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Tuesday, Sept. 20

Dress-up: First Letter of your Name at HS, Beach Day at Elementary.

School Breakfast: Frittatas.

School Lunch: Tacos with toppings.

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, corn, chocolate cake, fruit, whole wheat bread.

10 a.m.: Boys Golf at Sisseton Golf Course

Volleyball hosts Warner: C and 7th grade at 5 p.m., JV and 8th grade at 6 p.m. with varsity to follow. JH matches in GHS Gym.

Pantry at Community Center open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store Open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. at 209 N Main.

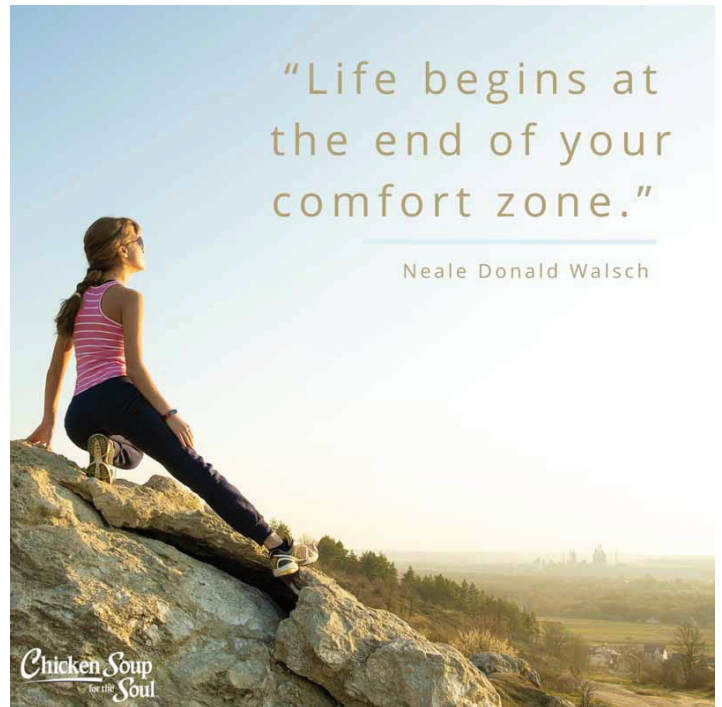
UMC: Conde Ad Council; Bible Study at 10 a.m.; The Walk Bible Study by Pastor Brandon in Conde, 7 p.m.

Olive Grove Bridge Party at noon.

Wednesday, Sept. 21

Dress-up: Dress like your parent at HS, Dream Job Day at elementary. School Breakfast: Hash brown pizza.

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



School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, corn o Brian
Senior Menu: Hearty vegetable soup, chicken salad sandwich, Mandarin oranges, peanutbutter cookie.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club and Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

UMC: Youth Breakfast at 7:30 a.m.; Community Coffee Hour at 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation Parents Meeting at 6 p.m.; Groton Ad Council at 7 p.m.

Emmanuel: 6 p.m.: 7th and 8th grade confirmation

NO OUTDOOR WATERING!
Effective immediatley, no outdoor watering is permitted in the City of Groton until further notice. (About 4-6 weeks)

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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The GHS Homecoming Royalty with their parents are Nick and Jamie Simon with King Cole Simon, Queen Aspen Johnson with Melanie and Fred Johnson. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Royalty Court

Left to right are Jacob Lewandowski, Kaleb Antonsen, Andrew Marzahn, Caleb Hanten, Scroll Carrier Nolan Rose, King Cole Simon, Queen Aspen Johnson, Scroll Carrier Eva Henderson, Gracie Traphagen, Brooke Gengerke, Shallyn Foertsch and Shaylee Peterson. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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GHS Homecoming Royalty
Cole Simon and Aspen Johnson

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Burning of the "G"

The burning of the "G" was held after the homecoming coronation. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The GHS Pep Band, under the direction of Desiree Yeigh, played the school song at the pep rally during the Burning of the "G". (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Parade Marshalls

The 2022 Parade Marshalls are Merle and Janet Harder. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Preschool Developmental Screening

Groton Area Schools #06-6

Preschool Developmental Screening is for children ages 3-4 who reside in the Groton Area School District. The child needs to be 3 years of age before the screening date/day. This screening is not required to enter Kindergarten.

The screening consists of adaptive, personal/social, communicating/speaking, motor, and concepts skills. If you believe your child has difficulties in any of these areas please contact the school.

If your child is already receiving services or enrolled at Groton Elementary School they will not need to be screened. If your child has already been screened but you have concerns please contact the elementary school. If you are new to the district and have a child under the age of 5, we also ask you to contact the elementary school.

Screenings will be held on Friday, September 30 8:00-3:30. Information will be sent to families who have already been identified. Please contact Heidi Krueger at 605-397-2317 to schedule a screening time.

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The juniors put on a skit of their own with their own candidates. The one on the left was the crowd pleaser winner. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Aubray Miller talked about the cheerleaders. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Adam Franken talked about cross country. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Chelsea Hanson talked about volleyball. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Desiree Yeigh talked about band. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Joel Guthmiller talked about boys golf.
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Chris Kucker talked about girls soccer.
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Andrew Marzahn was designated as the senior speaker for the football team. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Shaun Wanner talked about football. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



GHS Cheerleaders. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



GHS Pep Band. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Weekly Round[s] Up September 12-18 by Senator Mike Rounds

The Weekly Round[s] Up is back after our in-state work period. I had a busy couple weeks traveling around the state and visiting with South Dakotans. I made stops in Aberdeen, Deadwood, Highmore, Huron, Milbank, Mitchell, Sioux Falls, Spearfish, Wessington Springs and Wolsey. It's always good to be back at home in South Dakota, but now we have a few weeks of work in DC. Here's my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakota groups I visited with: South Dakota Farmers Union; Dakota Credit Union Association; South Dakota Growth Energy; Brandon Maddox, CEO of Silencer Central; Leadership from the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and Oglala Sioux Tribe. Additionally, I spoke virtually at the 2022 Sioux Falls Cybersecurity Conference.

Other meetings this week: Andrew Cecere, CEO of US Bank; Mitch Krebs, CEO of Coeur Mining; and Jamie Dimon, CEO of JP Morgan. I met with two nominees being processed in the Senate Armed Services Committee. I had a call with the Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin. We had our weekly Senate Prayer Breakfast (Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota was our speaker). I hosted a follow-up meeting with our cybersecurity working group. The meeting included the National Cyber Director, the Executive Director of the Cyberspace Solarium Commission and congressional leadership. I also gave a keynote address on artificial intelligence at the Global Emerging Threats Technology Summit.

Additionally, I participated in a special breakfast in honor of my friend and colleague Senator Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma. Senator Inhofe and I have traveled the world together through our roles on the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Africa holds a special place in our hearts. This breakfast was held by the Rwandan Embassy and was attended by ambassadors from many African nations.

Met with South Dakotans from: Aberdeen, Antelope, Britton, Buffalo, Cavour, Clark, Dallas, De Smet, Fort Pierre, Groton, Harrisburg, Hartford, Huron, Ipswich, Kimball, Lake Preston, Madison, Miller, Mitchell, Oacoma, Parade, Parkston, Pine Ridge, Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Tea, Watertown, Wessington Springs, White Horse, White Lake and Union Center.

Topics discussed: The impact of inflation on South Dakotans; the need to include Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (MCOOL) in the 2023 Farm Bill; the importance of cybersecurity; and the need for stronger law enforcement coordination among state, tribal and federal officials.

Legislation introduced: This week, I introduced the TRUCKS Act, or the Trucking Regulations Unduly Constricting Known Service-Providers Act. This bill would remove burdensome government regulations, which are making it more difficult to recruit and retain truck drivers for small businesses in South Dakota.

Votes taken: Eight – all of these were on nominations for judicial or executive positions.

Hearings: There were two hearings in the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee this week, and one of them was with Gary Gensler, the Chair of the US Securities and Exchange Commission. We also had two hearings in the Senate Armed Services Committee, both of which were on nominations. Additionally, there was a Senate Foreign Relations Committee business meeting where we passed a bill supporting Taiwan. I voted against a bill authorizing funds for the Department of State.

Classified briefings: We had a cybersecurity briefing on the Directive Authority for Cyberspace Operations.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Deadwood, Elm Springs, Rapid City and Spearfish.

Steps taken this week: 65,854 (or 30.4 miles)

Video of the week: I joined CNN's State of the Union to discuss the border crisis, abortion and foreign policy:



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The final stripe for the third pickleball court on the Tennis Court was done on Monday, completing the project. Still, everyone is waiting for the posts for the nets. When the posts come in, Alejandro Martinez and Carlos Rosado from Pro Track and Tennis, Inc., will come back to complete the net project. Meanwhile there are temporary pickle ball nets available. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The marching band is out practicing for the upcoming parades. (Photo by Tina Kosel)

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda September 20, 2022 – 7:00pm City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

- Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1

(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)

- Holiday Overtime Discussion
- Sanitary Sewer Discussion & Water Project Update - IMEG
- Discussion Regarding Stop Signs at Intersection of West 5th Ave and North Washington Street
- Discussion Regarding Installation of Fire Hydrant by Community Gardens
- Minutes
- Bills
- August Finance Report
- 2022 Baseball Report
- First Reading of Ordinance #762 Certifying 2023 City of Groton Property Tax Levy to Brown County
- Pay Request #1 – Dahme Construction Co, Inc.
- Move Water Fountain from Thrift Store to Library
- Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
- Adjournment

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Thats Life/Tony Bender

Editor's note: It's been more than six years since the death of Muhammad Ali. Tony remembered his hero in this column written after Ali's death,

If the sun wasn't as bright Friday, if the moon seemed morose, if the stars seemed muted, it's because the world is less than it once was. That which is irreplaceable is gone. An expanse of soul, poetry, conscience, heart and humor have left us.

I loved Muhammad Ali. I embraced him when I was in junior high, a defiant age, a man-child living in a rebellious time, and Ali was the biggest rebel of them all. He didn't just defy convention, he danced around it, teased it, ultimately knocked it out, and then wrote poems about it. Rumble, young man, rumble!

Ali represented all rebels when he emerged from a three-year exile in 1971 to challenge the great Joe Frazier, a man who, in a trilogy of epic fights, extracted huge chunks of Ali's essence.

I met the great warrior once. Together, Joe Frazier and I leaned over the railing of a riverboat chugging up the Missouri and watched the world go by. He had been Ali's friend, until Ali cruelly called him an Uncle Tom and a gorilla. He was neither. Frazier was gentle, soft-spoken, yet coiled inside. I liked him and felt guilty for cheering against him all those years ago, but knowing I would do so again.

"We forgive Muhammad Ali his excesses," Dave Kindred once wrote, "because we see in him the child in us, and if he is foolish or cruel, if he is arrogant, if he is outrageously in love with his reflection, we forgive him because we no more can condemn him than condemn a rainbow for dissolving into the dark. Rainbows are born of thunderstorms, and Muhammad Ali is both."

Ali's Muslim religion forbade him to take up arms. "I ain't got no quarrel with the Viet Cong," he said. "No Viet Cong ever called me nigger."

When I fully understood the reason for Ali's exile in the prime of his boxing career, I loved him more for his sense of justice, his moral center. By then, I was watching the draft lottery numbers fall every night on television, each one representing scores of young men destined for Vietnam and a war that made no sense. I thought about Ali and wondered what I would do if my number was called. But the draft ended, the war ended, before I was forced to make that decision.

They called him a coward. Nonsense. He could have done his brief service boxing exhibitions, a morale booster for the troops. Instead, he stood on principles and it cost him dearly. But it also elevated him in a way only tribulations can and, from that platform, he spoke hard, unpopular truths.

He'd represented his country at the Olympics in 1960, worn his gold medal for two days out of pride, only to return to the segregation and second-class citizenry of his times.

Later, he would spur the American conscience with gentle, chiding humor. "We've been brainwashed. Everything good is supposed to be white. We look at Jesus, and we see a white, with blond hair and blue eyes. We look at all the angels; we see white, with blond hair and blue eyes. Now, I'm sure there's a heaven in the sky and if colored folks die and go to heaven, where are the colored angels? They must be in the kitchen preparing the milk and honey! Even Tarzan, the king of the jungle in black Africa, he's white... All the good cowboys ride the white horses and wear white hats. Angel food cake is the white cake, but the devil's food cake is chocolate. When are we going to wake up as a people and end the lie that white is better than black?"

Was he The Greatest? Yes. You should be slapped for even asking. When he fought the punishing George Foreman in 1974, I listened to my transistor radio into the night for updates, praying he would survive. Win? I held out only a razor-thin slice of hope. Ali was too old, Foreman too strong. And yet... a miracle, created before our very eyes. When the fight ended in the outdoor stadium in Zaire, the skies opened up and it rained as if he had summoned the universe to his cause. He was magical, mythical and, ultimately, mortal.

Sometimes, in daydreams, I hatched plans to meet Ali to tell him what he meant to me, how much I admired him, to have him raise a fist to my chin and scowl for the camera. But Muhammad Ali did not need another testament to his greatness, one more worshipful fan.

Irony. Hubris. Recklessness. Heroism, nobility and sacrifice—it's all there in Ali's story. The ransom he paid to Foreman, Frazier and a tearful Larry Holmes, who never wanted to destroy his hero, was ultimately measured in lost years, the loss of his voice. This was the deal he struck.

Like steel tempered in the forge, he could not have been The Greatest without the trials and setbacks. Ali needed mountains to climb. And in the end, Muhammad Ali became the mountain.

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WEEK 4 - SDFBCA Coaches Poll

11AAA

SF Jefferson 4-0 133 (25)
SF O'Gorman 3-1 100 (2)
Harrisburg 3-1 84
Brandon Valley 2-2 62
SF Lincoln 2-2 31
RV: RC Stevens 13

11AA

Pierre 4-0 135 (27)
Tea 4-0 107
Yankton 3-1 73
Brookings 3-1 51
Sturgis 2-2 11
RV: Mitchell 10, Aberdeen Central 8

11A

West Central 4-0 124 (14)
Dell Rapids 4-0 121 (14)
Canton 2-2 65
Beresford 3-1 42
SF Christian 2-2 25
RV: Dakota Valley 17, Madison 12, Lennox 10

11B

Winner 5-0 110 (20)
EPJ 4-0 94 (4)
BEE 5-0 61
Aberdeen Roncalli 5-0 57
MVP 5-0 29
RV: MCM 8, Sioux Valley 7

9AA

1. Howard - (21) 120 5-0
2. Wall - (4) 93 5-0
3. Hamlin - (2) 69 5-0
4. Hanson - 46 3-1
5. Elkton-Lake Benton - (1) 36 5-0
RV: Parkston 26 4-1, Bon Homme 5 3-1, Platte-Geddes 5 2-2

9A

1. Gregory - (19) 121 4-0
2. Warner - (4) 99 4-0
3. Castlewood - (1) 62 4-0
4. Lyman - 40 4-0
5. Alcester-Hudson - 30 4-0
RV: Canistota (1) 13 2-3, Wolsey-Wessington 13 2-2, Harding Co./Bison 11 4-1

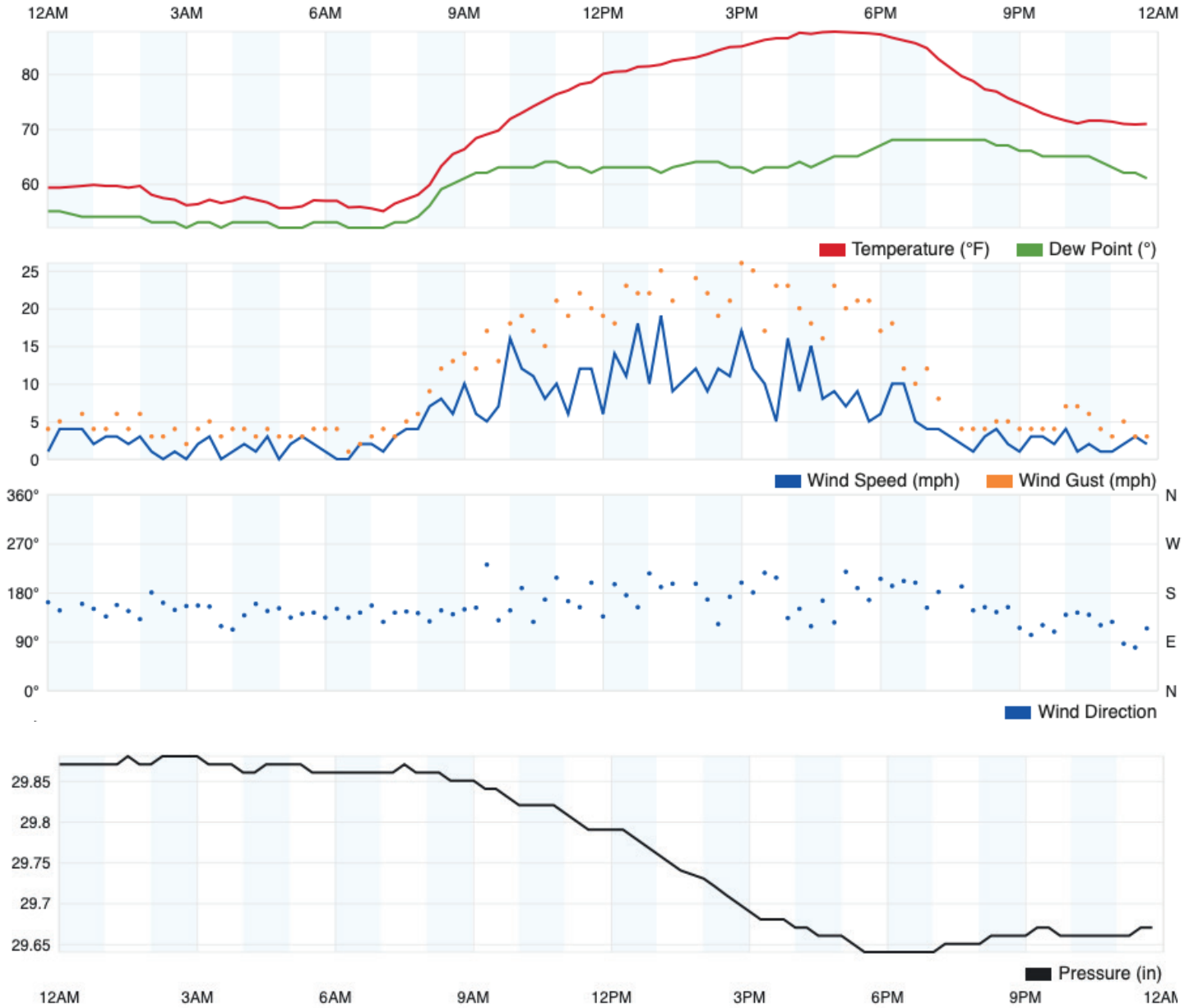
9B

1. Herreid/Selby Area - (22) 110 4-0
2. Hitchcock-Tulare - (5) 100 5-0
3. Sully Buttes - 66 5-0
4. De Smet - 65 3-2
5. Avon - (1) 32 3-2
RV: Kadoka Area 18 2-2, Dell Rapids St. Mary 14 2-3, Corsica-Stickney 10 4-1, Faith 8 4-1

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny then
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 83 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 48 °F

Wednesday



Sunny then
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 66 °F

Wednesday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 37 °F

Thursday

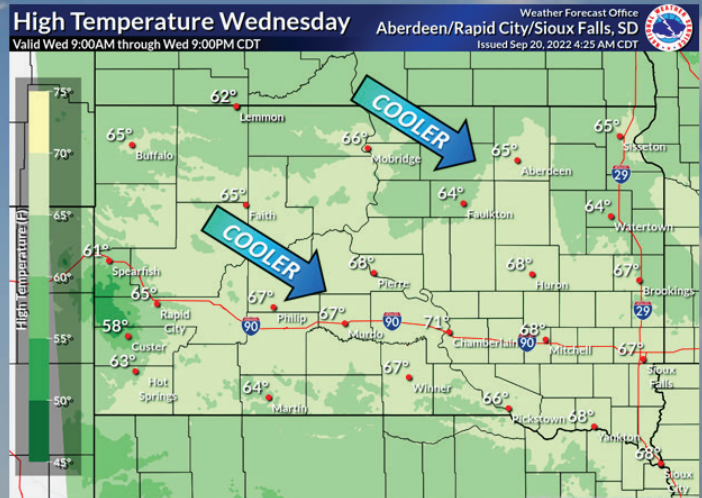
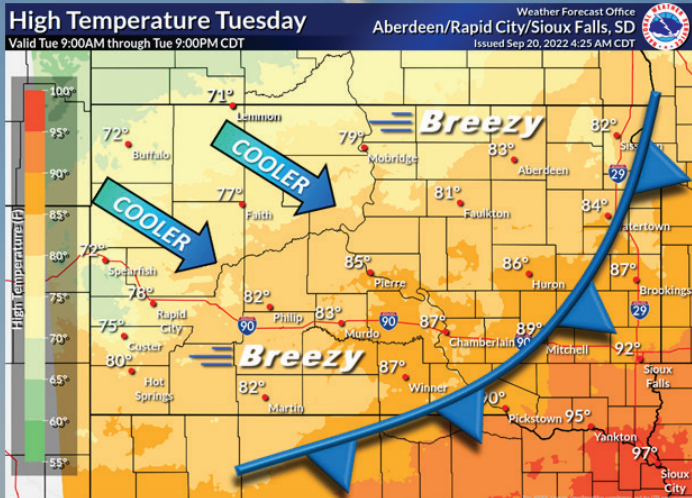


Mostly Sunny

High: 63 °F

Remaining Warm Today, Cooler on Wednesday

Breezy and gusty northerly winds developing through the morning



National Weather Service Aberdeen, South Dakota

Updated: 9/20/2022 5:45 AM Central

A frontal boundary is moving across the region this morning, with northerly winds increasing throughout the rest of the morning. Temperatures will remain mild/warm today as the cold air will lag behind the front a bit. The heart of the cool air will begin moving in tonight and Wednesday, with highs only in the 60s on Wednesday. Mid to upper 30s are in the forecast for Wednesday night, with patchy frost not out of the question over portions of northern South Dakota.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 88 °F at 5:01 PM

Low Temp: 55 °F at 7:14 AM

Wind: 26 mph at 2:51 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 19 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 1937

Record Low: 20 in 1901

Average High: 73°F

Average Low: 45°F

Average Precip in Sept.: 1.33

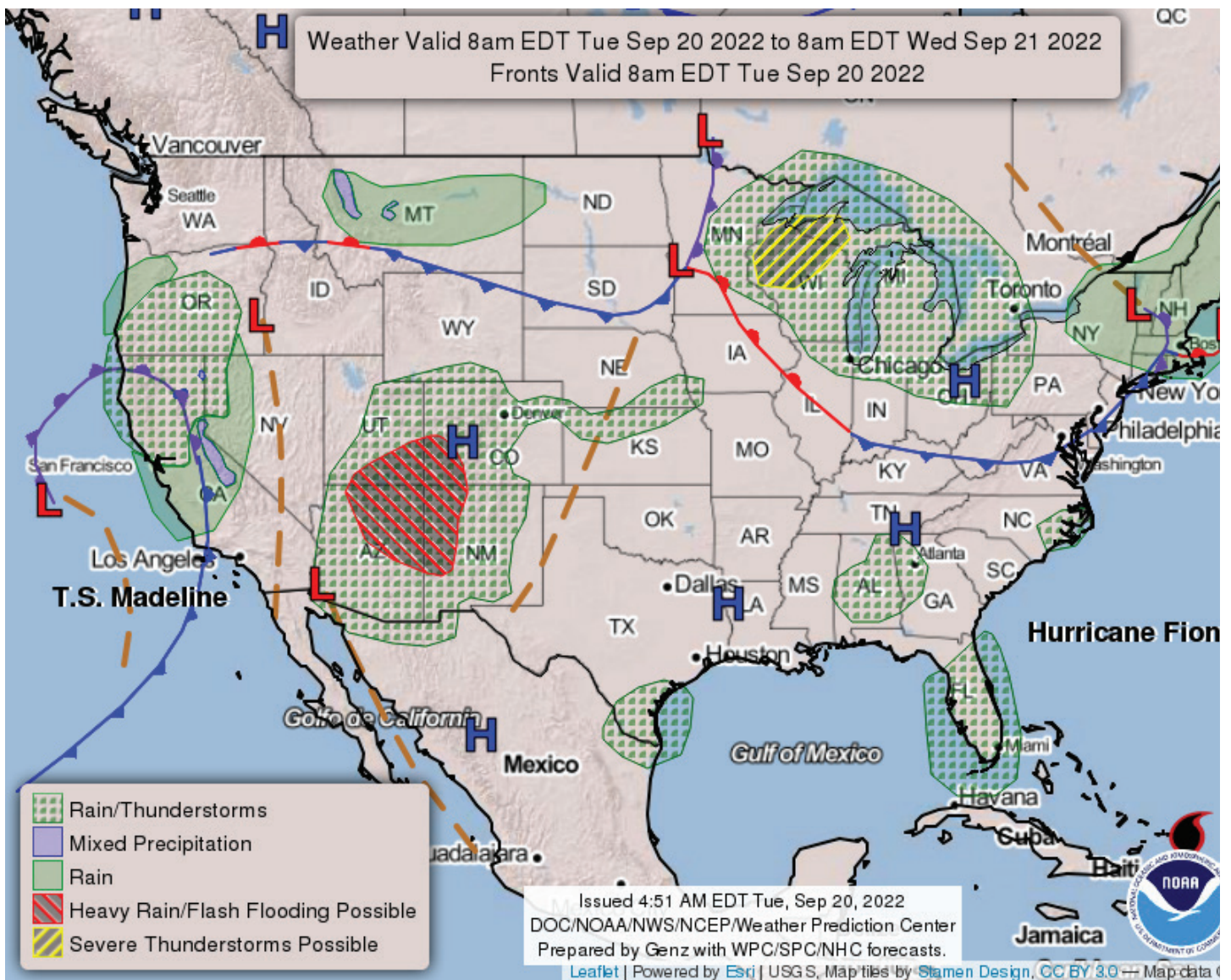
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.07

Average Precip to date: 17.67

Precip Year to Date: 16.05

Sunset Tonight: 7:35:34 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:17:06 AM



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Today in Weather History

September 20, 1970: During the late afternoon, golfball hail fell in and around Redfield with a tornado reported just north of Doland. No damage was reported with the hail or the tornado.

September 20, 1972: About 430 pm, in southeast South Dakota, a tornado caused an estimated \$95,000 damage to property and 50,000 damage to crops in Utica and nearby rural areas. Buildings were damaged; trees and power lines were downed.

1845 - A tornado traveled 275 miles across Lake Ontario, New York and Lake Champlain. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1909: A large and deadly Category 3 hurricane made landfall near Grand Isle, Louisiana during the late evening hours. The states of Louisiana and Mississippi showed catastrophic damage resulting in 371 deaths and \$265 million in damage (2010 USD).

1926 - A hurricane which hit Miami, FL, on the 18th, pounded Pensacola with wind gusts to 152 mph. Winds raged in excess of 100 mph for four hours, and above 75 mph for 20 hours. (The Weather Channel)

1961: On September 10th, the Television Infrared Observation Satellite observed an area of thunderstorms west-southwest of the Cape Verde Islands, suggesting a possible tropical cyclone. This storm is the first large tropical cyclone to be discovered on satellite imagery and would eventually become Hurricane Esther. On September 20th, Hurricane Esther, a Category 4 storm off of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina began to slow down as it moved north-northeast well off the Jersey shore. The storm continued to weaken as it made a five-day loop south of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, then moved to Cape Cod and into Maine on the 26th.

1967 - Hurricane Beulah moved into South Texas, and torrential rains from the hurricane turned the rich agricultural areas of South Texas into a large lake. Hurricane Beulah also spawned a record 115 tornadoes. (David Ludlum)

1983 - The temperature at West Yellowstone MT plunged to six degrees below zero, while the temperature at San Francisco CA soared to 94 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in Oklahoma and west Texas. In Oklahoma, a thunderstorm at Seiling produced three inches of rain in one hour, golf ball size hail, and wind gusts to 60 mph which collapsed a tent at the state fair injuring nine persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Showers and thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in central Wyoming, and snow in some of the higher elevations. Casper WY reported 1.75 inches of rain in 24 hours, and a thunderstorm north of the Wild Horse Reservoir produced 1.90 inches of rain in just forty minutes.

1989 - Hugo jilted Iris. Hurricane Hugo churned toward the South Atlantic Coast, gradually regaining strength along the way. Tropical Storm Iris got too close to Hugo, and began to weaken. A cold front brought strong and gusty winds to the Great Basin and the Southern Plateau Region, with wind gusts to 44 mph reported at Kingman AZ. (The National Weather Summary)

2002: A glacial avalanche buries the village of Karmadon in Russia, killing more than 100 people.

2005 - Hurricane Rita tracked through the Florida Straits and just south of the Florida Keys. Winds were sustained at tropical storm force at Key West, where peak winds gusted to 76 mph.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WICKEDNESS VS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Solomon makes no apology for the wicked and their lifestyle. In fact, his choice of words leaves no doubt about what they do and how to recognize them.

For example: "A man cannot be established through wickedness; the advice of the wicked is deceitfulness; the words of the wicked lie in wait for blood; wicked men are overthrown and are no more; men with warped minds are despised." And, in the end: "The Lord condemns a crafty man!"

However, the righteous: "cannot be uprooted; the plans of the righteous are just; the speech of the righteous rescues them; the house of the righteous stands forever; the house of the righteous stands firm." And ultimately: "A good man finds favor with the Lord."

It is most interesting to note that the wicked have a completely different approach to life than the righteous. They have a single focus. Whatever they do begins with the question: "How will what I am doing benefit me?" This opens the door to being deceitful and dishonest, being cunning and waiting for the right moment to take advantage of the weak, uninformed, less educated, those looking for someone they can trust to help them, the vulnerable.

When we look at the righteous, we see the exact opposite: what they do is steadfast, open, will stand the test of time and God's scrutiny, and they want to be just and fair as God is just and fair. Whatever they do, ultimately, will be right and just in the eyes of God and man.

The final reward? God's blessings or condemnation. What are you living for?

Prayer: Lord, how we live and how we get what we have reflects our attitude toward and our relationship with You. May what we do always honor You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The wicked die and disappear, but the family of the godly stands firm. Proverbs 12:7



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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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)
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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Lotto America

12-31-45-47-48, Star Ball: 6, ASB: 2

(twelve, thirty-one, forty-five, forty-seven, forty-eight; Star Ball: six; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$23,210,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 277,000,000

Powerball

07-15-36-46-67, Powerball: 7, Power Play: 2

(seven, fifteen, thirty-six, forty-six, sixty-seven; Powerball: seven; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$251,000,000

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli def. Aberdeen Christian, 25-10, 25-7, 25-9

Colome def. St. Francis Indian, 25-16, 25-15, 19-25, 26-24

Ethan def. Sioux Falls Lutheran, 25-12, 22-25, 26-24, 12-25, 15-7

Hamlin def. Estelline/Hendricks, 21-25, 20-25, 25-16, 25-16, 16-14

Little Wound def. Oelrichs, 25-18, 20-25, 25-22, 25-12

McCook Central/Montrose def. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, 17-25, 25-18, 25-14, 25-23

Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Wessington Springs, 25-14, 27-25, 23-25, 25-16

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

S. Dakota social studies hearings pit teachers against Noem

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota teachers and school administrators overwhelmingly voiced opposition on Monday to Gov. Kristi Noem's proposed standards for social studies in public schools, saying the proposal saddles them with expanding and unwieldy criteria to cover in classrooms but fails to teach students to think analytically about history.

Educators, who say they were left out of the process of developing the standards, voiced their opposition as the state's Board of Education Standards kicked off a series of public hearings Monday before deciding whether to adopt them.

Their objections present a determined challenge to the Republican governor's proposed standards, which could remake the state's standards for history and civics by relying heavily on material from Hillsdale College, a private, conservative institution in Michigan.

Conservatives and some parents who spoke at the Board of Education Standards hearing in Aberdeen on Monday defended the proposal as a robust effort to address a lack of knowledge of American civics and revive an appreciation for the nation's founding ideals. Noem, a potential 2024 White House contender, has billed the proposed standards as "free from political agendas" and the "very best" in the nation.

But two educators who were on the 15-member standards commission have spoken out against the standards they ostensibly helped create.

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"The process was hijacked and reduced the commission to essentially proofreading or randomly interjecting content to a bulleted list of exhaustive curriculum topics while the governor's chief of staff, not the secretary of education, had to approve each change," Samantha Walder, an elementary school principal who was a part of the standards commission, told the Board of Education Standards.

"When our small group of educator opponents tried to make significant changes, we were dismissed by the chair."

Roughly 87% of people who have submitted hundreds of written comments to the Department of Education voiced opposition. Teachers and historians, including the American Historical Association, have excoriated the proposal as failing to teach students to inquire into history and think critically about it.

Members of several American Indian tribes in the state have also said the state failed to consult with the tribes in developing the standards.

At Monday's hearing, conservatives supportive of the standards countered that the proposal increases the references to Native American history and leaders. They also argued for an idea popular in conservative circles: that education needs to be cleansed of pedagogical terms and owned by people besides professional educators.

"The complaint that students aren't required to do higher-ordered thinking because the standards don't use guild-approved buzzwords rings hollow," said Jon Schaff, a political science professor at Northern State University who presented the commission's rebuttal on Monday.

He added: "This is the kind of education our children need if they are to be informed, educated citizens ready to take on the arduous task of self-government."

At Monday's hearing, teachers and school administrators, with few exceptions, urged the board to reject the standards and suggested it consider ones developed by a commission of 44 South Dakota educators last year.

Last year's commission, which was facilitated by the National Council for the Social Studies, began its work with the state's established standards and built on them, notably to increase references to Native American history and culture.

The standards faced objections from conservatives who accused the National Council for Social Studies of advancing certain controversial teachings on race, such as the academic framework known as critical race theory. The organization has said it does not advance the teaching of critical race theory, but it does not shy away from discussing the facts of racism in the United States.

Two conservatives resigned from last year's group in protest, and a conservative commentator, Stanley Kurtz, took to the pages of the National Review to call for Noem to throw out the proposed standards. In October last year, she did just that.

The governor restarted the process with a smaller workgroup dominated by conservatives and hired a former politics professor at Hillsdale College, William Morrissey, to lead the group's work. It produced a 128-page proposal that contained distinct echoes of "The Hillsdale 1776 Curriculum," which glorifies the nation's founders and criticizes the expansion of U.S. government programs.

Meanwhile, Hillsdale has also been involved in helping private and charter schools across the country implement classical education models that emphasize learning around traditional, Western writing and ideas. Rachel Oglesby, Noem's chief of policy, told the Board of Education Standards that she hoped the standards would bring the classical model to all the state's public schools.

The board will hold three more public hearings before deciding whether to adopt the standards next year.

South Dakota Homeowners Win Key Ruling in Lawsuit Over Dangers Caused by Unstable Underground Mines

Judge approves class certification for Hideaway Hills homeowners in class-action lawsuit against state
RAPID CITY, S.D., Sept. 19, 2022 /PRNewswire/ -- A South Dakota judge has awarded class certification to all owners of homes rendered worthless by unstable underground mines operated by the state of South Dakota.

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The ruling on Thursday means all 158 homeowners in the Hideaway Hills neighborhood in Black Hawk, South Dakota, are part of the class-action lawsuit unless they opt out. A lawsuit filed by the Fox Rothschild law firm will now proceed demanding that the state pay full value of each home based upon the fair market value of the home before the collapse incident, plus lost opportunity costs. Homeowners can participate in the lawsuit without impacting any claims they might have against other defendants.

Obtaining class certification is a major milestone and follows extensive work by geological experts to document the imminent dangers faced by all homes in the neighborhood and the challenges that homeowners would face pursuing individual lawsuits. Circuit Court Judge Kevin Krull previously ruled that the plaintiffs "demonstrated that their injuries likely will be redressed by a favorable decision – i.e., an award of damages, based on their constitutional right to individually bring an inverse condemnation case against the State."

"This has been a living nightmare for every family in this neighborhood," said lead attorney Kathleen Barrow. "The judge carefully reviewed the detailed findings from geological experts and agreed that a class-action lawsuit is the best way for homeowners to obtain justice. We look forward to the next phase of this litigation and continuing to seek a fair resolution for members of the class."

The underground dangers were exposed in April 2020 when an abandoned gypsum mine collapse opened a large hole near East Daisy Drive. According to geological and engineering analysis, correcting the subsurface dangers would require removing the homes, which would cost more than the homes are worth with no guarantee that the remediation would work. Mounting a lawsuit would be too costly for any individual homeowner. As a class-action lawsuit, those costs would be shared by all of the plaintiffs.

The case is Andrew Morse and John and Emily Clarke et al. v. State of South Dakota et al., No. 46CIV-20-000295 in the Meade County 4th Judicial District.

Russia ups pressure on West as Ukraine gains ground

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The Kremlin said Tuesday that there are no prospects for a negotiated end to the war in Ukraine and gave its blessing to efforts to swiftly bring regions already captured under Russia's complete control. Such a move could set the stage for Moscow to escalate the conflict if Ukrainian forces try to take the regions back.

A close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, former President Dmitry Medvedev, said that folding the separatist Luhansk and Donetsk regions of eastern Ukraine into Russia itself would make their redrawn frontiers "irreversible" and enable Moscow to use "any means" to defend them.

Pressure within Russia and from Moscow-backed leaders in Luhansk and Donetsk for regional votes that would pave their way to becoming fully Russian has increased in the wake of a Ukrainian counteroffensive — bolstered by Western-supplied weaponry — that is wresting back large areas of previously Russian-occupied territory.

Moscow-backed leaders in the Russian-occupied Kherson region of southern Ukraine and pro-Russia activists in the partly-occupied Zaporizhzhia region on Tuesday joined earlier calls from separatist authorities in Luhansk and Donetsk for speedy referendums on joining Russia.

Such votes would almost certainly go Moscow's way. The succession of appeals and Medvedev's backing for them suggested stiffening determination in the Kremlin to fend off further territorial gains by Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that there are no prospects for a diplomatic settlement. Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by Putin, said on his messaging app channel that votes in separatist regions are important to protect their residents and "restore historic justice" and would "completely change" Russia's future trajectory.

"After they are held and the new territories are taken into Russia's fold, a geopolitical transformation of the world will become irreversible," said Medvedev, who also served as Russia's president from 2008-2012.

"An encroachment on the territory of Russia is a crime that would warrant any means of self-defense," he said, adding that Russia would enshrine the new territories in its constitution so no future Russian

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leader could hand them back.

"That is why they fear those referendums so much in Kyiv and in the West," Medvedev said. "That is why they must be held."

The recapturing of large areas of previously Russian-occupied territory, most notably in the northeastern Kharkiv region, has strengthened Ukraine's arguments that its troops could deliver more stinging defeats to Russia with additional armament deliveries.

More heavy weaponry is on its way, with Slovenia this week promising 28 tanks and Germany pledging four additional self-propelled howitzers. More aid also is expected from Britain, already one of Ukraine's biggest military backers after the United States. British Prime Minister Liz Truss is expected to promise that in 2023, her government will "match or exceed" the 2.3 billion pounds (\$2.7 billion) in military aid given to Ukraine this year.

The swiftness of the Ukrainian counteroffensive also saw Russian forces abandon armored vehicles and other weapons as they beat hasty retreats. Ukrainian forces are recycling captured weaponry back into battle. A Washington-based think tank, The Institute for the Study of War, said Tuesday that abandoned Russian T-72 tanks are being used by Ukrainian forces seeking to push onward into Russian-occupied Luhansk.

In the counteroffensive's wake, Ukrainian officials found hundreds of graves near the once-occupied city of Izium. Yevhenii Yenin, a deputy minister in Ukraine's Internal Affairs Ministry, told a national telecast that officials found many bodies "with signs of violent death."

"These are broken ribs and broken heads, men with bound hands, broken jaws and severed genitalia," he said.

Ukrainian officials also have alleged Russian forces tortured people in occupied areas, including shocking them with radio telephones dating back to the Soviet era. Russia has repeatedly denied abusing or killing prisoners, though Ukrainian officials found mass graves around the city of Bucha after blunting a Russian offensive targeting the capital, Kyiv, at the start of the war.

Meanwhile, a Ukrainian push continues in the south of the country. Ukraine's southern military command said early Tuesday its troops sank a Russian barge carrying troops and weapons across the Dnipro River near the Russian-occupied city of Nova Kakhovka. It offered no other details on the sinking of the barge in the Russian-occupied Kherson region, which has been a major target in the Ukrainian counteroffensive.

In other developments:

— Moscow has likely moved its Kilo-class submarines from their station on the Crimean Peninsula to southern Russia over fears about them being struck by long-range Ukrainian fire, the British military said Tuesday. In a daily intelligence briefing, the British Defense Ministry said those submarines had "almost certainly" been moved to Krasnodar Krai in mainland Russia, instead of a naval base at Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula.

— McDonald's eateries in Kyiv were to begin serving again Tuesday for the first time since Russia invaded in February. Three restaurants planned to offer delivery service only initially, marking a step of sorts back toward the life Ukrainians knew before the war, which enters its seventh month later this week.

Texas sheriff investigating flights to Martha's Vineyard

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A Texas sheriff on Monday opened an investigation into two flights of migrants sent to Martha's Vineyard by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, but did not say what laws may have been broken in putting 48 Venezuelans on private planes last week from San Antonio.

Bexar County Sheriff Javier Salazar, an elected Democrat, railed against the flights that took off in his city as political posturing. But he said investigators had so far only spoken to attorneys representing some of the migrants and did not name any potential suspects who might face charges.

He also did not mention DeSantis in a news conference that appeared to mark the first time a law enforcement official has said they would look into the flights.

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"I believe there is some criminal activity involved here," Salazar said. "But at present we are trying to keep an open mind and we are going to investigate to find out what exact laws were broken if that does turn out to be the case."

DeSantis' office responded with a statement that said the migrants had been given more options to succeed in Massachusetts.

"Immigrants have been more than willing to leave Bexar County after being abandoned, homeless, and left to fend for themselves," DeSantis spokesperson Taryn Fenske said. "Florida gave them an opportunity to seek greener pastures in a sanctuary jurisdiction that offered greater resources for them, as we expected."

The Venezuelan migrants who were flown to the wealthy Massachusetts island from San Antonio on Wednesday said they were told they were going to Boston. Julio Henriquez, an attorney who met with several migrants, said they "had no idea of where they were going or where they were."

He said a Latina woman approached migrants at a city-run shelter in San Antonio and put them up at a nearby La Quinta Inn, where she visited daily with food and gift cards. She promised jobs and three months of housing in Washington, New York, Philadelphia and Boston, according to Henriquez.

Salazar said the migrants had been "preyed upon" and "hoodwinked."

Some Democrats have urged the Justice Department to investigate the flights, including California Gov. Gavin Newsom and U.S. Rep. Joaquin Castro, whose district includes San Antonio.

A federal investigation might be complicated, however. It's not clear whether anyone boarded buses or planes unwillingly, or that their civil rights were violated. The rights of asylum seekers arriving to the U.S. are also more limited because they are not citizens. The constitution, though, does protect them from discrimination based on race or national origin and from improper treatment by the government.

China quarantine bus crash prompts outcry over 'zero COVID'

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — A nighttime bus crash that killed 27 people in southwest China this week has set off a storm of anger online over the harshness of the country's strict COVID-19 policies.

The initial police report did not say who the passengers were and where they were going, but it later emerged they were headed to a quarantine location outside their city of Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou province.

The bus with 47 people on board crashed about 2:40 a.m. Sunday. City officials announced many hours later that the passengers were under "medical observation," confirming reports they were being taken to quarantine.

Following public anger, Guiyang fired three officials in charge of Yunyan district, where the residents had been picked up, the provincial government said Monday. Guiyang's deputy mayor apologized at a news conference, bowing and observing a moment of silence.

Online, many wondered at the logic behind transporting people outside of Guiyang, accusing the government of moving them so that the city would no longer report any new cases.

"Will this ever end? On the top searches (on social media), there's all sorts of pandemic prevention situations every day, creating unnecessary panic and making people jittery," one person wrote. "Is there scientific validity to hauling people to quarantine, one car after another?"

Guiyang officials had announced the city would achieve "societal zero-COVID" by Monday, one day after the crash.

The phrase means new infections are found only among people already under surveillance — such as those in a centralized quarantine facility or who are close contacts of existing patients — so the virus is no longer spreading in the community.

China has managed the pandemic through a series of measures known as "clearing to zero," or "zero COVID," maintained through strict lockdowns and mass testing.

The approach saved lives before vaccines were widely available, as people refrained from public gather-

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ings and wore masks regularly. However, as other countries have opened up and loosened some of the most onerous restrictions, China has held steadfast to its zero-COVID strategy.

While China has cut down its quarantine time for overseas arrivals and said it would start issuing student visas, the policy remains strict at home. Officials are concerned about the potential death toll and the impact any loosening would have on the country's stretched medical system.

Zero COVID also has become a political issue, and at one point was celebrated by many Chinese as signifying the superiority of their country over the U.S., which has had more than a million COVID deaths.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has cited China's approach as a "major strategic success" and evidence of the "significant advantages" of its political system over Western liberal democracies.

Yet, even as other countries open up, the humanitarian costs to China's pandemic approach has grown.

Earlier this year in Shanghai, desperate residents complained of being unable to get medicines or even groceries during the city's two-month lockdown, while some died in hospitals from lack of medical care as the city restricted movement. Last week, residents in the western region of Xinjiang said they went hungry under a more than 40-day lockdown.

According to FreeWeibo, a website that tracks censored posts on the popular social media platform, three of top 10 searches on Weibo related to the bus accident.

Many fixated on images of the bus shared by social media users. One photo showed the bus after it had been retrieved from the accident site. Its roof was crushed and portions missing. Another photo allegedly showed the driver decked out in a full white protective suit.

Users online questioned how a driver could see properly when his face was covered up, and why he was driving so late at night. Many comments were censored but some that expressed discontent with the current approach to the pandemic did remain up.

"I hope that the price of this pain can push for change faster, but if it's possible, I don't want to pay such a high price for such change," said the comment with the most likes on an online report about the accident by state broadcaster CCTV. "Condolences."

One of the passengers on the bus said her whole building had been taken for central quarantine, according to a report by Caixin, a business news outlet. Yet her apartment building had not reported a single case, according to a friend who shared their text conversation with Caixin.

Another popular comment quoted a proverb, "These human lives are like straw."

On Tuesday, Guizhou reported 41 new COVID-19 cases in the entire province. The province has been on high alert in the past few weeks after discovering one case at the end of August. It has locked down its capital city, using the euphemistic "quiet period" to describe the move, which means people are not allowed to leave their homes.

Fiona barrels toward Turks and Caicos as Cat. 3 hurricane

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Hurricane Fiona barreled toward the Turks and Caicos Islands on Tuesday as a Category 3 storm, prompting the government to impose a curfew.

Forecasters said Fiona was expected to pass near Grand Turk, the British territory's capital island, on Tuesday morning.

"Storms are unpredictable," Premier Washington Misick said in a statement from London, where he was attending the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II. "You must therefore take every precaution to ensure your safety."

Misick is scheduled to return home on Thursday.

Early Tuesday, Fiona was centered 20 miles (30 kilometers) southeast of Grand Turk Island. It had maximum sustained winds of 115 mph (185 kph) and was moving north-northwest at 10 mph (17 kph).

The intensifying storm kept dropping copious rain over the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, where a 58-year-old man died after police said he was swept away by a river in the central mountain town of Comerio.

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Another death was linked to a power blackout — a 70-year-old man was burned to death after he tried to fill his generator with gasoline while it was running, officials said.

The National Guard has rescued more than 900 people as floodwaters continue to rush through towns in eastern and southern Puerto Rico with up to 30 inches (76 centimeters) of rain forecast for some areas. Multiple landslides also were reported.

The blow from Fiona was made more devastating because Puerto Rico has yet to recover from Hurricane Maria, which killed nearly 3,000 people and destroyed the power grid in 2017. Five years later, more than 3,000 homes on the island are still covered by blue tarps.

Authorities said at least 1,300 people and some 250 pets remain in shelters across the island.

Fiona sparked a blackout when it hit Puerto Rico's southwest corner on Sunday, the anniversary of Hurricane Hugo, which slammed into the island in 1989 as a Category 3 storm.

By Tuesday morning, authorities said they had restored power to more than 260,000 customers on the island of 3.2 million people.

Puerto Rico Gov. Pedro Pierluisi has warned it could take days before everyone has electricity.

Water service was cut to more than 837,000 customers — two thirds of the total on the island — because of turbid water at filtration plants or lack of power, officials said.

Fiona is not expected to threaten the U.S. mainland.

In the Dominican Republic, authorities reported one death: a man hit by a falling tree. The storm displaced more than 12,400 people and cut off at least two communities.

The hurricane left several highways blocked, and a tourist pier in the town of Miches was badly damaged by high waves. At least four international airports were closed, officials said.

The Dominican president, Luis Abinader, said authorities would need several days to assess the storm's effects.

Fiona previously battered the eastern Caribbean, killing one man in the French territory of Guadeloupe when floodwaters washed his home away, officials said.

'We have nothing': Iziium's trauma after Russian occupation

By LORI HINNANT and VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

IZIUM, Ukraine (AP) — The school was a shattered mess. Its six-month life as a Russian base and mechanic shop ended in August with a Ukrainian missile strike.

Its years educating Iziium's youth were over, but it had one last gift for the residents who needed so much: the wood that made up its lattice work, its chalkboards, its furniture and beams.

A handful of elderly residents — some prepared with gloves, sturdy woven bags, and hand tools — came by Monday to salvage firewood from the rubble. It will be months, if not longer, before meaningful electricity, gas and running water are restored, and a chill is already settling in.

This city in far eastern Ukraine was among the first taken by Russian forces after the war started on Feb. 24, and it became a command center for them. By early March, Iziium was isolated — no cell phones, no heat, no power. Residents didn't know what was going on in the war, whether their relatives were alive, whether there was still a Ukraine.

They were liberated in a swift counteroffensive on Sept. 10 that swept through the Kharkiv region, and that continues in the south, near Kherson. But residents are still emerging from the confusion and trauma of their occupation, the brutality of which gained worldwide attention last week after the discovery of one of the war's largest mass grave sites.

"We have nothing. We are taking wood to heat water for tea and to make porridge. Look at my hands! I'm 75 years old and this woman is even older than me. We are afraid of winter," said Oleksandra Lysenko, standing in a pile of bricks. "My grandchildren went to this school and I am looting it."

A man nearby loaded the battered hood of a car onto his bicycle. He planned to use the part, which was spray-painted with the letter Z that has come to symbolize the Russian army, to cover an open window frame.

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When the war began nearly seven months ago, about half of Iziy's roughly 40,000 residents fled, some of them into Russia itself. The rest hunkered down in basements or behind the thickest walls they could find. Russian soldiers handed out some food but rarely enough.

Those with battery-powered radios discovered that the only signal was a Russian propaganda station, feeding them lies about which Ukrainian cities had fallen, how their government had abandoned them, and how they would be put on trial as collaborators if ever the Ukrainian army returned.

So swift was the counteroffensive that the Russians abandoned their munitions and their armored vehicles, sometimes resorting to stealing clothes and cars from residents to escape undetected. It was Russia's biggest military defeat since the withdrawal of its troops from areas near Kyiv more than five months ago.

Ukrainian soldiers have begun to collect brass buttons yanked in haste from an officer's uniform, or patches emblazoned with the Russian flag. They are also collecting Russian munitions, which fit nicely into Ukrainian weapons, and are repurposing the abandoned vehicles that haven't rusted into uselessness.

The Russian occupiers scattered countless mines, which Ukrainian soldiers are painstakingly detonating one at a time. Every few minutes on Monday, until sundown, their enormous controlled explosions shook Iziy, which is about a two-hour drive from Ukraine's second-largest city of Kharkiv down straight rural highways.

It may as well have been another world.

"Is Kharkiv still Ukraine?" one woman hesitantly asked a visitor in the first few days after Iziy was freed.

There is now a tenuous cell signal — just enough to send texts or make a phone call, for those who have a way to charge their phones.

But on Monday morning expectations were running high for a more basic form of communication. By the time the mail truck pulled into the parking lot of a closed market, more than a hundred people were milling around, waiting for the first postal delivery since February.

"I am happy that the mail is working. It means that life is getting better. We will live and hope for the best," said 69-year-old Volodymyr Olyzarenko. He already knew what the box sent by his adult children contained: warm clothes for his brother.

But there will be hard days to come.

A site that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said contains more than 440 graves was discovered last week in a forest on the northern outskirts of town, and investigators are exhuming the bodies to start the grim job of identification. Russian officials have distanced themselves from responsibility for the site.

On the southern outskirts, where the fiercest battles raged, the entire village of Kamyanka is a hazard of explosives. Only 10 people remain of the 1,200 who lived there.

Almost every yard is scattered with bombs and bullets. A Russian rocket launcher is rusting away in someone's driveway, the weather just beginning to take its toll on the white Z. And as the sun sets, the only sound is the barking of dogs abandoned by their owners.

Natalya Zdorovets, the matriarch of a family of five that accounts for half the village population, said they stayed because it was home. They lost their connection to the outside world on March 5.

"We were in a vacuum. We were cut off from all the world. We didn't know what happened. We didn't even know what was happening in the neighboring street because we lived only here," she said, gesturing to a yard filled with ducks, chickens, cats and dogs.

Around 2,000 Russian soldiers settled in the homes vacated by terrified residents. Then suddenly, a little over a week ago, the village fell silent. The family had no idea why until the Ukrainian soldiers arrived.

"We cried and laughed at the same time," Zdorovets said. "We weren't prepared to see them. We hadn't heard the news."

—

Kentucky school shooter seeks parole in high-stakes hearing

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

PADUCAH, Ky. (AP) — A Kentucky man who killed three students and wounded five more in a school

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shooting 25 years ago will go before the state parole board on Tuesday in a high-stakes hearing that could see him released or denied the chance to ever leave prison.

Michael Carneal was a 14-year-old freshman on Dec. 1, 1997, when he fired a stolen pistol at a before-school prayer group in the lobby of Heath High School, near Paducah, Kentucky. School shootings were not yet a depressing part of the national consciousness, and Carneal was given the maximum sentence possible at the time for someone his age — life in prison but with the possibility of parole. A quarter century later, in the shadow of Uvalde and in a nation disgusted by the carnage of mass shootings, Carneal, now 39, will try to convince the parole board he deserves to be freed.

His parole hearing began Monday with testimony from those injured and close family of those killed, several of whom had considered Carneal a friend.

Missy Jenkins Smith, who was paralyzed by one of Carneal's bullets and uses a wheelchair, said there are too many "what ifs" to release him. What if he stops taking his medication? What if his medication stops working?

"Continuing his life in prison is the only way his victims can feel comfortable and safe," she said.

Killed in the shooting were 14-year-old Nicole Hadley, 17-year-old Jessica James, and 15-year-old Kayce Steger. Jenkins Smith said it would be unfair to them and their loved ones for Carneal to be set free.

"They will forever be a 17 year old, a 14 year old, and a 15 year old — allowed only one full decade of life. A consequence of Michael's choice," she said.

Also testifying Monday was Christina Hadley Ellegood, whose younger sister Nicole was killed in the shooting. Ellegood has written about the pain of seeing her sister's body and having to call their mom and tell her Nicole had been shot.

"I had no one to turn to who understood what I was going through," she said Monday. "For me, it's not fair for him to be able to roam around with freedom when we live in fear of where he might be."

A two-person panel of the full parole board is hearing Carneal's appeal. They have the option to release him or defer his next opportunity for parole for up to five years. If the two cannot agree on those options, they can send the case to a meeting of the full board next Monday. Only the full board has the power to deny Carneal any chance of parole, forcing him to stay in prison for the rest of his life.

Hollan Holm, who was wounded that day, spoke Monday about lying on the floor of the high school lobby, bleeding from his head and believing he was going to die. But he said Carneal was too young to comprehend the full consequences of his actions and should have a chance at supervised release.

"When I think of Michael Carneal, I think of the child I rode the bus with every day," he said. "I think of the child I shared a lunch table with in third grade. I think of what he could have become if, on that day, he had it somewhere in him to make a different choice or take a different path."

WNBA players skipping Russia, choosing other places to play

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

SYDNEY (AP) — Brittney Griner's highly publicized legal woes in Russia and the country's invasion of Ukraine has the top WNBA players opting to take their talents elsewhere this offseason.

For the past few decades, Russia has been the preferred offseason destination for WNBA players to compete because of the high salaries that can exceed \$1 million and the resources and amenities teams offered them.

That all has come to an abrupt end.

"Honestly my time in Russia has been wonderful, but especially with BG still wrongfully detained there, nobody's going to go there until she's home," said Breanna Stewart, a Griner teammate on the Russian team that paid the duo millions. "I think that, you know, now, people want to go overseas and if the money is not much different, they want to be in a better place,"

Griner was arrested in February, then detained and later convicted on drug possession charges amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Griner was sentenced last month to nine years in prison.

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Now, Stewart and other WNBA All-Stars, including Jonquel Jones and Courtney Vandersloot — who also have made millions of dollars playing in Russia — are going elsewhere this winter. All three played for Ekaterinburg, the same Russian team as Griner. That club won five EuroLeague titles in the past eight seasons and has been dominant for nearly two decades with former greats DeLisha Milton Jones and Diana Taurasi playing there.

Nearly a dozen WNBA players competed in Russia last winter and none of them are heading back this year.

After the World Cup tournament, Stewart is going to Turkey to play for Fenerbahçe. Top players can make a few hundred thousand dollars playing in Turkey, much less than their Russian salaries. Playing in Turkey also allows Stewart to be closer to her wife's family in Spain.

"You want to have a better lifestyle, a better off-the-court experience, and just continue to appreciate other countries," Stewart said.

Like Stewart, Vandersloot also isn't headed back to Russia, choosing to play in Hungary where she obtained citizenship in 2016.

"I am Hungarian. I thought it would be special since I haven't played there since I got the citizenship," Vandersloot said.

The 33-year-old guard said a lot would have to change before she'd ever consider going back to Russia to play even though she has many fond memories of the Russian people.

"The thing about it is, we were treated so well by our club and made such strong relationships with those people, I would never close the door on that," she said. "The whole situation with BG makes it really hard to think that it's safe for anyone to go back there right now."

Jones will be joining Stewart in Turkey, playing for Mersin. The 6-foot-6 Jones said she would consider going back to Russia if things change politically and Griner was back in the U.S.

The Griner situation also is weighing heavily on the minds of young WNBA players.

Rhyné Howard, the 2022 WNBA Rookie of the Year, is playing in Italy this winter — her first overseas experience. She said she was careful when deciding where she wanted to play.

"Everyone's going to be a bit cautious seeing as this situation is happening," she said.

It's not just the American players who are no longer going to Russia. Chicago Sky forward Emma Meeseman, who stars for the Belgium national team, had played in Russia with Stewart, Jones and Vandersloot. She also is headed to Turkey this offseason.

The WNBA has also been trying to make staying home in the offseason a better option for players. Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said at the WNBA Finals that top players could make up to \$700,000 this year between base salary, marketing agreements and award bonuses. While only a select few players could reach that amount, roughly a dozen have decided to take league marketing agreements this offseason.

Energy crisis key to Italy's election — but not conservation

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — Giambarini Group's plants in northern Italy must keep zinc baths that rustproof steel and iron parts super-heated around the clock, seven days a week, an energy-intensive process that has grown exponentially more costly as natural gas prices spike.

Methane to create molten zinc that forms a protective coating over high-rise support beams and wrought-iron fences used to take up just 3% of operating costs, but now it's as much as 30%. The family-run company has passed some of the extra cost to customers, but business is uncertain as rising prices for raw materials freezes the construction industry that Giambarini supplies.

"We don't know the future. We don't know if it will get worse or better, since clients don't know if they will have work," said CEO Alberto Giambarini, the third generation in his family to run the business. He has orders for the coming 10 days, instead of through Christmas, like in the past. "We are living day to day."

The energy crisis facing Italian industry and households — like those across Europe — is a top voter concern going into Sunday's parliamentary elections as fears grow that astronomically high bills will shutter some businesses, at least temporarily, and force household rationing by winter. Prices started going up a

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year ago and have only been exacerbated as Russia has cut back natural gas used to generate electricity, heat and cool homes, and run factories as Europe supports war-torn Ukraine.

Already in July and August, industrial energy use dropped by double digits mostly because of scaled-back production — which experts say could affect economic growth and employment in the coming months.

At the same time, three-quarters of Italian households expect even more pain this fall with higher bills, according to the SWG polling institute. Already, 80% report important sacrifices to pay energy costs, such as delaying vacations, major purchases and eating out.

Never in an Italian election campaign has energy been such a central talking point. Candidates have sparred over whether debt-laden Italy, which has already spent more than 60 billion euros to help families, businesses and local governments, should incur yet more debt to finance new relief. They're also facing off on whether Italy should consider investing in new nuclear technologies.

But no party is discussing mandatory conservation measures, like many of Italy's European neighbors.

"It is remarkable to see how much all these people are commenting on energy. Before the current situation, no one would mention the issue. But at the same time, they are neglecting if not ignoring completely the climate side of this," said Matteo Di Castelnuovo, an energy economist at Milan's Bocconi University. "No one is going to talk about rationing or reducing consumption."

Most major parties, including Giorgia Meloni's far-right Brothers of Italy and Enrico Letta's center-left Democratic Party, are largely following strategies pursued by the outgoing government of Premier Mario Draghi. They both advocate a European Union cap on natural gas prices, despite a failure to gain EU consensus in months of discussion, along with varying formulas to help families and offer tax breaks to businesses.

Pollsters and energy experts say these similarities have made it difficult for voters to be moved by energy policy.

Broadly, the campaign has focused on continued natural gas investments.

For the Democratic Party, plants that regasify liquid natural gas are positioned as a bridge to other technologies as it sets a target to add 85 gigawatts of renewable energy by 2030 in a country that for years has averaged just 1 gigawatt a year. The center-right coalition that Meloni's party is leading wants to expand pipeline deliveries to Italy, which fits a longer-term strategy of making Italy a gas hub for Europe but does not address the EU goal of emission reductions by 2030.

The right-wing coalition and small centrist parties also advocate a return to nuclear power, which Italians have rejected in two referendums decades apart. In addition to societal resistance, the technology would take at least two decades to implement, too late to help Italy's commitment with the Group of 7 wealthy economies to fully decarbonize by 2035, said Matteo Leonardi, executive director of the environmental think tank ECCO.

The political debate is largely focusing on lowering gas prices but not diversifying or discouraging households from consuming resources that would better support industry, Leonardi said.

"The response to this crisis, as they are saying in the rest of Europe, are renewables and efficiency," Leonardi said. "You cannot face a war without arms. You cannot give the message that the state will take care of it, consume what you want."

Italy's famed textile industry, which gives French and Italian fashion houses their luxury edge, also is suffering. The small and medium operators that form the backbone of the system risk closure without a swift, systemic response from both Europe and Italy, said Sergio Tamborini, head of the SMI Italian Fashion System association.

"The bills that arrived in June and July were explosive," Tamborini said.

Italy's textile industry — along with leather and accessories accounting for revenue of 100 billion euros a year — is a luxury niche that Tamborini worries will be weakened by cheaper markets if costs aren't reduced.

Dyeing and printing textiles is especially energy intensive, Tamborini said, and for some, "it is a problem of survival."

"We should have had help already in September. We cannot wait for the next government to be active,

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because it could be Christmas or even after," he said, given the fractured nature of Italian politics.

Meanwhile, Giambarini said his business has no immediate plans for short-term layoffs of 250 workers, but the outgoing government has been discussing new layoff programs to give businesses a way to avoid crippling energy costs.

Shutting down even temporarily would be devastating, taking months to relaunch, said Giambarini, adding he was still deciding which party to back.

"We are waiting for the election and hope we will get a government that will indicate a better road out of this period of crisis," Giambarini said.

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The right-wing coalition and small centrist parties also advocate a return to nuclear power, which Italians have rejected in two referendums decades apart. In addition to societal resistance, the technology would take at least two decades to implement, too late to help Italy's commitment with the Group of 7 wealthy economies to fully decarbonize by 2035, said Matteo Leonardi, executive director of the environmental think tank ECCO.

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Official jailed in Las Vegas journalist killing due in court

By KEN RITTER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A local elected official is due to face a judge on a murder charge Tuesday in the stabbing death of a Las Vegas investigative journalist who wrote articles critical of him and his managerial conduct.

Robert Richard Telles, the Clark County public administrator, has remained jailed without bail since his Sept. 7 arrest in the Sept. 2 slaying of veteran Las Vegas Review-Journal staff writer Jeff German.

A criminal complaint accuses Telles of "lying in wait" for German, 69, who prosecutors say was stabbed seven times. German lived alone, and his body was found the following day. The Clark County coroner ruled his death was a homicide.

Telles, 45, was arrested after police asked for help during the Labor Day weekend to identify a person seen wearing an orange work shirt and a wide-brim straw hat toting a shoulder bag and walking toward German's home the morning of Sept. 2. Police also released images of a distinctive SUV seen near German's home, driven by a person wearing an orange shirt.

A Review-Journal photographer snapped photos Sept. 6 of Telles washing the same type of vehicle in

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his driveway.

Police said Telles shut off his cellphone and waited in a vehicle outside German's home until the attack. It was characterized as a planned response to articles that German wrote about "turmoil and internal dissension" in the county office that handles assets of people who die without a will or family contacts.

Telles lost his primary bid for reelection in June after articles in May aired claims of administrative bullying, favoritism and Telles' relationship with a subordinate staffer. County lawmakers appointed a consultant to address complaints about leadership in his office.

German was widely respected for his tenacity, and his colleagues said he was working on follow-up reports about Telles and the public administrator's office when he died.

"The published articles ... ruined (Telles') political career, likely his marriage, and this was him lashing out at the cause," Chief Deputy Clark County District Attorney Richard Scow told a judge on Sept. 8.

That judge, Las Vegas Justice of the Peace Elana Lee Graham, called the police report detailing the attack "chilling" and said it described German "fighting for his life." She spoke of apparent defense wounds on German's arms and said DNA believed to be from Telles was found under German's fingernails.

Police said a search warrant turned up items at Telles' home including blood-stained shoes and a straw hat that had been cut into pieces. Authorities said they did not immediately find the weapon used to kill German.

Clark County Sheriff Joe Lombardo, a Republican running for governor in November, said investigators also obtained security video that might show the attack.

The Nevada Press Association has announced that German will be inducted this Saturday into the Nevada Newspaper Hall of Fame.

German joined the Review-Journal in 2010 after more than two decades at the rival Las Vegas Sun, where he was a columnist and reporter covering courts, politics, labor, government and organized crime.

Telles grew up in El Paso, Texas, and lived in Colorado before moving to Las Vegas. He worked as a heating and air conditioning technician and graduated in 2014 from law school at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He practiced probate and estate law before he was elected public administrator in 2018, replacing a three-term predecessor.

The Review-Journal reported that in El Paso, Telles' late grandfather, Richard Telles, served as city clerk, school board trustee and county commissioner. A grand-uncle, Raymond L. Telles Jr., was the city's first Mexican-American mayor and was appointed by President John F. Kennedy as ambassador to Costa Rica and by President Lyndon B. Johnson as chairman of the U.S.-Mexican Border Commission.

Telles' father, Raymond R. Telles, was elected to two terms on the El Paso City Council but lost a bid for mayor. He later gave up his law license and avoided prison after pleading guilty in a federal conspiracy and wire fraud case.

Court and police records show that Robert Telles was arrested in Las Vegas in February 2020 after his wife called 911. He was accused of grabbing her in a "bear-hug" position and of resisting efforts by two police officers to handcuff him. During his arrest, Telles was recorded on police body-worn cameras acknowledging that he had been drinking alcohol and repeatedly identifying himself as a public official.

The case was dismissed and closed in March 2021 after Telles paid a \$418 fine, attended counseling and stayed out of trouble.

His term in office expires Dec. 31, but Clark County officials said he is suspended and has been banned from county offices or property pending a review of his position as an elected official.

Lawyers seek data in Georgia election equipment breach

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A former Republican Party official in Georgia who was a fake elector in 2020 misrepresented her role in an alleged breach of voting equipment at a rural elections office two months after the last presidential election, according to a court filing.

The filing late Monday is part of a broader lawsuit challenging the security of the state's voting machines

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that has been drawn into a separate investigation of former President Donald Trump's efforts to overturn his loss in Georgia.

According to the latest filing, Cathy Latham helped coordinate the arrival of a computer forensics team at the Coffee County elections office on Jan. 7, 2021, welcomed them upon arrival and spent nearly all day there instructing them what to copy. That turned out to be "virtually every component of the voting system," the court filing says. That directly refutes her testimony in a sworn deposition and her representations in filings with the court, the document states.

The filing comes in response to Latham's attorneys' attempt to quash subpoenas for her personal electronic devices, including any cellphones, computers and storage devices.

Robert Cheeley, an attorney for Latham, did not respond to an email seeking comment. He previously said his client doesn't remember all the details of that day. But he said she "would not and has not knowingly been involved in any impropriety in any election" and "has not acted improperly or illegally."

Latham said in a deposition last month that she moved to Texas over the summer. In January 2021, she was chair of the Coffee County Republican Party and was the state party caucus chair for more than 125 of Georgia's smaller counties. Latham also was one of 16 Georgia Republicans who signed a certificate in December 2020 falsely stating that Trump had won the state and declaring that they were the state's "duly elected and qualified" electors.

Trump in fact lost Georgia by nearly 12,000 votes to Democrat Joe Biden. The investigation into Trump's efforts to change the results includes a phone call he made to the Georgia secretary of state suggesting he could "find" just enough votes to make Trump the winner.

The Georgia secretary of state's office has described the copying of data from Coffee County's election system as an "alleged unauthorized access." It's the latest of several suspected breaches of voting system data around the country tied to Trump allies since his election loss.

Attorney Sidney Powell and other Trump allies were involved in arranging for the copying of the election equipment in Coffee County — it is home to 43,000 people and voted overwhelmingly for Trump — as part of a wider effort to access voting equipment in several states, according to documents produced in response to subpoenas in the long-running lawsuit over Georgia's voting machines.

Latham's "data likely will reveal additional details about the work performed and information obtained in the breach, what was done with the compromised software and data, and the people involved in planning and orchestrating the breach, which puts voters and future elections at enormous risk," the filing says.

An exhibit attached to the Monday filing juxtaposes quotes from Latham's deposition with images pulled from security camera footage that appear to directly contradict her statements.

Latham said that she went to her job as a high school teacher and stopped by the election office briefly that afternoon. But the video image shows her arriving at 11:37 a.m. while time stamps on other images show her there throughout much of the day. She also said she didn't see specific people and saw others only briefly, but the video images show otherwise.

The lawsuit that includes the fight over Latham's personal electronic devices was originally filed several years before the 2020 election by individual voters and the Coalition for Good Governance, an election security advocacy group. It alleges that Georgia's touchscreen voting machines are not secure and seeks to have them replaced by hand-marked paper ballots.

The Monday filing said the plaintiffs have identified multiple specific documents that Latham failed to produce in response to a previous subpoena. It seeks to have a third party make a temporary forensic copy of her devices and search for responsive documents.

Ad spending shows Dems hinging midterm hopes on abortion

By STEVE PEOPLES and AARON M. KESSLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats are pumping an unprecedented amount of money into advertising related to abortion rights, underscoring how central the message is to the party in the final weeks before the November midterm elections.

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With the most intense period of campaigning only just beginning, Democrats have already invested more than an estimated \$124 million this year in television advertising referencing abortion. That's more than twice as much money as the Democrats' next top issue this year, "character," and almost 20 times more than Democrats spent on abortion-related ads in the 2018 midterms.

The estimated spending figures, based on an Associated Press analysis of data provided by the nonpartisan research firm AdImpact, reveal the extent to which Democrats are betting their majorities in Congress and key governorships on one issue. That's even as large majorities of Americans think the country is heading in the wrong direction and the economy is in poor condition.

The advertising numbers also reveal just how sharply Republicans have shied away from abortion in their paid advertising in the weeks since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, a decades-long goal of the GOP. (The AdImpact data captures every single time a campaign ad is aired on TV, and estimates a cost associated with those airings.)

Since the high court's decision in June to eliminate the constitutional right to abortion, roughly 1 in 3 television advertising dollars spent by Democrats and their allies have focused on abortion. Much of the spending is designed to attack Republicans on the ballot this fall who have long opposed abortion rights and are currently engaged in a state-by-state push to restrict abortion rights or outlaw the practice altogether.

The Democrats' unprecedented investment in abortion messaging on TV this year through Sept. 18 is larger than the Republican Party's combined national investment in ads relating to the economy, crime and immigration.

"With less than 60 days until the election, we refuse to stand by while out-of-step, anti-choice Republicans try to control our bodies and our futures and simultaneously lie about it to voters," said Melissa Williams, executive director of Women Vote!, an outside group that has invested more than \$4 million in abortion-related ads this year. "We are ensuring that each voter knows the candidates that stand with them and against them in protecting this right."

The Democrats' overwhelming focus on abortion may not be surprising given the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and the wave of Republican-backed abortion bans in more than a dozen states that followed. But the strategy still marks a sharp departure from the party's focus in recent years on former President Donald Trump and other issues like the economy, education and health care.

In the 2018 midterm elections, for example, Democrats spent less than \$6 million on abortion-related television advertising. That's compared to the \$51 million that Democrats invested in Trump-related ads, \$49 million on health care and \$46 million on education, according to AdImpact.

Jessica Floyd, president of American Bridge, a Democrat-allied super PAC running abortion-related advertising in Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and Pennsylvania, described abortion as "the ultimate health care issue" for women and families. The Supreme Court decision and the subsequent Republican push to ban abortion in some states, she said, represent "an actual rolling back of rights, which is unprecedented."

"It's a very powerful motivator," Floyd said. "It flies in the face of everything we know voters care about — especially the voters who will decide this election."

Television advertising data reveals that Republicans, too, have invested millions of dollars in abortion messaging. But most of those ads ran during the primary phase of the campaign this spring and summer as Republican candidates touted their anti-abortion credentials. The number of Republican ads aired referencing abortion has gone down each month since May.

As the calendar has shifted to the fall general election, the gulf between Democratic and Republican spending on abortion ads has grown even wider. So far this month, for example, Democrats and their allies have aired more than 68,000 ads on TV referencing abortion — more than 15 times as many as their Republican counterparts. They've spent an estimated \$31 million on such ads compared with the GOP's outlay of only \$2.8 million. That's even as Republican leaders such as GOP Chair Ronna McDaniel acknowledged in a recent interview that her party cannot allow Democrats to control the narrative on abortion.

"It's very clear that that's the only thing that Democrats have to run on, right? They don't run on a good economy. They can't run on community being safer. They can't run on education," McDaniel said. "So

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what are they going to do? They're going to make everything about abortion, which means we're going to have to talk about it as Republicans do."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., irked Republican leaders last week by proposing a national ban on abortions at 15 weeks of pregnancy. It was the kind of legislation Republicans on Capitol Hill have supported for several years. But this year, it was viewed as an unwelcome reminder to voters just eight weeks before Election Day that some Republicans in Congress hope to adopt national abortion restrictions if given the chance.

McDaniel encouraged Republicans instead to go on offense on abortion by highlighting Democrats' resistance to any limitations, a position she argued is out of step with most voters. And while Republican leaders and candidates are increasingly making that argument when asked, the party has yet to devote many resources to the issue in the one place most voters hear from GOP candidates: their screens.

Democrats, meanwhile, have released a new wave of abortion-related ads targeting statewide Republican candidates across North Carolina, New Mexico, Minnesota, Arizona, Colorado and Florida. Abortion is also a regular topic for state legislative candidates in competitive districts in California and Florida. Republican House candidates are under attack for opposing abortion rights in congressional districts in upstate New York, Connecticut, Michigan and Indiana.

In some cases, Republican candidates are being hit with multiple abortion-related ads running simultaneously on their local television stations.

One of them is Wisconsin's Republican candidate for governor, Tim Michels, who has been the focus of abortion-related attack ads from three groups so far this month, including his opponent, Democratic Gov. Tony Evers. Each of the three ad campaigns features Michels confirming that he opposes abortion rights even in cases of rape or incest.

"Is that the divisive radical you want as your governor?" the narrator asks in one ad produced by the Evers campaign.

Michels' campaign did not respond to a request for comment.

It's much the same in Nevada, where Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto is considered one of the most vulnerable Democratic incumbents in the nation. This month, at least two anti-Republican groups and the Cortez Masto campaign itself were running abortion-related ads against GOP challenger Adam Laxalt.

Cortez Masto's campaign featured a doctor saying that Republicans are trying to interfere with women's health care decisions.

"For doctors like me, it is our job to make sure women have the support they need to make decisions that are right for them. But Adam Laxalt disagrees," the doctor says on one ad.

In an op-ed last month, Laxalt tried to push back against the flood of abortion-related advertising against him.

"Cortez Masto and her allies are spending millions of dollars in campaign ads trying to ... make you believe in a falsehood that I would support a federal ban on abortion as a U.S. senator, or that I am somehow 'anti-woman' because I value, support and defend life at all stages," he wrote. "For my entire adult life, I have held the view that the Supreme Court should return the issue of abortion to the people and let them decide the issue on a state-by-state basis."

Abortion has been a big focus in Nevada's Senate contest so far, but other elections have seen far more abortion-related advertising.

The AdImpact data shows that the most TV ads aired this year referencing abortion took place in the Pennsylvania and Arizona Senate races, followed by gubernatorial contests for Illinois, Georgia and Wisconsin. (The now-defeated Kansas constitutional amendment ballot measure, while a unique election, also saw some of the most ads.)

Georgia's Democratic nominee for governor, Stacey Abrams, ran an ad campaign for much of August into September attacking Republican Gov. Brian Kemp, using the words of several women speaking directly to the camera.

"He supports a total ban, even if I'm raped, a victim of incest," the women say. Another woman is almost crying when she says, "Under Kemp, I could be investigated and imprisoned for a miscarriage."

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Kemp spokesperson Tate Mitchell pushed back against the accuracy of the ads, charging that “Stacey Abrams and her campaign are lying in an effort to scare people and distract voters from her dangerous agenda for Georgia.”

Democrats in several swing states are aggressively leaning in to some leading Republicans’ opposition to abortion exceptions in cases of rape, incest or the life of the mother at risk.

Cliff Schechter, a veteran Democratic ad maker and founder of Blue Amp Strategies, said Democrats are “messaging much better around abortion” this year.

“It’s not just liberal women anymore, or even moderate women. It’s conservative women who are horrified by this,” Schechter said of the new abortion restrictions being implemented across the country. “It’d be malpractice not to focus on it.”

“Don’t Look Up” director McKay gives to climate activists

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — In director Adam McKay’s “Don’t Look Up,” a 2021 satire about two scientists who try in vain to warn the world about a planet-destroying comet, the scientists’ desperate plea for action ultimately doesn’t work.

But don’t take that as McKay’s view on the power of activism to change the course of the climate crisis, the existential threat his movie was really about.

McKay on Tuesday plans to announce a \$4 million donation to the Climate Emergency Fund, an organization dedicated to getting money into the hands of activists engaged in disruptive demonstrations urging swifter, more aggressive climate action. It’s the largest donation the fund has received since it started in 2019, and McKay’s biggest personal gift. He joined the organization’s board in August.

Climate change is “extremely alarming, extremely frightening, and quickly becoming the only thing I’m thinking about on a daily basis, even as I’m writing scripts and directing or producing,” McKay said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

From the overthrowing of monarchies to labor movements and the Civil Rights Era, activism is an “incredibly kinetic, powerful, transformative” force that’s created change throughout history, he said.

The Climate Emergency Fund has awarded \$7 million to organizations supporting mostly volunteer climate activists around the globe. Those activists have done everything from marching in the streets of France to urge people to “look up” — a reference to McKay’s film — to demonstrating on the water near West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin’s boat about the need for federal climate legislation.

The fund’s goal is to provide a bridge for more traditional wealthy donors with activists looking to make a statement — two groups that don’t always see eye to eye, said Margaret Klein Salamon, the fund’s executive director and a clinical psychologist.

As for the ending of “Don’t Look Up,” Salamon said it was an “important psychological, cultural intervention” that put the stakes of the climate fight on stark display.

McKay, for his part, said he’s hesitant to attribute any direct action to his movie. But he sees both film and disruptive protest as actions that change culture, which can be a major step toward influencing policy. The film, he said, sparked an incredible reaction around the globe from ordinary viewers and scientists who have been fighting for climate action for decades.

“It was really beautiful to see people who have been fighting this fight for much longer than me really feel seen,” he said.

McKay, 54, started his career in comedy writing and became known for movies like “Anchorman” and “Step Brothers.” In recent years, his work has taken on a more political tone, though it’s still in the realm of comedy — if dark. He wrote and directed “The Big Short,” about the 2008 financial collapse, and “Vice,” about former Vice President Dick Cheney’s influence, and he’s the executive producer for “Succession,” the television show about a media mogul and his children who want to take over the company.

He says his own climate awakening came several years ago when he read a report by the International Panel on Climate Change that highlighted the vast differences that would occur if the planet warmed by

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2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) instead of 1.5 degrees (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-Industrial levels. It was the moment, he said, that he went from someone who was concerned about climate change to someone who saw it as a hair-on-fire situation.

In the years since, the situation has only grown more dire, he said, pointing to the drying of the Colorado River, flooding in Pakistan and Europe's summer heatwave as evidence that action is urgent.

"I really do believe, without any hyperbole, scientifically speaking, this is the greatest challenge, story, threat, in human history," he said.

Diggs scores 3 TDs for Bills in 41-7 rout of Titans

By JOHN WAWROW AP Sports Writer

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. (AP) — If the Buffalo Bills are making some sort of loud statement by opening their season with consecutive routs, quarterback Josh Allen isn't about to raise his voice.

As he did following a 31-10 win over the defending Super Bowl champion Los Angeles Rams, Allen dismissed questions about the message the Bills sent by throttling the Tennessee Titans 41-7 in Buffalo's home opener on Monday night.

"When we execute how we know we're supposed to execute, success typically leads to success," Allen said. "We're just trying to be the best version of ourselves."

It made no difference to Allen whether the Bills earned some vindication against an opponent that had defeated them in each of the past two seasons.

"It doesn't matter who it's against. Like, that's a good team that we played," he said. "For us to go do that was great."

Allen threw four touchdown passes, including three to Stefon Diggs, and the Bills' defense did the rest, containing Derrick Henry and the Titans. Buffalo forced four turnovers, including linebacker Matt Milano returning the second of Ryan Tannehill's two interceptions 43 yards for a touchdown.

Buffalo never trailed and blew the game open by outscoring the Titans 24-0 in the third quarter. The surge began in the final minute of the second quarter when Buffalo went ahead 17-7 on Allen's 4-yard touchdown pass to Diggs.

Allen topped 300 yards passing for the 15th time of his career, completing 26 of 38 attempts for 317 yards, and sat out the entire fourth quarter. Diggs had 12 catches for 148 yards. He has exceeded 100 yards in each of his first two games, a feat accomplished previously for the Bills only by Hall of Famer Andre Reed.

"It was a lot left on the bone, really," Diggs said with a shrug. "We had a lot of points. I think we had one punt and I think it came back to us. But just doing your job, and at this point we're doing OK I guess."

The Titans, coming off a 21-20 season-opening loss to the New York Giants, opened 0-2 for the first time since 2012.

The two-time defending AFC South champions face numerous questions about a defense that gave up 313 yards passing a week after allowing 238 yards rushing. Meantime, their offense mustered 187 yards, managed 12 first downs and had two of 11 drives finish in Bills territory.

"We got our (butts) kicked, plain and simple," coach Mike Vrabel said after the most lopsided loss in his four-plus seasons coaching the Titans. "They outplayed us and they outcoached us, and that's the definition of it. We're going to go back to work and try to figure out how to win a football game."

While Tannehill was benched after throwing his second interception, the Titans' Henry-led running game continued to be grounded.

The two-time rushing champion was limited to 25 yards on 13 carries while scoring on a 2-yard plunge.

"I pride myself on making plays and being a playmaker for this team. And I didn't do that tonight," Henry said. "They were the better team tonight in all three phases, the whole game. We just weren't good enough. At all."

Injuries affected both teams, the most serious involving Bills cornerback Dane Jackson, who hurt his neck in a troubling collision with a teammate and was taken to a hospital for evaluation. The Bills said Jackson had full movement in his limbs.

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Coach Sean McDermott said Jackson was still awaiting test results. The entire Bills team gathered around Jackson as he was loaded into an ambulance on the field.

"You go from being a coach to just a human. That's a real moment," McDermott said. "Just praying for him. It's an unfortunate situation."

Tannehill finished 11 of 20 for 117 yards and was benched following Milano's interception with 3:49 left in the third quarter. Rookie Malik Willis took over, and if Tannehill continues to struggle, Tennessee fans will want to see more of the young backup.

Vrabel stressed he benched many of his starters to protect them from getting hurt.

REMEMBERING SHOOTING VICTIMS

Bills Hall of Fame defensive end Bruce Smith asked fans for a moment of silence before the game to honor the memory of 10 people killed in shooting spree at a Buffalo supermarket in May.

"We stand united with the victims and the victims' families," Smith said.

"No one can erase their pain and suffering. But Buffalo, your acts of love and kindness will never be forgotten," he added. "The national media, the national activists have all gone. But we are here right now. It is up to us to love these families. To be with them."

INJURIES

Titans: LT Taylor Lewan did not return after hurting his right knee in the first quarter. ... RB Trenton Cannon did not return after hurting his right knee on the opening kickoff. ... LB Ola Adeniyi hurt his wrist. ... LB Bud Dupree hurt his hip. ... The Titans elevated receiver Josh Gordon from their practice squad some three weeks after he signed with the team.

Bills: S Micah Hyde sustained a neck injury. ... Milano did not return because of what was termed a stinger. ... DT Jordan Phillips hurt his hamstring. ... No. 2 WR Gabe Davis was inactive after hurting his ankle in practice on Saturday. ... DTs Brandin Bryant and C.J. Brewer were elevated from the practice squad to fill in for injured starter Ed Oliver (ankle) and backup Tim Settle (calf).

UP NEXT

Titans: Host the Las Vegas Raiders on Sunday.

Bills: At the Miami Dolphins on Sunday.

Harris returns to South Carolina to boost voting in midterms

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris is visiting two historically Black colleges in South Carolina to push for voter registration as she focuses on places and demographics that will be key to Democrats' chances to hold on to Congress in midterm elections.

Harris is traveling to Orangeburg on Tuesday to speak at a convocation at South Carolina State University, an HBCU where President Joe Biden addressed graduates last year. She'll also hold a roundtable discussion with students at nearby Claflin University.

The South Carolina trip, her third to the state as vice president, is part of Harris' increased travel schedule ahead of the midterms. She talked reproductive rights in Chicago on Friday, and she's heading to Wisconsin on Thursday to speak at the Democratic Attorneys General Conference. Earlier this month, she traveled to Houston for the National Baptist Convention.

Harris' trips are designed to prevent, or at least limit, any drop-off in turnout among voters of color and young people, important parts of the Democratic coalition.

In South Carolina, which holds the first presidential balloting in the South, Black voters play an outsize role in the Democratic voting electorate. During a June visit to the state, Harris expressed appreciation for South Carolina Democrats, whose key support for Biden in the first-in-the-South primary in 2020 helped turn around his campaign and build momentum in later contests that led to the party's nomination.

Harris' arrival in South Carolina follows shortly after Biden's noncommittal response to CBS' "60 Minutes" when asked if he would run again in 2024.

"My intention, as I said to begin with, is that I would run again," the president said during a wide-

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ranging interview that aired Sunday. "But it's just an intention. But is it a firm decision that I run again? That remains to be seen."

Biden noted in the interview that declaring his intention to seek reelection would put him afoul of campaign finance laws, which could have complicated spending by the Democratic National Committee ahead of the midterms.

White House officials said Biden is continuing to lay the groundwork for a 2024 run. Allies, though, acknowledge that he could always decide against seeking reelection before a formal announcement, which is expected in the first half of 2023.

Earlier this year, Biden committed to tapping Harris as his running mate for the 2024 reelection campaign. Her visit comes as Republicans considering White House bids of their own — including former Vice President Mike Pence, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis — continue to crisscross the state.

Some native South Carolina Republicans have also been testing the 2024 waters. Nikki Haley, who served the state for six years as governor before joining the Trump administration as U.N. ambassador, lives in the Charleston area and has been visiting other early voting states, as has U.S. Sen. Tim Scott.

Congress eyes strongest response yet to Jan. 6 attack

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats are voting this week on changes to a 19th century law for certifying presidential elections, their strongest legislative response yet to the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection and former President Donald Trump's efforts to overturn his 2020 election defeat.

The vote to overhaul the Electoral Count Act, expected Wednesday, comes as a bipartisan group of senators is moving forward with a similar bill. Lawmakers in both parties have said they want to change the arcane law before it is challenged again.

Trump and his allies tried to exploit the law's vague language in the weeks after the election as they strategized how they could keep Joe Biden out of office, including by lobbying Vice President Mike Pence to simply object to the certification of Biden's victory when Congress counted the votes on Jan. 6.

Pence refused to do so, but it was clear afterward that there was no real legal framework, or recourse, to respond under the 1887 law if the vice president had tried to block the count. The House and Senate bills would better define the vice president's ministerial role and make clear that he or she has no say in the final outcome.

Both versions would also make it harder for lawmakers to object if they don't like the results of an election, clarify laws that could allow a state's vote to be delayed, and ensure that there is only one slate of legal electors from each state. One strategy by Trump and his allies was to create alternate slates of electors in key states Biden won, with the ultimately unsuccessful idea that they could be voted on during the congressional certification on Jan. 6 and result in throwing the election back to Trump.

"We've got to make this more straightforward to respect the will of the people," said Senate Rules Committee Chairman Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., whose committee will hold a vote on the legislation bill next week. "We don't want to risk Jan. 6 happening again," she said.

The bills are a response to the violence of that day, when a mob of Trump's supporters pushed past police, broke into the building and interrupted Biden's certification. The crowd was echoing Trump's false claims of widespread voter fraud and calling for Pence's death after it became clear that he wouldn't try to overturn the election.

Democrats in both chambers have felt even more urgency on the issue as Trump is considering another run for president and is still claiming the election was stolen. Many Republicans say they believe him, even though 50 states certified Biden's win and courts across the country rejected Trump's false claims of widespread fraud.

While the House vote is expected to fall mostly along party lines, the Senate bill has some Republican support and its backers are hopeful they will have the 10 votes they need to break a filibuster and pass

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it in the 50-50 Senate. But that could be tricky amid campaigning for the November midterm elections, and Republicans most aligned with Trump are certain to oppose it.

The Senate Rules panel is expected to pass the measure next Tuesday, with some tweaks, though a floor vote will most likely wait until November or December, Klobuchar said.

Even though they are similar, the House version is more expansive than the Senate bill and the two chambers will have some key differences that lawmakers will have to work out. The House legislation was introduced on Monday by House Administration Committee Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., and Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, both members of the House panel that has been investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Like the Senate bill, the House legislation would require that there is a single set of electors from each state submitted by the governor. The House bill would also narrow the grounds on which members of Congress could object to any state's electoral votes and raise the threshold for how many objections would be needed. Currently, the House and Senate each debate and vote on whether to accept a state's electors if there is just one objection from each chamber.

The House bill would require instead that a third of the House and a third of the Senate object to a particular state's electors in order to hold a vote. The Senate bill would require that a fifth of each chamber object.

Two such votes were held on Jan. 6, 2021, after the rioters were cleared, because GOP Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Josh Hawley of Missouri joined dozens of House members in objecting to Biden's victories in Arizona and Pennsylvania. Both the House and Senate voted to certify the legitimate results.

Lofgren said the American people should be deciding the election, not Congress.

People who wanted to overturn the election "took advantage of ambiguous language as well as a low threshold to have Congress play a role that they really aren't supposed to play," she said.

The general similarities of the House bill to the Senate version could be a signal that House members are willing to compromise to get the legislation passed. Some House members had criticized the Senate bill for not going far enough. Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin, a member of both the Jan. 6 and House Administration committees, had said this summer that the Senate bill was not "remotely sufficient" to address the challenges presented by current law.

House members know they will have to give in some, though, to pass it through the 50-50 Senate. There are currently nine GOP senators and seven Democrats on the Senate bill, which is sponsored by centrist Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.V., and Susan Collins, R-Maine.

Collins said Monday, "I believe we can work this out, and I hope that we do so."

The bipartisan group of senators worked for months to find agreement on a way to revamp the process, eventually settling on a series of proposals introduced in July.

Klobuchar's Republican counterpart on the Senate Rules Committee, Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt, has also been supportive.

"This is something we shouldn't carry over into another election cycle," Blunt said at a Senate hearing in August.

UN chief warns global leaders: The world is in 'great peril'

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Warning that the world is in "great peril," the head of the United Nations says leaders meeting in person for the first time in three years must tackle conflicts and climate catastrophes, increasing poverty and inequality — and address divisions among major powers that have gotten worse since Russia invaded Ukraine.

In speeches and remarks leading up to the start of the leaders' meeting Tuesday, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres cited the "immense" task not only of saving the planet, "which is literally on fire," but of dealing with the persisting COVID-19 pandemic. He also pointed to "a lack of access to finance for developing countries to recover -- a crisis not seen in a generation" that has seen ground lost for education,

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health and women's rights.

Guterres will deliver his "state of the world" speech at Tuesday's opening of the annual high-level global gathering. U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said it would be "a sober, substantive and solutions-focused report card" for a world "where geopolitical divides are putting all of us at risk."

"There will be no sugar-coating in his remarks, but he will outline reasons for hope," Dujarric told reporters Monday.

The 77th General Assembly meeting of world leaders convenes under the shadow of Europe's first major war since World War II — the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which has unleashed a global food crisis and opened fissures among major powers in a way not seen since the Cold War.

Yet nearly 150 heads of state and government are on the latest speakers' list. That's a sign that despite the fragmented state of the planet, the United Nations remains the key gathering place for presidents, prime ministers, monarchs and ministers to not only deliver their views but to meet privately to discuss the challenges on the global agenda -- and hopefully make some progress.

At the top of that agenda for many: Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, which not only threatens the sovereignty of its smaller neighbor but has raised fears of a nuclear catastrophe at Europe's largest nuclear plant in the country's now Russia-occupied southeast.

Leaders in many countries are trying to prevent a wider war and restore peace in Europe. Diplomats, though, aren't expecting any breakthroughs this week.

The loss of important grain and fertilizer exports from Ukraine and Russia has triggered a food crisis, especially in developing countries, and inflation and a rising cost of living in many others. Those issues are high on the agenda.

At a meeting Monday to promote U.N. goals for 2030 — including ending extreme poverty, ensuring quality education for all children and achieving gender equality — Guterres said the world's many pressing perils make it "tempting to put our long-term development priorities to one side."

But the U.N. chief said some things can't wait — among them education, dignified jobs, full equality for women and girls, comprehensive health care and action to tackle the climate crisis. He called for public and private finance and investment, and above all for peace.

The death of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and her funeral in London on Monday, which many world leaders attended, have created last-minute headaches for the high-level meeting. Diplomats and U.N. staff have scrambled to deal with changes in travel plans, the timing of events and the logistically intricate speaking schedule for world leaders.

The global gathering, known as the General Debate, was entirely virtual in 2020 because of the pandemic, and hybrid in 2021. This year, the 193-member General Assembly returns to only in-person speeches, with a single exception — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Over objections from Russia and a few allies, the assembly voted last Friday to allow the Ukrainian leader to prerecord his speech because of reasons beyond his control — the "ongoing foreign invasion" and military hostilities that require him to carry out his "national defense and security duties."

By tradition, Brazil has spoken first for over seven decades because, at the early General Assembly sessions, it volunteered to start when no other country did.

The U.S. president, representing the host country for the United Nations, is traditionally the second speaker. But Joe Biden is attending the queen's funeral, and his speech has been pushed to Wednesday morning. Senegalese President Macky Sall is expected to take Biden's slot.

Damage assessments begin in flooded remote Alaska villages

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Authorities in Alaska were making contact Monday with some of the most remote villages in the United States to determine their food and water needs, as well as assess the damage after a massive storm flooded communities on the state's vast western coast this weekend.

No one was reported injured or killed during the massive storm — the remnants of Typhoon Merbok —

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as it traveled north through the Bering Strait over the weekend. However, damage to homes, roads and other infrastructure is only starting to be revealed as floodwaters recede.

About 21,000 residents living in the small communities dotting a 1,000-mile (1,609-kilometer) stretch of Alaska's western coastline — a distance longer than the entire length of California's coast — were impacted by the storm.

Many homes throughout the region were flooded, and some were knocked off their foundations by the rushing waters propelled by strong winds. Officials were starting the process of determining damage to roads, ports, seawalls and water and sewage systems.

The state transportation department said most airports in the area were open, and officials were making either temporary or permanent repairs to the runways that still have issues, said Jeremy Zidek, a spokesperson for the Alaska Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

The storm remained stalled Monday in the Chukchi Sea near northwest Alaska, but it was rapidly weakening after at its most powerful stage influencing weather patterns as far away as California.

Coastal flood warnings were extended for an area north of the Bering Strait since water will be slow to recede in towns like Kotzebue, Kivalina and Shishmaref, National Weather Service meteorologist Kaitlyn Lardeo said.

Shishmaref had seen water surges 5.5 feet (1.68 meters) above the normal tide level, while Kotzebue and Kivalina had smaller surges, but were both still without power Monday, she said.

Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy on Sunday identified five communities — Hooper Bay, Scammon Bay, Golovin, Newtok and Nome — as being greatly impacted by a combination of high water, flooding, erosion and electrical issues. Nome, where one home floated down a river until it was caught by a bridge, was among the many reporting road damage after recording tidal surges 11.1 feet (3.38 meters) above normal.

Zidek said state officials were looking closely at those five, but also reaching out to every community in the region because of the numerous reports of damage.

"While the needs may be greater in some, we don't want to neglect those other communities that have minor issues that still need to be resolved," he said. However, efforts to reach some communities has been difficult due to downed communication lines.

The state's emergency operations center is fully staffed with military, state agencies and volunteer organizations to address the aftermath of the storm.

Alaska National Guard members in the western half of the nation's largest state have been activated to help, either in the communities where they live or elsewhere along the coast, he said.

The American Red Cross has 50 volunteers ready to help and will be sent to communities that are in most need.

Most support personnel will have to be flown to these communities since there are few roads in western Alaska. Providing air support will be the Alaska National Guard, small commuter airlines that routinely fly between these small villages and possibly bush pilots.

Weather always adversely impacts flights in rural Alaska, but Zidek said the forecast seems favorable to conduct the response operations.

"Three may be another smaller weather front coming in, but it's nothing unusual for this time of the year," he said.

Dunleavy said he would request a federal disaster declaration as soon as agencies gather necessary information about the damage. If approved, the governor said the Federal Emergency Management Agency would cover at least 75% of eligible disaster costs, while the state would pick up the tab for the rest.

On Sunday, Dunleavy said time was of the essence because freeze-up, meaning the start of winter, can happen as early as October.

"We just have to impress upon our federal friends that it's not a Florida situation where we've got months to work on this," he said. "We've got several weeks."

Storm damages space center in Japan, 130K still lack power

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

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TOKYO (AP) — A tropical storm that dumped heavy rain as it cut across Japan moved into the Pacific Ocean on Tuesday after killing two and injuring more than 100, paralyzing traffic and leaving thousands of homes without power.

New damage was reported in southern Japan, where Typhoon Nanmadol hit over the weekend before weakening as it moved north.

On Tanegashima island, south of Kyushu island, a wall was damaged at a Japan Aerospace and Exploration Agency's space center, the Economy and Industry Ministry said. The extent of damage to the building used for rocket assembly was being assessed.

Two deaths were reported in Miyazaki prefecture on Japan's southern main island of Kyushu on Monday, when the storm was more powerful, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency said. One was a man was found in a car sunk in a flooded farm in Miyakonojo town, and another was found underneath a landslide in Mimata.

One person was missing in the western prefecture of Hiroshima, and 115 others were injured across western Japan, the agency said. Most of injuries were minor, with people falling down in the rainstorm, hit by shards of broken windows or flying objects.

More than 130,000 homes, most of them in the Kyushu region, were still without power Tuesday morning, according to the Economy and Industry Ministry. Many convenience stores were at one point closed and some distribution of supplies has been delayed.

Most transportation returned to normal on Tuesday when commuters returned to work after a three-day weekend. Bullet trains and most ground transportation resumed operation, but dozens of flights were grounded in northeastern Japan.

The tropical storm has headed out to the Pacific Ocean off northern Japanese coast, the Japan Meteorological Agency said Tuesday.

Fiona dumps more rain on Puerto Rico; troops rescue hundreds

By MARICARMEN RIVERA SANCHEZ and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Hurricane Fiona unleashed more rain on Puerto Rico on Monday, a day after the storm knocked out power and water to most of the island, and National Guard troops rescued hundreds of people who got stranded.

The governor warned that it could take days to get the lights back on.

The blow from Fiona was made more devastating because Puerto Rico has yet to recover from Hurricane Maria, which killed nearly 3,000 people and destroyed the power grid in 2017. Five years later, more than 3,000 homes on the island are still covered by blue tarps.

The storm stripped pavement from roads, tore off roofs and sent torrents pouring into homes. It also took out a bridge and flooded two airports.

Authorities reported two deaths from the hurricane — a Puerto Rican man who was swept away by a flooded river and a person in the Dominican Republic who was hit by a falling tree.

The storm was still expected to dump up to 15 inches (38 centimeters) of rain in some places as it spun away from the U.S. territory that is home to 3.2 million people.

Forecasts called for the storm to grow into a major hurricane of Category 3 or greater. It was on a path to pass close to the Turks and Caicos islands on Tuesday and was not expected to threaten the U.S. mainland.

One death in Puerto Rico was associated with the blackout — a 70-year-old man who was burned to death after he tried to fill his generator with gasoline while it was running, officials said.

Gov. Pedro Pierluisi declined to say how long it would take to fully restore electricity, but he said for most customers it would be "a question of days."

Since the start of the storm, National Guard troops have rescued more than 900 people, Gen. José Reyes told a news conference.

Meanwhile in the Dominican Republic, authorities closed ports and beaches and told most people to stay home from work. Nearly 800 people were evacuated to safer locations, and more than 700 were in shelters, officials said.

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The hurricane left several highways blocked, and a tourist pier in the town of Miches was badly damaged by high waves. At least four international airports were closed, officials said.

The Dominican president, Luis Abinader, said authorities would need several days to assess the storm's effects.

Back in Puerto Rico, the National Weather Service office said flash flooding was occurring in south-central parts of the island and tweeted, "MOVE TO HIGHER GROUND IMMEDIATELY!"

Up to 22 inches (56 centimeters) of rain fell in some areas of Puerto Rico, and forecasters said another 4 to 8 inches could fall as the storm moves away, with even more possible in some places.

"It's important people understand that this is not over," said Ernesto Morales, a weather service meteorologist in San Juan.

He said flooding reached "historic levels," with authorities evacuating or rescuing hundreds of people across Puerto Rico.

"The damages that we are seeing are catastrophic," Pierluisi said.

Water service was cut to more than 837,000 customers — two thirds of the total on the island — because of turbid water at filtration plants or lack of power, officials said.

Before dawn Monday, authorities in a boat navigated the flooded streets of the north coast town of Catano and used a megaphone to alert people that the pumps had collapsed, urging them to evacuate as soon as possible.

Authorities said at least 1,300 people spent the night in shelters across the island.

Brown water poured into streets and homes and closed airports in Ponce and Mayaguez.

The system also ripped asphalt from roads and washed away a bridge in the central mountain town of Utuado that police said was installed by the National Guard after Maria hit as a Category 4 storm.

Fiona also tore the roofs off homes, including that of Nelson Cirino in the northern coastal town of Loiza.

"I was sleeping and saw when the corrugated metal flew off," he said as he watched rain drench his belongings and wind whip his colorful curtains into the air.

After roaring over the Dominican Republic, Fiona moved into the open Atlantic, where it was projected to strengthen, according to the National Hurricane Center.

On Monday evening, it was centered about 130 miles (205 kilometers) southeast of Grand Turk Island and heading northwest at 10 mph (17 kph), with maximum sustained winds of 105 mph (165 kph).

Tropical storm-force winds extended for 140 miles (220 kilometers) from the center.

U.S. President Joe Biden declared a state of emergency as the eye of the storm approached the island's southwest corner.

Fiona previously battered the eastern Caribbean, killing one man in the French territory of Guadeloupe when floodwaters washed his home away, officials said.

The system hit Puerto Rico on the anniversary of Hurricane Hugo, which slammed into the island in 1989 as a Category 3 storm.

US court awards \$73 million for Venezuelan opponent's death

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A federal judge in Miami has awarded \$73 million in damages to the family of a prominent opponent of Venezuela's socialist government who died while in custody in what he described as a "murder for hire" carried out by a criminal enterprise led by President Nicolás Maduro.

Fernando Albán was arrested in 2018 upon arrival to the international airport in Caracas from New York, where he was part of a delegation that had denounced Maduro's government on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly. He died three days later in what authorities initially described as a suicide jump from the 10th floor of a building belonging to Venezuela's intelligence services.

Albán's death provoked international outrage and condemnation from the U.S. Last year, his widow and two children sued Maduro and several high-ranking members of his government for carrying out the kidnapping, torture and murder of the one-time Caracas councilman.

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The family accused the men of belonging to the “Cartel of the Suns,” a purported drug-smuggling ring involving top Venezuelan officials and guerrillas from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — a designated terrorist group — that allegedly sends 200 metric tons of cocaine from Venezuela into the U.S. each year.

Judge Darrin P. Gayles issued a default judgment against the cartel for failing to respond to the lawsuit in a previously unreported ruling last week. In it, the court found that what it calls the “Maduro criminal enterprise” is liable for federal racketeering offenses in Albán’s death because its entire purpose is to “exercise unlawful authoritarian control over Venezuela” through narcotics trafficking, acts of terrorism and human rights violations.

Adopting the earlier findings of a magistrate judge, the court said operatives for the Maduro government tailed Albán while he was still in New York, taking surveillance photos and sending information back to Venezuela that facilitated his kidnapping and murder upon his return home.

“Mr. Albán’s murder was a murder for hire because members of the Maduro Criminal Enterprise who committed the murder received payment (in the form of salaries) from the Maduro regime,” the court said.

The court found that the Cartel must pay \$73 million to Albán’s estate for the pain and suffering caused by his death.

However, it’s unclear how the survivors will collect such a large reward. While Maduro and other defendants named in the original complaint — including his Defense Minister and the head of Venezuela’s supreme court — have been criminally charged in the U.S. with narco-terrorism and corruption, they’re under little pressure from Albán’s former cohorts in the opposition to abandon power.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration has shown a willingness to ease sanctions on the oil-rich OPEC nation in exchange for progress in talks with the opposition aimed at fostering a more democratic environment for the 2024 presidential election.

Additionally, the only alleged cartel ringleader who is in U.S. custody, retired Army Gen. Cliver Alcala, is represented by a court-appointed legal team after claiming he was unable to pay for his defense.

A lawyer for Albán’s family declined to comment.

Albán’s case has also been denounced at the International Criminal Court, which is investigating allegations of torture and killings by Maduro’s security forces. In late 2021, Attorney General Tarek William Saab announced that two members of the feared SEBIN intelligence service had been sentenced to nearly six years in prison for negligence in connection to Albán’s death while in their custody.

On sidelines of UN, a push for China’s abuses to be punished

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The United Nations will be judged by how it addresses China’s persecution of ethnic minorities, diplomats and human rights advocates charged Monday on the sidelines of the body’s General Assembly, calling for forceful action after a report raised the specter of “crimes against humanity.”

For years, rights watchdogs and journalists have exposed brutal treatment of Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim ethnic groups in the far western region of Xinjiang, where China is accused of a ruthless campaign of torture, sexual assault and ethnic cleansing. Those accusations have been widely accepted in the West, but were given a new imprimatur with the landmark report released last month by the U.N. human rights office.

“Inaction is no longer possible,” Fernand de Varennes, the United Nations’ special rapporteur on minority rights said at a forum sponsored by the Atlantic Council and Human Rights Watch as world leaders descend on New York. “If we allow this to go unpunished, what kind of message is being propagated?”

Jeffrey Prescott, a deputy U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, suggested the integrity of the institution was at stake in its response to China.

“How these atrocities are addressed goes ultimately to the credibility of that system, to the credibility of our international system itself,” he said. “It’s deeply disheartening to see a country that has been so central to the creation of the modern U.N. system, and enjoys its status as a permanent member of the

Security Council, so profoundly violating its commitments.”

The U.N. report on China’s alleged abuses was released in the final minutes of the last day in office of Michele Bachelet, now the former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. Its release was believed to have been long delayed. Bachelet never explained the timing.

China responded to its release with fury, calling it “a patchwork of false information” and portraying it as a fabrication cooked up by Western nations. It issued a lengthy rebuttal and vowed to stop cooperating with the U.N.’s human rights office, and Chinese diplomats are now lobbying others to thwart the possibility of further scrutiny of its campaign in Xinjiang.

Rob Roe, Canada’s ambassador to the United Nations, called China’s reaction unsurprising and said new action was merited.

“We need to deal with this question. We need to deal with the question of what further sanctions will be required. We need to deal with the question of what further steps could be taken to respond to the extent of this crisis,” he said.

The U.N.’s report was drawn, in part, from interviews from more than two dozen former detainees and others familiar with conditions at eight detention centers who described being beaten, prevented from praying and forced to perform sex acts on guards. It said the evidence could constitute “crimes against humanity” but made no mention of genocide, which the United States and other countries have accused China of committing.

Prince Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the immediate predecessor to Bachelet as U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, said his successor deserved credit for publishing the report, but said it was a “shortcoming” not to refer to the abuses as genocide. Likewise, he criticized it for not calling for the establishment of a formal U.N. commission of inquiry.

“To be silent is to be an accomplice,” he said.

Rayhan Asat, a Uyghur lawyer who works for the Atlantic Council and whose brother is imprisoned in Xinjiang, urged the world to insist that action be taken, not just against China, but companies who profit off its abuses.

“We should not let the Chinese government off the hook by normalizing what the state did,” she said, “because at the end of the day, this is state violence.”

‘Serial’ case: Adnan Syed released, conviction tossed

By BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — A Baltimore judge on Monday ordered the release of Adnan Syed after overturning Syed’s conviction for the 1999 murder of high school student Hae Min Lee — a case that was chronicled in the hit podcast “Serial,” a true-crime series that transfixed listeners and revolutionized the genre.

At the behest of prosecutors who had uncovered new evidence, Circuit Court Judge Melissa Phinn ordered that Syed’s conviction be vacated as she approved the release of the now-41-year-old who has spent more than two decades behind bars. There were gasps and applause in the crowded courtroom as the judge announced her decision.

Phinn ruled that the state violated its legal obligation to share evidence that could have bolstered Syed’s defense. She ordered Syed to be placed on home detention with GPS location monitoring. The judge also said the state must decide whether to seek a new trial date or dismiss the case within 30 days.

“All right Mr. Syed, you’re free to join your family,” Phinn said as the hearing ended.

Minutes later, Syed emerged from the courthouse and flashed a smile as he was shepherded to a waiting SUV through a sea of cameras and a cheering crowd of supporters.

Syed did not speak during the hearing, nor did he address the reporters outside afterward. But after the hearing, his lawyer Erica Suter described his reaction to the decision, saying: “He said he couldn’t believe it’s real.”

Sara Patel, a friend of Syed’s, said “we’re very happy and relieved that he’s finally free. We’ve just been on pins and needles this whole time.”

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Syed has always maintained his innocence. His case captured the attention of millions in 2014 when the debut season of "Serial" focused on Lee's killing and raised doubts about some of the evidence prosecutors had used, inspiring heated debates across dinner tables and water coolers about Syed's innocence or guilt.

Last week, prosecutors filed a motion saying a lengthy investigation conducted with the defense had uncovered new evidence that could undermine the conviction of Syed, Lee's ex-boyfriend, in 2000.

"I understand how difficult this is, but we need to make sure we hold the correct person accountable," assistant state's attorney Becky Feldman told the judge as she described various details from the case that undermine the decades-old conviction, including other suspects, flawed cellphone data, unreliable witness testimony and a potentially biased detective.

After the hearing, State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby said investigators are waiting for the results of "DNA analysis" before determining whether to seek a new trial date or throw out the case against Syed and "certify his innocence."

Syed was serving a life sentence after he was convicted of strangling 18-year-old Lee, whose body was found buried in a Baltimore park.

The investigation "revealed undisclosed and newly-developed information regarding two alternative suspects, as well as unreliable cell phone tower data," Mosby's office said in a news release last week. The other suspects were known persons at the time of the original investigation, but weren't properly ruled out nor disclosed to the defense, said prosecutors, who declined to release information about the suspects, due to the ongoing investigation.

Prosecutors said the failure to disclose the alternative suspects to defense attorneys amounted to what's known as a Brady violation.

But Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh, whose office represented the state during Syed's appeals, issued a statement Monday evening saying "among the other serious problems with the motion to vacate, the allegations related to Brady violations are incorrect."

"Neither State's Attorney Mosby nor anyone from her office bothered to consult with either the Assistant State's Attorney who prosecuted the case or with anyone in my office regarding these alleged violations," Frosh said. "The file in this case was made available on several occasions to the defense."

Prosecutors said they weren't asserting that Syed is innocent, but they lacked confidence "in the integrity of the conviction" and recommended his release. The state's attorney's office had said if the motion were granted it would effectively put Syed in a new trial status, vacating his convictions, while the case remained active.

Syed was led into the crowded courtroom in handcuffs Monday. Wearing a white shirt with a tie, he sat next to his attorney. His mother and other family representatives were in the room, as was Mosby.

In 2016, a lower court ordered a retrial for Syed on the grounds that his attorney, Cristina Gutierrez, who died in 2004, didn't contact an alibi witness and provided ineffective counsel.

But after a series of appeals, Maryland's highest court in 2019 denied a new trial in a 4-3 opinion. The Court of Appeals agreed with a lower court that Syed's legal counsel was deficient in failing to investigate an alibi witness, but it disagreed that the deficiency prejudiced the case. The court said Syed waived his ineffective counsel claim.

The U.S. Supreme Court declined to review Syed's case in 2019.

The true-crime series was the brainchild of longtime radio producer and former Baltimore Sun reporter Sarah Koenig, who spent more than a year digging into Syed's case and reporting her findings in almost real-time in hour-long segments. The 12-episode podcast won a Peabody Award and was transformative in popularizing podcasts for a wide audience.

During the hearing, Hae Min Lee's brother Young Lee spoke to the court, saying he feels betrayed by prosecutors, since he thought the case was settled.

"This is not a podcast for me. This is real life," he said.

Speaking outside the courthouse after the ruling, Mosby expressed sympathy for Lee's brother and said she understands why he feels betrayed.

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"But I also understand the importance as the administer of the criminal justice system to ensure equality and justice and fairness. That is entitled to the defendant, as well," she added.

Witnesses: Myanmar air attack kills 13, including 7 children

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Government helicopters have attacked a school and village in north-central Myanmar, killing at least 13 people including seven children, a school administrator and an aid worker said Monday.

Civilian casualties often occur in attacks by the military government on pro-democracy insurgents and their allies. However, the number of children killed in the air attack last Friday in Tabayin township in Sagaing region appeared to be the highest since the army seized power in February last year, ousting the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

The army's takeover triggered mass nonviolent protests nationwide. The military and police responded with deadly force, resulting in the spread of armed resistance in the cities and countryside. Fighting has been especially fierce in Sagaing, where the military has launched several offensives, in some cases burning villages, which displaced more than half a million people, according to a report issued by UNICEF this month.

Friday's attack occurred in Let Yet Kone village in Tabayin, also known as Depayin, about 110 kilometers (70 miles) northwest of Mandalay, the country's second-largest city.

School administrator Mar Mar said she was trying to get students to safe hiding places in ground-floor classrooms when two of four Mi-35 helicopters hovering north of the village began attacking, firing machine guns and heavier weapons at the school, which is in the compound of the village's Buddhist monastery.

Mar Mar works at the school with 20 volunteers who teach 240 students from kindergarten to eighth grade. She has been hiding in the village with her three children since fleeing for safety to avoid the government crackdown after participating last year in a civil disobedience movement against the military takeover. She uses the pseudonym Mar Mar to protect herself and relatives from the military.

She said she had not expected trouble since the aircraft had been over the village before without any incident.

"Since the students had done nothing wrong, I never thought that they would be brutally shot by machine guns," Mar Mar told The Associated Press by phone on Monday.

By the time she and the students and teachers were able to take shelter in the classrooms, one teacher and a 7-year-old student had already been shot in the neck and head and Mar Mar had to use pieces of clothing to try to stanch the bleeding.

"They kept shooting into the compound from the air for an hour," Mar Mar said. "They didn't stop even for one minute. All we could do at that time was chant Buddhist mantras."

When the air attack stopped, about 80 soldiers entered the monastery compound, firing their guns at the buildings.

The soldiers then ordered everyone in the compound to come out of the buildings. Mar Mar said she saw about 30 students with wounds on their backs, thighs, faces and other parts of the bodies. Some students had lost limbs.

"The children told me that their friends were dying," she said. "I also heard a student yelling, 'It hurts so much. I can't take it anymore. Kill me, please.' This voice still echoes in my ears," Mar Mar said.

She said at least six students were killed in the school and a 13-year-old boy working at a fishery in a nearby village was also fatally shot. At least six adults were also killed in the air attack in other parts of the village, she said. The bodies of the dead children were taken away by the soldiers.

More than 20 people, including nine wounded children and three teachers, were also taken by the soldiers, she said. Two of those captured were accused of being members of the anti-government People's Defense Force, the armed wing of the resistance to the military.

Security forces also burned down a house in the village, causing residents to flee.

A volunteer in Tabayin assisting displaced people who asked not to be identified because of fear of

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government reprisals said the bodies of the dead children were cremated by the soldiers in nearby Ye U township.

"I am now telling the international community about this because I want redress for our children," Mar Mar said. "Instead of humanitarian aid, what we really need is genuine democracy and human rights."

Myanmar Now, an online news service, and other independent Myanmar media also reported the attack and the students' deaths.

A day after the attack, the state-run Myanmar Alinn newspaper reported that security forces had gone to check the village after receiving information that the members of the People's Defense Force were hiding there.

The report said members of the People's Defense Force and their allies from the Kachin Independence Army, an ethnic rebel group, were hiding inside houses and the monastery and started shooting at the security forces, causing deaths and injuries among village residents. It said the injured were taken to hospitals, but did not mention the situation of the students.

According to the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors human rights in Myanmar, at least 2,298 civilians have been killed by the security forces since the army seized power last year.

The U.N. has documented 260 attacks on schools and education personnel since the coup, the U.N. Child Rights Committee said in June.

Ukraine warns of 'nuclear terrorism' after strike near plant

By KARL RITTER and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Russian missile blasted a crater close to a nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine on Monday, damaging nearby industrial equipment but not hitting its three reactors. Ukrainian authorities denounced the move as an act of "nuclear terrorism."

The missile struck within 300 meters (328 yards) of the reactors at the South Ukraine Nuclear Power Plant near the city of Yuzhnoukrainsk in Mykolaiv province, leaving a hole 2 meters (6 1/2 feet) deep and 4 meters (13 feet) wide, according to Ukrainian nuclear operator Energoatom.

The reactors were operating normally and no employees were injured, it said. But the proximity of the strike renewed fears that Russia's nearly 7-month-long war in Ukraine might produce a radiation disaster.

This nuclear power station is Ukraine's second-largest after the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which has repeatedly come under fire.

Following recent battlefield setbacks, Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened last week to step up Russian attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure. Throughout the war, Russia has targeted Ukraine's electricity generation and transmission equipment, causing blackouts and endangering the safety systems of the country's nuclear power plants.

The industrial complex that includes the South Ukraine plant sits along the Southern Bug River about 300 kilometers (190 miles) south of the capital, Kyiv. The attack caused the temporary shutdown of a nearby hydroelectric power plant and shattered more than 100 windows at the complex, Ukrainian authorities said. The U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency said three power lines were knocked offline but later reconnected.

Ukraine's Defense Ministry released a black-and-white video showing two large fireballs erupting one after the other in the dark, followed by incandescent showers of sparks, at 19 minutes after midnight. The ministry and Energoatom called the strike "nuclear terrorism."

The Russian Defense Ministry did not immediately comment on the attack.

Russian forces have occupied the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, Europe's largest, since early after the invasion. Shelling has cut off the plant's transmission lines, forcing operators to shut down its six reactors to avoid a radiation disaster. Russia and Ukraine have traded blame for the strikes.

The IAEA, which has stationed monitors at the Zaporizhzhia plant, said a main transmission line was reconnected Friday, providing the electricity it needs to cool its reactors.

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But the mayor of Enerhodar, where the Zaporizhzhia plant is located, reported more Russian shelling Monday in the city's industrial zone.

While warning Friday of a possible ramp-up of strikes, Putin claimed his forces had so far acted with restraint but warned "if the situation develops this way, our response will be more serious."

"Just recently, the Russian armed forces have delivered a couple of impactful strikes," he said. "Let's consider those as warning strikes."

The latest Russian shelling killed at least eight civilians and wounded 22, Ukraine's presidential office said Monday. The governor of the northeastern Kharkiv region, now largely back in Ukrainian hands, said Russian shelling killed four medical workers trying to evacuate patients from a psychiatric hospital and wounded two patients.

The mayor of the Russian-occupied eastern city of Donetsk, meanwhile, said Ukrainian shelling had killed 13 civilians and wounded eight there.

Patricia Lewis, the international security research director at the Chatham House think-tank in London, said attacks at the Zaporizhzhia plant and Monday's strike on the South Ukraine plant indicated that the Russian military was attempting to knock Ukrainian nuclear plants offline before winter.

"It's a very, very dangerous and illegal act to be targeting a nuclear station," Lewis told The Associated Press. "Only the generals will know the intent, but there's clearly a pattern."

"What they seem to be doing each time is to try to cut off the power to the reactor," she said. "It's a very clumsy way to do it, because how accurate are these missiles?"

Power is needed to run pumps that circulate cooling water to the reactors, preventing overheating and — in a worst-case scenario — a radiation-spewing nuclear fuel meltdown.

Other recent Russian strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure have targeted power plants in the north and a dam in the south. They came in response to a sweeping Ukrainian counterattack in the country's east that reclaimed Russia-occupied territory in the Kharkiv region.

Analysts have noted that beyond recapturing territory, challenges remain in holding it. In a video address Monday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said cryptically of that effort, "I cannot reveal all the details, but thanks to the Security Service of Ukraine, we are now confident that the occupiers will not have any foothold on Ukrainian soil."

The Ukrainian successes in Kharkiv — Russia's biggest defeat since its forces were repelled from around Kyiv in the invasion's opening stage — have fueled rare public criticism in Russia and added to the military and diplomatic pressure on Putin. The Kremlin's nationalist critics have questioned why Moscow has failed to plunge Ukraine into darkness yet by hitting all of its major nuclear power plants.

In other developments:

— A governor said Ukraine had recaptured the village of Bilogorivka in the Russian-occupied eastern region of Luhansk. Russia didn't acknowledge the claim.

— The Russian-installed leaders of Ukraine's Luhansk, Donetsk and Kherson regions reiterated calls Monday for referendums to be held to tie their areas formally to Russia. These officials have discussed such plans before but the referendums have been repeatedly delayed, possibly because of insufficient popular support.

— The Supreme Court in the Russian-occupied region of Luhansk convicted a former interpreter for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and another person whose duties were not specified of high treason Monday. Both were sentenced to 13 years in prison.

—The Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania closed their borders Monday to most Russian citizens in response to domestic support in Russia for the war in Ukraine. Poland will join the ban on Sept. 26.

— Mega-pop star Alla Pugacheva became the most prominent Russian celebrity to criticize the war, describing Russia in an Instagram post Sunday as "a pariah" and saying its soldiers were dying for "illusory goals." Valery Fadeyev, the head of the Russian president's Human Rights Council, accused Pugacheva of insincerely citing humanitarian concerns to justify her criticism and predicted that popular artists like her would enjoy less public influence after the war.

Montana to allow transgender people to change birth record

By AMY BETH HANSON Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — After months of defiance, Montana's health department said Monday it will follow a judge's ruling and temporarily allow transgender people to change the gender on their birth certificates.

The judge issued a scathing order Monday morning saying health officials made "calculated violations" of his order, which had told them to temporarily stop enforcing a law blocking transgender people from changing their gender on their birth certificates unless they had undergone surgery.

District Court Judge Michael Moses said Monday he would promptly consider motions for contempt based on continued violations of his April order, which he clarified in a verbal order at a hearing on Thursday. Just hours after that hearing, the Republican-run state said it would defy the order and keep in place a rule that disallowed any changes to birth certificates unless they were due to a clerical error.

On Monday afternoon, the Department of Public Health and Human Services issued a statement saying it would comply with the order, despite disagreeing with it.

During Thursday's hearing, attorneys for the state had argued that blocking the law did not prevent the health department from promulgating new administrative rules.

The state, Moses wrote, engaged "in needless legal gymnastics to attempt to rationalize their actions and their calculated violations of the order." He called the state's interpretation of his earlier order "demonstrably ridiculous."

"The department stands by its actions and analysis concerning the April 2022 preliminary injunction decision, as set forth in its rulemaking that addressed critical regulatory gaps left by the court," said Jon Ebel, spokesperson for the health department. The agency is considering its next steps in the litigation, the statement said.

"It's unfortunate that it has taken two very clear court orders and many months to comply with the law," said Alex Rate, an attorney with the ACLU of Montana. The ACLU represents the plaintiffs, two transgender people who want to change their birth certificates.

"But from the perspective of transgender Montanans who are seeking to obtain accurate identity documents, today's announcement is certainly progress," Rate said.

Ebel did not respond to an email asking when the state might start processing applications. Rate did not know how many people have sought to correct their birth certificate in recent months, but he was aware of people who had contacted the court after the April injunction and up through Monday.

In April, Moses temporarily blocked a law passed by the Republican-controlled 2021 Legislature that would require transgender residents to undergo a surgical procedure and obtain a court order before being able to change the sex on their birth certificate. He said the law was unconstitutionally vague because it did not specify what kind of surgery would be required.

Rather than returning to a 2017 rule that allowed transgender residents to file an affidavit with the health department to correct the gender on their birth certificate, the state instead issued a rule saying a person's sex could not be changed, even after having surgery.

The health department "refused to issue corrections to birth certificates for weeks in violation of the order," Moses wrote. The state did not appeal Moses' ruling either.

The ACLU of Montana had requested the judicial clarification due to the state's inaction.

Moses' order on Monday included a copy of the 2017 rules.

"If defendants requires further clarification, they are welcome to request it from the court rather than engage in activities that constitute unlawful violations of the order," Moses wrote.

Such open defiance of a judge's order is very unusual from a government agency, said Carl Tobias, a former University of Montana Law School professor now at the University of Richmond. When officials disagree with a ruling, the typical response is to appeal to a higher court, he said.

"Appeal is what you contemplate — not that you can nullify a judge's orders. Otherwise, people just wouldn't obey the law," Tobias said Thursday. "The system can't work that way."

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The legal dispute comes as conservative lawmakers in numerous states including Montana have sought to restrict transgender rights, including banning transgender girls from competing in girls school sports. A different Montana judge last week determined a law passed by state lawmakers seeking to ban transgender women from participating on female collegiate sports teams was unconstitutional.

Judge says alleged clinic shooter can be forcibly medicated

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — A mentally ill man charged with killing three people at a Colorado Planned Parenthood clinic in 2015 because it offered abortion services can be forcibly medicated to try to make him competent to stand trial, a federal judge ruled Monday.

The prosecution of Robert Dear, 64, has stalled because he has been repeatedly found mentally incompetent since his arrest and he has refused to take anti-psychotic medication for delusional disorder.

During a three-day hearing this summer, prosecutors argued that medication had a substantial likelihood, based on research and the experience of government experts, to make Dear well enough to meet the legal standard for mental competency — being able to understand proceedings and assist in his defense.

Dear's lawyers and experts, however, said the government's plan did not take into account Dear's age and his health problems, including untreated high blood pressure and high cholesterol, which could be worsened as a result of the medication's side effects.

U.S. District Judge Robert Blackburn ruled that involuntary medication was the only realistic approach with a substantial chance of making Dear competent to stand trial and was also in the best interest of his overall health, both mental and physical.

"Under the proposed treatment plan, and again based on clear and convincing evidence, involuntary medication of Mr. Dear is not substantially likely to engender dangerous and unmanageable side effects," he said.

Dear is represented by federal public defenders who do not comment on cases.

Dear, who has called himself a "warrior for the babies," intended to wage "war" against the clinic because it offered abortion services, arming himself with four semi-automatic rifles, five handguns, two other rifles, a shotgun, propane tanks and 500 rounds of ammunition, prosecutors have alleged. He began shooting outside the clinic before getting inside by shooting his way through a door, according to his federal indictment.

According to experts who testified and Dear's lawyers, Dear has persecutory delusions that cause him to believe that the FBI is following him because he called a radio show in 1993 to criticize the agency over the law enforcement siege against the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. He also believes his lawyers are working for the FBI and the judge is also in on the arrangement.

Dear mentioned the radio call in one of many outbursts during the recent hearing, where he also claimed the shooting was a "success" and told the judge to go to hell because he did not get to testify. He largely remained quiet after Blackburn warned him that he would not tolerate any more disturbances. The judge said he concluded the outbursts were not the result of Dear's mental illness but of "selfish, childish and disaffected arrogance."

After Dear's prosecution bogged down in state court over the competency issue, Dear was charged in federal court in 2019 under the 1994 Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act. Federal prosecutors have said they would not seek the death penalty against him if he is convicted, but life in prison instead.

Two of the people killed in the attack were accompanying friends to the clinic — Ke'Arre Stewart, 29, an Army veteran who served in Iraq and was a father of two, and Jennifer Markovsky, 36, a mother of two who grew up in Oahu, Hawaii. The third person killed was a campus police officer at a nearby college, Garrett Swasey, who responded to the clinic after hearing there was an active shooter.

Queen Elizabeth II mourned by Britain and world at funeral

By DANICA KIRKA, MIKE CORDER and SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

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LONDON (AP) — The United Kingdom and the world bade farewell to Queen Elizabeth II on Monday with a state funeral that drew presidents and kings, princes and prime ministers — and crowds in the streets of London and at Windsor Castle — to honor a monarch whose 70-year reign defined an age.

In a country known for pomp and pageantry, the first state funeral since Winston Churchill's was filled with spectacle: Before the service, a bell tolled 96 times — once a minute for each year of Elizabeth's life. Then, 142 Royal Navy sailors used ropes to draw the gun carriage carrying her flag-draped coffin to Westminster Abbey, where pallbearers carried it inside and about 2,000 people ranging from world leaders to health care workers gathered to mourn.

The trappings of state and monarchy abounded: The coffin was draped with the Royal Standard and atop it was the Imperial State Crown, sparkling with almost 3,000 diamonds, and the sovereign's orb and scepter.

But the personal was also present: The coffin was followed into the church by generations of Elizabeth's descendants, including King Charles III, heir to the throne Prince William and 9-year-old George, who is second in line. On a wreath atop the coffin, a handwritten note read, "In loving and devoted memory," and was signed Charles R — for Rex, or king.

"Here, where Queen Elizabeth was married and crowned, we gather from across the nation, from the Commonwealth, and from the nations of the world, to mourn our loss, to remember her long life of selfless service, and in sure confidence to commit her to the mercy of God our maker and redeemer," the dean of the medieval abbey, David Hoyle, told the mourners.

The service ended with two minutes of silence observed across the United Kingdom, after which the attendees sang the national anthem, now titled "God Save the King."

The day began early when the doors of Parliament's 900-year-old Westminster Hall were closed to mourners after hundreds of thousands had filed in front of her coffin.

Monday was declared a public holiday in honor of Elizabeth, who died Sept. 8 — and hundreds of thousands of people descended on central London to witness history. They jammed sidewalks to watch the coffin wend its way through the streets of the capital after the service. As the procession passed Buckingham Palace, the queen's official residence in the city, staff stood outside, some bowing and curtsying.

Mark Elliott, 53, who traveled from the Lake District in northern England with his wife and two children to watch the procession, got up at 1:30 a.m. to stake out a good viewing location near the palace.

"I know we don't know the queen, but she's been our head of state for 70 years, you feel as though you know her, you feel as though she's part of the family. It is kind of moving," he said.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said in his sermon at Westminster Abbey that "few leaders receive the outpouring of love we have seen" for the queen.

More people lined the route the hearse took from the capital to Windsor Castle, and many tossed flowers at the cortege as it passed. Millions more tuned into the funeral live, and crowds flocked to parks and public spaces across the U.K. to watch it on screens. Even the Google doodle turned a respectful black for the day.

As the coffin arrived at the castle, there were poignant reminders of her love of animals: A groom stood at the roadside with one of her ponies, Emma, and another member of staff held the leashes of two of her beloved corgis, Sandy and Muick.

During the committal ceremony in St. George's Chapel on the castle grounds, Dean of Windsor David Conner praised Elizabeth for her "life of unstinting service" to the nation but also her "kindness, concern and reassuring care for her family and friends and neighbors."

Then the crown and the orb and scepter were removed from atop the coffin and placed on the altar — separating them from the queen for the last time. Her coffin was lowered into the royal vault through an opening in the chapel's floor. Charles looked weary and emotional as mourners sang the national anthem.

At a private family service, the queen was later laid to rest with her husband, Prince Philip.

The mourners at Westminster Abbey included U.S. President Joe Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron, all of the living former British prime ministers and European royalty.

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In Japan, whose Emperor Naruhito also attended, several people sipped beer and watched the service at The Aldgate British pub in Tokyo's fashionable Shibuya district.

"The queen had an especially long history in a country that boasts a long history, and so she deserves deep respect," said one of them, Tomotaka Hosokawa.

The global outpouring of sympathy touched the king, who on the eve of the funeral, issued a message of thanks to people in the U.K. and around the world, saying he and his wife, Camilla, the queen consort, have been "moved beyond measure" by the large numbers of people who have turned out to pay their respects.

Jilly Fitzgerald, who was in Windsor, said there was a sense of community among the mourners as they prepared to wait hours to see the procession carrying the queen's coffin.

"It's good to be with all the people who are all feeling the same. It's like a big family because everyone feels that ... the queen was part of their family," she said.

Strong earthquake shakes Mexico's Pacific coast; 1 killed

By FABIOLA SANCHEZ and MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A magnitude 7.6 earthquake shook Mexico's central Pacific coast on Monday, killing at least one person and setting off a seismic alarm in the rattled capital on the anniversary of two earlier devastating quakes.

There were at least some early reports of damage to buildings from the quake, which hit at 1:05 p.m. local time, according to the U.S. Geologic Survey, which had initially put the magnitude at 7.5.

It said the quake was centered 37 kilometers (23 miles) southeast of Aquila near the boundary of Colima and Michoacan states and at a depth of 15.1 kilometers (9.4 miles).

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said via Twitter that the secretary of the navy told him one person was killed in the port city of Manzanillo, Colima when a wall at a mall collapsed.

In Coalcoman, Michoacan, near the quake's epicenter, buildings were damaged, but there were not immediate reports of injuries.

"It started slowly and then was really strong and continued and continued until it started to relent," said 16-year-old Carla Cárdenas, a resident of Coalcoman. Cárdenas ran out of her family's hotel and waited with neighbors.

She said the hotel and some homes along the street displayed cracks in walls and segments of facades and roofs had broken off.

"In the hotel, the roof of the parking area boomed and fell to the ground, and there are cracks in the walls on the second floor," Cárdenas said.

She said the town's hospital was seriously damaged, but she had so far not heard of anyone injured.

Mexico's National Civil Defense agency said that based on historic data of tsunamis in Mexico, variations of as much as 32 inches (82 cm) were possible in coastal water levels near the epicenter. The U.S. Tsunami Warning Center said that hazardous tsunami waves were possible for coasts within 186 miles (300 kilometers) of the epicenter.

Irlanda Villa, of coastal Coahuayana, Michoacan near the border with Colima, said some walls had fallen, but the big fear was that a tsunami would follow. "We were afraid the sea would go out, but in the end everything is fine."

Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum tweeted that there were no reports of damage in the capital

Alarms for the new quake came less than an hour after a quake alarms warbled in a nationwide earthquake simulation marking major quakes that struck on the same date in 1985 and 2017. The magnitude 8.0 quake centered near the coast of Guerrero state in 1985 killed at least 9,500 people. More than 360 people died in the magnitude 7.1 quake that struck in 2017.

"This is a coincidence," that this is the third Sept. 19 earthquake, said U.S. Geological Survey seismologist Paul Earle. "There's no physical reason or statistical bias toward earthquakes in any given month in Mexico."

Nor is there a season or month for big earthquakes anywhere on the globe, Earle said. But there is a

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predictable thing: People seek and sometimes find coincidences that look like patterns.

"We knew we'd get this question as soon as it happened," Earle said. "Sometimes there are just coincidences."

The quake was not related to or caused by the drill an hour or so earlier, nor was it connected to a damaging temblor in Taiwan the day before, Earle said.

Humberto Garza stood outside a restaurant in Mexico City's Roma neighborhood holding his 3-year son. Like many milling about outside after the earthquake, Garza said the earthquake alarm sounded so soon after the annual simulation that he was not sure it was real.

"I heard the alarm, but it sounded really far away," he said.

Outside the city's environmental ombudsman's office, dozens of employees waited. Some appeared visibly shaken.

Power was out in parts of the city, including stoplights, snarling the capital's already notorious traffic.

'Out of control' STD situation prompts call for changes

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Sharply rising cases of some sexually transmitted diseases — including a 26% rise in new syphilis infections reported last year — are prompting U.S. health officials to call for new prevention and treatment efforts.

"It is imperative that we ... work to rebuild, innovate, and expand (STD) prevention in the U.S.," said Dr. Leandro Mena of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in a speech Monday at a medical conference on sexually transmitted diseases.

Infections rates for some STDs, including gonorrhea and syphilis, have been rising for years. Last year the rate of syphilis cases reached its highest since 1991 and the total number of cases hit its highest since 1948. HIV cases are also on the rise, up 16% last year.

And an international outbreak of monkeypox, which is being spread mainly between men who have sex with other men, has further highlighted the nation's worsening problem with diseases spread mostly through sex.

David Harvey, executive director of the National Coalition of STD Directors, called the situation "out of control."

Officials are working on new approaches to the problem, such as home-test kits for some STDs that will make it easier for people to learn they are infected and to take steps to prevent spreading it to others, Mena said.

Another expert said a core part of any effort must work to increase the use of condoms.

"It's pretty simple. More sexually transmitted infections occur when people are having more unprotected sex," said Dr. Mike Saag, an infectious disease expert at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Syphilis is a bacterial disease that surfaces as genital sores but can ultimately lead to severe symptoms and death if left untreated.

New syphilis infections plummeted in the U.S. starting in the 1940s when antibiotics became widely available. They fell to their lowest ever by 1998, when fewer than 7,000 new cases were reported nationwide. The CDC was so encouraged by the progress it launched a plan to eliminate syphilis in the U.S.

But by 2002 cases began rising again, largely among gay and bisexual men, and they kept going. In late 2013, CDC ended its elimination campaign in the face of limited funding and escalating cases, which that year surpassed 17,000.

By 2020 cases had reached nearly 41,700 and they spiked even further last year, to more than 52,000.

The rate of cases has been rising, too, hitting about 16 per 100,000 people last year. That's the highest in three decades.

Rates are highest in men who have sex with men, and among Black and Hispanic Americans and Native Americans. While the rate for women is lower than it is for men, officials noted that it's has been rising more dramatically — up about 50% last year.

That ties to another problem — the rise in congenital syphilis, in which infected moms pass the disease

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on to their babies, potentially leading to death of the child or health problems like deafness and blindness. Annual congenital syphilis cases numbered only about 300 a decade ago; they surged to nearly 2,700 last year. Of last year's tally, 211 were stillbirths or infant deaths, Mena said.

The increases in syphilis and other STDs may have several causes, experts say. Testing and prevention efforts have been hobbled by years of inadequate funding, and spread may have gotten worse — especially during the pandemic — as a result of delayed diagnosis and treatment. Drug and alcohol use may have contributed to risky sexual behavior. Condom use has been declining.

And there may have been a surge in sexual activity as people emerged from COVID-19 lockdowns. "People are feeling liberated," Saag said.

The arrival of monkeypox added a large additional burden. CDC recently sent a letter to state and local health departments saying that their HIV and STD resources could be used to fight the monkeypox outbreak. But some experts say the government needs to provide more funding for STD work, not divert it.

Harvey's group and some other public health organizations are pushing a proposal for more federal funding, including at least \$500 million for STD clinics.

Mena, who last year became director of the CDC's Division of STD Prevention, called for reducing stigma, broadening screening and treatment services, and supporting the development and accessibility of at-home testing. "I envision one day where getting tested (for STDs) can be as simple and as affordable as doing a home pregnancy test," he said.

US contractor freed by Taliban in swap for drug trafficker

By ERIC TUCKER and RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An American contractor held hostage in Afghanistan for more than two years has been released in exchange for a convicted Taliban drug lord jailed in the United States, the White House said Monday, announcing a rare success in U.S.-Taliban talks since the militant group took power a little more than a year ago.

Mark Frerichs, a Navy veteran who had spent more than a decade in Afghanistan as a civilian contractor, was abducted in January 2020 and is believed to have been held since then by the Taliban-linked Haqqani network. He was traded for Bashir Noorzai, a Taliban associate convicted in a heroin trafficking conspiracy who had spent 17 years behind bars before his release Monday.

The exchange is one of the most significant prisoner swaps to take place under the Biden administration, coming five months after a deal with Russia that brought home Marine veteran Trevor Reed. Though his case has received less public attention than those of some other Americans held abroad, including WNBA star Brittney Griner and corporate security executive Paul Whelan — who are both held in Russia and whose relatives met with President Joe Biden on Friday — U.S. officials said the deal for Frerichs was the result of months of quiet negotiations.

Those discussions gained new momentum in June when Biden agreed to grant Noorzai relief from his life sentence, setting the stage for what one administration official described as a "very narrow window of opportunity this month" to complete the deal.

Biden said in a statement released by the White House, "Bringing the negotiations that led to Mark's freedom to a successful resolution required difficult decisions, which I did not take lightly."

Frerichs, 60, had been working on civil engineering projects at the time of his Jan. 31, 2020 abduction in Kabul. He's believed to have been lured into a meeting to discuss a new project and then transported to Khost, a stronghold of the Taliban-linked Haqqani network near the Pakistan border.

He was last seen in a video posted last spring by The New Yorker in which he appeared in traditional Afghan clothing and pleaded for his release. He was accompanied Monday by the administration's special presidential envoy for hostage affairs and was in stable health, a U.S. official said. His ultimate destination was not immediately clear, though a Qatari Foreign Ministry official said Frerichs would soon head from Doha to the U.S.

A sister of Frerichs, who is from Lombard, Illinois, thanked U.S. officials who helped secure her brother's

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release.

"I am so happy to hear that my brother is safe and on his way home to us. Our family has prayed for this each day of the more than 31 months he has been a hostage. We never gave up hope that he would survive and come home safely to us," said a statement from the sister, Charlene Cakora.

Noorzai, at the time of his 2005 arrest, hardly seemed an ideal recipient for presidential clemency. He'd been designated on a list reserved for some of the world's most prolific drug traffickers, and was prosecuted in Manhattan's federal court on charges that accused him of owning opium fields in Kandahar province and relying on a network of distributors who sold the heroin in New York.

When he was sentenced to life imprisonment, the then-top federal prosecutor in Manhattan said Noorzai's "worldwide narcotics network supported a Taliban regime that made Afghanistan a breeding ground for international terrorism."

Monday's deal underscored the two sides to the Taliban's approach to illegal drugs. In April, they announced a ban on harvesting the poppies that produce opium for making heroin -- an order that also outlawed the manufacture and transportation of narcotics. However, during the years-long Taliban insurgency, they reportedly made millions of dollars taxing farmers and middle men who moved their drugs outside Afghanistan.

A senior administration official who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the administration said the U.S. government now determined that Noorzai's release would "not materially change any risk to Americans or fundamentally alter the contours of the drug trade there." Officials also took into account that Noorzai had spent 17 years in prison. They said it became clear from negotiations that releasing him would be necessary to get Frerichs home.

At a press conference Monday, Noorzai expressed gratitude at seeing his "mujahedeen brothers" — a reference to the Taliban — in Kabul.

"I pray for more success of the Taliban," he added. "I hope this exchange can lead to peace between Afghanistan and America, because an American was released and I am also free now."

Even before their takeover of Afghanistan in August last year, the Taliban had demanded the U.S. release Noorzai in exchange for Frerichs. But there had been little public indication of Washington proceeding along those lines.

Eric Lebson, a former U.S. government national security official who had been advising Frerichs' family, said in a statement that "everything about this case has been an uphill fight." He criticized the Trump administration for having given away "our leverage to get Mark home quickly by signing a peace accord with the Taliban without ever having asked them to return Mark first."

"Mark's family then had to navigate two administrations, where many people viewed Mark's safe return as an impediment to their plans for Afghanistan," the statement said.

The collapse of the Western-backed Afghan government and takeover by the Taliban in August 2021 raised additional concern that progress in negotiations could be undone or that Frerichs could be forgotten. But his name was invoked last month when Biden was said by his advisers to have pressed officials to consider any risk posed to Frerichs by the drone strike in Afghanistan that killed al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri.

The Taliban-appointed foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, hailed the exchange Monday as the start of a "new era" in U.S.-Taliban relations and the opening of a "new door for talks."

U.S. officials were more circumspect. Though it does not recognize the Taliban government, the U.S. does have interests at stake in Afghanistan and will continue to engage with the Taliban in addressing the hunger and humanitarian crisis gripping the country, administration officials said Monday.

But officials say they remain concerned about whether the Taliban are committed to fighting terrorism and by the exclusion of girls from high schools there, an issue that drew a United Nations reprimand on Sunday.

US contractor freed by Taliban in swap for drug trafficker

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By ERIC TUCKER and RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An American contractor held hostage in Afghanistan for more than two years has been released in exchange for a convicted Taliban drug lord jailed in the United States, the White House said Monday, announcing a rare success in U.S.-Taliban talks since the militant group took power a little more than a year ago.

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Blinken hosts Armenia, Azerbaijan FMs in bid to boost peace

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan on Monday in a bid to ease tensions and maintain a fragile ceasefire between the ex-Soviet countries and rivals following the largest outbreak of hostilities in more than two years.

Blinken brought Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov together at a New York hotel on the sidelines of the annual U.N. General Assembly. It was the foreign ministers' first face-to-face meeting since two days of shelling last week by both sides killed more than 200 troops.

Only Blinken spoke at the start of meeting at which the Armenian and Azerbaijani delegations sat somberly on opposite sides, separated by U.S. officials.

"We are encouraged by the fact that the fighting has ceased and there has not been" a resumption of shelling, said Blinken, who has spoken several times to the leaders of both countries.

"Strong, sustainable diplomatic engagement is the best path for everyone," he said. "There is a path to a durable peace that resolves the differences."

The meeting was held just a day after U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Armenia and condemned Azeri attacks, drawing complaints from Baku.

Speaking ahead of Monday's meeting, Bayramov said his country is "satisfied with the level of relations" with the U.S. and said his direct talks with Mirzoyan were not unusual.

"We are always open for meetings," he said.

The two Caucasus countries in have been locked in a decades-old conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, a region located within Azerbaijan but that had been long under the control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by Yerevan since a separatist war ended in 1994.

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During a six-week war in 2020, Azerbaijan reclaimed broad swaths of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent territories held by Armenian forces. More than 6,700 people died in that fighting.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have each blamed the other for starting last week's shelling attacks.

GLIMPSES: Barricades gatekeep the UN General Assembly

By MALLIKA SEN Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — How high are the barriers to entry at the U.N. General Assembly? Less than 4 feet (1.2 meters), technically.

While the barricades encircling the perimeter of the United Nations headquarters in New York are scarcely hip-level, the sea of gray grilles makes it clear that — with scores of world leaders and other high-profile figures slated to descend — security is intended to be more than just theater.

Patrick Freaney, special agent in charge of the U.S. Secret Service's New York field office, called the U.N. General Assembly both "one of the highest-profile events in the world" and "the largest protective event for the Secret Service on an annual basis."

U.N. staff and visitors must clear multiple checkpoints. Accredited media, for instance, flash badges at an NYPD and U.N. police checkpoints before going through an airport-style security screening that prologues the long (but scenic) trek to the international press corral in the U.N. Secretariat Building.

There are myriad types of U.N. badges, each adorned with a colored symbol. Woe betide the grounds passholder who shows up at the "wrong" entrance; you may be made to walk several blocks, though several on Monday attempted to argue with U.N. police.

Security is a joint effort mounted by U.N., federal, state and local law enforcement. NYPD Chief of Department Kenneth Corey told news outlets that preparation for this year's General Assembly began shortly after last year's hybrid meeting, which saw far fewer world leaders attend. The 2020 meeting, at the height of the early pandemic, was entirely virtual.

While there were no specific threats to the General Assembly or the city, Corey said, one can't too careful: "There's always a certain amount of disharmony in the world."

Inside the abbey, a funeral fit for a leader

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — I couldn't see the lone piper. But it didn't matter.

As the sounds of the Scottish lament, "Sleep, Dearie, Sleep," faded into the silence of Westminster Abbey, it finally struck me that Queen Elizabeth II was really gone.

The queen loved bagpipes so much that she had a piper play under her window for 15 minutes every morning, so those notes disappearing into the ether had a sense of finality, in a grand, show-stopping way.

Monday's state funeral was filled with those kinds of moments as Britain said good-bye to its longest-serving monarch with all the pageantry the nation is known for.

The black-clad mourners included the royal family, seven British prime ministers and hundreds of dignitaries from around the world, including U.S. President Joe Biden.

But it was the colors that caught my eye.

The dark clothing was just a backdrop for decorations of all kinds. Military medals gleamed from the chests of old soldiers, and civilians sported ribbons denoting civilian honors bestowed by the queen.

There were Knights of the Garter in blue velvet capes. Trumpeters with long silver instruments festooned with banners. Soldiers in gleaming plumed-helmets and the army veterans known as Chelsea Pensioners, resplendent in their traditional scarlet tunics.

"It was like something out of a fairy tale," said Bertram Leon, who was recently awarded a British Empire Medal for service to the St. Lucian community. "You know, it was amazing, beautifully well done — orchestrated, which is what you expected."

I witnessed the spectacle from a seat in the abbey's north transept, my view obstructed by a great stone pillar. That's partly why I couldn't see the piper.

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But so what? It didn't matter. It was enough to be part of the crowd.

Watching the world leaders file in, I wished I had a scorecard with little photographs to figure out who was who. There were so many of them — who could keep track?

Then came the royals, led by King Charles III in full military uniform, a sword on his hip.

But behind the pomp and circumstance, this was about honoring the late queen and her lifetime of service to Britain and the Commonwealth.

And it was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, who captured that better than any parade or procession.

Welby reminded the congregation of the queen's speech during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic — when frightened Britons were stuck in their homes unable to see friends and family.

Elizabeth, a symbol of stability for 70 years, echoed the words of a World War II-era song by Vera Lynn — and assured the nation that "We will meet again."

Welby's words reminded me of the night I listened to that speech, and wondered what the future would hold. I was frightened too — wasn't everyone?

So somehow this immense state funeral service suddenly became very personal. Amid all the pomp and pageantry, we were all invited to think about that night— about what the queen meant to us in that awful, pandemic time.

So whatever it was, the words or the guardsmen or the choristers, I can tell you one thing: At the end of the service, the congregation stood and sang "God Save the King" with such gusto that it almost felt as if the abbey walls were shaking. If nothing else, the nation's long-time leader was leaving center stage.

I can't say for sure, of course. But I think it will take this country some time to remember that the first line of the national anthem is no longer "God Save our gracious Queen."

Q&A: James Cameron on the return of 'Avatar'

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Thirteen years after James Cameron plunged moviegoers into the cosmic world of "Avatar," the lush, distant moon of Pandora is finally orbiting back into view.

Cameron's "Avatar" industrial complex has been whirling in high gear for some time; production on the upcoming sequel, "Avatar: The Way of Water," began back in 2017. But after shuffling through half a decade's worth of release dates, Cameron's science-fiction epic is poised to again blanket movie screens and transport willing travelers back, in 3-D, to the land of the Na'vi.

For even the visionary filmmaker of "Titanic" and "The Terminator," the relaunch of "Avatar" is, as Cameron said in a recent interview from Wellington, New Zealand, "a big bet." A third "Avatar" is already in post-production, and production has begun on a fourth. The record-breaking \$2.8 billion in box office that "Avatar" grossed made the coming "Avatar" armada a far-from-risky wager. But a lot has changed since the original's release, when Netflix was still renting DVDs by mail and Cameron was working for 20th Century Fox.

To whet moviegoers' appetites ahead of the Dec. 16 debut of the three-hour "Avatar: The Way of Water" — and remind them of a movie world they may have lost touch with — the Walt Disney Co. on Friday will rerelease "Avatar" in a remastered, 4K, HDR version that he says is "better than it's ever looked."

It's an opening salvo in Cameron's ambitious plan to sketch a yet-grander sci-fi saga, and to again conjure a cinematic experience, as he says, "that you simply cannot have in the home." Taking a break from all the "Avatar" juggling, Cameron talked re-watching the original, his expectation for "The Way of Water" and why he nearly quit the "Avatar" business.

Remarks have been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: Does "Avatar" seem like a long time ago to you?

CAMERON: It feels like yesterday at times and then obviously it feels like more than a decade other times. The time has passed quickly. I've been doing all sorts of interesting things. Deep ocean research. Building submersibles. Writing four epic movies. Now finishing up "Avatar 2" and we're mid-process in post

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on "Avatar 3." So "Avatar" has never been far from my mind. I constantly go back to it, obviously in the remaster process making it better than it's ever looked before. I'm kind of just living on Pandora right now.

AP: When you went back to watch "Avatar," how did it look to you?

CAMERON: I see a lot of good work by a lot of good people in terms of the production design, the visual effects, the groundbreaking strides that were made at that time in capturing the performances of the actors, and the great work of the actors. It was tough to live up to. We had set the bar very high for ourselves back then and we had to live up to that bar this time with the new films. I remind our VFX team all the time: "Look at the bugs in the forest in the first movie. We had better bugs!"

AP: Moviegoing rebounded this summer but there's been a late-summer lull that the "Avatar" re-release may help jumpstart. How do you see the health of theatrical right now?

CAMERON: It's shown resiliency that I don't think we expected. The pandemic, quite rightly, scared everybody. There was a period of time where you were basically risking your life to go to the movies. People did it anyway. Now, we feel like we're past the hump or at least it's a manageable problem. We're seeing a resurgence back in cinemas. It's not where we were before. Streaming has taken a bite. The pandemic has taken a bite. We're probably down 20, 25% from where we were pre-pandemic. I think it's going to be a very long tail on this thing before we're back to where we were before. It's incumbent on us to double down on showmanship.

AP: Over the years, some have argued that "Avatar," despite its stature as the highest grossing film of all time, hasn't stuck in the culture the way you'd expect. Do those arguments irk you?

CAMERON: I think it's true for a specific reason, which is that we didn't immediately follow it up with another film in two or three years, and another film in two or three years. We didn't play the Marvel game. We're playing a longer game here. "Avatar" isn't going anywhere, it just didn't follow up with a continuous barrage to keep it in the public eye and the public consciousness, which is what you have to do. Taking a lesson from that, we basically architected four sequels so that if "Avatar 2" is successful, we can follow it up with a regular cadence — two years, maybe three years at the most between "3" and "4." It will be in the public consciousness more and more regularly, but only if people embrace "Avatar 2."

AP: Your films have grossed more than \$6 billion. I imagine you're not a filmmaker who gets nervous before opening a movie.

CAMERON: You bet I do. Anyone who says they don't get nervous before a movie drops is a lying son of a (expletive).

AP: And there is an awful lot riding on "The Way of Water."

CAMERON: Yeah, it's a big play. It's a big bet. And we won't know where we are until the second or third weekend. The success of the first film — we had a pretty good opening at \$75 million. But openings are dwarfing that by factors of two or even three these days. Even if we have a stellar opening, we won't really know where we are for a couple weeks because it was the return visits on the first one. It was people wanting to go share. If we get that again, we'll probably be on solid ground.

AP: I think the odds are in your favor.

CAMERON: Nobody knows. The market has changed. Twenty-five percent could be our entire margin. It's one thing to make a lot of money, it's another thing to actually make a profit. We're not going to keep making movies that lose money even though they look good and make a ton of money. This is a wait-and-see, let's-put-it-out-there-and-see-if-people-embrace-it kind of situation.

AP: "Avatar" was especially rich in an ecological subtext. In the 13 years since, much has only gone worse for the climate and the health of the planet. How much was that on your mind making the sequels?

CAMERON: Very much so, even to the extent that I very strongly debated with myself and discussed with my wife whether I should stop filmmaking and work on the sustainability issues. But we managed to be able to do that in parallel with the filmmaking process. We're doing all of our sustainability efforts — I don't want to say as a side hustle, but in parallel. I put as much effort into that as I do the filmmaking.

That said, the new "Avatar" films aren't any more like a lecture on climate or environmentalism than the first one was. The first one was an adventure. It captured you at the level of character, at a level of storytelling. I think subtext is a useful way of looking at it. It's there but it's not what's driving the story.

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And we kept that in mind with the new films. Yes, "Avatar: The Way of Water" is about the oceans and our relationship with the oceans and the animals that live in it. But it's driven by character.

AP: "Avatar: The Way of Water" will bring back 3D and feature high-frame rate footage, both of which moviegoers have mixed opinions on. What do you think has been the biggest technological leap in the last 13 years?

CAMERON: In terms of the presentation, we're authoring in high-dynamic range, which I think is very important. Projection out there in the field is brighter now than it was a decade ago, which is much better for 3D. We're judiciously using high-frame rates in the process of authoring our 3D because people become more sensitive to rapid lateral motion. Your mind is more sensitive, so we solved that by judiciously applying high-frame rate here and there throughout the film. That's all at the service of making it a better viewing experience.

I don't think anybody should go see a movie because it's authored a certain way. That's just part of our showmanship. I think the reasons to see this film are the same reasons to see the first one. You enter a world. You become fully immersed in it. You feel like it surrounds you and you become an inhabitant there, and you get to linger there. You go on that journey. Of course, in the new film, it's a bit longer because we have more characters and more story to service. I think people are very story-driven. When they get a set of characters they like and they get involved in their problems, they'll follow it for scores of hours across multiple years of limited series. I'm not worried about that part of it.

NASA Mars lander captures strikes by 4 incoming space rocks

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A NASA lander on Mars has captured the vibrations and sounds of four meteoroids striking the planet's surface.

Scientists reported Monday that Mars InSight detected seismic and acoustic waves from a series of impacts in 2020 and 2021. A satellite orbiting the red planet confirmed the impact locations, as far as 180 miles (290 kilometers) from the lander.

Scientists are delighted by the detections — a first for another planet.

The first confirmed meteoroid exploded into at least three pieces, each leaving its own crater. An 11-second audio snippet of this strike includes three "bloops," as NASA calls them, one of sounding like metal flapping loudly in the wind here on Earth.

"After three years of InSight waiting to detect an impact, those craters looked beautiful," Brown University's Ingrid Daubar, a co-author of the research paper in the journal Nature Geoscience, said in a statement.

The InSight team expected to pick up numerous meteoroid strikes, given Mars' proximity to the asteroid belt and the planet's thin atmosphere, which tends to keep entering space rocks from burning up. But the lander's French-built seismometer may have missed impacts because of interfering noise from the Martian wind or seasonal changes in the atmosphere. Now scientists know what to look for, according to NASA, likely resulting in a surge of detections.

"Impacts are the clocks of the solar system," French lead author Raphael Garcia said in a statement from the Higher Institute of Aeronautics and Space in Toulouse. "We need to know the impact rate today to estimate the age of different surfaces."

Launched in 2018, InSight has already detected more than 1,300 marsquakes. The largest measured a magnitude 5 earlier this year. By comparison, the marsquakes generated by the meteoroid impacts registered no more than a magnitude 2.

Uvalde children grapple with trauma after school massacre

By ACACIA CORONADO and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — One girl runs and hides when she sees thin people with long hair similar to the gunman who stormed into her Uvalde school and killed 21 people. One boy stopped making friends and playing with animals. A third child feels her heart race when she's reminded of the May 24 massacre that

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killed a close friend — once at such a dangerous pace that she had to be rushed to a hospital, where she stayed for weeks.

The 11-year-old girl has been diagnosed with anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. She and her family spoke to The Associated Press on condition her name not be used to protect her identity.

"I never lost someone before," she said, adding that her friend who was among the 19 students and two teachers killed in the United States' deadliest school massacre in a decade would encourage her through hard times. "She was a very strong person."

As students get ready to return to school in Uvalde on Tuesday for the first time since the massacre at Robb Elementary, PTSD symptoms are starting to show. Parents are finding themselves unable to help, and experts worry because communities of color such as the largely Hispanic city of Uvalde face disparities in access mental health care. For low-income families, it can be even harder, as access to limited resources requires long waits for referrals through medical assistance programs such as Medicaid.

"It's hard hearing what these kids are going through at such a young age," said Yuri Castro, a mother of two boys in Uvalde, whose cousin was killed in the shooting and whose sons were once taught by the two slain teachers. Castro knows of children so traumatized they have stopped speaking.

School shootings dramatically upend survivors' lives. For some, symptoms linger for years and high-quality treatment can be difficult to find.

In recent years, Texas lawmakers have focused on spending money on mental health services, devoting more than \$2.5 billion during the current fiscal year.

But according to the 11-year-old girl's family — lifelong residents of Uvalde — the only mental health center in the area — just blocks from Robb Elementary — was seldom used or discussed, raising worries about the lack of awareness regarding signs and symptoms of mental illness and the stigma surrounding seeking help.

The mother of the 11-year-old girl whose racing heart led to her hospitalization says open conversations about mental health were previously taboo in the heavily Latino community, where culturally, mental health is brushed off as feeling lazy, bored or throwing a tantrum.

"I remember growing up it was like, 'Go over there, you are just being chiflada,'" the mother said, using a Spanish word that means "acting spoiled."

Now, she said, the town is waking up to the reality of mental health even as some people still ask why survivors like her daughter need help.

Members of the community have been supporting one another by checking in with extended family and friends and taking advantage of community resources that have been set up, including counseling by the Red Cross and emotional support from the churches. The parents of one of the children who was killed started an organization that will be putting together wilderness retreats for victims' families and survivors. Residents also have social media groups where they can share mental health resources and express their grief.

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission contracted with organizations to create a mental health hotline that in six weeks responded to nearly 400 calls.

Martha Rodriguez, who coordinated efforts to help students recover after the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, said officials need to visit the community to make sure the right resources are available. She said addressing stigmas and sending providers who understand the families' language and values are key.

"Some families may not feel comfortable sharing distress and needs," she said.

Many families impacted by the shooting are Roman Catholic. The mother of a girl who survived the attack said her daughter has only been able to open up to a priest in Houston — 280 miles (450 kilometers) away — whom the family goes to see when they visit relatives.

"This is going to be a long journey. This is not going to be something that we can just do some work and fix it," said San Antonio Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller.

Julie Kaplow, executive director of the Trauma and Grief Centers at The Hackett Center for Mental Health in Houston, said many students who survived the May 2018 Santa Fe High School shooting that killed 10

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in suburban Houston did not exhibit symptoms for six months.

"I am anticipating that we will see some similarities," said Kaplow, who has been training clinicians and others who are treating families in Uvalde. "Part of the reason is those symptoms haven't manifested yet and will start to manifest when they are reminded of the event itself. Or the caregiver starts to recognize, 'Wait a minute my child is still not eating, is still not sleeping.'"

The length of treatment varies depending on the severity of symptoms. For some, it can last up to two to three years.

Melissa Brymer, director of terrorism and disaster programs at the UCLA-Duke National Center for Child Traumatic Stress, was the lead adviser to public schools in Newtown, Connecticut, after the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012. She said officials need to make sure that families can get services at school. They also need to create spaces that feel friendlier, such as community meals, rather than clinics.

Parents of the incoming fifth-grader who is struggling with symptoms chose to home-school her this year so she can continue going to appointments more easily. She is also getting a service dog who will alert her if her heart rate rises.

But she worries about her brothers returning to the classroom and gets anxious thinking others will judge her because of how she has been affected by the massacre when she wasn't shot, her mother said. She is awakened daily by night terrors.

"We don't sleep. ... We don't even know what that is anymore since this has happened," the mother said. "I am going to have to deal with that for however long it takes for her to heal."

How to get a student loan refund if you paid during pandemic

By ADRIANA MORGA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When President Joe Biden announced a plan to forgive student loan debt, many borrowers who kept making payments during the pandemic wondered if they'd made the right choice.

Borrowers who paid down their debt during a pandemic freeze that started in March 2020 can in fact get a refund — and then apply for forgiveness — but the process for doing that hasn't always been clear.

If you think you're eligible, here's what you need to know:

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR A REFUND?

Borrowers who hold eligible federal student loans and have made voluntary payments since March 13, 2020, can get a refund, according to the Department of Education.

For some people, that refund will be automatic. You can get a refund without applying if your payments brought your loan balance below the maximum debt relief amount: \$10,000 for all borrowers, and \$20,000 for Pell Grant recipients. Borrowers can check their balance in their studentaid.gov account.

For example, if a borrower paid \$100 a month for 10 months of the pandemic and their balance is now \$8,000, that \$1,000 will automatically be refunded. Then they can apply to get the rest of their debt forgiven.

But if a borrower paid throughout the pandemic and still owes \$14,000, they won't get an automatic refund. They can, however, apply to have \$10,000 of that debt erased.

Another group of people that has to apply for a refund is those who completely paid off their loan balance during the pandemic. If that's you, you're eligible for loan forgiveness, but you'll have to request a refund prior to applying for debt relief. Borrowers should confirm their eligibility for the loan forgiveness program prior to requesting a refund.

For example, if a borrower had \$5,000 in debt at the start of the pandemic and paid it all back during the freeze, but is eligible for up to \$10,000 in forgiveness, they would apply for a \$5,000 refund, then apply to have their debt forgiven.

"Borrowers who paid off their loans during the pause will need to request a refund first, then request cancellation," said a spokesperson from the Department of Education.

The refund is not available for private student loans.

Eligible federal student loans:

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- Direct Loans (defaulted and non defaulted)
- Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program loans held by ED (defaulted and non defaulted)
- Federal Perkins Loans held by ED (defaulted and non defaulted)
- Defaulted FFEL Program loans not held by ED
- Defaulted HEAL loans

If you are not sure which loan you have, visit your dashboard at studentaid.gov and find the “my loan servicers” section. If you can’t access your dashboard, you can call the Federal Student Aid office at 1-800-433-3243 to ask for loan servicer information.

HOW CAN I APPLY FOR A REFUND?

Borrowers who want a specific amount refunded can apply by calling their loan service provider. Right now, refunds are only being done via phone and not through any website or email.

When the Biden Administration announced the forgiveness, loan servicers found themselves inundated with calls. But many borrowers now say they’re not waiting long when calling.

“I was on hold for about five minutes,” said Megan McParland, of New Jersey, who graduated in 2018 and made several payments during the payment freeze.

McParland requested a refund the first week of September. At first, she felt the servicer tried to dissuade her from making the request. But after confirming that she wanted to proceed, she was told that she would see her refund in about a month.

Sierra Tibbs, a 47-year-old resident of Casselberry, Florida, had a similar experience. The entire phone call with her loan servicer took around 20 minutes.

Tibbs applied for a refund after seeing a video online informing her that she could get back money she paid during the pandemic.

If you are unsure who services your loan, or if the servicer changed during the pandemic, visit your student aid account dashboard and scroll to “my loan servicers” or call 1-800-433-3243.

Before calling your loan provider to request your refund, you need to know your account number and the amount you want refunded.

—Loan servicers’ phone numbers:

FedLoan Servicing: 1-800-699-2908

Great Lakes Educational Loan Services, Inc.: 1-800-236-4300

Edfinancial: 1-855-337-6884

MOHELA: 1-888-866-4352

Aidvantage: 1-800-722-1300

Nelnet: 1-888-486-4722

OSLA Servicing: 1-866-264-9762

ECSI: 1-866-313-3797

Default Resolution Group: 1-800-621-3115 (1-877-825-9923 for the deaf or hard of hearing)

HOW WILL THE REFUND WORK — AND WHEN WILL MY LOANS BE FORGIVEN?

When you request a refund, the amount that you have paid during the payment freeze will be added back to your student loan balance, said Katherine Welbeck, Civil Rights Counsel for the Student Borrower Protection Center.

That amount is still eligible for cancellation and can be eliminated after you apply for forgiveness.

You’re eligible for debt relief if you had an annual federal income below \$125,000 individually or \$250,000 if you’re married or head of household in 2020 or 2021. The application is expected to open in early October and you can apply until Dec. 31, 2023.

It is unclear when borrowers will see debt relief. So far, the plan only mentions borrowers will be notified by their loan servicer when their debt is forgiven. There is also a possibility that forgiveness could be delayed if the Biden administration faces legal challenges.

Laura Baum, a 30-year-old resident of Chicago, paid \$5,000 during the payment freeze toward her \$15,000 remaining debt. She is eligible to have \$20,000 canceled since she was a Pell grant recipient when she was an undergraduate. At the beginning of September, Baum called her loan servicer and asked for a refund.

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But because of the uncertainty, she is planning to save that money until the Department of Education confirms her debt has been canceled.

"I'm going to hold on to that refund until I absolutely see \$0 in my student loans," Baum said.

WHEN IS THE DEADLINE TO APPLY?

The deadline to apply for a refund is December 31, 2023. However, Welbeck recommends that you apply for a refund before you apply for debt forgiveness.

"If you apply first, you can process the refund to get your money back, and then that balance in your account is canceled," Welbeck said.

The application process for loan forgiveness is expected to take four to six weeks.

The Department of Education is offering a subscription page where you can sign up to be notified when the application is open.

HOW MUCH CAN I GET REFUNDED?

You can get a refund for the entire amount you paid during the payment freeze, according to the Department of Education. However, you can choose a lower amount.

You might pick this option if, during the pandemic, you paid enough to get your debt below the maximum amount of forgiveness. You could get a partial refund, then apply to have your remaining debt wiped out.

Say you had \$15,000 worth of debt remaining at the beginning of the payment freeze and have since paid \$8,000, but qualify for \$10,000 in debt relief. You might decide to ask for a refund of just \$3,000. Then, your debt balance will be exactly \$10,000, and you can apply for maximum loan forgiveness.

WHEN WILL I GET MY REFUND?

Borrowers should expect to receive their refund six to 12 weeks after requesting it, according to the Department of Education. But you might want to double-check with your loan servicer.

McParland's loan servicer told her that she should see her refunded amount in 30 to 45 business days, but Baum was told that it would take 60 to 70 business days to see her money back in her bank account.

IS THE REFUND TAXABLE INCOME?

It is not yet clear if the refunded money will be considered taxable income. Welbeck recommends borrowers check with financial advisers from their own state.

Some states, such as Indiana, have already said they will tax debt relief for people who have their student loans canceled. Policies vary from state to state.

DOES THE REFUND AFFECT MY CREDIT SCORE?

Since the Department of Education has not yet announced how the cancellation or refunds will be reported to the credit bureaus, it is still uncertain if these amounts will affect borrowers' credit scores, said Welbeck.

SHOULD I START PAYING AGAIN WHEN THE PAYMENT FREEZE ENDS?

The pandemic payment freeze is set to end Dec. 31. If you have not seen debt relief by then, you are still expected to start making payments. Welbeck recommends that borrowers enroll in income-driven repayment plans before the end of the payment freeze.

Income-driven repayment plans allow you to set an affordable payment amount based on income and family size.

You can find more information about the four types of income-driven repayment plans here.

GOP's election-year standing with independents at risk

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Wis. (AP) — Sarah Motiff has voted for Sen. Ron Johnson every time his name appeared on the ballot, starting in 2010 when the Wisconsin Republican was first elected as part of the tea party wave. Fond of his tough views on spending, she began the year planning to support his reelection again.

She became skeptical this summer as the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection reported his office discussed giving then-Vice President Mike Pence certificates with fake presidential electors for Donald Trump from Wisconsin and Michigan, part of a broader push to overturn Joe Biden's victory. Johnson has downplayed the effort and the certificates were never given to Pence, but Motiff, a

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political independent, wasn't convinced.

"I'm not going to lie when I say I've had some concerns about some of the reports that have come out," the 52-year-old nonpartisan city councilwoman from Columbus, Wisconsin, said. "It just put a bad taste in my mouth."

Nudged further by the June U.S. Supreme Court decision invalidating a woman's constitutional right to an abortion, Motiff is opposing Johnson and supports his Democratic challenger, Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, in one of the most fiercely-contested Senate races this year.

"Which was really a hard decision for me because I do think he's done good things in the past," Motiff said of Johnson. "But this is pretty damaging."

Motiff's evolution represents the challenge for Republicans emerging from a tumultuous summer, defined by the court decision, high-profile hearings on former President Donald Trump's actions during the insurrection and intensifying legal scrutiny of his handling of classified information and efforts to overturn the election. Now, a midterm campaign that the GOP hoped would be a referendum on President Joe Biden and the economy is at risk of becoming a comparison of the two parties, putting Republicans in an unexpectedly defensive position.

In politically-divided Wisconsin where recent elections have been decided by a few thousand votes, the outcome could hinge on self-described independent voters like Motiff.

"Having former President Trump so prominently in the news in so many ways makes it easier for Democrats to frame the midterm as a choice between two competing futures as opposed to a referendum on the Democrat governance," said Republican pollster Whit Ayres. "That's hurting Republicans. It's distracting from the referendum message and allowing more of a focus on a choice of two different parties."

That tension is playing out in Columbia County, Wisconsin, a constellation of tidy small towns surrounded by rolling dairy farm country, all within commuting distance of Madison.

Statewide, top-of-the-ticket candidates have won by barely a percentage point in the past three elections. Trump won Columbia County by a little more than 500 votes out of 33,000 cast in 2020.

In interviews with more than a dozen independent voters here over two days last week, many were rethinking their support of the GOP this fall.

Steve Gray, a self-described Republican-leaning independent "but never a Trump fan," opposed the June court decision, because he backs abortion rights. But the 61-year-old school maintenance manager also resented what he saw as an unwelcome political power play by out-of-power Republicans.

"Trump stacked the Supreme Court. We all knew he wanted to overturn Roe," said Gray, of small-town Rio, where Trump won by two votes in 2020. "That decision was a partisan hand grenade Trump threw into this election."

The court decision "upended the physics of midterm elections," said Jesse Stinebring, a pollster advising several Democratic campaigns.

It gave voters the rare opportunity to judge a policy advance backed by the minority party, distracting them from a pure up-or-down vote on majority Democrats, he said.

"The backlash from a political perspective isn't directed at the traditional party in power, but is actually reframed in terms of this Republican control of the Supreme Court," Stinebring said.

The decision made Dilaine Noel's vote automatic.

The 29-year-old data analytics director for a Madison-area business said she had never affiliated with either party.

Despite her grievances about Democrats' warring moderate and liberal wings, her support for abortion rights gave her no choice than to vote for the party's candidates this fall.

"By default, I have to move in that direction," said Noel, from small-town Poynette in the Wisconsin River valley. "I'm being forced to."

Mary Percifield is a lifelong independent voter who says the abortion decision motivated her to vote Democratic because she worries the court might overturn other rights.

"A right has been taken away from us," the 68-year-old customer service representative from Pardeeville, said. "I question if a woman's right to vote will be taken away. A woman's right for birth control."

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Independent voters who lean neither Democrat nor Republican nationally preferred Biden over Trump, 52% to 37% in 2020, and preferred Democrats over Republicans in U.S. House races by a similar margin in the 2018 midterms, according to AP VoteCast. Independents who lean neither Democrat nor Republican made up 5% of the 2020 electorate and 12% in 2018.

Independents had moved toward Republicans by early this year, seeking answers on the economy, said Republican pollster David Winston, a senior adviser to House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy. But they have drifted back toward Democrats as efforts by GOP leaders to focus on the economy have clashed with Republican attacks on the Justice Department and Trump's continuing complaints about the 2020 election.

"Everything is suddenly back in the context of Trump," Winston said in light of Trump's prominent endorsement of Senate candidates and protests of the federal investigation into classified documents recovered from his Florida home. "It's not that Democrats are gaining. It's that Republicans over the summer were off talking about a variety of things. And independents are thinking, 'If you're not talking specifically about the problems that I'm concerned about, why am I listening?'"

Republicans remain optimistic about their chances in November, particularly about netting the handful of seats they need to regain the U.S. House majority. Inflation remains high and, despite a recent uptick, approval of Biden is still low for a party hoping to maintain its hold on power.

The economy remains the most effective message and one that breaks through others, GOP campaign officials say.

"Prices and things are so front-of-mind to people," said Calvin Moore, the communications director for Congressional Leadership Fund, a superPAC supporting Republican U.S. House candidates. "It's not just something that's on the news. It's something they are experiencing every day in their daily life. It's something they face themselves every day when they go to the grocery store."

A shift by independents is particularly meaningful in Wisconsin, as Republicans work to overtake Democrats' one-seat majority in the Senate.

Johnson, among the most vulnerable Republicans running for reelection this fall, is locked in a tight race with Barnes, Wisconsin's lieutenant governor. Of the most competitive Senate seats this year, his is the only one held by a Republican.

Though Johnson dismissed testimony about fake electors as staff work which never reached him, it reminded Christian Wood, an independent voter from Lodi, of Johnson's opposition to certifying the election before Jan. 6. Johnson reversed course after the riot.

"It's absolutely scary," said Wood, who has often voted Republican. "To me that's the most existential threat to our democracy. And to think he was even considering it makes him a non-starter."

There's time for an economic message to win out, but it will require news about Trump fading, GOP pollster Ayres said.

Meanwhile, Trump has a full schedule of fall campaign travel for candidates he has endorsed.

"Any distraction from that focus undermines the best Republican message," he said.

Rapper Mystikal pleads not guilty to rape, drug charges

By JANET McCONNAUGHEY Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The Grammy-nominated rapper Mystikal pleaded not guilty on Monday to charges accusing him of raping and choking a woman at his home in Louisiana and of possessing several drugs.

The 51-year-old performer whose given name is Michael Tyler is innocent of all charges, attorney Joel Pearce said after the arraignment in Ascension Parish court in Gonzales, about 15 miles (24 kilometers) from Baton Rouge.

The charges include first-degree rape, which carries an automatic life sentence.

Pearce said he has not been able to get copies of the two indictments, but they were read aloud in court.

Charges also include simple criminal damage to property, false imprisonment, domestic abuse battery by strangulation, simple robbery, possession of heroin, marijuana, methamphetamine and Xanax, and possession of drug paraphernalia, he said.

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"My client doesn't even do drugs, so he has absolutely no idea what they were talking about," Pearce said in a telephone interview during his 250-mile (402-kilometer) drive from Gonzales to Shreveport.

He said bond may be discussed at a hearing Oct. 17. Prosecutors said they plan to bring up Tyler's 2003 guilty plea to sexual battery and extortion as evidence of prior crimes, said Pearce.

Tyler and two bodyguards had videotaped themselves in sex acts with Tyler's hairstylist. The prosecutor in that case, Sue Bernie, said in 2003 that the woman told investigators that Tyler accused her of stealing \$80,000 worth of his checks and told her he would not go to police if she did something "degrading." The woman denied stealing any money, Bernie said.

A letter in court records before Tyler's sentencing stated that he had paid the woman \$350,000.

He served six years in prison on that conviction, which came the same year that he was nominated for two Grammy awards. He also received a Grammy nomination in 2001.

Pearce said he doesn't know what the woman who is now accusing Tyler allegedly was robbed of, but the criminal damage charge accuses him of breaking the band of her Apple watch.

Pearce represented Tyler on rape and kidnapping charges that prosecutors in northwest Louisiana dropped in December 2020. Those charges, brought in 2017, had kept Tyler jailed nearly 18 months before he was released on \$3 million bond.

"People keep saying it's his third time to be charged" with rape, Pearce said, but Tyler pleaded guilty to a lesser charge in Baton Rouge. "And in Caddo Parish, after a grand jury indicted him, they un-indicted him."

Mystikal told The Associated Press in April 2021 that he used to be "a nasty lil' rapper" but now is proud of lyrics he can imagine rapping to God.

62 and 700: Judge, Pujols closing in on home run milestones

By NOAH TRISTER AP Baseball Writer

Aaron Judge and Albert Pujols could make this a milestone week for home runs.

Judge hit two more Sunday, raising his season total to 59, two shy of Roger Maris' American League record. Now the slugger returns to Yankee Stadium, where New York plays its next six games. Pujols, meanwhile, is somewhat improbably closing in on the 700-homer mark after hitting 12 since the start of August.

Judge's pursuit of Maris has stirred debate over how to put this AL record in context, should he break it. He's unlikely to threaten Barry Bonds' major league record of 73, but that mark, as well as the exploits of Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa around the same time, have become complicated by performance-enhancing drug suspicions.

There's one way in which Judge likely will surpass both Bonds and Maris, no matter how many more homers he hits. Right now, he has an incredible 20-homer lead over Kyle Schwarber, who is second in the majors. Nobody has led baseball in homers by at least 20 since Babe Ruth finished with 54 in 1928 and nobody else had more than 31.

Maris led the majors by only seven when he hit 61, and Bonds led by nine when he hit 73.

Judge is also in the mix for the AL Triple Crown — he's leading big in homers and RBIs and just one point behind batting leader Luis Arraez — but that won't sort itself out until closer to the end of the season.

The 42-year-old Pujols, who is retiring at the end of the season, is trying to become the fourth major leaguer to reach 700 homers, following Bonds, Hank Aaron and Ruth. Unlike Judge, he won't be going for his milestone at home this week. St. Louis' next eight games are on the road against the Padres, Dodgers and Brewers.

CUTTING IT CLOSE

Is it possible the Padres won't even make the playoffs after pulling off the blockbuster trade for Juan Soto? San Diego holds the second wild card in the National League at the moment, but the Padres are only a half-game ahead of Philadelphia and 2 1/2 ahead of Milwaukee.

San Diego is 24-20 since the start of August for a .545 winning percentage — after going 57-46 (.553) before that. Soto has hit only .221 since joining the Padres.

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San Diego did win the last three games of a series with Arizona, with Soto hitting his first homer this month Sunday.

TRIVIA TIME

Who is the most recent player to lead the majors in home runs by double digits?

LINE OF THE WEEK

While Schwarber is second in the majors in home runs with 39, Houston's Yordan Alvarez is second to Judge in the AL with 37. He homered in his first three at-bats Friday night in the Astros' 5-0 victory over Oakland.

Honorable mention: In that same game, Justin Verlander came back from the injured list for Houston and threw five no-hit innings before being removed.

COMEBACK OF THE WEEK

It's actually a double dose this week.

On Tuesday night, Texas trailed Oakland 7-2 in the fifth inning before rallying for an 8-7 victory. Mark Mathias homered twice, including a solo shot in the ninth to win it. The Athletics had a 94.8% chance to win in the fifth inning, according to Baseball Savant.

The next night, the script was flipped. Oakland beat Texas 8-7 after the Rangers were up 5-1 after four. The win probability for Texas peaked at 93.2%. The A's completed their comeback with two runs in the top of the ninth, with the go-ahead run coming in on an error by shortstop Corey Seager.

TRIVIA ANSWER

Jose Bautista hit 54 home runs in 2010, finishing 12 ahead of Pujols.

New this week: 'Athena,' 'Sidney' and 'Quantum Leap' returns

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's a collection curated by The Associated Press' entertainment journalists of what's arriving on TV, streaming services and music platforms this week.

MOVIES

— Less than a year after the death of Sidney Poitier, who died in January at the age of 94, arrives the Oprah Winfrey-produced documentary "Sidney." Premiering Friday on Apple TV+, it's a poignant portrait of the groundbreaking actor who paved the way for countless Black actors in Hollywood and revolutionized how they were portrayed on screen. Shot largely before Poitier's death by director Reginald Hudlin, "Sidney" was made with the cooperation of the Poitier estate (several of Poitier's daughters appear in the film) and a number of luminaries. Denzel Washington, Spike Lee, Morgan Freeman, George Nelson, Robert Redford and Halle Berry are all interviewed in "Sidney," as is Winfrey.

— In "Athena," director Romain Gavras brings spectacular flare and long, sinewy shots to a panoramic thriller about a police siege in a fictitious housing project in a Paris suburb. The film, which premiered at the Venice Film Festival and debuts Friday on Netflix, is a violent but balletically filmed urban Greek tragedy by the youngest son of the Oscar-winning Greek director, Costa-Gavras. It's the French filmmaker's third feature (he's also made music videos for Kanye West, Jamie xx and others); he wrote with Elias Belkeddar and Ladj Ly, whose 2019 film "Les Misérables" covered some similar territory.

— Based on the best-selling 2019 young-adult novel by Angie Thomas ("The Hate U Give"), "On the Come Up" is about a 16-year-old girl (Jamila Gray) whose rap ambitions have both urgency (her family is in need of money) and poignancy (her late father was a hip-hop legend killed by gang violence). The film, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, streams Friday on Peacock while also playing in some theaters.

— AP Film Writer Jake Coyle

MUSIC

— Kelsea Ballerini may sound pretty good on her new album but it's the title of the 15-track set that seems pretty perfect: "Subject to Change." On the poppy first single, "Heartfirst," she decides to jump into a relationship not knowing if it will last. "Who knows what'll happen/Ain't that always kinda magic?"

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she sings. On the ballad "Love Is a Cowboy," Ballerini sings: "All the bad ones say they're the good and all the good ones ride way." The new music comes after she and her husband Morgan Evans decided to divorce after nearly five years of marriage. The album comes out Friday.

— We've already had the album "Denim & Rhinestones" from Carrie Underwood so get ready for "Denim & Diamonds" from Nashville singer and songwriter Nikki Lane. For Lane's first album in five years, she enlisted Queens of the Stone Age's frontman Joshua Homme for production and mixing, with further contributions from Arctic Monkeys' Matt Helders. Singles include "Black Widow" and "First High," with the splendid lyric: "Take me back to the first dream/501 blue jeans/Tighter than goddamn Springsteen."

— Coming just as fall approaches is a new 5 Seconds of Summer album. "5SOS5" — their fifth album — has already spawned the tracks "Blender", "Take My Hand", "Me, Myself & I" and the pop-rock anthem "COMPLETE MESS." Another early single is the ballad "Older," which features vocals and a co-writing credit from lead singer Luke Hemmings' fiancée, Sierra Deaton, and the lyrics: "On the day that you leave me/I'll forever be bleeding love." The majority of the new album was written by the band with Michael Clifford leading on production.

— AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

TELEVISION

— "Quantum Leap" is jumping back to TV with a sequel to the 1989-93 sci-fi series about a scientist trapped in the past by an experiment gone awry. Three decades later, physicist Ben Song (Raymond Lee) is part of a team attempting to decipher the nature of the quantum-leap accelerator when he suffers a similar fate. But his colleagues (including co-stars Ernie Hudson and Caitlin Bassett) are determined to rescue him. Scott Bakula, star of the original series, affirmed online he's not connected with NBC's newcomer but wishes it "good luck and happy leaping!" It debuts Monday.

— Hulu's "Reboot" is a clever take on the resurrection of an early 2000s cheesy family sitcom and its former stars whose careers haven't exactly flourished. The ensemble cast is appealing — Keegan-Michael Key, Johnny Knoxville, Judy Greer, Paul Reiser, Rachel Bloom, Calum Worthy and Krista Marie Yu — but the marquee name is creator-executive producer Steven Levitan. "Reboot" marks a return to TV for the award-winning "Modern Family" co-creator, and he takes delight poking fun at network TV's fondness for repeating itself. The series debuts with three episodes on Tuesday.

— Norman Lear turned 100 last July, but it be nitpicking to begrudge the legendary TV producer and activist a belated party, especially one that's pulling out all the stops. "Norman Lear: 100 Years of Music and Laughter," airing Thursday on ABC, will celebrate Lear's life and achievements, among them the groundbreaking sitcoms "All in the Family" and "The Jeffersons." George Clooney, Rita Moreno, Anthony Anderson, Jennifer Aniston, Jimmy Kimmel and Octavia Spencer are among those set to appear in the two-hour special that promises comedy, performances and surprise reunions.

How much 'pain'? Fed to signal more rate hikes ahead

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell bluntly warned in a speech last month that the Fed's drive to curb inflation by aggressively raising interest rates would "bring some pain." On Wednesday, Americans may get a better sense of how much pain could be in store.

The Fed is expected at its latest meeting to raise its key short-term rate by a substantial three-quarters of a point for the third consecutive time. Another hike that large would lift its benchmark rate — which affects many consumer and business loans — to a range of 3% to 3.25%, the highest level in 14 years.

In a further sign of the Fed's deepening concern about inflation, it will also likely signal that it plans to raise rates much higher by year's end than it had forecast three months ago — and to keep them higher for a longer period.

Economists expect Fed officials to forecast that their key rate could go as high as 4% by the end of this year. They're also likely to signal additional increases in 2023, perhaps to as high as roughly 4.5%.

Short-term rates at that level would make a recession likelier next year by sharply raising the cost of

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mortgages, car loans and business loans. The Fed intends those higher borrowing costs to slow growth by cooling off a still-robust job market to cap wage growth and other inflation pressures. Yet the risk is growing that the Fed may weaken the economy so much as to cause a downturn that would produce job losses.

The U.S. economy hasn't seen rates as high as the Fed is projecting since before the 2008 financial crisis. Last week, the average fixed mortgage rate topped 6%, its highest point in 14 years. Credit card borrowing costs have reached their highest level since 1996, according to Bankrate.com.

Powell and other Fed officials still say the Fed's goal is to achieve a so-called "soft landing," by which they would slow growth enough to tame inflation but not so much as to trigger a recession.

By last week, though, that goal appeared further out of reach after the government reported that inflation over the past year was a painful 8.3%. Even worse, so-called core prices, which exclude the volatile food and energy categories, rose much faster than expected.

The inflation report also documented just how broadly inflation has spread through the economy, complicating the the Fed's anti-inflation efforts. Inflation now appears increasingly fueled by higher wages and by consumers' steady desire to spend and less by the supply shortages that had bedeviled the economy during the pandemic recession.

"They're going try to avoid recession," said William Dudley, formerly the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. "They're going to try to achieve a soft landing. The problem is that the room to do that is virtually non-existent at this point."

At a news conference he will give Wednesday after the Fed meeting ends, Powell isn't likely to drop any hints that the central bank will ease up on its credit tightening campaign. Most economists expect the Fed to stop raising rates in early 2023. But for now, they expect Powell to reinforce his hard-line anti-inflation stance.

"It's going to end up being a hard landing," said Kathy Bostjancic, an economist at Oxford Economics.

"He's not going to say that," Bostjancic said. But, referring to the most recent Fed meeting in July, when Powell raised hopes for an eventual pullback on rate hikes, she added: "He also wants to make sure that the markets don't come away and rally. That's what happened last time."

Indeed, investors responded then by bidding up stock prices and buying bonds, which lowered rates on securities like the benchmark the 10-year Treasury. Higher stock prices and lower bond yields generally boost the economy — the opposite of what the Fed wants.

At a previous news conference in June, Powell had noted that a three-quarter-point rate hike was "an unusually large one" and suggested that "I do not expect moves of this size to be common." Yet after the alarming August inflation report, the Fed now seems all but sure to announce its third consecutive such increase. A fourth such hike is possible, too, if future measures of inflation don't improve.

The central bank has already engaged in the fastest series of interest rate hikes since the early 1980s. Yet some economists — and some Fed officials — argue that they have yet to raise rates to a level that would actually restrict borrowing and spending and slow growth.

Loretta Mester, president of the Cleveland Federal Reserve Bank, and one of the 12 officials who will vote on the Fed's decision this week, said she thinks it will be necessary to raise the Fed's rate to "somewhat above 4% by early next year and hold it there."

"I do not anticipate the Fed cutting" rates next year, Mester added, dispelling the expectations of many investors on Wall Street who had hoped for such a reversal. Comments like Mester's contributed to a sharp fall in stock prices last month that began after Powell's stern anti-inflation speech at an economic conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

"Our responsibility to deliver price stability is unconditional," Powell said then — a remark widely interpreted to mean that the Fed will fight inflation even if it requires deep job losses and a recession.

Many economists sound convinced that a recession and widespread layoffs will be necessary to slow rising prices. Research published earlier this month under the auspices of the Brookings Institution concluded that unemployment might have to go as high as 7.5% to get inflation back to the Fed's 2% target.

Only a downturn that harsh would reduce wage growth and consumer spending enough to cool inflation,

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according to the a paper by Johns Hopkins University economist Laurence Ball and two economists at the International Monetary Fund.

By dancing, Rodrygo and Vinícius make stance against racism

By TALES AZZONI AP Sports Writer

MADRID (AP) — With a goal and a dance, Real Madrid's young Brazilian forwards made a statement against racism in soccer this weekend.

With their samba-like moves after a goal in the derby against Atlético Madrid on Sunday, Rodrygo and Vinícius Júnior made it clear they are not backing down from the racist language from their critics or by the racist chants from the opposing fans.

"Dance wherever you want," Vinícius wrote on Twitter in a message directed at Rodrygo after Madrid's 2-1 win at Atlético in the Spanish league.

"White and BLACK dance," Rodrygo posted not long afterward, along with the photo of the young Brazilians celebrating together.

Rodrygo had just scored Madrid's first goal in a derby whose buildup had been surrounded by controversy over Vinícius' recent goal celebrations.

Vinícius, who is Black, was upset when a guest on a television sports talk show used racist language to criticize his dances. The 22-year-old Brazilian, who is set to make it to his first World Cup in November, said his actions on the field were "being criminalized," and that his success as a Black Brazilian man in Europe was "annoying" to some.

The controversy continued just before Sunday's match as online videos showed some Atlético fans outside the Metropolitano Stadium chanting "Vinícius is a monkey."

"This (derby) was even more special because of everything that happened during the week, and we answered on the field," Rodrygo said.

Some Atlético fans threw objects toward Rodrygo and Vinícius as they celebrated the goal near one of the corner flags.

The talk show where Vinícius was criticized for "acting like a monkey" had apologized by saying the expression was "unfortunate" but not racist, because it said those words are normally used in Spain to talk about someone doing "silly" things.

Madrid had issued a statement supporting Vinícius and condemning racism, and coach Carlo Ancelotti also defended Vinícius, although he also contradicted the Brazilian by saying he didn't think there was that type of racism in Spain.

It wasn't the first time Vinícius was subjected to racist taunts, though. It happened last year during a "clásico" against Barcelona at the Camp Nou.

There were also cases against other players, including Athletic Bilbao's Iñaki Williams.

Among those who came out to publicly support Vinícius was Pelé and current Brazil forward Neymar, who told Vinícius to "keep dancing."

The duo's celebration on Sunday was widely shared online and was praised by many in Brazil and Latin America. Some players in Europe also showed their appreciation.

There will certainly be more of the same going forward.

"I repeat it to you racist: I will not stop dancing," Vinícius said. "Whether at the Sambódromo, at the Bernabéu or wherever."

MADRID'S MOMENTUM

With the win over Atlético, Madrid remained the only perfect team to start the season in the top five European leagues.

"We wanted a start like this before the international break," Ancelotti said. "It's an unusual season because of the World Cup and nobody really knows what's going to happen. Things can change very quickly."

Madrid is being closely followed by a revamped Barcelona team, which has won five straight after opening with a home draw against Rayo Vallecano.

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The only other Spanish team with at least five wins is Real Betis, which defeated Girona 2-1 at home on Sunday.

Betis rival Sevilla — fourth last season behind Atlético, Barcelona and Madrid — is struggling with only one win, while Atlético has three victories from its six matches.

Almería, Valladolid, Cádiz, Espanyol and winless Elche are the teams closest to the bottom of the standings.

Today in History: September 20, King beats Riggs

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Sept. 20, the 263rd day of 2022. There are 102 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 20, 1973, in their so-called "battle of the sexes," tennis star Billie Jean King defeated Bobby Riggs in straight sets, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3, at the Houston Astrodome.

On this date:

In 1519, Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan and his crew set out from Spain on five ships to find a western passage to the Spice Islands. (Magellan was killed enroute, but one of his ships eventually circled the world.)

In 1881, Chester A. Arthur was sworn in as the 21st president of the United States, succeeding the assassinated James A. Garfield.

In 1946, the first Cannes Film Festival, lasting 16 days, opened in France.

In 1962, James Meredith, a Black student, was blocked from enrolling at the University of Mississippi by Democratic Gov. Ross R. Barnett. (Meredith was later admitted.)

In 1964, The Beatles concluded their first full-fledged U.S. tour by performing in a charity concert at the Paramount Theater in New York.

In 1967, the Cunard liner RMS Queen Elizabeth 2 was christened by Britain's Queen Elizabeth II in Clydebank, Scotland.

In 1973, singer-songwriter Jim Croce died in a plane crash near Natchitoches, Louisiana; he was 30.

In 1995, in a move that stunned Wall Street, AT&T Corporation announced it was splitting into three companies.

In 2000, Independent Counsel Robert Ray announced the end of the Whitewater investigation, saying there was insufficient evidence to warrant charges against President and Mrs. Clinton.

In 2001, during an address to a joint session of Congress, President George W. Bush announced a new Cabinet-level office to fortify homeland security and named Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge its director.

In 2011, repeal of the U.S. military's 18-year-old "don't ask, don't tell" compromise took effect, allowing gay and lesbian service members to serve openly.

In 2019, Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania, the 1979 site of the nation's worst commercial nuclear power accident, was shut down by its owner after producing electricity for 45 years.

Ten years ago: On a day when thousands of angry Pakistanis tried to make their way to the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, the embassy aired an ad on Pakistani TV showing President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton denouncing an anti-Islamic video produced in the United States. Space shuttle Endeavour, riding atop a Boeing 747, landed at Edwards Air Force Base in California en route to its eventual retirement home, the California Science Center in Los Angeles.

Five years ago: Hurricane Maria, the strongest hurricane to hit Puerto Rico in more than 80 years, struck the island, wiping out as much as 75 percent of the power distribution lines and causing an island-wide blackout. Rescuers worked furiously at a collapsed school in Mexico City where a girl was believed trapped under debris in the aftermath of a deadly earthquake; it was later determined that no children were still trapped in the debris.

One year ago: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau won his third straight election, but failed to get the majority in Parliament that he wanted; Trudeau had voiced the concerns of Canadians who were in-

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creasingly upset with those who refused to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Pfizer announced that its COVID-19 vaccine was effective for children ages 5 to 11; the vaccine was already available to anyone 12 and older. (U.S. health officials would approve the vaccine for children as young as 5 in November 2021.) In a major easing of pandemic travel restrictions, the White House said it would allow foreigners to fly into the country starting in November if they had vaccination proof and a negative COVID-19 test. U.S. officials said more than 6,000 Haitians and other migrants had been removed from an encampment at a Texas border town; the officials defended a response that included immediately expelling the migrants to their impoverished Caribbean country.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Sophia Loren is 88. Rock musician Chuck Panozzo is 74. Actor Tony Denison is 73. Actor Debbi Morgan is 71. Jazz musician Peter White is 68. Actor Betsy Brantley is 67. Actor Gary Cole is 66. TV news correspondent Deborah Roberts is 62. Country-rock musician Joseph Shreve (Flynnville Train) is 61. Rock musician Randy Bradbury (Pennywise) is 58. Actor Kristen Johnston is 55. Rock singers Gunnar and Matthew Nelson are 55. Rock musician Ben Shepherd is 54. Actor Erika Okuma is 50. Actor-model Moon Bloodgood is 47. Actor Jon Bernthal is 46. Singer The-Dream is 45. Actor Charlie Weber is 44. Rock musician Rick Woolstenhulme (WOOL'-sten-hyoolm) (Lifehouse) is 43. Rapper Yung Joc is 42. Actor Crystle Stewart is 41. Actor Aldis Hodge is 36. Rock drummer Jack Lawless is 35. Actor Malachi (MAL'-ah-ky) Kirby is 33.