledger is brilliant in that movie. No one would deny that Sean Penn is magnificent in 'Milk.' No one would deny that Tom Hanks is wonderful in 'Philadelphia,'" Eichner says. "Tom Hanks, though — and I was so impressed and grateful for him saying this publicly — said recently that if 'Philadelphia' was made today, he wouldn't have gotten the role and he said that would have been the right thing to do. In 1992, you needed Tom Hanks to play a gay man dying of AIDS because the movie wouldn't have gotten the financing it required, it wouldn't have gotten a wide release and, on some level, straight people wouldn't have been comfortable with it."

Eichner, 43, is acutely aware of the not-so-long-ago Hollywood history that leads up to "Bros." Only a handful of years ago — and today isn't so hunky-dory, either, Eichner cautions — coming out for gay performers meant sacrificing their career. Eichner, himself, has previously been told by a theater agent to "tone down" his gayness.

"And those were the options up until, I don't know, a couple of years ago. 'Bros' is the antithesis to all of that," says Eichner. "It's not just a symbol because it is a living, breathing movie that I think is very successful creatively in its own right having nothing to do with representation or the historical nature of it. But on top of it being a really funny movie, it is a symbol of progress.

"It really is, honestly, just kind of a big f--- you to the history of Hollywood and how it's treated LGBTQ people behind the scenes."

The "Billy on the Street" persona of Eichner's — arch, satirical — isn't his character in "Bros," though they share some qualities. It was important to Eichner that his character and the film's love interest, played by Luke Macfarlane, be complex, three-dimensional characters, not an absurdist version of a gay man — not stereotypical sidekicks.

"Billy on the Street" opened with a mock theme song that introduced him as "making dreams come true." But with "Bros," Eichner may have genuinely done so — probably for many others but definitely for himself.

"It's far and away the best thing I've ever done," Eichner says. "I'm allowed to be a fully, multi-dimensional human being. It's not identical to me but you can tell when you watch the movie, this really is the most accurate glimpse of everything that I am."

Red flag laws get little use as shootings, gun deaths soar

By BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

Chicago is one of the nation's gun violence hotspots and a seemingly ideal place to employ Illinois' "red flag" law that allows police to step in and take firearms away from people who threaten to kill. But amid more than 8,500 shootings resulting in 1,800 deaths since 2020, the law was used there just four times.

It's a pattern that's played out in New Mexico, with nearly 600 gun homicides during that period and a mere eight uses of its red flag law. And in Massachusetts, with nearly 300 shooting homicides and just 12 uses of its law.

An Associated Press analysis found many U.S. states barely use the red flag laws touted as the most powerful tool to stop gun violence before it happens, a trend blamed on a lack of awareness of the laws and resistance by some authorities to enforce them even as shootings and gun deaths soar.

AP found such laws in 19 states and the District of Columbia were used to remove firearms from people 15,049 times since 2020, fewer than 10 per 100,000 adult residents. Experts called that woefully low and not nearly enough to make a dent in gun violence, considering the millions of firearms in circulation and countless potential warning signs law enforcement officers encounter from gun owners every day.

"It's too small a pebble to make a ripple," Duke University sociologist Jeffrey Swanson, who has studied red flag gun surrender orders across the nation, said of the AP tally. "It's as if the law doesn't exist."

"The number of people we are catching with red flags is likely infinitesimal," added Indiana University law professor Jody Madeira, who like other experts who reviewed AP's findings wouldn't speculate how

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many red flag removal orders would be necessary to make a difference.

The search for solutions comes amid a string of mass shootings in Buffalo, New York, Uvalde, Texas, and Highland Park, Illinois, and a spike in gun violence not seen in decades: 27,000 deaths so far this year, following 45,000 deaths each of the past two years.

AP's count, compiled from inquiries and Freedom of Information Law requests, showed wide disparities in how the laws were applied from state to state, county to county, most without regard to population or crime rates.

Florida led with 5,800 such orders, or 34 per 100,000 adult residents, but that is due mostly to aggressive enforcement in a few counties that don't include Miami-Dade and others with more gun killings. More than a quarter of Illinois' slim 154 orders came from one suburban county that makes up just 7% of the state's population. California had 3,197 orders but was working through a backlog of three times that number of people barred from owning guns under a variety of measures who had not yet surrendered them.

And a national movement among politicians and sheriffs that has declared nearly 2,000 counties as "Second Amendment Sanctuaries," opposing laws that infringe on gun rights, may have affected red flag enforcement in several states. In Colorado, 37 counties that consider themselves "sanctuaries" issued just 45 surrender orders in the two years through last year, a fifth fewer than non-sanctuary counties did per resident. New Mexico and Nevada reported only about 20 orders combined.

"The law shouldn't even be there in the first place," argued Richard Mack, a former Arizona sheriff who heads the pro-gun Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association. "You're taking away someone's property and means of self-defense."

Red flag laws, most of which came into effect over the last four years, allow police officers who believe gun owners are an imminent danger to themselves or others to petition a judge to order firearms surrendered or, barring that, seized for an "emergency" period, typically two weeks. The judge can then convene a court hearing in which petitioners present evidence to withhold weapons longer, typically a year, and the owner can argue against that.

AP's tally counts an emergency order that is followed by a longer one as a single order if they involve the same gun owner. In rare cases where no one asked for an emergency order and only a longer one was requested and granted, that also counts as a single order. Several states reported incomplete data.

Some states also allow family members of gun owners, school officials, work colleagues or doctors to ask for gun removal orders, also known as extreme risk protection orders. But data reviewed by the AP show nearly all petitions in several states were initiated by police, possibly because, as several surveys have shown, few people outside law enforcement are even aware the laws exist.

The recent spike in shootings has brought renewed attention to red flag laws, with states including Alaska, Pennsylvania and Kentucky introducing legislation to add them. The Biden administration is seeking to foster wider use of red flag laws by allocating money in a newly passed federal gun law to help spread the word about such measures.

An AP-NORC poll in late July found 78% of U.S. adults strongly or somewhat favor red flag laws, but the backlash against them has been intense in some states, particularly in rural areas. Opponents argue that allowing judges to rule on gun seizures in initial emergency petitions before full hearings violates due process rights, though court cases claiming this have generally found the laws constitutional.

Many police believe seizing guns can also be dangerous and unnecessary, even as a last resort, especially in sparsely populated areas where they know many of the residents with mental health issues, said Tony Mace, head of the New Mexico Sheriffs' Association, which lobbied against the state's law.

"You're showing up with 10 to 15 law enforcement officers and coming in the middle of the night and kicking in the door, and it's already a dangerous environment," said Mace, sheriff of Cibola County, a sanctuary county with just one order since 2020. "You're dealing with someone in crisis and elevating it even more."

One fierce gun rights defender who still aggressively uses the law is Polk County, Florida, Sheriff Grady Judd, who says he doesn't let his beliefs stand in the way of moving fast when gun owners threaten violence.

"We're not going to wait for an Uvalde, Texas, or a Parkland or a Columbine if we have the information

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and people say that they're going to shoot or kill," said Judd, who enforced 752 orders since 2020 in a county of 725,000 residents, a tally that's more than the total orders for 15 entire states. "We're going to use the tools that the state gave us."

Florida's traditionally pro-gun Republican-led legislature passed its red flag law in 2018 following revelations police failed to act on repeated threats by an expelled student who would go on to carry out the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland earlier that year that left 17 people dead.

A recent high-profile example of a red flag law not being used was for the 21-year-old gunman accused of fatally shooting seven people and injuring dozens more at a Fourth of July parade in the Chicago suburb of Highland Park. Robert E. Crimo III drew police attention three years earlier when he threatened to "kill everyone" in his house and officers acknowledged going to the home several times previously because of a "history of attempts" to take his own life.

But Highland Park police never requested a gun surrender order, saying there was no gun belonging to Crimo to take away at the time, even though the law has a provision to block threatening people from making future purchases, too.

Illinois state Rep. Denyse Stoneback said there has clearly been a problem with awareness of the law among those tasked with carrying it out. "We'd go to police departments and they didn't know anything about it," said the Democrat who helped push through a bill last year providing \$1 million in police red flag law training.

Asked why Chicago had so few red flag firearm restraining orders, police spokesman Thomas Ahern said many of the city's gun killings are committed with illegally owned firearms.

But Ahern emphasized it remained a priority of the department to increase its awareness and use of the red flag law. "If we are able to prevent one citizen from getting hurt or killed that's a law worth having and definitely not a low priority," he said.

In New York, a red flag-type situation that wasn't covered under the state's law nonetheless led to a spike in red flag gun surrender orders.

Payton Gendron was a 17-year-old high school senior last year when he was investigated by New York's State Police and ordered hospitalized for a mental health evaluation for typing into an economics class online program that his future plans included "murder-suicide." But since he was a minor, he wasn't covered under the state's red flag law and it didn't prevent him from later buying the high-powered rifle authorities say he used to kill 10 Black people in a racially-motivated shooting at Buffalo supermarket in May.

Since then, New York has seen 779 gun surrender orders under its red flag law, equal to nearly half of all its orders since the measure took effect three years ago.

Several experts said it's impossible to come up with an ideal number of red flag orders and misleading to compare states by orders because of the widely varying rates of gun ownership and gun homicides and suicides, among other stats.

Another complicating factor is that some states have stricter gun ownerships rules and multiple ways to seize firearms. In California, for instance, guns can be taken away through domestic violence restraining orders, civil harassment protection orders and school violence prevention orders in addition to the red flag law.

Still, experts consulted by AP agreed more could be done to enforce red flag laws given the prevalence of guns and the millions of gun owners that national studies suggest could be dangerous to themselves and others. In red flag states alone, figures compiled by the Gun Violence Archive show at least 21,100 homicides and 47,000 injuries during the 2½ years covered by AP's count.

Several studies suggest red flag laws can be particularly effective in preventing gun suicides, which kill about 20,000 people a year. A Duke University study of Connecticut's-first-in-the-nation red flag law in 1999 estimated that for every 10 to 20 surrender orders a life from a potential suicide was saved. A study of Indiana's law came up with a similar ratio.

While the impact of red flag laws on homicides is less well researched, studies suggest many mass shootings could be avoided if the laws were implemented aggressively. A study by the gun-control advocacy

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group Everytown for Gun Safety showed perpetrators exhibited dangerous warning signs before more than half of the mass shootings in the dozen years through 2020 that accounted for 596 deaths.

Such warning signs have led to many opportunities to stop gun violence, as well as missed chances.

In Colorado in 2020, police seized 59 guns from a man who complained of hit men coming to get him, bragged about shooting someone and repeatedly threatened his ex-wife.

In New Jersey in 2019, police took seven guns from a man threatening on Facebook to attack a Walmart.

And in Washington state in 2018, police removed 12 guns from the home of a man who posted on social media about killing Jews in a synagogue and kids in a school.

None of those threatened shootings happened.

But in Indianapolis in 2020, failure to employ all aspects of a red flag law resulted in disaster. After 18-year-old Brandon Hole's mother alerted police that he was threatening to commit "suicide by cop," police seized his pump-action shotgun. A county prosecutor could have gone further under the law to argue before a judge that Hole should be barred from possessing or buying a gun, but that never happened.

A few months later, Hole bought two AR-style rifles at a gun store, turning to his mother and saying, "They don't have a flag on me." Several months after that, he fatally shot eight employees in a FedEx warehouse where he had worked and injured seven more before killing himself.

"I feel the state of Indiana is an accessory to murder," a wounded Angela Hughley told the Indianapolis Star shortly after the shooting.

Amber Clark, a librarian in Sacramento, California, might still be alive today if police had acted on a tip that Ronald Seay was armed and dangerous.

The gunman's twin brother called police in 2018 warning that Seay, who had a history of mental illness and trouble with police, was making violent threats and had two semiautomatic pistols. But the police never went to a judge to ask for a gun surrender order or tell the sibling that he could do that himself.

A few weeks later, Seay unloaded 11 bullets into Clark's face, head and body at pointblank range outside the Sacramento library.

"It is obvious to me and my family that the application of California's red flag law in this case would have saved two lives – Amber's and the shooter's – and prevented immeasurable grief," said her husband, Kelly Clark. "My wife would still be alive and the killer would have received the help he needed instead of being condemned to life in prison."

Beijing taps into anti-West resentment to counter UN report

By DAKE KANG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Hours after yet another assessment by outside observers that China's crackdown in its far-west Xinjiang region may constitute crimes against humanity, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin stepped up to a podium to go on the offensive.

"The so-called assessment you mentioned is orchestrated and produced by the U.S. and some Western forces" and is a "a political tool" meant to contain China, he said.

It was a tactic long used by Beijing to deflect criticism from its mass detentions of Uyghurs and other largely Muslim ethnic groups in Xinjiang: blame a Western conspiracy.

At home, it's found a willing audience. But abroad, it's angered Uyghurs and alienated foreigners. The result has been a splintering of views on Xinjiang in China and the West, a gap that threatens to fracture already-poor relations.

For decades, Beijing has struggled to integrate the Uyghurs, a historically Muslim group with close ethnic and linguistic ties to Turkey, locking the region in a cycle of revolt and repression. After bombings and knifings by a small number of extremist Uyghurs, Chinese leader Xi Jinping launched a crackdown, ensnaring huge numbers of people in a network of camps and prisons.

Since the beginning of the crackdown, the Chinese government has sought to control the narrative. They have done so through secrecy and censorship. But they have also done so by tapping into powerful, deep-rooted anti-Western sentiment, born out of a century of humiliation at the hands of the West.

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Growing up in Xinjiang, Uyghur linguist Abduweli Ayup learned about how European empires marched on China's capital and burned ancient palaces. He learned about the U.S. colonization of Hawaii and how it took Texas from Mexico.

Even as a Uyghur, Ayup said, this history instilled resentment.

"All our history we learn that China is the victim, and all those countries around us are very bad," Ayup said, adding that he himself was opposed to the West until well into his adulthood. "Anti-Western sentiment is really strong."

It wasn't until his thirties, Ayup said, when he saw how the authorities weaponized historic grievances to deflect blame from themselves. On July 5, 2009, protests demanding justice for lynched Uyghurs turned bloody. Police opened fire, violent demonstrators stoned ethnic majority Han Chinese bystanders and hundreds were killed in the melee.

Beijing blamed the riots on overseas "terrorists" and "separatists" supported by foreign governments. They glossed over long-held Uyghur resentments and suppressed evidence showing that police, too, were in part responsible for the violence.

"I felt it was ridiculous," Ayup said. "How could these foreign forces manipulate Uyghurs from far away?"

When the government first launched the crackdown, they sought to keep it secret. For months, they denied the existence of the camps.

But as evidence mounted, the state switched tactics and followed the same playbook: They hit back with accusations of a foreign plot.

When the BBC investigated labor practices in Xinjiang's cotton fields, state media denounced the report as "using the so-called 'research' of anti-China scholars" to "concoct rumors."

When a former Xinjiang resident gathered records on over 10,000 people detained in the region, a state spokesperson said the database was "created by anti-China figures" backed by the U.S. and Australia.

And after Omir Bekali, an ethnic Kazakh and Uyghur who spent eight months in detention, testified about torture inside the camps, he was branded a liar with "stories full of loopholes" by state media, feeding into "anti-China forces' smears."

It's frustrating, Bekali said, because he believes most Han Chinese in China are well intentioned, but have been kept ignorant by the country's sophisticated censorship apparatus.

"If you want to know the reality, speak to the victims," he said. "The government controls the media, they keep on saying lies."

As criticism mounted, Xinjiang authorities also moved quietly to scale down the most visible signs of repression. Though unclear whether it was due to global scrutiny or planned all along, the result was the same: It hid the intensity of the crackdown from outside visitors.

They took down barbed wire, dismantled some of the camps, and ripped out surveillance cameras peering over city streets, bare wires still dangling on poles overhead. They replaced the region's hard-line leader with one from a wealthy coastal province, known more for developing economies than for brutal policing.

Then, they took journalists to vineyards and banquets, dance shows and historic mosques, with a clear, underlying message: Xinjiang is open for business.

Today, Xinjiang's tourism industry is booming. Travelers stuck inside China because of its harsh "zero-COVID" policies are flocking to the region's deserts, mountains and bazaars, lured by what they see as its exotic, Islam-infused character.

Though hundreds of thousands still languish in prison on secret charges, they're tucked away in facilities behind forests and desert dunes, far from city centers and prying eyes. Voices that cut against the party line are silenced, with fear and sometimes with prison sentences.

As a result, ex-camp detainee Bekali said, "people inside China, they don't know what's really going on."

With the latest report on abuses in Xinjiang, there's been a change from the usual pattern: The assessment didn't come from the U.S. State Department, or a rights group, or from Uyghurs in exile.

Instead, it came from the human rights office of the United Nations, an organization that China's own leaders have repeatedly praised as the "core" of the international system. As a result, Beijing finds itself

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in an awkward spot, as the report threatens to puncture the party line.

Still, with independent information censored, the authorities have been largely successful in shaping the narrative within China's borders. On Chinese social media, response to the report has been muted. And with Western sanctions and rhetoric aimed at China, resentment against the West has only grown stronger.

Today, from executives pacing downtown Beijing to teachers lecturing in lush Guangxi province, many Chinese wonder what all the Xinjiang fuss is about.

"People in Xinjiang live happy lives. All my friends living there are doing just fine," said Ge Jing, a Han Chinese raised in Xinjiang who now runs a restaurant serving Uyghur cuisine. "I think foreign media are super biased against Xinjiang, they just can't leave it alone."

Lower US job gain in August could aid Fed's inflation fight

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — America's employers added a healthy number of jobs last month, yet slowed their hiring enough to potentially help the Federal Reserve in its fight to reduce raging inflation.

The economy gained 315,000 jobs in August, a still-solid figure that pointed to an economy that remains resilient despite rising interest rates, high inflation and sluggish consumer spending. Friday's report from the government also showed that the unemployment rate rose to 3.7%, up from a half-century low of 3.5%. Yet that increase was also an encouraging sign: It reflected a long-awaited rise in the number of Americans who are looking for work.

"It's a very positive report and still holds open the possibility for a soft landing," said Ellen Gaske, an economist at PGIM Fixed Income, referring to the Fed's goal of slowing the economy enough to cool inflation without going so far as to cause a recession.

Prices are rising at nearly the fastest pace in 40 years, which has handed congressional Republicans a hammer to use against Democrats in the fall congressional elections. Texas Republican Rep. Kevin Brady noted Friday that rising wages aren't keeping up with inflation, leaving Americans with "shrinking paychecks."

The White House has pushed back, claiming credit for what it calls evidence that the economy remains on firm footing.

"Jobs are up, wages are up, people are back to work and we're seeing some signs that inflation may be, may be ... beginning to ease," President Joe Biden said Friday.

Inflation did fall to an 8.5% annual rate in July from 9.1% in June, mostly as gas prices steadily dropped. Prices at the pump fell to \$3.81 a gallon Friday from a peak of \$5.02 in mid-June. But inflation has declined in the past only to jump higher again, and few economists are willing to declare yet that it has peaked.

The August hiring gain was down from 526,000 jobs that were added in July, and it fell below the average increase of the previous three months. Wage growth weakened a bit last month, too, which could also serve the Fed's inflation fight. Average hourly pay rose 0.3% from the previous month, the smallest gain since April. Businesses typically pass the cost of higher wages on to their customers through higher prices, thereby fueling inflation.

Gaske suggested that the figures could allow the Fed to raise its benchmark short-term interest rate by a half-percentage point at its next meeting later this month, rather than by three-quarters of a point, as many Wall Street traders and some economists have expected. Either size increase would exceed the Fed's typical hike of a quarter of a percentage point. When the Fed increases its rate, it leads over time to higher rates on mortgages, auto loans and business borrowing and can weaken the economy.

The Fed is rapidly raising rates to try to cool the economy and reduce inflation. Some economists fear, though, that the Fed is tightening credit so aggressively that it will eventually tip the economy into recession.

Most industries added workers last month, with the biggest increases in professional and business services, which gained 68,000 jobs. That sector includes architects, engineers and some tech workers. Health care added 61,500 jobs, retailers 44,000.

Some companies, particularly in technology, have announced layoffs in recent months. On Wednesday, Snap, the parent company of the social media platform Snapchat, said it would cut 20% of its staff. The

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fitness equipment maker Peloton, the stock trading app Robinhood and the online furniture Wayfair have also said they are laying off workers. Bed, Bath & Beyond says it will close 150 stores and slash its workforce by 20%.

Yet with unemployment still very low and many businesses desperate to find workers, people who have been laid off are still finding plentiful opportunities elsewhere. One eager employer is TruBlue Total House Care, which does home renovations and repairs, with a focus on making homes safer for senior citizens.

Sean Fitzgerald, president of TruBlue, based in Cincinnati, said all its 87 locations have posted job openings. The number of people applying has risen recently, he said — a welcome sign for a company that has been short-staffed since soon after COVID-19 struck in the spring of 2020.

"We have far more demand than we do employees," Fitzgerald said. "Our biggest hurdle continues to be getting enough qualified employees hired."

To help retain its workers, TruBlue in some cases is lending company vehicles to employees and paying for gas.

Fitzgerald said a slowdown in home building, one consequence of the Fed's rate hikes, has likely cost some construction workers their jobs, making it a bit easier for his company to hire.

Becky Frankiewicz, president of the staffing firm Manpower Group North America, said that laid-off workers, particularly in technology, are being quickly rehired. Software development, she said, is the second-most in-demand skill, behind nursing. The job market is the "eye of the economic hurricane," she said, with hiring resilient despite the turmoil created by weaker growth and high inflation.

But Frankiewicz said she is starting to see some early signs that employers are dialing back: Job postings at Manpower were down 6% in August from a month ago. Wage growth has also started to plateau.

Mathieu Stevenson, CEO of Snagajob, an hourly hiring platform, said his firm has also seen a small decline in job postings, though hiring is still strong. Some employers, after being short-staffed for so long, appear to have figured out how to get by with fewer workers, he said — a trend that could slow future job gains.

"People are less panicked by the understaffing, because they've just gotten so accustomed to operating with it," Stevenson said. "And so they're much less aggressive about how hard they're trying to hire."

Recent data has painted a somewhat conflicting picture of the economy. The broadest measure of the economy's output — gross domestic product — has shrunk for two straight quarters, meeting one informal definition of a recession. Yet another measure, focused on incomes, indicates the economy expanded in the first half of the year, albeit slowly.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell, in a high-profile speech last week, made clear that the central bank was prepared to continue raising short-term interest rates and to keep them elevated to keep fighting inflation. Powell warned that the Fed's inflation fight would likely cause pain for Americans in the form of a weaker economy and job losses.

The Fed chair also said the job market was "clearly out of balance," with demand for workers "substantially exceeding" the available supply. Friday's jobs figures and a report earlier this week that showed the number of job openings rose in July suggest that the Fed's rate hikes so far haven't restored much balance.

There are roughly two advertised job openings for every unemployed worker.

Big reveal: Biden to help unveil Obama White House portrait

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's been more than a decade since President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, welcomed back George W. Bush and his wife, Laura, for the unveiling of their White House portraits, part of a beloved Washington tradition that for decades managed to transcend partisan politics.

President Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, are set to revive that ritual — after an awkward and anomalous gap in the Trump years — when they host the Obamas on Wednesday for the big reveal of their portraits in front of scores of friends, family and staff.

The Obama paintings will not look like any in the White House portrait collection to which they will be added. They were America's first Black president and first lady.

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The ceremony will also mark Michelle Obama's first visit to the White House since Obama's presidency ended in January 2017, and only the second visit for Barack Obama. He was at the White House in April to mark the 12th anniversary of the health care law he signed in 2010.

Portrait ceremonies often give past presidents an opportunity to showcase their comedic timing.

"I am pleased that my portrait brings an interesting symmetry to the White House collection. It now starts and ends with a George W," Bush quipped at his ceremony in 2012.

Bill Clinton joked in 2004 that "most of the time, till you get your picture hung like this, the only artists that draw you are cartoonists."

Recent tradition, no matter the party affiliation, has had the current president genially hosting his immediate predecessor for the unveiling — as Clinton did for George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush did for Clinton and Obama did for the younger Bush.

Then there was an unexplained pause when Donald Trump did not host Obama.

Two spokespeople for Trump did not respond to emailed requests for comment on the lack of a ceremony for Obama, and whether artists are working on portraits of Trump and former first lady Melania Trump.

The White House portrait collection starts with George Washington, America's first president. Congress bought his portrait.

Other portraits of early presidents and first ladies often came to the White House as gifts. Since the 1960s, the White House Historical Association has paid for most of the paintings.

The first portraits financed by the association were of Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird Johnson, and John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy, said Stewart McLaurin, president of the private, nonprofit organization established by first lady Kennedy.

Before presidents and first ladies leave office, the association explains the portrait process. The former president and first lady choose the artist or artists, and offer guidance on how they want to be portrayed.

"It really involves how that president and first lady see themselves," McLaurin said in an interview with The Associated Press.

The collection includes an iconic, full-length portrait of Washington that adorns the East Room. It is the only item still in the White House that was in the executive mansion in November 1800 when John Adams and Abigail Adams became the first president and first lady to live in the White House.

Years later, first lady Dolley Madison saved Gilbert Stuart's portrait of Washington from almost certain ruin. She had White House staff take it out of the city before advancing British forces burned the mansion in 1814. The painting was held in storage until the White House was rebuilt.

President and first lady portraits are seen by millions of White House visitors, though not all are on display. Some are undergoing conservation or are in storage.

Those that are on display line hallways and rooms in public areas of the mansion, such as the Ground Floor and its Vermeil and China Rooms, and the State Floor one level above, which has the famous Green, Blue and Red Rooms, the East Room and State Dining Room.

Portraits of Mamie Eisenhower, Pat Nixon, Lady Bird Johnson and Lou Henry Hoover grace the Vermeil Room, along with a full-length image of Jacqueline Kennedy. Michelle Obama's portrait likely will join Barbara Bush, Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush along the Ground Floor hallway.

The State Floor hallway one floor above features recent presidents: John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Gerald Ford's portrait and the likeness of Richard Nixon — the only president to resign from office — are on view on the Grand Staircase leading to the private living quarters on the second floor.

Past presidents' images move around the White House, depending on their standing with the current occupants. Ronald Reagan, for example, moved Thomas Jefferson and Harry S. Truman out of the Cabinet Room and swapped in Dwight Eisenhower and Calvin Coolidge.

In the Clinton era, portraits of Richard Nixon and Reagan, idols of the Republican Party, lost their showcase spot in the Grand Foyer and were replaced with pictures of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Truman, heroes of the Democrats. Nancy Reagan temporarily moved Eleanor Roosevelt to a place of prominence in the

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East Room in 1984 to mark the centennial of her birth.

One of the most prominent spots for a portrait is above the mantle in the State Dining Room and it has been occupied for decades by a painting of a seated Abraham Lincoln, hand supporting his chin. It was placed there by Franklin Roosevelt.

Bill Clinton's and George W. Bush's portraits hang on opposing walls in the Grand Foyer.

Clinton's would be relocated to make room for Barack Obama's if the White House sticks to tradition and keeps the two most recent Oval Office occupants there, McLaurin said.

"That's up to the White House, to the curators," he said.

The association, which is funded through private donations and the sale of books and an annual White House Christmas ornament, keeps the portrait price well below market value because of the "extraordinary honor" an artist derives from having "their work of art hanging perpetually in the White House," McLaurin said.

Details about the Obamas' portraits will stay under wraps until Wednesday.

Biden will be the rare president to host a former boss for the unveiling; he was Obama's vice president. George H.W. Bush, who held Ronald Reagan's ceremony, was Reagan's No. 2.

Betty Monkman, a former White House curator, said during a 2017 podcast for the White House Historical Association that the ceremony is a "statement of generosity" by the president and first lady. "It's a very warm, lovely moment."

The White House portraits are one of two sets of portraits of presidents and first ladies. The National Portrait Gallery, a Smithsonian museum, maintains its own collection and those portraits are unveiled before the White House pair. The Obamas' unveiled their museum portraits in February 2018.

Linda St. Thomas, chief spokesperson for the Smithsonian Institution, said in an email that a \$650,000 donation in July from Save America, Trump's political action committee, was earmarked for the couple's museum portraits. Two artists have been commissioned, one for each painting, and work has begun, St. Thomas said.

You can't rain on Lea Michele's parade at 'Funny Girl'

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Lea Michele was 21 when she first saw "Funny Girl." She was starring on Broadway in "Spring Awakening," but all was not well in her personal life.

"I had just gone through a horrible breakup," she recalls. "I didn't care what was happening for me in my career. I was so heartbroken and I couldn't believe that I had to pick myself up and go on stage every night."

Michael Mayer, her "Spring Awakening" director, noticed a forlorn Michele and prescribed a special theater cure: a big dose of Barbra Streisand as vaudeville comedian Fanny Brice in the movie musical "Funny Girl." It was the story of a woman refusing to let a man drag her down.

That did the trick: "I fell in love with it. And I fell in love with the story and I fell in love with the music. And, of course, Barbra." Michele would go on to star in "Glee," where she would sing songs from "Funny Girl" and also serenaded Streisand at a tribute with a "Funny Girl" song.

Michele, now 36, finds herself stepping into the role Streisand made famous by taking over the role of Fanny from Beanie Feldstein in the show's first revival on Broadway, with Mayer again her director. It's a dream come true, but it has also created waves.

The high-profile casting change rocked the Broadway community this summer, with Feldstein leaving early after Michele was announced, giving the impression that things backstage were strained at best. Michele noted that one actor replacing another on Broadway is nothing new.

"People leave shows and people come into shows. I think that the media is really drawn to drama and especially pitting women against each other, which I think is so unfortunate," said Michele. "All I can say for me is how grateful I am to have been accepted with such open arms into what I know has been a lot of just different changes."

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Michele praised Feldstein — “I think that Beanie was fantastic” — as well as her understudy, Julie Benko, who will play Thursday performances — and threw herself into rehearsals. For someone who knows the musical so intimately, even Michele was stunned to realize how much work she needs to do.

“I think that I had potentially an expectation that I would just come into this and everything would be super-easy,” she said. “But then there are also other parts of it where I had to take the car and break it down completely and take out all the nuts and bolts and then look at everything, which is extremely scary because you’re like, ‘Wait a second, I have to go on in two weeks. How am I going to put this car all the way back together now and then drive it high speed across the country?’”

Fanny, to be fair, is one of musical theater’s more difficult roles to cast, needing both a set of pipes, some physical comedy skills and a spunky charm, perhaps why it has taken so long to revive it on theater’s biggest stage since Streisand starred in it on Broadway in 1964 and then won an Oscar in the 1968 film version. It has the songs “People” and “Don’t Rain on My Parade.”

“I’ve always wanted to play this role. But I know that I couldn’t have played it at any other point in my entire life. I think that it’s the experiences. It’s what I’ve been through in my life,” said Michele, citing marriage and motherhood as deepening her approach.

Broadway veteran Ramin Karimloo, who plays Brice’s love interest in “Funny Girl,” worked with Feldstein and said Michele brings a different Fanny to the show — not better, just different.

“It just feels like embarrassment of riches. I had one version and now I’ve got this version,” he said. “There’s a new injection of life and a different life coming in. And so I get excited for that.”

Michele making her debut on Tuesday isn’t the only casting change. Four-time Tony Award nominee Tovah Feldshuh will replace Emmy-winner Jane Lynch as Fanny’s mother.

It’s a remarkable full-circle moment for Feldshuh, too, since she she recalls watching Streisand live in the role on Broadway in 1964. “I think that Fanny Brice is the greatest role ever written for a woman in the American musical theater,” she said.

“This is Lea’s karma,” added Feldshuh. “This has been marinating in her ever since ‘Glee’ and the roller-coaster ride that the show took, for better or for worse — for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health — it did never stop. And it has come through a different tunnel now. And hopefully the audiences will continue to enjoy it.”

The replacement is another step toward respectability for Michele after former “Glee” castmates in 2020 accused the actor of behavior that was interpreted as racist and bullying. While unable to recall any specific incident, Michele blamed her privilege and “immaturity.”

Another person cheering on the Broadway changes is Jared Grimes, who earned a Tony Award nomination as a featured actor in a musical. He said he has watched as Michele “grabbed the role by the horns.”

“It was as if I was watching someone who had been preparing for this role in this project her entire life. It was very instinctive. It was really captivating to watch,” he said. “She left no meat on the bone.

“I was just like, ‘OK, cool. We’re bringing in some heavyweights and it’s time to just have more fun in a different way.’”

Tropical Storm Danielle strengthens into hurricane

MIAMI (AP) — Tropical Storm Danielle strengthened into a hurricane Friday morning — the first of an unusually quiet storm season.

The storm is not currently a threat to any land.

The storm’s maximum sustained winds were clocked at 75 mph (120 kph), according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center.

The storm is centered about 885 miles (1,425 kilometers) west of the Azores and is drifting west at about 1 mph (about 2 kph). The hurricane center said the storm is expected to meander in the Atlantic over the next few days.

The tropical storm comes amid what had been a calm hurricane season. It is 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

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hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach had told The Associated Press earlier.

There are no coastal watches or warnings in effect.

In the north Pacific, Tropical Storm Javier formed overnight. Forecasters said that late Thursday it was 210 miles (338 kilometers) southwest of Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, with maximum sustained winds of 45 mph (72 kph).

Javier is moving northwest at 9 mph (about 14 kph).

There are no coastal watches or warnings in effect.

'Devastating': Mass shootings obscure daily U.S. gun toll

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Cameron Taylor was watching an illegal street race that had attracted hundreds to an intersection in Portland, Oregon, but decided to leave as the crowd got increasingly unruly. Moments later, gunfire erupted and Taylor was hit by a stray bullet as he and a friend headed to their car.

Police, who were overwhelmed with 911 calls about other shootings, couldn't control multiple street takeovers in the city that night and had trouble finding the victims of three shootings that occurred during the chaos.

"His friend who was with him put him in the car and drove him out to get him to the hospital, but he was not able to make it and that friend called his parents" to say Taylor was dead, family friend Erin Russell told The Associated Press.

Taylor, 20, died Sunday the same day that four high-profile, public shooting rampages in Bend, Oregon, Phoenix, Detroit and Houston drew national headlines. His slaying went largely unnoticed amid the daily toll of gun violence that has come to define Portland and a number of other American cities since the pandemic.

Homicide rates appear to be dropping in some major U.S. cities, such as New York and Chicago, but in others killings are on the rise, particularly from guns. In Portland, the homicide rate surged 207% since 2019 and there have been more than 800 shootings so far this year. In Phoenix, police Chief Jeri Williams said this week the gun violence was the worst she'd seen in 33 years on the job.

"How many more officers have to be shot? How many more community members have to be killed before those in our community take a stand? This is not only a Phoenix police issue, this is a community issue," she said after a weekend that tallied 17 shootings and 11 homicides citywide.

Now, police are on edge heading into Labor Day weekend, with its traditional end-of-summer festivities, and some are adding extra patrols as they brace for more potential violence.

In Portland, police busy with three killings and nine non-fatal shootings in 48 hours couldn't control three illegal street races last weekend that attracted hundreds and shut down major intersections for hours. In Houston, the day after a gunman shot five neighbors, killing three, another man shot two sisters before killing himself.

In the past two weeks, authorities in Phoenix have confiscated 711 guns and made 525 gun-related arrests as part of a targeted crackdown. Nearly 90% of homicides there this year were by gun, police said. In Detroit, where a man is accused of shooting three people at random on city streets last weekend, authorities are also cracking down on gun violence in high-crime neighborhoods through Labor Day.

"Let's stop talking about our inability to respond to crime in the community. Let's stop advertising to criminals that they're going to get away with it," Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler said, using an expletive at a City Council meeting this week after police Chief Chuck Lovell once more asked for more officers.

"I think we should stop using the messaging at every turn, that the reason we can't help our citizens with basic criminal justice issues is because we don't have the personnel," Wheeler said. "We've got to figure out better ways to address this crisis."

Last weekend's rampages — which included a heavily armed assailant who stormed a central Oregon supermarket, random shootings on Detroit streets and a Phoenix man who opened fire while wearing body armor — were shocking and scary, but they aren't representative of the broader toll gun violence is

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taking on American society, experts said.

Victims killed in mass shootings make up about 1% of all those killed in gun homicides nationwide, despite headlines that instill fear in many Americans, said James Fox, a professor at Northeastern University who has created a database of mass killings stretching back to 2006 with The Associated Press and USA Today.

All four shootings last weekend didn't even meet the database's definition of a mass killing — four or more people, excluding the assailant, killed in a 24-hour period — but they nonetheless sowed fear because of the random nature of the violence, he added.

"Those don't tend to make news. They don't tend to scare people because people say, 'Well, that's not my family,'" Fox said. "We have as many as 20,000 gun homicides a year, and most of those are one victim. Sometimes two, sometimes three, (but) rarely four or more."

The pandemic and the social unrest it caused has also played a role. Eight million Americans became first-time gun owners between 2019 and 2021, said Jeffrey Butts, director of the research and evaluation center for the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at City University of New York.

"We already had 400 million guns in circulation. So when you bump that up and include a lot of first-timers in the population, you get accidents, you get precipitous behavior, you get people reacting to small insults and conflicts with their guns because they're in their pocket now," he said.

Meanwhile Taylor's friends and family mourn his death in Portland.

The car aficionado and beloved big brother who loved barbecues and spending time with his family was "at the wrong place at the wrong time," Russell said.

"He has a lot of friends and a lot of family who love him dearly, and this is a devastating loss."

Today in History: September 3, Treaty of Paris is signed

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Sept. 3, the 246th day of 2022. There are 119 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 3, 1783, representatives of the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Paris, which officially ended the Revolutionary War.

On this date:

In 1861, during the Civil War, Confederate forces invaded the border state of Kentucky, which had declared its neutrality in the conflict.

In 1939, Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declared war on Germany, two days after the Nazi invasion of Poland; in a radio address, Britain's King George VI said, "With God's help, we shall prevail." The same day, a German U-boat torpedoed and sank the British liner SS Athenia some 250 miles off the Irish coast, killing more than 100 out of the 1,400 or so people on board.

In 1943, Allied forces invaded Italy during World War II, the same day Italian officials signed a secret armistice with the Allies.

In 1970, legendary football coach Vince Lombardi, 57, died in Washington, D.C.

In 1976, America's Viking 2 lander touched down on Mars to take the first close-up, color photographs of the red planet's surface.

In 1999, a French judge closed a two-year inquiry into the car crash that killed Princess Diana, dismissing all charges against nine photographers and a press motorcyclist, and concluding the accident was caused by an inebriated driver.

In 2003, Paul Hill, a former minister who said he murdered an abortion doctor and his escort to save the lives of unborn babies, was executed in Florida by injection, becoming the first person put to death in the United States for anti-abortion violence.

In 2005, President George W. Bush ordered more than 7,000 active duty forces to the Gulf Coast as his administration intensified efforts to rescue Katrina survivors and send aid to the hurricane-ravaged region in the face of criticism it did not act quickly enough.

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In 2009, a private funeral service was held in Glendale, California, for pop superstar Michael Jackson, whose body was entombed in a mausoleum more than two months after his death.

In 2010, Defense Secretary Robert Gates toured U.S. bases and war zones in Afghanistan, saying he saw and heard evidence that the American counterinsurgency strategy was taking hold in critical Kandahar province.

In 2012, Sun Myung Moon, 92, a self-proclaimed messiah who founded the Unification Church, died in Gapeyeong, South Korea.

In 2019, Walmart said it would stop selling ammunition for handguns and short-barrel rifles, and the store chain requested that customers not openly carry firearms in its stores; the announcement followed a shooting at a Walmart store in Texas that left 22 people dead.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama consoled victims of Hurricane Isaac along the Gulf Coast and stoked the enthusiasm of union voters in the industrial heartland, blending a hard political sell with a softer show of sympathy on the eve of the Democratic National Convention. Prolific character actor Michael Clarke Duncan, 54, died in Los Angeles.

Five years ago: North Korea carried out its sixth and strongest nuclear test, detonating what it said was a hydrogen bomb. Walter Becker, co-founder of the 1970s rock group Steely Dan, died at the age of 67.

One year ago: Police went door to door in search of more victims from the catastrophic flooding across the Northeast from the remnants of Hurricane Ida, which left nearly 50 people dead in the region. Sheriff's deputies warned residents returning to communities outside New Orleans to come equipped like survivalists because of the lack of basic services in the aftermath of the hurricane, which knocked out electricity to more than 1 million customers in Louisiana. An Arizona man, Jacob Chansley, who wore face paint, no shirt and a furry hat with horns when he joined the mob that stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 pleaded guilty to a felony charge. (Chansley would be sentenced to 41 months in prison.) Authorities said improved weather conditions had slowed the growth of a huge California wildfire near Lake Tahoe resort communities.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Pauline Collins is 82. Rock singer-musician Al Jardine is 80. Actor Valerie Perrine is 79. Rock musician Donald Brewer (Grand Funk Railroad) is 74. Rock guitarist Steve Jones (The Sex Pistols) is 67. Actor Steve Schirripa is 65. Actor Holt McCallany is 58. Rock singer-musician Todd Lewis is 57. Actor Costas Mandylor is 57. Actor Charlie Sheen is 57. Singer Jennifer Paige is 49. Dance-rock musician Redfoo is 47. Actor Ashley Jones is 46. Actor Nichole Hiltz is 44. Actor Joel Johnstone is 44. Actor Nick Wechsler is 44. Rock musician Tomo Milicevic (30 Seconds to Mars) is 43. Bluegrass musician Darren Nicholson (Balsam Range) is 39. Actor Christine Woods is 39. Actor Garrett Hedlund is 38. Olympic gold medal snowboarder Shaun White is 36. Hip-hop singer August Alsina is 30.