

Groton Daily Independent

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Chicken Soup
for the Soul

“A friend is someone who gives you
total freedom to be yourself.”

-Jim Morrison

Wednesday, Sept. 21

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

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

Thursday, Sept. 22

FIRST DAY OF AUTUMN

Dress-up: Class Colors at HS: Class Color (seniors-black, juniors-white, sophomores-grey, freshman-gold, 8th grade-purple, 7th grade-blue, 6th grade-red, staff-pink; Pajama Day at elementary.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal

School Lunch: Spaghetti with garlic toast.

Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes with ham, green peas, sunset salad, oatmeal raisin cookie, whole

wheat bread.

6 p.m.: Youth Football hosts Warner

Volleyball hosts Tiospa Zina: 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.

UMC: Bible Study with Ashley, 6:30 p.m.

Emmanuel: Conversation with Bishop Hammier at Good Shepherd, 6:30 p.m.

NO OUTDOOR WATERING!

Effective immediately, 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.

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

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#554 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

At midday today, things look like they are continuing to decline from the time of our last Update. The seven-day new-case average has dropped from 66,077 to 61,712 with a pandemic total today of 95,439,991. At this rate, we're going to extend the period between million-case milestones considerably during the present period. Average hospitalizations have decreased from 35,126 to 32,057. Seven-day average deaths, however, have increased from 385 to 464, which is a pretty substantial gain. I don't really understand what might be operating there, but it's not a good thing. I'll keep an eye on this. Pandemic total deaths are now 1,049,765.

Here's a bit of good news: According to a news briefing from Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization, on Wednesday, "Last week, the number of weekly reported deaths from Covid-19 was the lowest since March 2020." You will undoubtedly recall that this is in the very earliest days of this pandemic, back before the virus had even been reported in much of the world. Even with serious underreporting of new-case numbers, deaths remains a reliable indicator of the extent of this pandemic so that this drop in deaths indicates a real trend across the world; CNN reports that "weekly case counts are falling in all regions [of the world], with an overall fall of 28% compared to a week before. And in the United States, cases have been steadily dropping for the past two months, according to data from Johns Hopkins University." Deaths have been decreasing in much of the world as well, although there was a recent small uptick in the WHO's African Region—not exactly sure what that means yet; it could be a momentary blip in the data. The CDC's prediction is that new hospitalizations and deaths in the US will hold steady for another month. I call this breathing space; it would be nice to discover it's more than that. Remains to be seen.

There appears to be a hot debate in scientific circles these days. The question at hand: Has Covid-19 changed sufficiently that we can now regard it as no more dangerous than the flu? There is serious disagreement on this at the moment with some pretty prominent smart people lining up on either side of the question. Let's look at the contestants and the arguments.

On the no-worse-than-flu side, we have folks like Dr. Monica Gandhi, infectious disease specialist at the University of California, San Francisco; Dr. Shira Doron, infectious disease specialist at the Tufts Medical Center and professor at the Tufts University School of Medicine; and (a bit more cautiously because he sees the virus as still posing a great risk on the population if not the individual level) Dr. Ashish Jha, White House Covid-19 response coordinator, saying that this is no longer a dangerous virus for most individuals. Citing widespread immunity in the US population due to a combination of vaccination and repeated infection and the decreased virulence of the most recent variants, these experts say most people—primarily the young and healthy—are not going to get seriously ill from this virus. We're seeing that hospitalizations and deaths in younger people have become rare. These scientists say most people can go about their daily lives the way we did in the past.

On the still-worse-than-the-flu side, we have folks like Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and White House medical adviser; Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly of Washington University in St. Louis; and Dr. Jeremy Faust, emergency physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, who cite the continuing high number of deaths from Covid-19 and the great degree of risk to the elderly and the compromised. While mortality from disease varies by age and some other factors, we're still seeing a fair degree of danger for those who are not vaccinated, boosted, and appropriately treated when infected. We're losing around 400 people per day from Covid-19, and current projections are for 125,000 deaths over the next year. A really bad flu season yields something more in the neighborhood of

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50,000 deaths, quite a lot lower than that.

The no-worse people often suggest that deaths numbers for Covid-19 are inflated by deaths of people who have Covid and die from another condition. Thing is, as Fauci argues, it's difficult to separate deaths with Covid from deaths because of Covid because there are a lot of people with chronic conditions whose chance of dying if they get Covid-19 is considerably higher than if they do not get Covid-19. It's pretty tough to make the case that one of those deaths with Covid isn't because of the virus; here you have a person who'd still be alive if they hadn't encountered this virus. Fauci told NPR, "What's the difference with someone who has mild congestive heart failure, goes into the hospital and gets COVID, and then dies from profound congestive heart failure? Is that with COVID or because of COVID? COVID certainly contributed to it." My thought is that this certainly is a Covid-19 death. Another point I think arises here which was not mentioned by the experts on this side of the issue is that influenza deaths numbers are also padded by deaths of people who didn't actually die from influenza—in fact, by deaths of people who didn't even have influenza at all. We've had this discussion before (see my Update #68 posted way back on May 2, 2020, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3557028290980218>), but the bottom line is that reported influenza deaths are actually a combination of pneumonia and influenza deaths, that is, deaths of people with pneumonia who did not have the flu and people with pneumonia from the flu. That makes an apples-to-apples comparison most difficult and makes basing one on an argument about deaths with Covid vs. deaths because of Covid a bit specious. Seems to me that a person who dies and was only incidentally diagnosed with Covid-19 is not a Covid-19 death, and that's how death certificates are being handled. In those folks, the death certificate is not going to mention the virus. On the other hand, a person with symptomatic Covid-19 which is viewed by the attending physician as contributory to their death is a person who is a Covid-19 death, and this is also how the death certificates are being handled. Not that complicated in my view, even if there is some number of cases where the contributing influence of this virus is uncertain.

There is, on the other hand, no doubt Covid-19 deaths—and the death rate—have dropped since the Omicron variant reared its head, but while it may well be true that, as Doron says, "we have reached the point where, for an individual, COVID poses less of a risk of hospitalization and death than does influenza," we also need to recognize that not all individuals are created equal or in equivalent circumstances. CDC data shows that, to quote NPR, "compared to 18- to 29-year-olds, people aged 65 to 74 have 60 times the risk of dying; those aged 75 to 84 have 140 times the risk; and those 85 and older have 330 times greater risk." Maybe because I'm a certified old person myself, I find the easy dismissal of the risk to those folks a little jarring. Additionally, I'm a little put off by the equally easy dismissal of the risk to the immunocompromised and the otherwise medically frail. I'm still not feeling we have pulled together in concern for our fellow citizens at all, particularly in our rush to normalcy, old and sick people be damned. I also think we need to remember that, even with serious underreporting, the number of cases of Covid-19 (year-round, not just seasonally at this point) far outstrips the reported cases of flu, so that, even as the case fatality rate for Covid-19 has plunged, we're still going to see a whole lot more dead Americans from Covid-19 than from flu. The numbers are the numbers.

I acknowledge I am not the kind of expert any of the aforementioned folks are, but for what it's worth, to my way of thinking, I'm more in the camp with Al-Aly, who told NPR, "However you slice it, there was never an instance where COVID-19 was milder than the flu," and Faust, who added, "I'll probably feel more comfortable with saying something like, 'Oh COVID is similar to the flu' when we actually see a pattern that resembles that." I am quite disappointed in the President who seems to have declared the pandemic over this past week based, apparently, on the fact that we're all acting as though it was over. I think we're getting there, but I do not believe we're there yet. When I consider the downside and potential consequences of a premature declaration of the end of this pandemic, I am not yet ready to relegate this virus to the class of no-worse-than-the-flu. With time, I think it will happen, but not yet. Not at all.

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I am not suggesting we should all run around with our hair on fire, hollering how the sky is falling, but recommending we face the reality of a whole lot of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths continuing to this very day. Not there yet.

One thing we can all do to hasten that “pandemic’s over” day: Get a booster. This new bivalent vaccine has an added advantage over the old one. It is that, by exposing you to more than one antigen, it will better train antibodies and memory cells to respond to future exposures. We know the immune response can broaden and mature with time and repeated exposure; now this exposure to an additional antigen is believed to stimulate that process more effectively, yielding more diverse memory cells for selection as our response evolves. There are some early indications this reformulated booster may yield more durable protection, that is, protection which lasts longer. I’d be in favor of that.

I know our vaccines have been getting bad press lately. Think about all of the breakthrough infections we’ve been seeing: makes you think they don’t work, right? And many people figure if they had the original vaccine series, they should be as covered as they need to be. Well, we have some population-level data that would take you to a different conclusion. In the US, only about a third of eligible adults received boosters since their primary series; this compares with two-thirds of adults in other developed countries. And what did we see in these different populations? How about a death rate 80 percent higher in the US than in Canada during the Omicron wave? We compare similarly with Europe where people have been getting vaccinated at rates that put us to shame. Some Asian countries, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, have more than 80 percent of adults vaccinated-and-boosted, and death rates are even lower than Europe’s. And while our vaccines do not entirely prevent infection in everyone, they do still prevent it in many vaccinated-and-boosted people. It seems worthwhile to improve your odds there. We’re getting evidence that vaccination does reduce the probability of developing long-Covid even in those with breakthrough infections, and of course, if you don’t get infected at all, your chances of developing long-Covid drop to zero. The facts are still lining up on the side of getting that booster. I’m really going to encourage you to go out and find a booster dose this fall. Covid-19 is not gone, and if it comes bouncing back for another round, I’ll feel better knowing you’ve done all you can to protect yourselves. Give it some thought.

I read a paper published last month in the Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease which puts into perspective how important these new boosters are likely to be. This reports on a study from Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine which adds to a growing body of research that indicates there are links between Covid-19 in the elderly and the development of Alzheimer’s. Looking at the health records for more than six million people over 65 from almost 70 health care centers around the country who made a medical visit during a period between February 2020 and May 2021, the researchers found an association between infection with SARS-CoV-2 and a new diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease within a year after. The background rate of development of Alzheimer’s disease (that is, the usual rate at which it is diagnosed in the absence of other factors) is five new diagnoses per 1000 seniors within a year. After Covid-19, the rate increased to seven in 1000, a 40 percent increase, which is considerable. Now it is possible that some folks with long-Covid get mistakenly diagnosed with Alzheimer’s due to the neurologic complications we see after SARS-CoV-2 infection; of course, if you have all the symptoms of a loss of cognitive competency, then maybe the precise diagnosis doesn’t matter all that much. We should also note that patients with dementia from any cause have a significantly higher risk for Covid-19 than patients without dementia as well. So perhaps Covid-19 is both a cause and an effect of dementia—not great news.

What’s more, the upcoming flu season has been predicted to be a rough one. Each year, we take a look at what happened in countries in the Southern Hemisphere whose flu season is just ending; that generally serves as a useful indicator for how we’ll fare in the upcoming winter. (For the record, they do the same, assessing our flu season when they make their plans for the next winter.) And if that pattern holds, we’re going to see higher-than-average cases here over the next few months. That means the smart money is

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on getting a flu vaccine too this fall. If the timing for a Covid-19 booster works out, you can receive both boosters at the same time; the two shots are perfectly safe together if they go into opposite arms. I will note that for people who are older or frail, a later flu shot is often recommended—more toward the end of October or early November; this is because the duration of immunity from flu vaccine can be shorter in these folks, and we really want to see coverage through the peak of the season in about February. A late October/early November dose will take most of us right into March. In any case, this is a vaccine you really should consider too. No one's quite sure, but the smart money's on expecting a co-infection with both viruses at once to be a fairly serious matter for a whole lot of people. Both of them kill by screwing up your lungs; I can't think of a world in which it would be a great idea to get both at once.

Just lately, we've been talking about what the next steps in vaccine development need to be, and now we're seeing signs folks are working on these steps. I've just read a paper published this week in *Science Translational Medicine* from a research team at the University of Texas who are working on something new and different. What they have is a bivalent vaccine (meaning it contains two different antigens, each of which will stimulate an immune response), but this is not like the new bivalent booster we're distributing right now. The current vaccine is bivalent in that it has antigens from two different variants of the virus, specifically the original Wuhan-Hu-1 and BA.5; on the other hand, this proposed vaccine has antigens from two different parts of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, specifically spike (S) protein and nucleocapsid (N) protein. They used the original wild-type Wuhan-Hu-1 variant as the basis for both antigens in their vaccine. It's built on an mRNA platform, so is very similar in basic design to the vaccines we're using right now, just with different sorts of proteins as antigens; they're calling it an mRNA-S+N vaccine.

It's been a while since we talked about viral structure, so quick review: The spikes, home to spike (S) protein, are those little protrusions we're accustomed to seeing in representations of coronaviruses, and the nucleocapsid, home to nucleocapsid (N) protein, is the "body" of the virus, the part from which the spikes protrude. Now we're able to have an immune response to both, and the nucleocapsid is very stable, that is, it hasn't been mutating, which makes it seem like a smart antigen to include in a vaccine. There is a downside though; it elicits binding, but not neutralizing antibodies, that is, they can attach to the virus, but can't by themselves prevent it from infecting cells. The cell-mediated (T-cell) response, however, is very strong and eliminates virus after it infects cells. Problem is antibodies are what prevents infection in the first place; T cells are much better later in the viral life cycle by interfering with viral replication inside the host cell. This means things get farther along in the whole infection process before T cells really kick in. On the other hand, T-cell immunity can be pretty agnostic about the virus's mutations because it's going to work whatever smart tricks the virus pulls with its S proteins.

So this new vaccine under development has the advantage of stimulating antibody production against S, but with the issue that the virus will continue to evolve, rendering those anti-S antibodies less effective as time goes on. It also has the advantage of stimulating a strong cell-mediated response, but with the issue that this sort of response isn't going to work as early in the infection. Put together, they act as a pretty good one-two punch, at least in animals. When just N antigen (mRNA-N) was injected into the mice, the immune response yielded modest protection—nothing to write home about. When just S (mRNA-S) was injected into the mice, seven of eight mice had detectable amounts of viral RNA in the lung cells, which is not great, but still indicating some effect. When mRNA-S+N was injected, none of the eight mice tested had viral RNA in their lung cells. Now this looks promising.

Furthermore, similar results were obtained in hamsters which were immunized, then exposed to Delta variant. Animals which received mRNA-S+N did not have detectable levels of virus, and their lungs remained clear. They also had less virus in their upper respiratory tracts than those vaccinated with mRNA-S, which just might mean they're less likely to transmit virus to others; that looks very promising too. When mRNA-S+N was tested against Omicron in hamsters, four of five animals were clear of detectable virus,

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none had lung damage, and median viral loads in the upper respiratory tract were significantly reduced, compared to mRNA-S which yielded four of five animals with detectable virus and lung lesions. Interestingly, analysis of the immune responses generated showed that the combination mRNA-S+N augmented S-specific immunity in terms of neutralizing antibody activity when compared with mRNA-S vaccination; somehow, the bivalent vaccine stimulates better responses against each of the individual antigens (S and N) than either monovalent does. The writers indicated they're not sure just what's going on there, but advanced a couple of possible mechanisms to explain it, mentioning that "[a] better understanding of mechanisms for S- and N-specific immunity regulation after combined mRNA-S+N vaccination is needed."

Now hamsters are not people, and importantly, none of these experiments followed the animals longer than two weeks, so duration of immunity is unknown. Another factor is that these tests were all performed in immunologically naïve, that is, never-exposed-to-SARS-CoV-2, animals. It is difficult to know how these results will map on to a human population nearly all of whom have now been exposed to these antigens either through infection and/or through vaccination. That means there's work left to do before this stuff hits the market—if it ever does. Testing in nonhuman primates is next and will take around six months once underway, which will also give us a better look at durability of protection; human trials would occur only if those results look good. As I understand things, this team is still waiting for both funding and approvals to commence those trials. I'm not certain how close they are to securing that funding, but we've talked about the considerable cost of developing a vaccine. I hope that's not an obstacle to finding out just how well and how long this stuff works in people. Having options is good.

Another paper published in the journal *Pathogens* this week addressed route of administration for a vaccine containing S-RBD (receptor-binding domain) antigen displayed on immunogenic liposomes (tiny fat globules). The liposomes are formulated with a lipid adjuvant to enhance the vaccine's immunogenicity. It was administered to humanized mice, intranasally (I.N.) or by inhalation in some and intramuscularly (I.M.) or by injection in others. Antibodies of two classes were evaluated, IgA secretory antibodies along the mucous membranes and IgG antibodies in serum.

Findings were that I.N., but not I.M. administration yielded IgA in the lungs, but I.M. yielded higher levels of IgG in serum. Animals challenged with SARS-CoV-2 after vaccination showed that the low level of IgA produced in the lungs was insufficient to clear the virus as effectively as antibodies from I.M. administration and that I.N. immunization induces RBD-specific T cells in the lungs, but not as many systemic RBD-specific T cells in the spleen. So I.N. immunization induces localized antibody and T cell responses while I.M. immunization gives a more systemic response; both are likely better than just one, but if I had to choose, systemic is better than local. I.N. administration did induce protection against a lethal challenge with virus and reduce viral burden in the lungs and nasal passages, but not as well as I.M. administration. They suggest that a combination of I.N. and I.M. immunization might maximize the effectiveness of the immune response to virus. It appears the thinking is that an I.N.-administered booster might be useful after a I.M.-administered primary vaccine series. We'll see what develops here.

That's a wrap for today. I hope you're keeping yourself safe and well; going into fall, some additional vigilance might be wise. We'll talk again in a few days.

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4TH ANNUAL RONCALLI MARCHING BAND FESTIVAL

Sponsored by the Area
Federal Credit Union



Wednesday, September 28, 2022, beginning at 9:30AM

Parade Route - 15th Ave. NE from Main Street, traveling east to Dakota Street

The 2022 Parade Order and approximate step-off times are:

9:30 – In Exhibition: Aberdeen Central High School Golden Eagles Marching Band

9:35 – Holgate/Simmons Combined Middle School Band

9:35 – Langford Area Marching Lions

9:40 – Ipswich High School Marching Band

9:45 – Emerald Regiment, Pierre

9:50 – Hoven Marching Greyhounds

9:55 – Aberdeen Christian

10:00 – Webster Area High School

10:05 – Groton Area High School

10:10 – Castlewood Warrior Band

10:15 – Aberdeen Roncalli Marching Cavaliers

10:20 – Warner High School Band

10:25 – Feature Band: Northern State University Marching Wolves

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.

Weekly Vikings Recap - Week 2

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

After coming off an exciting victory against the Green Bay Packers in Week 1, the Vikings had an underwhelming performance on Monday night against the Philadelphia Eagles. The Vikings' defense failed to show up to start the game as they gave up a total of 347 yards to the Eagles in the first half. Jalen Hurts, who is known more for his running than his passing, went 12/12 before his first incompleteness. The main issue for the Vikings seemed to be their lack of coverage in the secondary as the Eagles' receivers were often left relatively wide open in coverage.

The Vikings' offense did itself no favors either. Besides going 3-and-out on three of its possessions in the first half, the Vikings blew a huge opportunity to get back in the game when Irv Smith Jr. dropped a pass from Kirk Cousins on a guaranteed touchdown. Instead of the Vikings cutting the Eagles' lead to seven, the Vikings were forced to punt, and the Eagles immediately drove down the field to kick a field goal. As the first half ended, the Vikings went into the locker room down 17 points and with less than 100 yards of offense.

The Vikings got the ball to start the second half. The drive initially looked promising as the Vikings utilized a no-huddle approach to the drive. However, none of it mattered as Cousins threw an interception in the end zone to Eagles' cornerback, Darius Slay. It appeared that Cousins thought Justin Jefferson was going to run a tighter route than he did.

Even though the Eagles' interception gave the Eagles even more momentum, the Vikings' defense was still able to hold them to a field goal attempt. However, Vikings' cornerback, Patrick Peterson, was able to get around the edge and block the Eagles' field goal attempt. After Kris Boyd was able to return the Eagles' missed field goal down to the Eagles' 30-yard line, the Vikings quickly killed all momentum they had with another Kirk Cousins interception. Unlike the first interception, this interception was entirely the fault of Cousins.

All hope of a Vikings' comeback seemed to vanish with that interception. The Eagles went into "run out the clock" mode and the Vikings just could never seem to click on offense at all. Although Cousins struggled throughout the game, the Vikings' pass catchers gave him no help either. On top of Irv Smith Jr.'s dropped pass in the first half, Dalvin Cook, Alexander Mattison, and Johnny Mundt all had drops on wide-open passes. To make matters worse, when the Vikings got one last chance at a comeback thanks to a Jordan Hicks interception, Cousins threw yet another interception in the endzone. In all, the Vikings just seemed out-of-sync from start to finish in the game. The Vikings fall to the Eagles 24-7.

The Vikings will now head back home with a short week to prepare to face the Detroit Lions at home on Sunday. For being one of the two worst teams in the NFL last year, the Lions played the Vikings extremely well in both of their meetings last season. Perhaps, the Vikings will not overlook the Lions as they pose an actual threat to beat the Vikings at home, something that was not the case in the last half-decade.

Conde National League

Sept. 19 Team Standings: Braves 7, Giants 5, Tigers 4, Pirates 3, Mets 3, Cubs 2

Men's High Games: Ryan Bethke 221, 197; Russ Bethke 208, Chad Furney 181

Men's High Series: Ryan Bethke 561, Jeff Lahammer 494, Russ Bethke 492

Women's High Games: Vickie Kramp 180, Sam Bahr 171, Joyce Walter 162

Women's High Series: Vickie Kramp 483, Sam Bahr 444, Joyce Walter 415

Netters drop three sets to Warner

Warner's volleyball team handed the Lady Tigers a three-set loss Tuesday in Groton, 25-10, 25-15 and 25-10.

Anna Fjeldheim had six kills, Sydney Leicht had five kills and one block, Aspen Johnson had three kills and three blocks, Lydia Meier had three kills, Laila Roberts had one kill, Carly Guthmiller one ace serve and Hollie Frost a block.

Lauren Marcuson had eight kills for Warner while Kyleigh Schopp had eight kills and four blocks, Kamryn Anderson had eight kills, an ace serve and three blocks, Kendyl Naderson had six kills and one block, Courtney Bjorgaard had three ace serves, Harleigh had an ace serve, Liby Scepaniak had two ace serves and Sophia Hoeft had a kill.

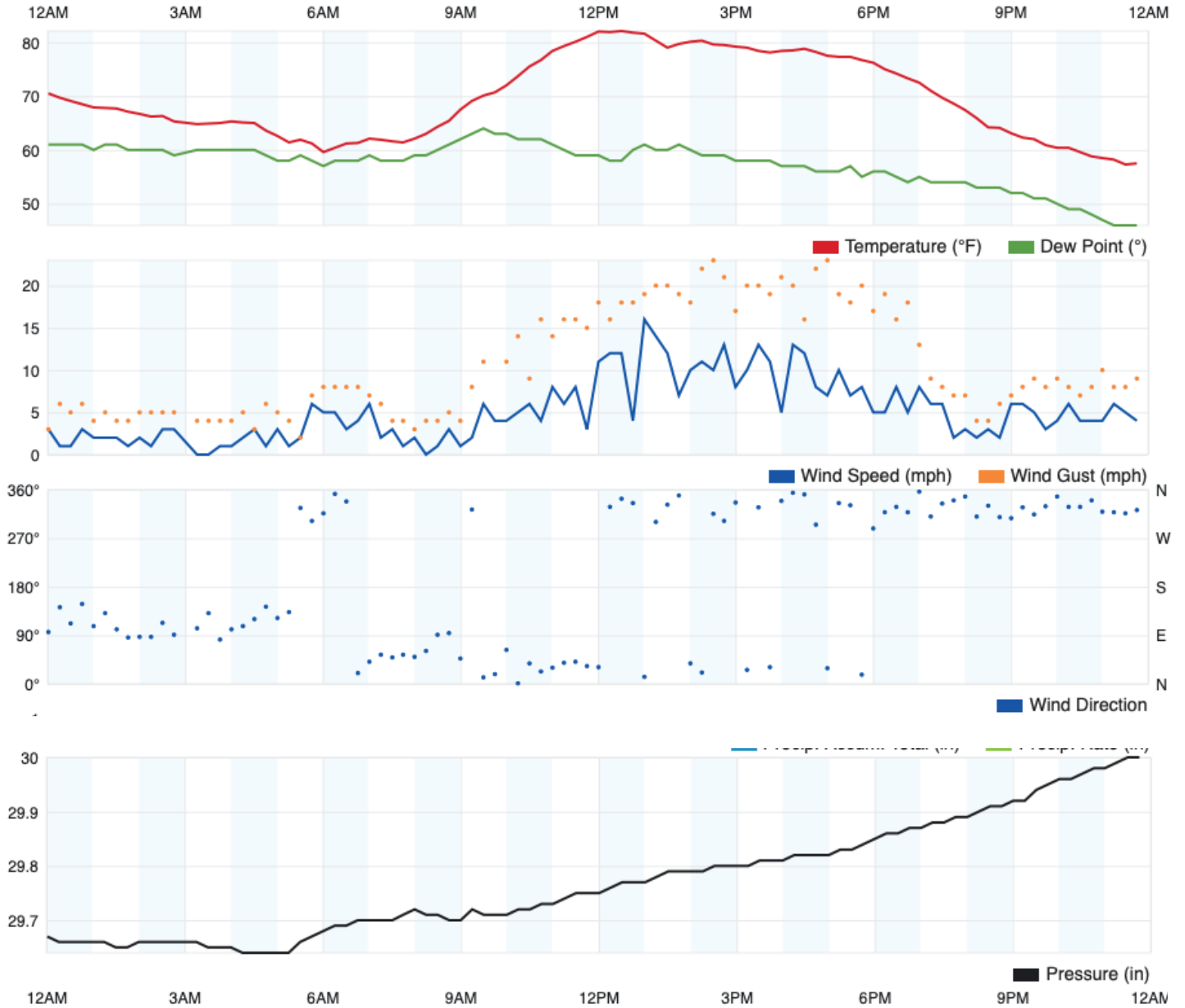
The match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bahr Spray Foam, John Sieh Agency, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Locke Electric, Dacotah Bank, SD Army National Guard, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc, Groton Area Chamber of Commerce. Justin Hanson and Ryan Tracy provided the play-by-play action.

Warner won the junior varsity match, 25-16 and 25-19. Warner won the C match, 26-24, 15-25 and 15-6.

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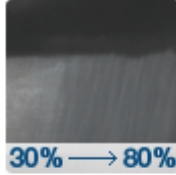

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
Mostly Sunny then Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear then Patchy Frost	Patchy Frost then Mostly Sunny	30% → 80% Chance Showers then Showers	30% Chance Showers and Breezy
High: 68 °F	Low: 34 °F	High: 65 °F	Low: 46 °F	High: 65 °F

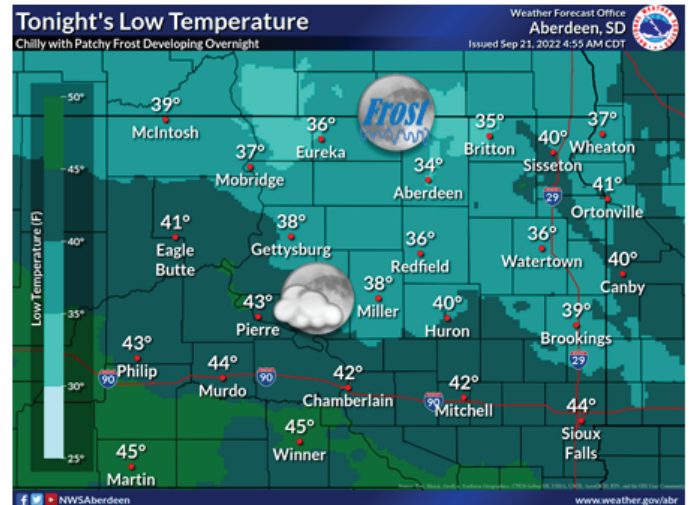
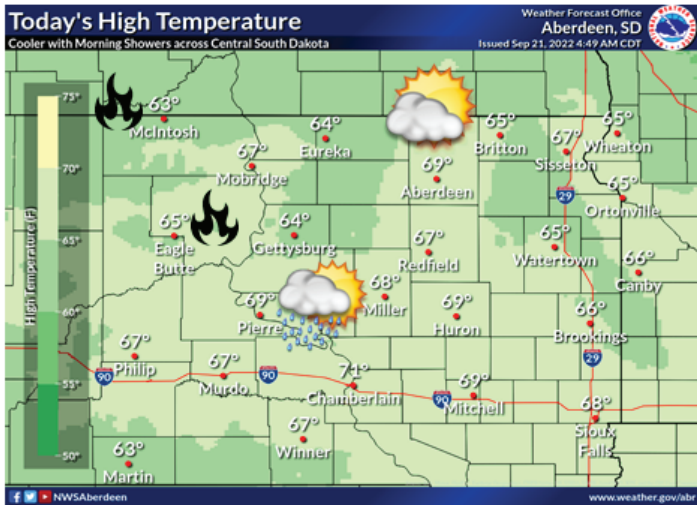
Today: Much Cooler Today

High Fire Danger Across North-Central SD

Partly to Mostly Cloudy skies with morning showers across Central SD. Becoming Mostly Sunny this afternoon with breezy northwest winds.

Tonight: Chilly, patchy frost possible for some

The greatest potential for some patchy frost is across the Big Sioux & James River Valley's into North-Central SD



National Weather Service Aberdeen, South Dakota

Updated: 9/21/2022 5:24 AM Central

Temperatures will be much cooler today underneath a mix of sun and clouds. More clouds will be around through the morning hours with some showers across Central South Dakota. More sunshine is expected this afternoon as northwest breezes make it feel more autumn like. Clear to partly cloudy skies are expected tonight. Winds will diminish this evening and temperatures are expected to fall into the 30s and 40s overnight. Patchy frost with mid 30s will be possible in some areas of the Big Sioux and James Valley's early Thursday morning.

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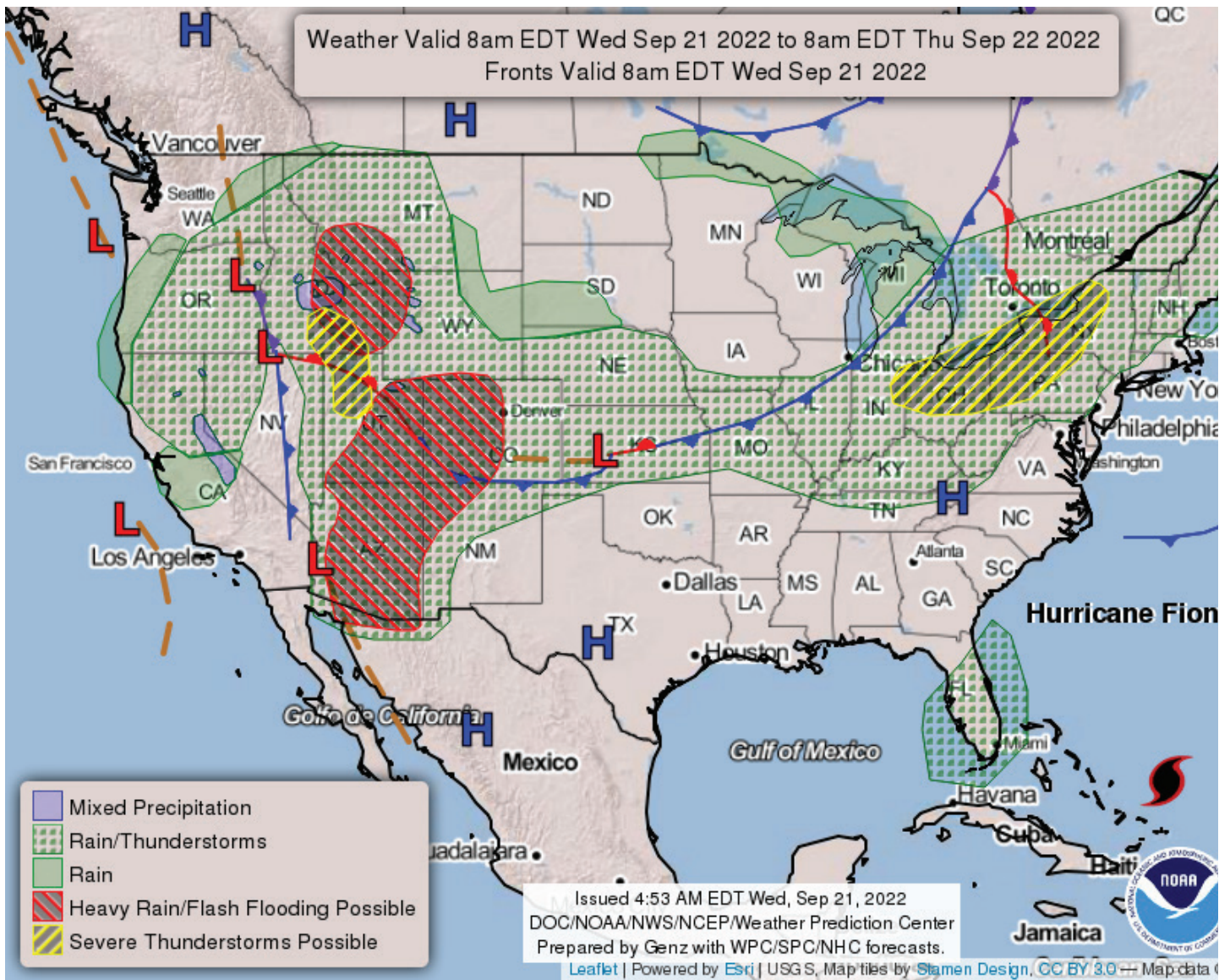
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 82.1 °F at 12:30 PM
Low Temp: 57.3 °F at 11:45 PM
Wind: 23 mph at 5:00 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 16 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 99 in 1937
Record Low: 22 in 1893
Average High: 73°F
Average Low: 45°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 1.40
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.07
Average Precip to date: 17.74
Precip Year to Date: 16.05
Sunset Tonight: 7:33:38 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:18:20 AM



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Today in Weather History

September 21, 1960: In the morning hours of September 21st, lightning struck and caused structural damage to a home in Clear Lake, Deuel County. Lightning also hit a home in Clark in Clark County, and two telephone poles near Milbank in Grant County. Power was also interrupted for a short time by lightning near Britton.

1894: A late season severe weather outbreak occurred across northwest Iowa, south central Minnesota and southwestern Wisconsin during the late evening hours. Several communities were impacted by this outbreak with an estimated 55 to 65 deaths, and in additional 300 injuries. The strongest tornado was an estimated F5, which tore through the counties of Kossuth, Hancock, Winnebago in Iowa, and Faribault in Minnesota.

1924: A couple of tornadoes, one rated F4 and the other F5, tore paths of devastation through Eau Claire, Clark, and Taylor Counties in Wisconsin. The death toll was 18 and 50 people were injured.

1926 - A hurricane came inland near Daytona Beach, FL. The hurricane caused 2.5 million dollars damage in eastern Florida, including the Jacksonville area. (David Ludlum)

1938: On this day, one of the most destructive and powerful hurricanes in recorded history struck Long Island and Southern New England. This Category 3 Hurricane was traveling at 47 mph when it made landfall near Bellport, New York. This storm caused at least 600 deaths and left approximately 63,000 homeless.

1939 - The temperature at Lewiston, ID, hit 117 degrees to establish an all-time record high for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1943 - On a whim, and flying a single engine AT-6, Lieutenant Ralph O'Hair and Colonel Duckworth were the first to fly into a hurricane. It started regular Air Force flights into hurricanes. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in Minnesota spawned a tornado which moved in a southwesterly direction for a distance of thirty miles across Rice County and Goodhue County. Trees were uprooted and tossed about like toys, and a horse lifted by the tornado was observed sailing horizontally through the air. Thunderstorms drenched La Crosse, WI, with 5.26 inches of rain, their second highest 24 hour total of record. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Hot weather prevailed in the north central U.S. Williston, ND, reported a record high of 108 degrees. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the eastern U.S., and in southeastern Texas. Richland County, SC, was soaked with up to 5.5 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

1989: Hurricane Hugo made landfall on Isle of Palms, South Carolina as a Category 4 hurricane. This storm brought strong winds to many areas of South Carolina. In Downtown Charleston, sustained winds of 87 mph were reported; along with gusts of 108 mph. Total damage from this hurricane is estimated at \$10 billion, including \$5.2 billion in the United States. The National Weather Service office in Charleston, SC has a page dedicated to Hurricane Hugo.

1989 - Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in the southwestern U.S. Yuma, AZ, experienced their most severe thunderstorm of record. Strong thunderstorm winds, with unofficial gusts as high as 95 mph, reduced visibilities to near zero in blowing dust and sand. Yuma got nearly as much rain in one hour as is normally received in an entire year. The storm total of 2.55 inches of rain was a record 24 hour total for July. Property damage due to flash flooding and high winds was in the millions. (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from Wisconsin and northern Illinois to New England, with 103 reports of large hail and damaging winds through the day. Thunderstorms in Wisconsin produced hail three inches in diameter near Oshkosh, and wind gusts to 65 mph at Germantown. (The National Weather Summary)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

OUR DAILY BREAD

There can be no doubt about the significance of work in the eyes of God. It is a theme that we find throughout His Word. Work glorifies God and is a way to demonstrate our obedience to His plan for our lives as well as a way to worship and honor Him.

Consider Paul. He was a tentmaker by trade but a minister of the gospel, theologian, philosopher, warrior, legal expert, missionary and author of Scripture under the direction of God. In fact, he instituted a "rule" with "the church of the Thessalonians." This rule was blunt and to the point: "For when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work he shall not eat.'" One does not need a degree in Biblical exegesis to understand that.

Solomon addressed two points of view about work: "He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment." Willing workers will be blessed and have all their needs met. God will see to that. God, however, has another rule: if we know of someone in need, who honestly cannot work or find work, we who are Christians are obligated to help them.

Those who "chase fantasies lack judgment" referring to "delusional" thinking. They are the ones who chase an easy way of living by devising schemes to take advantage of others. They want to receive life's rewards without hard work and riches from "rackets" not righteousness.

And, yes, they may have "their day." But, in the end, they "lack judgment" that comes from following God's way and His wisdom, and ultimately, face His judgment.

Prayer: Sound judgment, wise decisions and eternal rewards, Lord, come from obedience to Your Word. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment. Proverbs 12:11



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)
10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

09-21-28-30-52, Mega Ball: 10, Megaplier: 5

(nine, twenty-one, twenty-eight, thirty, fifty-two; Mega Ball: ten; Megaplier: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$301,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 251,000,000

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Christian def. Waubay/Summit, 25-16, 14-25, 25-20, 25-23

Arlington def. Madison, 25-16, 25-18, 25-20

Britton-Hecla def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-15, 25-10, 25-19

Canton def. Tri-Valley, 25-16, 25-12, 21-25, 25-14

Castlewood def. Great Plains Lutheran, 25-23, 25-18, 25-4

Chester def. Parker, 25-9, 25-4, 25-12

Colman-Egan def. Canistota, 25-21, 25-14, 25-7

Dakota Valley def. West Central, 25-8, 25-6, 25-10

DeSmet def. James Valley Christian, 25-21, 25-18, 26-24

Deubrook def. Deuel

Douglas def. Red Cloud, 25-10, 25-8, 25-22

Edgemont def. Crawford, Neb., 25-19, 25-16, 25-9

Elk Point-Jefferson def. Beresford, 25-22, 25-23, 25-12

Elkton-Lake Benton def. Baltic, 0-0

Faulkton def. Highmore-Harrold, 25-14, 25-16, 25-14

Florence/Henry def. Sisseton, 25-20, 25-7, 25-11

Freeman def. Scotland, 25-13, 25-12, 25-17

Garretson def. Dell Rapids, 25-23, 25-16, 25-19

Gregory def. Todd County, 25-14, 25-8, 25-13

Heart River, N.D. def. Harding County, 25-19, 25-16, 24-26, 25-13

Hill City def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-13, 25-17, 25-17

Hitchcock-Tulare def. Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op, 25-21, 18-25, 20-25, 25-18, 15-13

Hot Springs def. St. Thomas More, 25-23, 25-13, 24-26, 25-14

Howard def. Dell Rapids St. Mary, 25-21, 25-23, 22-25, 27-25

Huron def. Aberdeen Central, 25-22, 25-20, 25-22

Kimball/White Lake def. Corsica/Stickney, 16-25, 25-17, 25-21, 25-21

Lower Brule def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-17, 25-17, 24-26, 25-21

McCook Central/Montrose def. Flandreau, 20-25, 25-13, 25-10, 25-20

Miller def. Redfield, 25-23, 25-20, 25-17

Mitchell def. Brookings, 19-25, 25-15, 25-21, 15-11

Mobridge-Pollock def. Lemmon, 24-26, 25-10, 25-9, 25-7

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. Lennox, 25-23, 26-24, 25-16

Northwestern def. Leola/Frederick, 25-5, 25-5, 25-10

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Parkston def. Winner, 25-12, 25-12, 22-25, 25-18
Philip def. White River, 28-26, 25-23, 25-15
Platte-Geddes def. Burke, 25-22, 16-25, 25-9, 26-24
Potter County def. Ipswich, 18-25, 25-16, 25-18, 25-19
Rapid City Christian def. Belle Fourche, 27-25, 25-20, 25-14
Sioux Falls Lincoln def. Yankton, 25-16, 25-11, 25-16
Sioux Falls Lutheran def. Centerville, 25-12, 23-25, 25-16, 25-21
Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Sioux Falls Jefferson, 25-16, 25-9, 23-25, 25-20, 0-0
Sioux Falls Roosevelt def. Brandon Valley, 25-19, 25-23, 25-22
Sioux Falls Washington def. Harrisburg, 25-15, 22-25, 25-14, 23-25, 15-12
Sioux Valley def. Milbank
Spearfish def. Sturgis Brown, 25-19, 25-9, 25-19
Timber Lake def. McLaughlin, 25-18, 25-15, 25-9
Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-20, 25-15, 25-16
Viborg-Hurley def. Menno, 25-19, 25-13, 23-25, 25-21
Wall def. Lyman, 20-25, 26-24, 19-25, 25-13, 16-14
Warner def. Groton Area, 25-10, 25-15, 25-10
Wolsey-Wessington def. Sanborn Central/Woonsocket, 25-17, 25-10, 25-8
Bridgewater-Emery Tournament=
Hanson def. Bridgewater-Emery, 25-16, 23-25, 25-21, 18-25, 15-2
Triangular=
Wagner def. Bon Homme, 25-20, 25-14, 25-11

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

Ethics board keeps 'action' secret on complaint against Noem

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's ethics board won't publicly disclose the "appropriate action" it took after finding evidence Gov. Kristi Noem intervened with a state agency to influence her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license, a lawyer for the board told The Associated Press.

The state's Government Accountability Board was created to provide a check on any misconduct by state officials, and the question of whether to discipline the Republican governor presented its first major test.

A lawyer hired by the board, Mark Haigh, responded to an open records request by telling the AP this week that the board's response would remain "confidential."

The board's three retired judges considering the complaint voted unanimously last month to find that there was evidence that Noem, who is considered a potential 2024 White House contender, engaged in a conflict of interest and malfeasance when she held a meeting in July 2020 that included her daughter, Cassidy Peters, and key decision-makers in Peters' licensure just days after the agency had moved to deny her a license. After the meeting, Peters got another opportunity to demonstrate she could meet federal standards and was ultimately awarded the license.

But the board appeared to let Noem decide whether to defend herself in a public hearing, known as a contested case hearing, or simply accept the "appropriate action" and let the matter quietly die. As a deadline passed last week to contest the board's finding, Noem stayed silent, and the board's lawyer says the case remains closed.

"This all looks like, frankly, an ethics board trying to engage in a cover-up," said Kathleen Clark, a law professor who specializes in government ethics at the Washington University in St. Louis School of Law.

After reviewing the board's statutes, Clark pointed out that South Dakota law says the board "shall" conduct a contested case hearing if the board members vote that there is enough evidence to believe an official engaged in misconduct. That vote then triggers a statute that makes the board's files open to the

public.

"This appears to be an end-run around the required transparency and disclosure," Clark added.

The board's attorney said by email that the board has "maintained confidentiality where required by the statute" and is "confident that it has interpreted the statutes correctly."

He also took issue with Clark's assertion that the board appeared to be engaged in a "cover-up," saying that the two retired judges and retired justice of the state Supreme Court "are highly respected in the legal community and have served on this Board on a volunteer basis. They have absolutely no reason for a cover-up as you allege."

Board members on Tuesday either did not respond to a request for comment on their action or referred questions to the attorney.

The board, which deliberated over the complaints for nearly a year in a series of closed-door meetings, has never handled such a high-profile case since its inception in 2017. It has navigated untested laws that could not anticipate the context around the complaint: Jason Ravnsborg, who was facing pressure from Noem to resign as attorney general for his conduct in a fatal car crash, announced he was filing the complaint to the board shortly after the AP reported on Noem's hands-on role in her daughter's licensure.

The South Dakota Legislature's audit committee, controlled by Republicans, also unanimously approved a report in May that found Noem's daughter got preferential treatment.

Board members have previously said the laws governing it are not clearly laid out.

Karen Soli, a former Democratic state lawmaker who helped create the board, suggested that the board is supposed to have some discretion, describing it as "a quiet, behind-the-scenes way to let someone know that they were doing something wrong in state government."

The board is allowed under the law to issue a private reprimand. But the statute says it may take that action at the conclusion of a contested case hearing and after it has determined, by a majority vote, that there has been misconduct.

John Pelissero, a scholar at the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, said it was best practice for ethics boards "to be as transparent as possible" once they take action.

Across states and local governments, ethics boards follow a variety of procedures, he said, but added: "Most announce the final actions to the public."

Toddler kidnapped, citizens alert police to suspicious man

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Some concerned citizens in South Dakota are being credited with stopping a kidnapping by flagging down police about a suspicious man carrying a young child.

Sioux Falls police say a group of people flagged down officers on patrol Saturday and directed them to the man and child.

Officers stopped the 36-year-old man who told them he was the uncle of the 1-year-old child, but couldn't identify the parents. Officials also say he told police that he was being shot at and was concerned for his safety, KOTA-TV reported.

Officers arrested the man on an outstanding warrant. A short time later, police received a call saying the 1-year-old had been taken from her home after a man forced his way inside, pushed past the babysitter, took the child and left.

Police said the man was loosely acquainted with the child's parents and went to their apartment while they were at work.

Officials have not released a motive. The man is facing charges of second-degree kidnapping and drug possession.

58 bison relocated from Grand Canyon National Park North Rim

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, Ariz. (AP) — Wildlife managers say 58 bison have been successfully relocated from the North Rim of Grand Canyon National Park.

They said the bison were transferred to the Intertribal Buffalo Council, who transported the animals to

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the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma and the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe of South Dakota.

Since reduction efforts began in 2018, park staff have removed 203 bison from the North Rim with 182 transferred to eight different tribes through an agreement with the Intertribal Buffalo Council.

The National Park Service began a science-based planning process in 2014 to manage bison overpopulation at Grand Canyon National Park.

In 2017, park managers reduced the herd to fewer than 200 bison using live capture and transfer as well as limited lethal removal.

The 2021-2022 winter population estimate for the herd was about 216 before calving occurred.

In the last three years, between live capture and removal by the NPS and Arizona Game and Fish Department hunter harvest, about 358 bison have been removed from the herd. The estimate does not include hunter harvests on lands outside the park this year.

At UN, hope peeks through the gloom despite a global morass

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The head of the United Nations had just warned of a world gone badly wrong — a place where inequity was on the rise, war was back in Europe, fragmentation was everywhere, the pandemic was pushing onward and technology was tearing things apart as much as it was uniting them.

“Our world is in big trouble. Divides are growing deeper. Inequalities are growing wider. Challenges are spreading farther,” Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Tuesday morning as he opened the general debate at the 77th U.N. General Assembly. And he was, on all counts, incontrovertibly correct.

Yet barely an hour later, here were two U.N. delegates — one Asian, one African — grinning and standing in the sun-dappled lobby of the U.N. Secretariat Building, thrilled to be there in person on this particular morning as they snapped photos of each other, laughing along the way as they captured the moment.

Hope: It can be hard to find anywhere these days, much less for the people who walk the floors of the United Nations, where shouldering the world’s weight is central to the job description. After all, this is an institution that listened last year as the president of the not-yet-at-war nation of Ukraine described it as being “like a retired superhero who has long forgotten how great they once were.”

And when world leaders are trying to solve some of humanity’s thorniest problems — or, to be frank, sometimes to impede solutions to those same problems — it’s easy, from a distance, to lose sight of hope through the haze of negative adjectives.

Yet beneath the layers of existential gloom Tuesday — and this is no doubt a pandemic-exhausted group of people representing a world in a really bad mood from so many disquieting challenges — there were signs of brightness poking through like persistent clovers in the sidewalk cracks.

“For each and every one of us, the U.N. is a unique platform for dialogue and for cooperation,” Swiss President Ignazio Cassis said. Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. spoke of his country being an “optimistic” nation for whom “solutions are within our collective grasp.”

And David Kabua, president of the ocean-besieged Marshall Islands — a man who has little reason to express optimism these days — came to the United Nations and spoke of “this iconic hall, the symbol of humanity’s hope and aspiration for world peace, prosperity, and international cooperation.”

“As humanity strives to defend freedom and build lasting peace, the U.N.’s role is indispensable,” said South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.

There were many other such moments Tuesday. Taken together, they are noteworthy: There seems a collective sense — echoed by leader after leader in different, sometimes oblique ways — that even when it disappoints or falters, the United Nations must be a place of hope amid the cold-eyed pragmatism.

Why is that? Part of it is the unswerving commitment since the U.N.’s very beginnings to the principle of multilateralism, a \$10 word for playing nicely with each other. And to play nicely when your feuds are ancient or bloody or seemingly insurmountable — to even try — requires hope.

That’s always been true, though. There’s also something else, something unique to this year, to this moment. In the frightening early pandemic days of 2020, the U.N. General Assembly was all virtual, and

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leaders stayed home and made videos. Last year, despite a theme of "Building Resilience Through Hope," the hybrid General Assembly produced spotty leader attendance and little sense of the world congregating.

Now, though the pandemic persists, the U.N. grounds are alive with people from most of the planet's backgrounds and traditions, interacting and talking and generally doing what the United Nations was built to do — take nations and turn them into people, as the late Sen. William Fulbright used to say.

Even when nothing is in session, they're doing what the whole outfit was designed to do — figuring out, bit by bit, what the world should look like.

"It's the only place in international organizations where there is this effort to define what is collectively shared," says Katie Laatikainen, a professor of political science and international relations at Adelphi University in Garden City, New York, who studies the United Nations.

"They're working to figure out what it means to be part of the international community," she says. "They've learned the language of appealing to the 'we,' and it encourages others to define the 'we' and commit to the 'we.'"

Guterres made sure to infuse that sensibility as he opened the proceedings with his doom-saturated speech. He told of a ship called the Brave Commander, loaded with Ukrainian grain and — helped by the warring nations of Ukraine and Russia — headed for the Horn of Africa, where it can help prevent famine.

It flew under a U.N. flag, and Guterres said it and the dozens of ships that followed were not only carrying grain; they were carrying "one of today's rarest commodities" — hope.

"By acting as one," he said, "we can nurture fragile shoots of hope."

So, no: Hope is not absent at the United Nations this week. That much is certain. It's contained, it's muted, it's tentative. But it is there, gossamer though it might be — even if some might find the notion naive.

"Our opportunity is here and now," said the president of the General Assembly, Csaba Kőrösi of Hungary.

The world, after all, is not an easy place. Was it ever? The second secretary-general of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, understood that. "The United Nations was not created in order to bring us to heaven," he said, "but in order to save us from hell."

Putin sets partial military call-up, won't 'bluff' on nukes

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a partial mobilization of reservists in Russia on Wednesday, risking a deeply unpopular step that follows a string of humiliating setbacks for his troops nearly seven months after invading Ukraine.

It's the first mobilization in Russia since World War II and is sure to further fuel tensions with the Western backers of Ukraine, who derided the move as an act of weakness. The move also sent Russians scrambling to buy plane tickets out of the country.

The Russian leader, in a seven-minute televised address to the nation aired on Wednesday morning, also warned the West that he isn't bluffing over using all the means at his disposal to protect Russia's territory, in what appeared to be a veiled reference to Russia's nuclear capability. Putin has previously warned the West not to back Russia against the wall and has rebuked NATO countries for supplying weapons to help Ukraine.

The total number of reservists to be called up could be as high as 300,000, officials said.

Even a partial mobilization is likely to increase dismay, or sow doubt, among Russians about the war in Ukraine. Shortly after Putin's address, Russian media reported a sharp spike in demand for plane tickets abroad amid an apparent scramble to leave despite exorbitant prices for flights.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, who was asked what had changed since he and others previously said no mobilization was planned, argued that Russia is effectively fighting against a combined potential of NATO because the alliance's members have been supplying weapons to Kyiv.

Only those with relevant combat and service experience will be mobilized, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said. He added that there are around 25 million people who fit this criteria, but only around 1% of them will be mobilized.

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Another clause in the decree prevents most professional soldiers from terminating their contracts and leaving service until the partial mobilization is no longer in place.

Putin's announcement came against the backdrop of the U.N. General Assembly in New York, where Moscow's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 has been the target of broad international criticism that has kept up intense diplomatic pressure on Moscow.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is due to address the gathering in a prerecorded address on Wednesday. Putin didn't travel to New York.

Putin's gambit has a strong element of risk — it could backfire, by making the Ukraine war unpopular at home and hurting his own standing, and it exposes Russia's underlying military shortcomings.

A Ukraine counteroffensive launched this month has snatched the military initiative away from Russia, as well as capturing large areas the Russians once held. The swiftness of the counteroffensive saw Russian forces abandon armored vehicles and other weapons as they beat hasty retreats.

A spokesman for Zelenskyy called the mobilization a "big tragedy" for the Russian people.

In a statement to The Associated Press, Sergii Nikiforov said conscripts sent to the front line in Ukraine would face a similar fate as ill-prepared Russian forces who were repelled in an attack on Kyiv in the first days of the invasion last February.

"This is a recognition of the incapacity of the Russian professional army, which has failed in all its tasks," Nikiforov said.

The mobilization is unlikely to bring any consequences on the battlefield for months because of a lack of training facilities and equipment.

The U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, Bridget Brink, tweeted that the mobilization is a sign "of weakness, of Russian failure."

British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace echoed that assessment, describing Putin's move as "an admission that his invasion is failing."

Russian political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin said Putin's announcement smacked of "an act of desperation." He predicted that Russians will resist the mobilization through "passive sabotage."

"People will evade this mobilization in every possible way, bribe their way out of this mobilization, leave the country," Oreshkin told the AP in an interview Wednesday.

The announcement won't go down well with the general public, Oreshkin said, describing it as "a huge personal blow to Russian citizens, who until recently (took part in the hostilities) with pleasure, sitting on their couches, (watching) TV. And now the war has come into their home."

The head of the Duma defense committee, Andrei Kartapolov, said there would be no additional restrictions on reservists leaving Russia based on this mobilization, according to Russian media reports. Kartapolov said he wanted to "calm" people about the mobilization.

The partial mobilization order came a day after Russian-controlled regions in eastern and southern Ukraine announced plans to hold votes on becoming integral parts of Russia — a move that could set the stage for Moscow to escalate the war following Ukrainian successes.

The referendums, which have been expected to take place since the first months of the war, will start Friday in the Luhansk, Kherson and partly Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions.

The ballots are all but certain to go Moscow's way.

The war, which has killed thousands of people, has driven up food prices worldwide and caused energy costs to soar. It has also brought fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe at Europe's largest nuclear plant in Ukraine's now Russia-occupied southeast. Investigations are also underway into possible atrocities committed by Russian forces in Ukraine.

In his address, which was far shorter than previous speeches about the Ukraine war, Putin accused the West of engaging in "nuclear blackmail" and noted "statements of some high-ranking representatives of the leading NATO states about the possibility of using nuclear weapons of mass destruction against Russia."

He didn't identify who had made such comments.

"To those who allow themselves such statements regarding Russia, I want to remind you that our country also has various means of destruction, and for separate components and more modern than those of

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NATO countries and when the territorial integrity of our country is threatened, to protect Russia and our people, we will certainly use all the means at our disposal," Putin said.

He added: "It's not a bluff."

Foreign leaders have described the ballots as illegitimate and nonbinding. Zelenskyy said they were a "sham" and "noise" to distract public attention.

Putin said he has already signed the decree for partial mobilization, which is due to start on Wednesday. A full-scale mobilization would likely be unpopular in Russia and could further dent Putin's standing after the recent military setbacks in Ukraine.

"We are talking about partial mobilization, that is, only citizens who are currently in the reserve will be subject to conscription, and above all, those who served in the armed forces have a certain military specialty and relevant experience," Putin said.

Shoigu, the Russian defense minister, also said that 5,937 Russian soldiers have died in the Ukraine conflict, far lower than Western estimates that Russia has lost tens of thousands.

The Vesna opposition movement called for nationwide protests on Wednesday, saying "Thousands of Russian men -- our fathers, brothers and husbands -- will be thrown into the meat grinder of the war. What will they be dying for? What will mothers and children be crying for?"

It was unclear how many would dare to protest amid Russia's overall suppression of opposition and harsh laws against discrediting soldiers and the military operation.

EXPLAINER: What kept Iran protests going after first spark?

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

Protests have erupted across Iran in recent days after a 22-year-old woman died while being held by the morality police for violating the country's strictly enforced Islamic dress code.

The death of Mahsa Amini, who had been picked up by Iran's morality police for her allegedly loose headscarf, or hijab, has triggered daring displays of defiance, in the face of beatings and possible arrest.

In street protests, some women tore off their mandatory headscarves, demonstratively twirling them in the air. Videos online showed two women throwing their hijabs into a bonfire. Another woman is seen cutting off her hair in a show of protest.

Many Iranians, particularly the young, have come to see Amini's death as part of the Islamic Republic's heavy-handed policing of dissent and the morality police's increasingly violent treatment of young women.

At some of the demonstrations, protesters clashed with police and thick clouds of tear gas were seen rising in the capital, Tehran. Protesters were also chased and beaten with clubs by the motorcycle-riding Basij, or volunteers in Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

The Basij have violently suppressed protests in the past, including over water rights and the country's cratering economy.

Yet some demonstrators still chant "death to the dictator," targeting both Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's rule and Iran's theocracy, despite the threat of arrest, imprisonment and even the possibility of a death sentence.

Here's a look at what sparked the protests and where they might lead.

WHAT CAUSED THE PROTESTS IN IRAN?

Iran's morality police arrested Amini on Sept. 13 in Tehran, where she was visiting from her hometown in the country's western Kurdish region. She collapsed at a police station and died three days later.

Police detained her over wearing her hijab too loosely. Iran requires women to wear the headscarf in a way that completely covers their hair when in public. Only Afghanistan under Taliban rule now actively enforces a similar law. Ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia dialed back its enforcement over recent years.

The police deny Amini was mistreated and say she died of a heart attack. President Ebrahim Raisi, who will speak at the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday, has promised an investigation.

Amini's family says she had no history of heart trouble and that they were prevented from seeing her body before she was buried. The demonstrations erupted after her funeral in the Kurdish city of Saqez on

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Saturday, and quickly spread to other parts of the country, including Tehran.

HOW ARE WOMEN TREATED IN IRAN?

Iranian women have full access to education, work outside the home and hold public office. But they are required to dress modestly in public, which includes wearing the hijab as well as long, loose-fitting robes. Unmarried men and women are barred from mingling.

The rules, which date back to the days after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, are enforced by the morality police. The force, officially known as the Guidance Patrol, is stationed across public areas. It is made up of men as well as women.

Enforcement was eased under former President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate who at one point accused the morality police of being overly aggressive. In 2017, the head of the force said it would no longer arrest women for violating the dress code.

But under Raisi, a hard-liner elected last year, agents of the morality police appear to have been unleashed. The U.N. human rights office says young women have been slapped in the face, beaten with batons and shoved into police vehicles in recent months.

HOW HAS IRAN RESPONDED TO THE PROTESTS?

Iranian leaders have vowed to investigate the circumstances of Amini's death while accusing unnamed foreign countries and exiled opposition groups of seizing on it as a pretext to foment unrest. That's been a common pattern in the protests that erupted in recent years.

Iran's ruling clerics view the United States as a threat to the Islamic Republic and believe the adoption of Western customs undermines society. Khamenei himself has seized on so-called "color" protests in Europe and elsewhere as foreign interventions — and not as people demonstrating for more rights.

Tensions have been especially high since former President Donald Trump withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and imposed crippling sanctions. The Biden administration has been working with European allies for the last two years to revive the accord, but negotiations appear deadlocked as nonproliferation experts warn Iran has enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear bomb if it chose to build one. The Islamic Republic insists its program is peaceful.

The governor of Tehran said Wednesday that authorities arrested three foreign nationals at protests in the capital, without elaborating. Iranian security forces have arrested at least 25 people, and the governor of the Kurdistan province says three people have been killed by armed groups in unrest linked to the protests, without elaborating.

Activists and human rights groups have blamed Iranian security forces for killing protesters in other demonstrations, like those over gasoline prices in 2019.

COULD THE PROTESTS BRING DOWN IRAN'S GOVERNMENT?

Iran's ruling clerics have weathered several waves of protests going back decades, eventually quashing them with brute force.

The most serious challenge to the clerics' rule was the Green Movement that emerged after the country's disputed presidential election in 2009 and called for far-reaching reforms; millions of Iranians took to the streets.

Authorities responded with a brutal crackdown, with the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij militia opening fire on protesters and launching waves of arrests. Opposition leaders were placed under house arrest.

Among those killed was Neda Agha Soltan, a 27-year-old woman who became an icon of the protest movement after she was shot and bled to death in a video seen by millions on social media.

Fiona strengthens into Category 4 storm, heads to Bermuda

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Hurricane Fiona strengthened into a Category 4 storm Wednesday after lashing the Turks and Caicos Islands and was forecast to squeeze past Bermuda later this week.

The storm was blamed for causing at least four direct deaths in its march through the Caribbean, where it unleashed torrential rain in Puerto Rico, leaving a majority without power or water as hundreds of thou-

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sands of people scraped mud out of their homes following what authorities described as “historic” flooding. Power company officials initially said it would take a couple of days for electricity to be fully restored, but then appeared to backtrack late Tuesday night.

“Hurricane Fiona has severely impacted electrical infrastructure and generation facilities throughout the island. We want to make it very clear that efforts to restore and reenergize continue and are being affected by severe flooding, impassable roads, downed trees, deteriorating equipment, and downed lines,” said Luma, the company that operates power transmission and distribution.

The hum of generators could be heard across the U.S. territory as people became increasingly exasperated, with some still trying to recover from Hurricane Maria, which made landfall as a Category 4 storm five years ago, killing an estimated 2,975 people in its aftermath.

Luis Noguera, who was helping clear a landslide in the central mountain town of Cayey, said Maria left him without power for a year.

“We paid an electrician out of our own pocket to connect us,” he recalled, adding that he doesn’t think the government will be of much help again after Fiona.

Long lines were reported at several gas stations across Puerto Rico, and some pulled off a main highway to collect water from a stream.

“We thought we had a bad experience with Maria, but this was worse,” said Gerardo Rodríguez, who lives in the southern coastal town of Salinas.

Parts of the island had received more than 25 inches (64 centimeters) of rain and more had fallen on Tuesday.

By late Tuesday, authorities said they had restored power to nearly 300,000 of the island’s 1.47 million customers, while water service was cut to more than 760,000 customers — two thirds of the total on the island.

The head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency traveled to Puerto Rico on Tuesday as the agency announced it was sending hundreds of additional personnel to boost local response efforts.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency on the island and deployed a couple of teams to the island.

In the Turks and Caicos Islands, officials reported minimal damage and no deaths despite the storm’s eye passing close to Grand Turk, the small British territory’s capital island, on Tuesday morning.

Th government had imposed a curfew and urged people to flee flood-prone areas.

“Turks and Caicos had a phenomenal experience over the past 24 hours,” said Deputy Gov. Anya Williams. “It certainly came with its share of challenges.”

Early Wednesday morning, Fiona was centered about 170 miles (275 kilometers) north-northwest of Grand Turk Island, with hurricane-force winds extending up to 30 miles (45 kilometers) from the center. It had maximum sustained winds of 130 mph (215 kph) and was moving north at eight mph (13 kph), according to the National Hurricane Center, which said the storm was likely to strengthen into a Category 4 hurricane as it approaches Bermuda on Friday.

The storm killed a man in the French overseas department of Guadeloupe, another man in Puerto Rico who was swept away by a swollen river and two people in the Dominican Republic: one killed by a falling tree and the other by a falling electric post.

Some 230 whales beached in Tasmania; rescue efforts underway

HOBART, Australia (AP) — About 230 whales have been stranded on Tasmania’s west coast, just days after 14 sperm whales were found beached on an island off the Australian state’s northwestern coast.

The pod stranded on Ocean Beach in Macquarie Harbour appears to be pilot whales and at least half are presumed to still be alive, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania said Wednesday.

A team from the Marine Conservation Program was assembling whale rescue gear and heading to the area, the department said.

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The whales beached two years to the day after the largest mass-stranding in Australia's history was discovered in the same harbor.

About 470 long-finned pilot whales were found on Sept. 21, 2020, stuck on sandbars. After a weeklong effort, 111 of those whales were rescued but the rest died.

The entrance to the harbor is a notoriously shallow and dangerous channel known as Hell's Gate.

Local salmon farmer Linton Kringle helped in the 2020 rescue effort and said the latest challenge would be more difficult.

"Last time they were actually in the harbor and it's quite calm and we could, sort of, deal with them in there and we could get the boats up to them," Kringle told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"But just on the beach, you just can't get a boat in there, it's too shallow, way too rough. My thoughts would be try to get them onto a vehicle if we can't swim them out," Kringle added.

Vanessa Pirotta, a wildlife scientist specializing in marine mammals, said it was too early to explain why the stranding had occurred.

"The fact that we've seen similar species, the same time, in the same location, reoccurring in terms of stranding at that same spot might provide some sort of indication that there might be something environmental here," Pirotta said.

David Midson, general manager of the West Coast Council municipality, urged people to stay clear.

"Whales are a protected species, even once deceased, and it is an offense to interfere with a carcass," the environment department said.

Fourteen sperm whales were discovered Monday afternoon on King Island, part of the state of Tasmania in the Bass Strait between Melbourne and Tasmania's northern coast.

Griffith University marine scientist Olaf Meynecke said it's unusual for sperm whales to wash ashore. He said that warmer temperatures could also be changing the ocean currents and moving the whales' traditional food.

"They will be going to different areas and searching for different food sources," Meynecke said. "When they do this, they are not in the best physical condition because they might be starving so this can lead them to take more risks and maybe go closer to shore."

The pilot whale is notorious for stranding in mass numbers, for reasons that are not entirely understood.

Roger Federer says he knows it's right decision to retire

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

LONDON (AP) — Roger Federer says he now is at peace with his choice to retire from professional tennis and plans to close his career with one doubles match at the Laver Cup — perhaps with longtime rival Rafael Nadal by his side.

"I'm happy, because I know it's the right decision" to walk away from the game, Federer said at a news conference Wednesday at the arena that will host the team competition founded by his management company.

Wearing a blue blazer with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and a white polo shirt, Federer took questions for about a half-hour, occasionally smiling or chuckling at his own jokes.

The 20-time Grand Slam champion, who announced last week he'd be retiring, said it took him a bit to get used to the idea of stepping away from competition, but it was something he understood he needed to do after running into setbacks this July during his rehabilitation from what was his third surgery on his right knee in about 1 1/2 years.

"You're sad in the very moment when you realize, 'OK, this is it,'" Federer said.

The last operation came shortly after his last singles match — a quarterfinal loss to Hubert Hurkacz at Wimbledon in July 2021.

"You always want to play forever," Federer said.

He said he will play doubles for Team Europe against Team World on Friday, Day 1 of the event, and then will give way to 2021 Wimbledon runner-up Matteo Berrettini for singles play over the weekend.

Federer, who is 41, would not say definitively who his doubles partner would be for the final match of his career — he said that's up to team captain Bjorn Borg — but the expectation is that it will be Nadal, who holds the men's record of 22 major championships.

"It's been a great, great journey," Federer said, "and for that, I'm very grateful."

The Muscogee get their say in national park plan for Georgia

By MICHAEL WARREN Associated Press

MACON, Ga. (AP) — When Tracie Revis climbs the Great Temple Mound, rising nine stories above the Ocmulgee River in the center of present-day Georgia, she walks in the steps of her Muscogean ancestors who were forcibly removed to Oklahoma 200 years ago.

"This is lush, gorgeous land. The rivers are gorgeous here," Revis said recently as she gazed over the forest canopy to a distant green horizon, broken only by Macon's skyline, just across the water. "We believe that those ancestors are still here, their songs are still here, their words are still here, their tears are still here. And so we speak to them. You know, we still honor those that have passed on."

If approved by Congress after a three-year federal review wraps up this fall, the mounds in Macon would serve as the gateway to a new Ocmulgee National Park and Preserve, protecting 54 river-miles of floodplain where nearly 900 more sites of cultural or historic significance have been identified.

Efforts to expand an existing historical park at the mounds site are in keeping with Interior Secretary Deb Haaland's "Tribal Homelands Initiative," which supports fundraising to buy land and requires federal managers to seek out indigenous knowledge about resources.

"This kind of land acquisition represents the best of what our conservation efforts should look like: collaborative, inclusive, locally led, and in support of the priorities of our country's tribal nations," Haaland said at last weekend's 30th Annual Ocmulgee Indigenous Celebration.

In an era when some culture warriors see government as the enemy, years of coalition-building have eliminated any significant opposition to federal management in the reliably Republican center of a long-red state. Hunting will still be allowed, even encouraged to keep feral hogs from destroying the ecosystem. Georgia's congressional delegation is on board, and the Muscogee (Creek) Nation has been welcomed as an essential partner.

"Our voice, our say has been all over this whole process for a while now," said Revis, a Muscogee and Yuchi lawyer who moved to Georgia this year to join Seth Clark, mayor pro-tem of Macon, in advocating to give the National Park Service primary authority over the heart of her people's ancestral land, which once stretched across Georgia, South Carolina, Florida and Alabama.

Unifying a patchwork of state and federally managed lands could help draw a million more visitors each year, spending a collective \$187 million while hiking, canoeing, hunting, fishing and learning about Native American history, and generating \$30 million in taxes while sustaining 3,000 more jobs, an economic impact study found.

"It's a game changer for this region," Clark said. "Reimagining our economic vitality through a sense of ecotourism is something that I just think is huge for this community."

Gliding over the surface of the Ocmulgee, kayakers can see nothing but woodlands and wildlife, interrupted very occasionally by a bridge. Few know that 14 more ceremonial mounds, unexplored and vulnerable, rise from the swamps nearby.

Plans call for leaving the wilderness as untouched as possible while also building trails and access ramps. No land would be taken through eminent domain. Instead, park service oversight would facilitate raising money to expand the boundaries and increase public hunting areas by purchasing private wetlands from willing sellers.

The tribal government in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, also bought 130 acres (52.6 hectares) of bottomland to be surrounded by the park. Principal Chief David Hill said there are no plans to develop it — they want it preserved so that their 97,000 citizens always have a place of their own in the cradle of their culture.

"Our history is here. Our ancestors are here. Our stories started here. And we are committed to ensur-

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ing that this cherished site is protected," Hill said.

Muscogean people say that history is fraught with trauma, but also pride at how they're thriving now after surviving the Road to Misery, their phrase for the Trail of Tears. The forced march ordered by Congress removed 80,000 Native Americans from the eastern United States. Many died of illness, starvation or abuse as the federal government broke its promises to care for them in exchange for their lands.

White settlers had made their lives unbearable through relentless campaigns of "expulsion or extermination" in the 1820s and 1830s. And as soon as the Muscogee, Seminole, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw and other natives were gone from the Deep South, they were replaced by hundreds of thousands of slaves, sold down rivers by their northern owners to clear the land for cotton.

Settlers kept the place names, not knowing what they meant in Native languages.

Desecrations swiftly followed at the Ocmulgee Mounds, the spiritual, legislative and economic heart of the Creek Confederacy. Old growth trees were cleared for a slave labor camp. A massive funeral mound was blasted open for a railroad to ship cotton. Civil War battlements later carved up its fields.

About 700 acres (283 hectares) surrounding seven mounds were declared a national monument in 1936. But that did not stop archeologists from removing 2.5 million artifacts reflecting 17,000 years of continuous human habitation. Most remain unexamined in Smithsonian, park service and university archives.

For decades, the park was promoted with postcards featuring an exposed skeleton. It turned out to be the skull of one person and the bones of another, said Raelynn Butler, the tribal nation's manager of historic and cultural preservation. "They didn't treat us like people," she said.

The facts about genocide and survival began to resurface in the 1970s when Revis' aunt Addie and other tribal elders traveled back to Georgia to lead cultural discussions. "That was really where the first idea of the celebration came from — that we have got to change the narrative," Revis said.

Twenty years of painstaking collaboration enabled the tribal nation to reunite and rebury the remains of 114 people at the mounds in 2017. And this February, an adjoining 1,000 acres (404 hectares) of sacred land were protected, purchased by the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund at no cost to the taxpayers, Haaland said. Expanding this to a park and preserve could protect another 85,000 acres (34,400 hectares) downriver.

"We get questioned all the time, 'this is such a beautiful place, why'd you all leave?' We weren't asked to - we were forced to," Hill said. "And that's what we want to prevent in the future — the things we do now, it's for our future generations. I don't want them to go through that. So Oklahoma is home, but this is still our original home."

UNICEF renews Pakistan flood appeal as 10 more people die

By MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Devastating floods in Pakistan's worst-hit province have killed 10 more people in the past day, including four children, officials said Wednesday as the U.N. children's agency renewed its appeal for \$39 million to help the most vulnerable flood victims.

Only a third of the sum in the funding appeal has been met so far, UNICEF said in a statement. Pakistani doctors and medical workers are struggling to contain the outbreak of waterborne diseases, malaria, and dengue fever among hundreds of thousands of survivors now living in tents in southern Sindh province.

The unprecedented monsoon rains and flooding, which many experts attribute to climate change, have affected 33 million people and killed as many as 1,569 people across the country since mid-June.

Of that number, 701 people — including 293 children and 131 women — have died in Sindh, where many areas remain submerged. Hollywood actress and U.N. humanitarian Angelina Jolie made a surprise visit to Sindh on Tuesday, meeting with some of the flood victims.

UNICEF said more than 3.4 million children have been uprooted from their homes and the floodwaters have claimed the lives of more than 550 children across Pakistan.

"Without a significant surge in support, we fear many more children will lose their lives," UNICEF said in a statement.

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In Sindh, many of the roads and bridges have been washed away or are badly damaged, and thousands of families remain cut off and desperately need support. "Families have no food, safe water or medicines," the agency said.

UNICEF has set up 71 mobile health camps and temporary schools for children in the flood-affected areas. But its \$39 million appeal is still less than a third funded, UNICEF added. That sum is part of U.N.'s flash appeal for \$160 million to support Pakistan's flood response.

Meanwhile, Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif met with world leaders on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, seeking more help from the international community to tackle the record-breaking floods.

In a televised message from New York, Sharif on Wednesday urged philanthropists to urgently and generously donate baby food for children affected by the floods. "God will reward you for this noble work," he said.

Pakistan's infrastructure and agriculture have also been decimated, raising concerns for a looming food crisis. Authorities say the damage caused by the floods amounts to at least \$30 billion.

Man sets himself on fire in apparent protest of Abe funeral

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A man set himself on fire near the Japanese prime minister's office in Tokyo on Wednesday in an apparent protest against the state funeral planned next week for former leader Shinzo Abe, officials and media reports said.

The man, believed to be in his 70s, sustained burns on large parts of his body but was conscious and told police that he set himself on fire after pouring oil over himself, Kyodo News agency reported.

A note was found with him that said, "Personally, I am absolutely against" Abe's funeral, Kyodo reported.

A Tokyo Fire Department official confirmed that a man set himself afire on the street in Tokyo's Kasumigaseki government district and that he was alive when he was taken to a hospital by ambulance, but declined to give further details, including the man's identity, motive or condition, citing the sensitivity of what was a police matter.

Police called it an attempted suicide and refused to give further details because the case involved no criminal intent. Police also declined to comment on a report that a police officer was caught in the fire.

The incident underscores a growing wave of protests against the funeral for Abe, who was one of the most divisive leaders in postwar Japanese politics because of his revisionist view of wartime history, support for a stronger military, and what critics call an autocratic approach and cronyism. More protests are expected in coming days, including the day of the funeral next week.

It also is an embarrassment for police, who have stepped up security for an event expected to be attended by about 6,000 people, including U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris and other dignitaries.

Police were also partly blamed for insufficient protection of Abe, who was shot to death by a gunman who approached him from behind as he was giving an outdoor campaign speech in July.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is in New York for the annual U.N. General Assembly meeting of world leaders. He gave a speech Tuesday expressing disappointment over the Security Council's failure to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine because of Russia's permanent veto and called for reforms that would allow the U.N. to better defend global peace and order.

The planned state funeral for Abe has become increasingly unpopular among Japanese as more details emerge about the governing Liberal Democratic Party's and Abe's links to the Unification Church, which built close ties with party lawmakers over their shared interests in conservative causes.

The suspect in Abe's assassination reportedly believed his mother's large donations to the church ruined his family. The LDP has said nearly half its lawmakers have ties to the church, but party officials have denied ties between the party as an organization and the church.

Kishida has said Abe deserves the honor of a state funeral as Japan's longest-serving post-World War II leader and for his diplomatic and economic achievements.

Critics have said it was decided undemocratically and is an inappropriate and costly use of taxpayers'

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money. They say Kishida decided to hold a state funeral to please Abe's party faction and buttress his own power. Support ratings for Kishida's government have weakened amid public dissatisfaction over his handling of the party's church ties and the funeral plans.

A family funeral for Abe was held at a Buddhist temple in July. The state funeral is scheduled for next Tuesday at the Budokan martial arts arena in Tokyo.

High inflation in sight, Fed to signal more rate hikes ahead

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Last month, when Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell spoke at an economic conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, he issued a blunt warning: The Fed's drive to curb inflation by aggressively raising interest rates, he said, would "bring some pain" for Americans.

When the Fed ends its latest meeting Wednesday and Powell holds a news conference, Americans will likely get a better idea of how much pain could be in store.

The central bank is expected 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 boost its benchmark rate — which affects many consumer and business loans — to a range of 3% to 3.25%, the highest level in 14 years.

Many Fed watchers, though, will be paying particular attention to Powell's words at a news conference afterward. His remarks will be parsed for any hint of whether the Fed expects to moderate its rate hikes in the coming months — or instead to continue tightening credit significantly until it's convinced that inflation is on its way down.

In a further sign of the Fed's deepening concern about inflation, it will also likely signal Wednesday 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 longer. Economists expect Fed officials to forecast that their key rate could go as high as 4% before the new year. They're also likely to signal additional hikes 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 costs of mortgages, car loans and business loans. The Fed intends those higher borrowing costs to slow growth by cooling 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 heavy job losses.

The 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 "soft landing," by which they would slow the economy 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 volatile food and energy costs, rose much faster than expected.

The inflation report also documented just how broadly inflation has spread through the economy, complicating the the Fed's task. 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. "The problem is that the room to do that is virtually non-existent at this point."

The Fed's rapid rate hikes mirror steps that other major central banks are taking, contributing to concerns about a potential global recession. The European Central Bank last week raised its benchmark rate by three-quarters of a percentage point. The Bank of England, the Reserve Bank of Australia and the Bank of Canada have all carried out hefty rate increases in recent weeks.

And in China, the world's second-largest economy, growth is already suffering from the government's

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repeated COVID lockdowns. If recession sweeps through most large economies, that could derail the U.S. economy, too.

At his news conference Wednesday, 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.

The central bank has already engaged in the fastest series of 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 Wednesday, 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 the conference in Jackson Hole.

"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, according to the a paper by Johns Hopkins University economist Laurence Ball and two economists at the International Monetary Fund.

House to vote on election law overhaul in response to Jan. 6

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House will vote on an overhaul of a centuries-old election law, an effort to prevent future presidential candidates from trying to subvert the popular will.

The legislation under consideration Wednesday is a direct response to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection and former President Donald Trump's efforts to find a way around the Electoral Count Act, an arcane 1800s-era law that governs, along with the U.S. Constitution, how states and Congress certify electors and declare presidential election winners.

While that process has long been routine and ceremonial, Trump and a group of his aides and lawyers tried to exploit loopholes in the law in an attempt to overturn his defeat.

The bill would set new parameters around the Jan. 6 joint session of Congress that happens every four years after a presidential election. The day turned violent last year after hundreds of Trump's supporters interrupted the proceedings, broke into the building and threatened the lives of then-Vice President Mike Pence and members of Congress. The rioters echoed Trump's false claims of widespread fraud and wanted Pence to block Democrat Joe Biden's victory as he presided over the joint session.

The legislation intends to ensure that future Jan. 6 sessions are "as the constitution envisioned, a ministerial day," said Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, a Republican who co-sponsored the legislation with House Administration Committee Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif. Both Cheney and Lofgren are also members

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of the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack.

"The American people are supposed to decide an election, not Congress," Lofgren said.

The bill, which is similar to legislation moving through the Senate, would clarify in the law that the vice president's role presiding over the count is only ceremonial and also sets out that each state can only send one certified set of electors. Trump's allies had unsuccessfully tried to put together alternate slates of illegitimate pro-Trump electors in swing states where Biden won.

The legislation would increase the threshold for individual lawmakers' objections to any state's electoral votes, requiring a third of the House and a third of the Senate to object to trigger votes on the results in both chambers. Currently, only one lawmaker in the House and one lawmaker in the Senate has to object. The House bill would set out very narrow grounds for those objections, an attempt to thwart baseless or politically motivated challenges. The legislation also would require courts to get involved if state or local officials want to delay a presidential vote or refuse to certify the results.

The House vote comes as the Senate is moving on a similar track with enough Republican support to virtually ensure passage before the end of the year. After months of talks, House Democrats introduced the legislation on Monday and are holding a quick vote two days later in order to send the bill across the Capitol and start to resolve differences. A bipartisan group of senators introduced legislation this summer and a Senate committee is expected to vote on it next week.

While the House bill is more expansive than the Senate version, the two bills cover similar ground and members in both chambers are optimistic that they can work out the differences. While few House Republicans are expected to vote for the legislation — most are still allied with Trump — supporters are encouraged by the bipartisan effort in the Senate.

"Both sides have an incentive to want a set of clear rules, and this is an antiquated law that no one understands," said Benjamin Ginsburg, a longtime GOP lawyer who consulted with lawmakers as they wrote the bill. "All parties benefit from clarity."

House GOP leaders disagree, and are encouraging their members to vote against the legislation. They say the involvement of courts could drag out elections and that the bill would take rights away from states.

Illinois Rep. Rodney Davis, Lofgren's GOP counterpart on the House Administration Committee, said Tuesday that the bill would trample on state sovereignty and is "opening the door to mass litigation."

Democrats are "desperately trying to talk about their favorite topic, and that is former president Donald Trump," Davis said.

Cheney, a frequent Trump critic who was defeated in Wyoming's GOP primary last month, says she hopes it receives votes from some of her Republican colleagues.

The bill would "ensure that in the future our election process reflects the will of the people," she said.

Biden at UN to call Russian war an affront to body's charter

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Joe Biden is ready to make the case to world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly that Russia's "naked aggression" in Ukraine is an affront to the heart of what the international body stands for as he looks to rally allies to stand firm in backing the Ukrainian resistance.

Biden, during his time at the U.N. General Assembly, also planned to meet Wednesday with new British Prime Minister Liz Truss, announce a global food security initiative and press allies to meet an \$18 billion target to replenish the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

But White House officials say the crux of the president's visit to the U.N. this year would be a full-throated condemnation of Russia as its brutal war nears the seven-month mark.

"He'll offer a firm rebuke of Russia's unjust war in Ukraine and make a call to the world to continue to stand against the naked aggression that we've seen these past several months," White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said in previewing the president's address. "He will underscore the importance of strengthening the United Nations and reaffirm core tenets of its charter at a time when a permanent member of the Security Council has struck at the very heart of the charter by challenging the principle of

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territorial integrity and sovereignty.”

The address comes as Russian-controlled regions of eastern and southern Ukraine have announced plans to hold Kremlin-backed referendums in days ahead on becoming part of Russia and as Moscow is losing ground in the invasion. Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday announced a partial mobilization to call up 300,000 reservists and accused the West of engaging in “nuclear blackmail.”

Biden is confronting no shortage of difficult issues as leaders gather this year.

In addition to the Russian war in Ukraine, European fears that a recession could be just around the corner are heightened. Administration concerns grow by the day that time is running short to revive the Iran nuclear deal and over China’s saber-rattling on Taiwan.

When he addressed last year’s General Assembly, Biden focused on broad themes of global partnership, urging world leaders to act with haste against the coronavirus, climate change and human rights abuses. And he offered assurances that his presidency marked a return of American leadership to international institutions following Donald Trump’s “America First” foreign policy.

But one year later, global dynamics have dramatically changed.

Stewart Patrick, senior fellow and director of the Global Order and Institutions Program at the Washington think tank Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, wrote in an analysis that Biden’s task this year is “immense” compared to his first address to the U.N. as president.

“Last year, the U.S. leader won easy plaudits as the ‘anti-Trump,’ pledging that ‘America was back,’” Patrick said. “This year demands more. The liberal, rules-based international system is reeling, battered by Russian aggression, Chinese ambitions, authoritarian assaults, a halting pandemic recovery, quickening climate change, skepticism of the U.N.’s relevance, and gnawing doubts about American staying power.”

Beyond diplomacy, the president is also doing some politicking. This year’s gathering comes less than seven weeks before pivotal midterm elections in the United States. Shortly after arriving in Manhattan on Tuesday night, Biden spoke at a Democratic National Committee fundraiser for about 100 participants that raised nearly \$2 million, and he’s set to hold another fundraiser on Thursday before heading back to Washington.

His Wednesday address comes on the heels of Ukrainian forces retaking control of large stretches of territory near Kharkiv. But even as Ukrainian forces have racked up battlefield wins, much of Europe is feeling painful blowback from economic sanctions levied against Russia. A vast reduction in Russian oil and gas has led to a sharp jump in energy prices, skyrocketing inflation and growing risk of Europe slipping into a recession.

Biden’s visit to the U.N. also comes as his administration’s efforts to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal appears stalled.

The deal brokered by the Obama administration — and scrapped by Trump in 2018 — provided billions of dollars in sanctions relief in exchange for Iran’s agreement to dismantle much of its nuclear program and open its facilities to extensive international inspection.

Sullivan said no breakthrough with Iran is expected during the General Assembly but Biden would make clear in his speech that a deal can still be done “if Iran is prepared to be serious about its obligations.” He added that administration officials would be consulting with fellow signatories of the 2015 deal on the sidelines of this week’s meetings.

This year’s U.N. gathering is back to being a full-scale, in-person event after two years of curtailed activity due to the pandemic. In 2020, the in-person gathering was canceled and leaders instead delivered prerecorded speeches; last year was a mix of in-person and prerecorded speeches. Biden and first lady Jill Biden were set to host a leaders’ reception on Wednesday evening.

China’s President Xi Jinping opted not to attend this year’s U.N. gathering, but his country’s conduct and intentions will loom large during the leaders’ talks.

Last month, the U.N. human rights office raised concerns about possible “crimes against humanity” in China’s western region against Uyghurs and other largely Muslim ethnic groups. Beijing has vowed to suspend cooperation with the office and blasted what it described as a Western plot to undermine China’s rise.

Meanwhile, China’s government on Monday said Biden’s statement in a CBS “60 Minutes” interview that

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American forces would defend Taiwan if Beijing tried to invade the self-ruled island was a violation of U.S. commitments on the matter, but it gave no indication of possible retaliation.

The White House said after the interview that there has been no change in U.S. policy on Taiwan, which China claims as its own. That policy says Washington wants to see Taiwan's status resolved peacefully but doesn't say whether U.S. forces might be sent in response to a Chinese attack.

Roger Federer to discuss his retirement on Wednesday

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

LONDON (AP) — In Roger Federer's case, the farewell news conference will come before the beginning of what he's said will be the last competitive tennis event of his career.

Federer is in London and has been practicing ahead of the Laver Cup, an event founded by his management team that begins Friday with the fifth edition of its Team Europe vs. Team World format.

The main rivals whose careers overlapped with Federer's — Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray — also are participating.

Before the Laver Cup starts, Federer will meet with the media Wednesday morning to discuss walking away from tournament tennis at age 41 after a career that began in the 1990s, lasted until the 2020s and included 20 Grand Slam championships, 83 titles at other tournaments and hundreds of weeks at No. 1 in the rankings.

He is bidding adieu shortly after Serena Williams played what is expected to be the last match of her career at the U.S. Open, signaling a significant shift for a sport they both transcended for decades.

Williams told the world of her plans to stop playing via a magazine article, then did not hold a news conference until after her first match at Flushing Meadows; the 23-time Grand Slam champion made it to the third round there before losing to Ajla Tomljanovic.

Federer last played a match at Wimbledon in 2021, when he lost in the quarterfinals to Hubert Hurkacz. Shortly after that, Federer had surgery on his right knee for the third time in a span of about 1 1/2 years.

The Swiss star had hoped to play at Basel in his home country next month and had suggested he might be able to enter Wimbledon one last time next year. But recovery and rehabilitation of his knee became too much.

He called his retirement a "bittersweet decision" when he announced it last week via social media. Wednesday offers a chance to hear more about what went into that choice and what Federer might have in mind for the future.

His tweet concluded: "Finally, to the game of tennis: I love you and will never leave you." That would bode well for those fans of Federer's who hope to see him continue to hold a role in the sport — and would bode well for the sport, too.

Djokovic wrote on Instagram after Federer revealed he'd be retiring that it was "hard to see this day and put into words all that we've shared in this sport together."

It's unclear just how much Federer actually will participate in the Laver Cup. There are singles and doubles matches across the three days, and his agent said Federer definitely will play.

Back in February, when word emerged that Federer would be in London, he said Nadal messaged him last year suggesting they play doubles together again. They teamed up to win a doubles match during the first Laver Cup in 2017.

"If we're able to possibly share the court one more time as a doubles pairing," Nadal said at the time, "then this would be a truly special experience for us both at this stage in our careers."

Ex-cop Lane to be sentenced for aiding in George Floyd death

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A former Minneapolis police officer who pleaded guilty to a state charge of aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter in the killing of George Floyd is scheduled to be sentenced Wednesday.

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Thomas Lane is already serving a 2 1/2-year federal sentence for violating Floyd's civil rights. When it comes to the state's case, prosecutors and Lane's attorneys agreed to a recommended sentence of three years, and prosecutors agreed to allow him to serve that penalty at the same time as his federal sentence, and in a federal prison.

It's expected that Lane will get a state sentence that coincides with his federal time. Wednesday's sentencing hearing will be held remotely, and Lane will appear via video from the Federal Correctional Institution Englewood, the low-security federal prison camp in Littleton, Colorado.

Floyd, 46, died in May 2020 after Officer Derek Chauvin, who is white, pinned him to the ground with a knee on Floyd's neck as the Black man repeatedly said he couldn't breathe. Lane, who is white, held down Floyd's legs. J. Alexander Kueng, who is Black, knelt on Floyd's back, and Tou Thao, who is Hmong American, kept bystanders from intervening during the 9 1/2-minute restraint.

The killing, captured on widely viewed bystander video, sparked protests in Minneapolis and around the globe as part of a reckoning over racial injustice.

Chauvin was convicted of murder and manslaughter and was given a 22 1/2-year state sentence in 2021. He also pleaded guilty to a federal count of violating Floyd's civil rights, and his state and federal sentences are being served at the same time.

Kueng and Thao were also convicted on federal civil rights charges and were sentenced to three and 3 1/2 years respectively. They have not yet reported to federal prison, and are scheduled to go to trial on state charges of aiding and abetting both murder and manslaughter in October.

When Lane pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter earlier this year, he admitted that he intentionally helped restrain Floyd in a way that created an unreasonable risk and caused his death. As part of the plea agreement, a more serious count of aiding and abetting second-degree unintentional murder was dismissed.

In his plea agreement, Lane admitted that he knew from his training that restraining Floyd in that way created a serious risk of death, and that he heard Floyd say he couldn't breathe, knew Floyd fell silent, had no pulse and appeared to have lost consciousness.

The plea agreement says Lane knew Floyd should have been rolled onto his side — and evidence shows he asked twice if that should be done — but he continued to assist in the restraint despite the risk. Lane agreed the restraint was "unreasonable under the circumstances and constituted an unlawful use of force."

Lane did not speak at his federal sentencing and it was not clear if he would speak on Wednesday, though he has a right to make a statement.

Bettor up! Record spending on California gambling question

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The campaign that could bring legalized sports betting to California is the most expensive ballot-initiative fight in U.S. history at about \$400 million and counting, pitting wealthy Native American tribes against online gambling companies and less-affluent tribes over what's expected to be a multibillion-dollar marketplace.

A torrent of advertising has buffeted Californians for months, much of it making promises far beyond a plump payoff from a game wager. Some ads coming from the consortium of gambling companies barely mention online betting.

Instead, the ads tease a cornucopia of benefits from new revenues — helping the homeless, aiding the mentally ill and providing financial security for poorer tribes that haven't seen a windfall from casino gambling. Further clouding the issue: There are two sports betting questions on the ballot.

The skeptics include Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who hasn't taken a position on either proposal but has said Proposition 27 "is not a homeless initiative" despite the claims in advertising.

Claremont McKenna College political scientist Jack Pitney said "something for nothing" promises have been used in the past to sell state lotteries as a boundless source for education funding. It's political salesmanship, "not a cure-all," he said.

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With the stakes high, over \$400 million has been raised so far – easily a national record for a ballot initiative fight, and nearly doubling the previous mark in California set in 2020 -- with another seven weeks to go until balloting ends on Nov. 8.

“They are spending hundreds of millions because billions are on the line,” said longtime Democratic consultant Steven Maviglio, referring to potential future profits from expanded gambling in the state of nearly 40 million people.

“Both sides stand to really get rich for the long term,” said Maviglio, who is not involved in the campaign. It could become “a permanent funding source for a handful of companies -- or a handful of tribes.”

All of it could be a bad bet.

With the midterm elections approaching, voters are in a foul mood and cynical about political sales pitches. And with two similar proposals on the ballot, history suggests that voters are inclined to be confused and grab the “no” lever on both.

“When in doubt, people vote no,” Pitney said.

In California, gambling now is permitted on horse races, at Indian casinos, in cardrooms and the state lottery. But the state has been something of a laggard in sports betting, which has been spreading across the country.

The two proposals would open the way for sports betting, but in strikingly different ways.

Proposition 27 is backed by DraftKings, BetMGM, FanDuel — the latter is the official odds provider for The Associated Press — and other national sports betting operators. The proposal would change state law to allow online sports betting for adults over the internet and on phones or other mobile devices.

Multistate operators would be required to partner with a tribe involved in gambling, or licensed tribes could enter on their own. However, the tribes argue they would have to surrender some of their independence to enter the deal. A tax would cover regulatory costs, with the bulk of the remainder earmarked for homeless programs, and a slice going to tribes not involved in online betting.

A rival proposal backed by many tribes, Proposition 26, would let people wager on sporting events in person at retail locations — casinos operated by tribes and the state’s four licensed horse racing tracks. A portion of a 10% tax would help pay for enforcement of gambling laws and programs to help people who have a gambling addiction. It also could open the way for roulette and dice games at tribal casinos.

A handful of political committees are in the center of the fight, raising funds and dueling for public support.

The Yes on 26, No on 27 committee, sponsored by more than two dozen Indian tribes, has raised about \$108 million through this month, state records show. Among the major donors: Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria (\$30 million), the Pechanga Band of Indians (\$25 million) and the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation (\$20 million). All have been enriched by their own casinos.

Another committee seeking to defeat Proposition 27 is backed by tribes including the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians and has pulled in about \$91 million.

Their main rival, the Yes on 27 committee backed by sports betting companies, has generated about \$169 million in loans and donations.

A committee opposing Proposition 26, backed by card clubs, has piled up over \$41 million for the fight. The proposition includes changes in enforcement that the clubs see as an attempt to give tribes a virtual monopoly on all gaming in the state.

Despite the lofty claims about new income for the state, it’s not clear what the fiscal benefits might be with either proposal.

With Proposition 27, the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst’s Office concluded its effect on revenues and costs are uncertain, in part because it’s not known how many entities would offer betting or how many people would place bets. It’s possible it could bring in hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

But the office also concluded some of the income would not be new dollars since people could shift their spending habits, placing sports bets rather than buying lottery tickets or shopping at the mall.

The state analysts also found the fiscal impacts of rival Proposition 26 are unclear, in part because it’s not known how state-tribal compacts would be modified to allow for sports betting. They found the propo-

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sition could increase state revenues, possibly by tens of millions of dollars each year, but would increase costs for enforcement and regulation, too.

A muddle of political endorsements are in the mix. The California Republican Party opposes both proposals. State Democrats oppose Proposition 27, but are neutral on Proposition 26. Major League Baseball is backing Proposition 27.

Voters are witnessing a deluge of competing claims.

The No on 26 committee says wealthy tribes are looking to game the system to gain unprecedented gambling income and political influence.

Rob Stutzman, a spokesman for the No on 27 committee, warned that up to 90% of the profits from the proposal could go to the gambling companies and "you know a measure is bad news when both the Democratic and Republican parties oppose it."

Analysis: UN chief, speaking to leaders, doesn't mince words

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — He sounded a global alarm, warning leaders about the survival of humanity and the planet. In language that was sometimes downright undiplomatic, he called out those he blames for the perilous state of the world.

It was Antonio Guterres' strongest, most striking speech since he took the helm of the United Nations in 2017. And if you were the leader of a country, it was clear he wanted your undivided attention.

Guterres has spoken out often on growing geopolitical divisions, increasing inequality and the failure of nations to move quickly to tackle the climate crisis. But what was noticeable about his state-of-the-world speech Tuesday was its no-nonsense language, its gloomy tone and its focus not only on the breadth of challenges confronting "the splintering world" but his solutions — and his repeated plea to those in power that there is still hope and it's time for action.

Guterres' language was especially blunt when he lashed out at the growing divides in the world, saying "the international community is not ready or willing to tackle the big dramatic challenges of our age." He then ticked them off — the war in Ukraine, spreading conflicts, climate, money, ending extreme poverty and achieving quality education for all children.

The U.N. chief then took no-holds-barred aim at those he views as responsible.

Self-absorbed governments that are ignoring the U.N. Charter's key principles of working together. Social media platforms ruled by profits that misinform, cause "untold damage" to people, communities and societies, and buy and sell data "to influence our behavior." Artificial intelligence that "can compromise the integrity of information systems, the media and indeed democracy itself."

There were more targets: the Group of 20 richest countries in the world that emit 80% of greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. The fossil fuel industry that reaps hundreds of billions of dollars while family budgets shrink and the planet burns. In a controversial proposal, he called on rich developed countries to tax these windfall profits and use the money to help countries suffering losses from the climate crisis and people struggling with rising food and energy prices.

"Polluters must pay," Guterres said — unusually stark language for the world's most prominent diplomat.

To review Guterres' language this week — and to compare it to a year ago — is instructive in understanding why his speech this year was so singular.

Last year, as the COVID-19 pandemic still raged, the secretary-general was already warning presidents and prime ministers that the world faced "the greatest cascade of crises in our lifetime." That was before Russia invaded Ukraine, sparking global food and energy crises and dividing the already splintered community of nations even further.

His warning this year was even more alarming: "Our world is in peril — and paralyzed." And in perhaps his most dire warning, he said, "We have a duty to act. And yet we are gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction."

David Scheffer, a former U.S. ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues, said the 2022 version of Guterres

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is "a truth-teller" for a world "that has reached a point where either we're surviving or we're going to perish."

"It's the most consequential speech by a secretary-general in the history of the United Nations," said Scheffer, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. "He set out not only the crises of our time, but he sent out a clarion call to ensure the survival of both humanity and of the planet."

He said Guterres abandoned "the niceties of diplomacy" and predicted that his speech will become known as the "survival" address.

"He basically said, 'wake up,' and he was not ambiguous about it," Scheffer told The Associated Press. No leader, he said, can ignore or challenge "anything that the secretary-general said today without being regarded as an irrelevant leader at this time in history."

Richard Gowan, U.N. director of the International Crisis Group, said he thought it was a "gloomy speech," but he allowed that Guterres "has a lot to be gloomy about."

"I do think he feels it's urgent to speak as frankly as possible," Gowan said. "His overarching goal was clearly to try to confront world leaders with the poor state of international cooperation and threats to the planet. I thought he did that pretty effectively, but he has made similarly dire warnings in the past with little real impact on international relations."

For the first time at the high-level meeting, a secretary-general projected an image before world leaders to illustrate his speech — a picture of the first U.N.-chartered ship carrying grain from Ukraine. The Brave Commander was part of the deal between Ukraine and Russia that the United Nations and Turkey helped broker. It traveled from a Black Sea port to the Horn of Africa, where millions of people are on the edge of famine.

Guterres called it an example of promise and hope "in a world teeming with turmoil." He stressed that that cooperation and dialogue are the only path forward, and he warned that "no power or group alone can call the shots."

"Guterres has long been known to feel that the U.N. needs a couple of clear diplomatic wins to restore confidence in the utility of multilateralism," Gowan said. "The grain deal gave him that win, and he used it well as a hook for his talk."

A talk that will go down in U.N. history as something very different — no matter what direction the world goes from here.

US, Iran to speak at UN; Zelenskyy to appear from Ukraine

By PIA SARKAR Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Leaders of two of the world's most-watched nations — U.S. President Joe Biden and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi — will be among those who have their say on the second day of the U.N. General Assembly's first fully in-person meeting since the coronavirus pandemic began.

But the biggest draw Wednesday will likely be the only leader to be seen and heard but not actually there in the flesh: Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose nation is at war with Russia.

The 193-member assembly voted last week to allow Zelenskyy to deliver a pre-recorded address because of his continuing need to deal with Russia's invasion, making an exception to its requirement that all leaders speak in person. Russian President Vladimir Putin will not be attending the annual gathering of world leaders.

Unsurprisingly, Ukraine has been the center of attention at the assembly, with leader after world leader condemning Russia for attacking a sovereign nation. The war, which has already killed thousands, is driving up food prices around the globe while also causing energy costs to soar -- a particularly worrisome issue heading into the winter. It has also raised fears of a nuclear catastrophe at Europe's largest nuclear plant in Ukraine's now Russia-occupied southeast.

Leaders from many countries are trying to prevent a wider conflict and restore peace in Europe. Diplomats, though, aren't expecting any breakthroughs this week at the United Nations, where nearly 150 leaders are addressing each other and the world.

Biden's address on Wednesday is expected to have a heavy focus on the war in Ukraine, where the

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country's troops in recent weeks have retaken control of large stretches of territory near Kharkiv that were seized by Russian forces earlier in the nearly seven-month-old war.

But even as Ukrainian forces have racked up battlefield wins, much of Europe is feeling painful blowback from economic sanctions levied against Russia to punish Moscow for its invasion.

At the White House, there's also growing concern that Putin might further escalate the conflict after recent setbacks. Biden, in a CBS-TV "60 Minutes" interview that aired on Sunday, warned Putin that deploying nuclear or chemical weapons in Ukraine would result in a "consequential" response from the United States.

Biden's visit to the U.N. also comes as his administration's efforts to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal appear stalled. The deal brokered by the Obama administration — and scrapped by Trump in 2018 — provided billions of dollars in sanctions relief in exchange for Iran's agreement to dismantle much of its nuclear program and open its facilities to international inspection.

Iran's president has said he has no plans to meet with Biden on the sidelines of the U.N. event. Raisi called his first-ever appearance at the United Nations as Iran's leader an opportunity to explain to the world about alleged "malice" that unspecified nations and world powers have toward Iran but he did not elaborate.

Iran has been facing international criticism over the death of a woman held by its morality police, which ignited days of protests, including clashes with security forces in the capital and other unrest that claimed at least three lives.

The U.N. human rights office called for an investigation. The United States called on Iran to end its "systemic persecution" of women. Italy also condemned her death.

Iranian officials dismissed the criticism as politically motivated and accused unnamed foreign countries of fomenting the unrest.

EXPLAINER: How alleged plot exploited pandemic to net \$250M

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Department of Justice has charged 48 people in Minnesota in what prosecutors have called a \$250 million scheme to defraud a federal meals program.

Prosecutors said just a fraction of the money went toward feeding kids, with the rest laundered through shell companies and spent on property, luxury cars and travel.

Here's a look at how the alleged scheme worked, according to court documents:

ROOTS OF THE ALLEGED SCHEME

The defendants are accused of targeting federal child nutrition programs that provide free meals to low-income children and adults. The money comes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with oversight from state governments. In Minnesota, the funds are administered by the state Department of Education, with meals historically provided to kids through schools and day care centers. Sites that serve the food are sponsored by authorized public or nonprofit groups.

Some standard program requirements were relaxed during the COVID-19 pandemic; for-profit restaurants were allowed to participate, and food could be distributed outside educational programs.

Minnesota U.S. Attorney Andy Luger said Tuesday that a small group of people came up with a plan to exploit the relaxed rules and steal tens of millions of dollars by falsely claiming they were providing food to children.

Others soon joined, and the scheme grew to become what Luger called the largest pandemic-related fraud in the U.S.

HOW IT ALLEGEDLY WORKED

Several companies applied to provide meals to low-income children, many using Feeding Our Future as a sponsor to seek funding, according to court documents.

Authorities allege Feeding our Future employees recruited others to open program sites across Minnesota that inflated the number of children and meals they were serving, or didn't serve any at all. The nonprofit then submitted false claims for reimbursement, receiving an administrative fee of 10% to 15% in addition

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to kickbacks from people who wanted to join the scheme, the charges allege.

The charges say the scheme used shell companies that falsified invoices showing meals were served and submitted fake attendance rosters purporting to list the names and ages of children being fed each day.

The FBI says one company claimed to be serving meals to 300 kids a day in January 2021. By February 2021, the group claimed it was providing daily meals for 3,290 children. In all, the group got \$3.6 million in reimbursements in 2021, according to an FBI affidavit. Nearly that much was deposited into its bank account, then most of it went to another company. Little was used to buy food.

FEEDING OUR FUTURE

Feeding Our Future was formed in 2016 to help poor and minority communities secure federal food program funding. The nonprofit quickly became the largest independent sponsor of such programs in Minnesota.

Founder Aimee Bock told the Star Tribune this year that she employed 65 staff members who spoke 17 languages, and was working with 140 subcontractors to distribute 100,000 meals a day to Minnesota children.

An FBI affidavit traced the nonprofit's rising reimbursements: \$307,000 in 2018, \$3.45 million in 2019, \$42.7 million in 2020 and \$197.9 million in 2021.

Bock said she never stole money and saw no evidence of fraud among her subcontractors. Feeding Our Future was dissolved in February.

POSSIBLE RED FLAGS

Court documents say the Department of Education grew concerned about the rapid growth in reimbursements and the number of sites sponsored by Feeding Our Future. The department said it reached out to the USDA in the summer of 2020 and began scrutinizing the nonprofit's site applications. In one case, the agency denied an application for a group that claimed in March 2021 it was serving an after-school snack and supper to 5,000 kids a day; the FBI characterized this as "an exceedingly large number of children."

The Department of Education went to the FBI in April 2021, and the FBI began investigating the following month. Last January, officers raided several properties including Feeding Our Future's offices and Bock's home.

Feeding Our Future received \$244 million in federal reimbursements through the food nutrition programs between 2018 and 2021, the FBI said. Department of Education data puts the nonprofit's total reimbursements at \$268.4 million in the same years.

Charging documents made public Tuesday say Feeding our Future fraudulently obtained and disbursed more than \$240 million in program funds during the pandemic.

Prosecutors say almost none of the money went to feed children, but was instead used to buy real estate, cars, and other luxury items including a half-million-dollar apartment in Kenya, lakeside homes in Minnesota, expensive trips and multiple properties in Minneapolis.

OTHER LEGAL BATTLES

After the Department of Education increased its scrutiny, Feeding Our Future sued the agency in November 2020. Feeding Our Future alleged discrimination, among other things, saying many of the groups it works with are in minority communities.

By December 2020, the Department of Education stopped approving new site applications for Feeding Our Future. By the following March, the department halted all payments to the group. But in April 2021, a state judge ruled that the agency didn't have the authority to stop payments and ordered that the reimbursements continue. The case was dismissed after the FBI investigation became public in January.

Alaskans pocket over \$3,000 in annual oil-wealth payments

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Nearly every single Alaskan got a financial windfall amounting to more than \$3,000 Tuesday, the day the state began distributing payments from Alaska's investment fund that has been seeded with money from the state's oil riches.

The payments, officially called the Permanent Fund Dividend or the PFD locally, amounted to \$2,622 —

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the highest amount ever. Alaska lawmakers added \$662 as a one-time benefit to help residents with high energy costs.

A total of \$1.6 billion in direct deposits began hitting bank accounts Tuesday, and checks will arrive later for those who opted for them.

Residents use the money in various ways, from buying big-screen TVs, vehicles or other goods, using it for vacations or putting it in savings or college funds. In rural Alaska, the money can help offset the enormous costs of fuel and food, like \$14 for a 12-pack of soda, \$4 for a celery bunch and \$3 for a small container of Greek yogurt.

"We're experiencing record high inflation that we haven't seen since the first PFD was paid in 1982," Gov. Mike Dunleavy said in a video. "Alaskans have been bearing the brunt of this inflation from the gas pump to the grocery store, and this year's PFD will provide much needed relief as we head into winter."

The timing of the checks couldn't have come at a better time for those living on the state's vast western coast, which was devastated last weekend by the remnants of Typhoon Merbok. Damage to homes and infrastructure was widespread along a 1,000 miles (1,609 kilometers) of coastline.

Among the communities experiencing the greatest damage was Nome, the largest city on the coast with about 3,500 residents and known for being the end point of the world's most famous sled dog race.

Howard Farley, now 90, helped secure Nome as the Iditarod's finish line over 50 years ago. His century-old home was safe from the storm on high ground in Nome, but they did lose about 100 feet (30.48 meters) of frontage and one building at the family's camp site about 5 miles (8 kilometers) east of town.

"The beach is a lot closer," he said.

He said the payments — which would be more than \$16,000 for a family of five — are much needed.

"Even people that didn't have damage, with the inflation up here, that's really, really hitting hard," he said.

Farley said gas is \$7 a gallon and will remain that way until the next shipment arrives next spring because barges can't deliver once the Bering Sea freezes.

"The price won't go down like it does in Anchorage and other places because you guys can get deliveries almost any time," he said.

"What it will mean for a lot of families is that they can break even with the high prices we're paying," he said.

The oil-wealth check, which some in Alaska see as an entitlement, typically is derived from the earnings of the nest-egg investment account. The diversified fund was established during construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline in the 1970s and now is worth \$73.6 billion.

There is a yearly application process and residency requirements to qualify for a dividend. Dividends traditionally have been paid using earnings from the Alaska Permanent Fund. Lawmakers in 2018 began using fund earnings to also help pay for government and sought to limit how much can be withdrawn from earnings for both purposes. The amount going to the dividend this year represents half the authorized draw.

Residents received the first check, \$1,000, in 1982. Amounts have varied over the years, and traditionally were calculated on a five-year rolling average to buffer downturns in the economy.

The smallest check ever was \$331 in 1983. The largest before this year's check was \$2,072 in 2015. If someone has collected every check since 1982, it would amount to \$47,049.

Mildred Jonathan, 74, and her husband, Alfred, 79, live about 100 miles (161 kilometers) west of the Canadian border in the interior Alaska village of Tanacross.

There will be no frivolous spending when they receive their paper check in October. Instead, the Jonathans' major purchase will be firewood.

"The wood I'm hoping to get is \$1,600, and it's a 10-cord load," she said. "I'll survive the winter if I buy that."

Snow was already falling on nearby mountains, and temperatures in the Athabascan village during the winter are typically well below zero. "It's cold, cold, cold," she said.

Any money the couple have left over will go to a new hot water system, flooring for their home and Christmas gifts for their grandchildren, who want new phones.

US: 48 exploited pandemic to steal \$250M from food program

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — United States authorities charged 48 people in Minnesota with conspiracy and other counts in what they said Tuesday was the largest pandemic-related fraud scheme yet, stealing \$250 million from a federal program that provides meals to low-income children.

Federal prosecutors say the defendants created companies that claimed to be offering food to tens of thousands of children across Minnesota, then sought reimbursement for those meals through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's food nutrition programs. Prosecutors say few meals were actually served, and the defendants used the money to buy luxury cars, property and jewelry.

"This \$250 million is the floor," Andy Luger, the U.S. attorney for Minnesota, said at a news conference. "Our investigation continues."

Many of the companies that claimed to be serving food were sponsored by a nonprofit called Feeding Our Future, which submitted the companies' claims for reimbursement. Feeding Our Future's founder and executive director, Aimee Bock, was among those indicted, and authorities say she and others in her organization submitted the fraudulent claims for reimbursement and received kickbacks.

Bock's attorney, Kenneth Udoibok, said the indictment "doesn't indicate guilt or innocence." He said he wouldn't comment further until seeing the indictment.

In interviews after law enforcement searched multiple sites in January, including Bock's home and offices, Bock denied stealing money and said she never saw evidence of fraud.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Justice made prosecuting pandemic-related fraud a priority. The department has already taken enforcement actions related to more than \$8 billion in suspected pandemic fraud, including bringing charges in more than 1,000 criminal cases involving losses in excess of \$1.1 billion.

Federal officials repeatedly described the alleged fraud as "brazen," and decried that it involved a program intended to feed children who needed help during the pandemic. Michael Paul, special agent in charge of the Minneapolis FBI office, called it "an astonishing display of deceit."

Luger said the government was billed for more than 125 million fake meals, with some defendants making up names for children by using an online random name generator. He displayed one form for reimbursement that claimed a site served exactly 2,500 meals each day Monday through Friday — with no children ever getting sick or otherwise missing from the program.

"These children were simply invented," Luger said.

He said the government has so far recovered \$50 million in money and property and expects to recover more.

The defendants in Minnesota face multiple counts, including conspiracy, wire fraud, money laundering and bribery. Luger said some of them were arrested Tuesday morning. Authorities announced 47 indictments at the news conference. A 48th person, who according to a criminal complaint was scheduled to board a one-way flight to Ethiopia on Tuesday evening, was arrested sometime after the prosecutors' press conference.

According to court documents, the alleged scheme targeted the USDA's federal child nutrition programs, which provide food to low-income children and adults. In Minnesota, the funds are administered by the state Department of Education, and meals have historically been provided to kids through educational programs, such as schools or day care centers.

The sites that serve the food are sponsored by public or nonprofit groups, such as Feeding Our Future. The sponsoring agency keeps 10% to 15% of the reimbursement funds as an administrative fee in exchange for submitting claims, sponsoring the sites and disbursing the funds.

But during the pandemic, some of the standard requirements for sites to participate in the federal food nutrition programs were waived. The USDA allowed for-profit restaurants to participate, and allowed food to be distributed outside educational programs. The charging documents say the defendants exploited such changes "to enrich themselves."

The documents say Bock oversaw the scheme and that she and Feeding Our Future sponsored the

opening of nearly 200 federal child nutrition program sites throughout the state, knowing that the sites intended to submit fraudulent claims.

"The sites fraudulently claimed to be serving meals to thousands of children a day within just days or weeks of being formed and despite having few, if any staff and little to no experience serving this volume of meals," according to the indictments.

One example described a small storefront restaurant in Willmar, in west-central Minnesota, that typically served only a few dozen people a day. Two defendants offered the owner \$40,000 a month to use his restaurant, then billed the government for some 1.6 million meals through 11 months of 2021, according to one indictment. They listed the names of around 2,000 children — nearly half of the local school district's total enrollment — and only 33 names matched actual students, the indictment said.

Feeding Our Future received nearly \$18 million in federal child nutrition program funds as administrative fees in 2021 alone, and Bock and other employees received additional kickbacks, which were often disguised as "consulting fees" paid to shell companies, the charging documents said.

According to an FBI affidavit unsealed earlier this year, Feeding Our Future received \$307,000 in reimbursements from the USDA in 2018, \$3.45 million in 2019 and \$42.7 million in 2020. The amount of reimbursements jumped to \$197.9 million in 2021.

Court documents say the Minnesota Department of Education was growing concerned about the rapid increase in the number of sites sponsored by Feeding Our Future, as well as the increase in reimbursements.

The department began scrutinizing Feeding Our Future's site applications more carefully, and denied dozens of them. In response, Bock sued the department in November 2020, alleging discrimination, saying the majority of her sites were based in immigrant communities. That case has since been dismissed.

Fiona swipes Turks and Caicos, Puerto Rico faces big cleanup

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

CAYEY, Puerto Rico (AP) — Hurricane Fiona blasted the Turks and Caicos Islands on Tuesday as a Category 3 storm after devastating Puerto Rico, where most people remained without electricity or running water and rescuers used heavy equipment to lift survivors to safety.

The storm's eye passed close to Grand Turk, the small British territory's capital island, on Tuesday morning after the government imposed a curfew and urged people to flee flood-prone areas. Storm surge could raise water levels there by as much as 5 to 8 feet above normal, according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center.

While the storm was still lashing the archipelago late Tuesday, officials reported only a handful of downed trees and electric posts and no deaths. However, they noted that telecommunications on Grand Turk were severely affected.

"Fiona definitely has battled us over the last few hours, and we're not out of the thick of it yet," said Akierra Missick, minister of physical planning and infrastructure development.

Late Tuesday night, the storm was centered about 75 miles (120 kilometers) north of North Caicos Island, with hurricane-force winds extending up to 30 miles (45 kilometers) from the center.

Premier Washington Misick had urged people to evacuate. "Storms are unpredictable," he said in a statement from London, where he had attended the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II.

Fiona had maximum sustained winds of 125 mph (205 kph) and was moving north-northwest at 8 mph (13 kph), according to the Hurricane Center, which said the storm was likely to strengthen into a Category 4 hurricane as it approaches Bermuda on Friday.

Rain was still lashing parts of Puerto Rico Tuesday, where the sounds of people scraping, sweeping and spraying their homes and streets echoed across rural areas as historic floodwaters began to recede.

In the central mountain town of Cayey, where the Plato River burst its banks and the brown torrent of water consumed cars and homes, overturned dressers, beds and large refrigerators lay strewn in people's yards Tuesday.

"Puerto Rico is not prepared for this, or for anything," said Mariangy Hernández, a 48-year-old housewife,

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who said she doubted the government would help her community of some 300 in the long term, despite ongoing efforts to clear the streets and restore power. "This is only for a couple of days and later they forget about us."

She and her husband were stuck in line waiting for the National Guard to clear a landslide in their hilly neighborhood.

"Is it open? Is it open?" one driver asked, worried that the road might have been completely closed.

Other drivers asked the National Guard if they could swing by their homes to help cut trees or clear clumps of mud and debris.

The cleanup efforts occurred on the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Maria, which hit as a Category 4 storm in 2017 and knocked out power for a year in parts of Cayey.

Jeannette Soto, a 34-year-old manicurist, worried it would take a long time for crews to restore power because a landslide swept away the neighborhood's main light post.

"It's the first time this happens," she said of the landslides. "We didn't think the magnitude of the rain was going to be so great."

Gov. Pedro Pierluisi requested a major disaster declaration on Tuesday and said it would be at least a week before authorities have an estimate of the damage that Fiona caused.

He said the damage caused by the rain was "catastrophic," especially in the island's central, south and southeast regions.

"The impact caused by the hurricane has been devastating for many people," he said.

The head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency traveled to Puerto Rico on Tuesday as the agency announced it was sending hundreds of additional personnel to boost local response efforts.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency on the island and deployed a couple of teams to the U.S. territory.

The broad 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.

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.

Parts of the island had received more than 25 inches (64 centimeters) of rain and more was falling Tuesday.

National Guard Brig. Gen. Narciso Cruz described the flooding as historic.

"There were communities that flooded in the storm that didn't flood under Maria," he said, referring to the 2017 hurricane that caused nearly 3,000 deaths. "I've never seen anything like this."

Cruz said 670 people have been rescued in Puerto Rico, including 19 people at a retirement home in Cayey that was in danger of collapsing.

"The rivers broke their banks and blanketed communities," he said.

Some people were rescued via kayaks and boats while others nestled into the massive shovel of a digger and were lifted to higher ground.

He lamented that some people initially refused to leave their homes, adding that he understood why.

"It's human nature," he said. "But when they saw their lives were in danger, they agreed to leave."

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

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Tuesday he would push for the federal government to cover 100% of disaster response costs — instead of the usual 75% — as part of an emergency disaster declaration.

"We need to make sure this time, Puerto Rico has absolutely everything it needs, as soon as possible, for as long as they need it," he said.

Authorities said Tuesday that at least 1,220 people and more than 70 pets remained in shelters across the island.

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Fiona triggered 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 nearly 300,000 of the island's 1.47 million customers. Puerto Rico's governor warned it could take days before everyone has electricity.

Water service was cut to more than 760,000 customers — two thirds of the total on the island — because of turbid water at filtration plants or lack of power, officials said.

Fiona was forecast to weaken before running into easternmost Canada over the weekend. It was not expected to threaten the U.S. mainland.

In the Dominican Republic, authorities reported two deaths: a 68-year-old man hit by a falling tree and an 18-year-old girl who was struck by a falling electrical post while riding a motorcycle. The storm forced more than 1,550 people to seek safety in government shelters and left more than 406,500 homes without power.

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.

Migrants sue Florida governor over Martha's Vineyard flights

BOSTON (AP) — Venezuelan migrants flown to the upscale Massachusetts island of Martha's Vineyard sued Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and his transportation secretary Tuesday for engaging in a "fraudulent and discriminatory scheme" to relocate them.

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Boston, alleges that the migrants were told they were going to Boston or Washington, "which was completely false," and were induced with perks such as \$10 McDonald's gift certificates.

"No human being should be used as a political pawn," said Ivan Espinoza-Madriral, executive director of Lawyers for Civil Rights, which is seeking class-action status in the lawsuit filed on behalf of several migrants who were aboard last week's flights and Alianza Americas, a network of advocacy groups.

"It is opportunistic that activists would use illegal immigrants for political theater," said Taryn Fenske, DeSantis' communication director, in a statement late Tuesday.

The lawsuit, which also names Secretary of Transportation Jared W. Perdue as a defendant, alleges that migrants were induced to cross state lines under false pretenses, a line that some Democratic officials are using to urge a federal investigation.

On Monday, Javier Salazar, the sheriff of Bexar County, which includes San Antonio, opened an investigation into the flights, but the elected Democrat did not say what laws may have been broken. California Gov. Gavin Newsom and U.S. Rep. Joaquin Castro, whose district includes San Antonio, have asked the Justice Department to begin a probe.

Guesswork was rampant among government officials, advocates and journalists Tuesday about DeSantis' next move, consistent with the element of surprise that he and another Republican governor, Greg Abbott of Texas, have sought to achieve by busing and flying migrants across the country to Democratic strongholds with little or no notice.

Asked Tuesday about speculation that DeSantis may send migrants to his home state of Delaware, President Joe Biden said: "He should come visit. We have a beautiful shoreline."

DeSantis declined to confirm speculation, based on flight-tracking software, that more migrants were on the move. He again defended his decision to fly about 50 Venezuelans to Martha's Vineyard, saying their decisions were completely voluntary and, without evidence, that they were in awful condition when Florida got involved.

Arbiter in Trump docs probe signals intent to move quickly

By ERIC TUCKER and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The independent arbiter tasked with inspecting documents seized in an FBI search of former President Donald Trump's Florida home said Tuesday he intends to push briskly through the review process and appeared skeptical of the Trump team's reluctance to say whether it believed the records had been declassified.

"We're going to proceed with what I call responsible dispatch," Raymond Dearie, a veteran Brooklyn judge, told lawyers for Trump and the Justice Department in their first meeting since his appointment last week as a so-called special master.

The purpose of the meeting was to sort out next steps in a review process expected to slow by weeks, if not months, the criminal investigation into the retention of top-secret information at Mar-a-Lago after Trump left the White House. As special master, Dearie will be responsible for sifting through the thousands of documents recovered during the Aug. 8 FBI search and segregating any that might be protected by claims of executive privilege or attorney-client privilege.

Though Trump's lawyers had requested the appointment of a special master to ensure an independent review of the documents, they have resisted Dearie's request for more information about whether the seized records had been previously declassified — as Trump has maintained. His lawyers have consistently stopped short of that claim even as they asserted in a separate filing Tuesday that the Justice Department had not proven that the documents were classified. In any event, they say, a president has absolute authority to declassify information.

"In the case of someone who has been president of the United States, they have unfettered access along with unfettered declassification authority," one of Trump's lawyers, James Trusty, said in court Tuesday.

But Dearie said that if Trump's lawyers will not actually assert that the records have been declassified, and the Justice Department instead makes an acceptable case that they remain classified, then he would be inclined to regard them as classified.

"As far as I'm concerned," he said, "that's the end of it."

In a letter to Dearie on Monday night, the lawyers said the declassification issue might be part of Trump's defense in the event of an indictment. And Trusty said in court Tuesday that the Trump team should not be forced at this point in the investigation to disclose details of a possible defense based on the idea the records had been declassified.

He denied that the lawyers were trying to engage in "gamesman-like" behavior but instead said it was a process that required "baby steps." He said the right time for the discussion is whenever Trump presses forward with a claim to get any seized property back.

Dearie said he understood the position but observed, "I guess my view of it is, you can't have your cake and eat it" too.

The resistance to the judge's request was notable because it was Trump's lawyers, not the Justice Department, who had requested the appointment of a special master and because the recalcitrance included an acknowledgment that the probe could be building toward an indictment.

Despite the focus on whether the seized documents are classified or not, the three statutes the Justice Department listed on a warrant as part of its investigation do not require that the mishandled information be classified in order for prosecutors to initiate a criminal case.

The Trump team has also questioned the feasibility of some of the deadlines for the special master's review. That work includes inspecting the roughly 11,000 documents, including about 100 marked as classified, that were taken during the FBI's search.

U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon, a Trump appointee who granted the Trump team's request for a special master, had set a Nov. 30 deadline for Dearie's review and instructed him to prioritize the tranche of classified records.

Dearie, a Ronald Reagan appointee whose name is on the atrium of his Brooklyn courthouse, made clear during Tuesday's meeting that he intended to meet the deadlines, saying there was "little time" to

complete the assigned tasks.

Julie Edelstein, a Justice Department lawyer, said she was hopeful that the department could get the documents digitized and provided to Trump's lawyers by early next week. She noted that the department had given the legal team a list of five vendors approved by the government for the purposes of scanning, hosting and otherwise processing the seized records.

After some haggling, Dearie instructed Trusty's lawyers to choose a vendor by Friday.

Earlier Tuesday, the Trump legal team urged the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit to leave in place Cannon's order temporarily barring the Justice Department's use of the classified records for its criminal investigation while Dearie completes his review. The department is also contesting Cannon's requirement that it provide Dearie with classified materials for his review, saying such records are not subject to any possible claims of attorney-client privilege or executive privilege.

The department has also said that Cannon's order has impeded its investigation.

Trump's lawyers called those concerns overblown in a response Tuesday, saying investigators could still do other work on the probe even without scrutinizing the seized records.

"Ultimately, any brief delay to the criminal investigation will not irreparably harm the Government," Trump's lawyers wrote. "The injunction does not preclude the Government from conducting a criminal investigation, it merely delays the investigation for a short period while a neutral third party reviews the documents in question."

Review: Is 'Don't Worry Darling' worth all the drama?

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

Somewhere around when TikTok videos were analyzing, with the intensity of the Zapruder film, whether spit flew at the Venice Film Festival premiere of Olivia Wilde's "Don't Worry Darling," it became clear that the melodrama of the movie's promotional tour had easily eclipsed the movie, itself.

The tabloid frenzy that engulfed "Don't Worry Darling" was so public, so out in the open that it quickly passed into something kind of exhausting. I would definitely rather re-watch "Don't Worry Darling" the movie than replay that media storm. But in some ways, the on-screen and off-screen dramas go hand-in-hand. Like that fraught Venice debut, Wilde's movie, set in a Palm Springs fantasy world, brings together beautiful faces in a sunny, fashionable locale with the possibility of sinister doings afoot.

"Don't Worry Darling," which opens in theaters Friday, takes a kind of "Stepford Wives" or "Truman Show" concept and reorients it with a potent #MeToo lens. All the ingredients are here for a powerful dystopic drama: Wilde, an ascendant filmmaker coming off her terrific debut, the 2019 teen comedy "Booksmart"; Florence Pugh, one of the most electric young actors working in film today; Harry Style's pop presence; and some sensational mid-century modern production design thanks to Richard Neutra's Kaufmann Desert House.

Yet for all its promise, "Don't Worry Darling" at every twist and turn lacks the right balance of suspense. Wilde, working from a script by Katie Silberman, conjures a kind of '50s-style utopia in which the young married couple Alice (Pugh) and Jack Kramden (Styles) live on a picturesque cul-de-sac. Every morning the devoted housewives kiss their suit-clad husbands goodbye before they drive off to a mysterious dirt mountain in the desert to do whatever keeps this strange male fantasy humming.

At least since Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," marrying routine and ritual with ominous cracks in a social facade has been a fine foundation for conspiratorial thrillers of all kinds, from "The Twilight Zone" to "Get Out." And though it's a compelling starting framework for "Don't Worry Darling," every little revelation is bluntly over-the-top, sapping the movie of any mystery. The town is named Victory and its only Black resident is a traumatized woman (KiKi Layne) who shouts "Why are we here?" before quickly being disappeared. No more subtle is the town's cult-like leader, Frank (Chris Pine, smoothly devious), preaching about keeping "chaos" at bay.

But it's still easy enough to go along with the film because, well, Pugh. If her devotion to the film has been uncertain during its release, Pugh's commitment to the role is far harder to question. It's often

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riveting following her increasingly paranoid psychology as Alice's growing suspicions cause her to doubt everything, maybe even her own seemingly perfect husband.

For a while, "Don't Worry Darling" seems to be an almost perfect Hollywood embodiment of the King Princess song, "1950." ("I like it when we play 1950.") Pugh and Styles have a glamorous chemistry together, even if their codified gender roles — Alice greets him at the end of the day at the front door with a cocktail in hand — are increasingly dubious. Style's performance, along with his in the upcoming "My Policeman," hint at real possibility for him as a movie star of cryptic allure.

"Don't Worry Darling" is ultimately neither worthy of all the off-screen fuss nor quite the on-screen disappointment it's been made out to be. It's a promising but clunky thriller that feels to me like it's mistaken two acts for three, overly drawing out the portentous set-up and leaving off the story, after its big twist ending, just as it's getting interesting.

"Don't Worry Darling," a Warner Bros. release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for sexuality, violent content and language. Running time: 123 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

Cowboys for Trump cofounder appeals ban from public office

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — A New Mexico politician and Trump supporter who was removed and barred from elected office for his role in the U.S. Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021, is attempting to appeal that decision to the state Supreme Court.

Cowboys for Trump cofounder and former county commissioner Couy Griffin on Tuesday notified the high court of his intent to appeal.

The ruling against Griffin this month from a Santa Fe-based District Court was the first to remove or bar an elected official from office in connection with the attack on the U.S. Capitol building that disrupted Congress as it was trying to certify President Joe Biden's 2020 electoral victory.

Griffin was previously convicted in federal court of a misdemeanor for entering the Capitol grounds on Jan. 6, without going inside the building. He was sentenced to 14 days and given credit for time served.

Griffin has invoked free speech guarantees in his defense and says his banishment from public office disenfranchises his political constituents in Otero County.

He was barred from office under provisions of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which holds that anyone who has taken an oath to uphold the Constitution can be barred from office for engaging in insurrection or rebellion. The provisions were put in place shortly after the Civil War.

A flurry of similar lawsuits around the country are seeking to use the provision to punish politicians who took part in Jan. 6.

Griffin says he continues to act as his own legal counsel in the case.

"Honestly I have felt very abandoned by many," Griffin said.

Conservative activists aligned with Griffin have urged supporters to file disciplinary complaints against the judge who barred Griffin from office.

Griffin, a 48-year-old former rodeo rider and former pastor, helped found Cowboys for Trump in 2019. The promotional group staged horseback parades to spread President Donald Trump's conservative message about gun rights, immigration controls and abortion restrictions.

This year, Griffin voted twice as a county commissioner against certifying New Mexico's June 7 primary election, in a standoff over election integrity fueled by conspiracy theories about the security of voting equipment in the Republican-dominated county.

'Our world is in peril': At UN, leaders push for solutions

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The world's problems seized the spotlight Tuesday as the U.N. General Assembly's yearly meeting of world leaders opened with dire assessments of a planet beset by escalating crises and conflicts that an aging international order seems increasingly ill-equipped to tackle.

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After two years when many leaders weighed in by video because of the coronavirus pandemic, now presidents, premiers, monarchs and foreign ministers have gathered almost entirely in person for diplomacy's premier global event.

But the tone is far from celebratory. Instead, it's the blare of a tense and worried world.

"We are gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, adding that "our world is in peril — and paralyzed."

He and others pointed to conflicts ranging from Russia's six-month-old war in Ukraine to the decades-long dispute between Israel and the Palestinians. Speakers worried about a changing climate, spiking fuel prices, food shortages, economic inequality, migration, disinformation, discrimination, hate speech, public health and more.

Priorities varied, as did prescriptions for curing the humanity's ills. But in a forum dedicated to the idea of bringing the world together, many leaders sounded a common theme: The globe needs cooperation, dialogue and trust, now more than ever.

"We live in an era of uncertainty and shocks," Chilean President Gabriel Boric said. "It is clear nowadays that no country, large or small, humble or powerful, can save itself on its own."

Or, as Guterres put it, "Let's work as one, as a coalition of the world, as united nations."

It's rarely that easy. As Guterres himself noted, geopolitical divisions are undermining the work of the U.N. Security Council, international law, people's trust in democratic institutions, and most forms of international cooperation.

"The divergence between developed and developing countries, between North and South, between the privileged and the rest, is becoming more dangerous by the day," the secretary-general said. "It is at the root of the geopolitical tensions and lack of trust that poison every area of global cooperation, from vaccines to sanctions to trade."

While appeals to preserve large-scale international cooperation — or multilateralism, in diplomatic parlance — abound, so do different ideas about the balance between working together and standing up for oneself, and about whether an "international order" set up after World War II needs reordering.

"We want a multilateralism that is open and respectful of our differences," Senegalese President Macky Sall said. He added that the U.N. can win all countries' support only "on the basis of shared ideals, and not local values erected as universal norms."

After the pandemic forced an entirely virtual meeting in 2020 and a hybrid one last year, delegates reflecting the world's countries and cultures are once again filling the halls of the United Nations headquarters this week. Before the meeting began, leaders and ministers wearing masks wandered the assembly hall, chatting individually and in groups.

It was a sign that that despite the fragmented state of the international community, the United Nations remains the key gathering place for global leaders. Nearly 150 heads of state and government have signed on to speak during the nearly weeklong "General Debate," a high number that illustrates the gathering's distinction as a place to deliver their views and meet privately to discuss various challenges -- and, they hope, make some progress.

Guterres made sure to start out by sounding a note of hope. He showed a photo of the first U.N.-chartered ship carrying grain from Ukraine — part of a deal between Ukraine and Russia that the U.N. and Turkey helped broker — to the Horn of Africa, where millions of people are on the edge of famine. It is, he said, an example of promise "in a world teeming with turmoil."

Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine topped the agenda for many speakers.

The conflict has become the largest war in Europe since World War II and has opened fissures among major powers in a way not seen since the Cold War. It also has raised fears of a nuclear catastrophe at a large power plant in Ukraine's now Russia-occupied southeast.

Meanwhile, 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 nations.

As Jordan's King Abdullah II noted, well-off countries that are having unfamiliar experiences of scarcity

"are discovering a truth that people in developing countries have known for a long time: For countries to thrive, affordable food must get to every family's table."

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.

In an impassioned speech to the assembly, French President Emmanuel Macron said no country can stand on the sidelines in the face of Russia's aggression. He accused those who remain silent of being "in a way complicit with a new cause of imperialism" that is trampling on the current world order and is making peace impossible.

Slovakian President Zuzana Caputova's country has long depended on Russia for oil and gas. But Slovakia has provided military aid to neighbor Ukraine, she noted.

"We, the members of the U.N., need to clearly side with victim over aggressor," she said.

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro called for an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine, protection of civilians and "the maintenance of all channels of dialogue between the parties." But he opposed what he called "one-sided or unilateral" Western sanctions, saying they have harmed economic recovery and have threatened human rights of vulnerable populations.

Neither Ukraine nor Russia has yet had its turn to speak. The assembly has agreed to allow Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to speak by video, over objections from Russia and a few of its allies.

Zelenskyy's speech is expected Wednesday, as is an in-person address from U.S. President Joe Biden. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is due to take the rostrum Saturday.

4 Ukrainian regions schedule votes this week to join Russia

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian-controlled regions of eastern and southern Ukraine announced plans Tuesday to start voting this week to become integral parts of Russia. The Kremlin-backed efforts to swallow up four regions could set the stage for Moscow to escalate the war following Ukrainian successes on the battlefield.

The scheduling of referendums starting Friday in the Luhansk, Kherson and partly Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions came after a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin said the votes are needed and as Moscow is losing ground in the invasion it began nearly seven months ago.

Former President Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by Putin, said referendums that fold regions into Russia itself would make redrawn frontiers "irreversible" and enable Moscow to use "any means" to defend them.

In 2014, Russia sent troops into Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and then held a referendum there that paved the way for its annexation by Moscow.

The upcoming votes, in territory Russia already controls, are all but certain to go Moscow's way. But they were quickly dismissed as illegitimate by Western leaders who are backing Kyiv with military and other support that has helped its forces seize momentum on battlefields in the east and south.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba denounced the planned votes as a sham.

"The referendums will change nothing," he told reporters at U.N. headquarters where he is attending the General Assembly's annual gathering of world leaders. "It's an act of desperation for Russia, but it is not going to help them."

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said the United States would "never recognize this territory as anything other than part of Ukraine," he said, adding that the Kremlin effort reflects Russia's setbacks on the battlefield.

"These are not the actions of a confident country. These are not acts of strength," he said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who is also attending the U.N. General Assembly in New York, said: "It is very, very clear that these sham referendums cannot be accepted."

French President Emmanuel Macron said referendum plans amounted to "cynicism."

"Russia declared war ... and now it explains that in this same region it is going to organize a referendum. If

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this were not tragic, it might be funny," he said, adding that the votes would have "no legal consequences."

Authorities installed by Russia in occupied areas of four Ukrainian regions had outlined plans to hold referendums on membership to the Russian Federation later this month. They have been condemned by Ukraine.

Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics called for more sanctions against Russia and more weapons for Ukraine, tweeting: "We must say no to Russian blackmail."

In Donetsk, part of Ukraine's wider Donbas region that Putin has set as a primary objective of the invasion, separatist leader Denis Pushilin said the vote will "restore historic justice" to the territory's "long-suffering people."

They "have earned the right to be part of the great country that they always considered their motherland," he said.

In partly Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia, pro-Russia activist Vladimir Rogov said: "The faster we become part of Russia, the sooner peace will come."

Pressure inside Russia for votes and from Moscow-backed leaders in Ukrainian regions that Moscow controls increased after a Ukrainian counteroffensive that has recaptured large areas.

Former Kremlin speechwriter and Russian political analyst Abbas Gallyamov said on Facebook that Moscow-backed separatists appeared "scared that the Russians will abandon them" amid the Ukrainian offensive and forged ahead with referendum plans to force the Kremlin's hand.

In another signal that Russia is digging in for a protracted and possibly ramped-up conflict, the Kremlin-controlled lower house of parliament voted Tuesday to toughen laws against desertion, surrender and looting by Russian troops. Lawmakers also voted to introduce possible 10-year prison terms for soldiers refusing to fight.

If approved, as expected, by the upper house and then signed by Putin, the legislation would strengthen commanders' hands against failing morale reported among soldiers.

In an interview in New York with the "PBS News Hour," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that if peace is to prevail in Ukraine, "the returning of the land that was invaded will become really important."

He also repeated his long-held position that the Crimean Peninsula should be returned to Ukraine. Turkey has strong ethnic ties to Crimean Tatars. "Since 2014, we have been talking to my dear friend Putin about this, and this is what we have requested from him," he said.

In the Russian-occupied city of Enerhodar, shelling Tuesday around Europe's largest nuclear power plant damaged a cooling system, a dining hall for staff and an unspecified "special building," the city administration said in a statement. There were no further details about the damage.

The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant has been a focus for concern for months because of fears that shelling could lead to a radiation leak. Russia and Ukraine blame each other for the shelling.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said there are no prospects for a diplomatic settlement of the conflict. Medvedev, who served as Russia's president from 2008 to 2012, said on his messaging app channel that the referendums are important to protect their residents 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," Medvedev said.

"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 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."

Ukrainian analyst Volodymyr Fesenko, head of the independent Penta Center think tank in Kyiv, said the Kremlin hopes the votes and the possibility of military escalation will raise the pressure from Western governments for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to start talks with Moscow.

The move "reflects the weakness, not the strength of the Kremlin, which is struggling to find levers to

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influence the situation that has increasingly spun out of its control," he said.

The recapturing of 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 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 U.S. 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 the captured weaponry back into battle. A Washington-based think tank, The Institute for the Study of War, said abandoned Russian T-72 tanks are being used by Ukrainian forces seeking to push into Russian-occupied Luhansk.

In the counteroffensive's wake, Ukrainian officials found hundreds of graves near the once-occupied city of Iuzium. 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.

Prosecutor-General Andriy Kostin, during a trip to Washington, said Tuesday that another mass grave with possibly 100 bodies was discovered in another village in the counteroffensive area.

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

NTSB wants all new vehicles to check drivers for alcohol use

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — The National Transportation Safety Board is recommending that all new vehicles in the U.S. be equipped with blood alcohol monitoring systems that can stop an intoxicated person from driving.

The recommendation, if enacted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, could reduce the number of alcohol-related crashes, one of the biggest causes of highway deaths in the U.S.

The new push to make roads safer was included in a report released Tuesday about a horrific crash last year in which a drunk driver collided head-on with another vehicle near Fresno, California, killing both adult drivers and seven children.

NHTSA said this week that roadway deaths in the U.S. are at crisis levels. Nearly 43,000 people were killed last year, the greatest number in 16 years, as Americans returned to roads after pandemic stay-at-home orders.

Early estimates show fatalities rising again through the first half of this year, but they declined from April through June, which authorities are hoping is a trend.

The NTSB, which has no regulatory authority and can only ask other agencies to act, said the recommendation is designed to put pressure on NHTSA to move. It could be effective as early as three years from now.

"We need NHTSA to act. We see the numbers," NTSB Chairman Jennifer Homendy said. "We need to make sure that we're doing all we can to save lives."

The NTSB, she said, has been pushing NHTSA to explore alcohol monitoring technology since 2012. "The faster the technology is implemented the more lives that will be saved," she said.

The recommendation also calls for systems to monitor a driver's behavior, making sure they're alert. She said many cars now have cameras pointed at the driver, which have the potential to limit impaired driving.

But Homendy says she also understands that perfecting the alcohol tests will take time. "We also know that it's going to take time for NHTSA to evaluate what technologies are available and how to develop a standard."

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A message was left Tuesday seeking comment from NHTSA.

The agency and a group of 16 automakers have been jointly funding research on alcohol monitoring since 2008, forming a group called Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety.

The group has hired a Swedish company to research technology that would automatically test a driver's breath for alcohol and stop a vehicle from moving if the driver is impaired, said Jake McCook, spokesman for the group. The driver wouldn't have to blow into a tube, and a sensor would check the driver's breath, McCook said.

Another company is working on light technology that could test for blood alcohol in a person's finger, he said. Breath technology could be ready by the end of 2024, while the touch technology would come about a year later.

It could take one or two more model years after automakers get the technology for it to be in new vehicles, McCook said.

Once the technology is ready, it will take years for it to be in most of the roughly 280 million vehicles on U.S. roads.

Under last year's bipartisan infrastructure law, Congress required NHTSA to make automakers install alcohol monitoring systems within three years. The agency can seek an extension. In the past it has been slow to enact such requirements.

The legislation doesn't specify the technology, only that it must "passively monitor" a driver to determine if they are impaired.

In 2020, the most recent figures available, 11,654 people died in alcohol-related crashes, according to NHTSA data. That's about 30% of all U.S. traffic deaths, and a 14% increase over 2019 figures, the last full year before the coronavirus pandemic, the NTSB said.

In the fatal crash included in the report, a 28-year-old driver of an SUV was headed home from a 2021 New Year's Day party where he had been drinking. The SUV went off the right side of State Route 33, crossed the center line and hit a Ford F-150 pickup truck head-on near Avenal, California.

The pickup was carrying 34-year-old Gabriela Pulido and seven children ages 6 to 15 home after a trip to Pismo Beach. The truck quickly caught fire and bystanders couldn't save the passengers, the NTSB said.

The SUV driver's blood alcohol level was 0.21%, nearly three times California's legal limit. He also had marijuana in his system, but the agency said the alcohol was more than enough to severely impair his driving. The SUV was traveling 88-to-98 miles per hour (142 to 158 kilometers per hour), the report said.

The crash happened less than a second from when the Journey re-entered the road, giving Pulido no time to avoid the collision, the NTSB said.

Juan Pulido, 37, whose wife and four children were killed in the crash, said he's happy the NTSB is pushing for alcohol monitoring because it could stop another person from losing loved ones. "It's something that their families have to live with," he said. "It doesn't go away tomorrow."

Pulido's lawyer, Paul Kiesel, says driver monitoring systems also could stop crashes caused by medical problems or drowsiness, saving anguish and billions in hospital treatment costs.

FDA concedes delays in response to baby formula shortage

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration acknowledged Tuesday that its response to the U.S. infant formula shortage was slowed by delays in processing a whistleblower complaint and test samples from the nation's largest formula factory.

A 10-page report from the agency offers its first formal account of the factors that led to the ongoing shortage, which has forced the U.S. to airlift millions of pounds of powdered formula from overseas.

The review zeroed in on several key problems at the agency, including outdated data-sharing systems, inadequate staffing and training among its food inspectors, and poor visibility into formula supply chains and manufacturing procedures.

"For things that are critical to the public health, if you don't have some understanding of how all the pieces fit together, then when you get into a crisis or a shortage you have a real problem," FDA Commissioner

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Robert Califf told The Associated Press in an interview. "To a large extent that's what happened here."

Califf said the FDA will seek new authority to compel companies to turn over key information.

One consumer advocate said the evaluation doesn't go far enough to fix the problems.

"This internal evaluation treats the symptoms of the disease rather than offering a cure," Scott Faber of the Environmental Working Group said in a statement. "Nothing in this evaluation addresses the fragmented leadership structure that led to critical communication failures."

The FDA report was overseen by a senior official who interviewed dozens of agency staffers. It comes nearly eight months after the FDA shuttered Abbott's Michigan plant due to safety concerns, quickly slashing domestic production within the highly concentrated formula industry.

A company whistleblower had tried to warn the FDA of problems at the plant in September 2021, but government inspectors didn't investigate the complaints until February after four infants became sick, resulting in two deaths. The FDA is still investigating links between those illnesses and the formula.

The FDA previously told Congress that top agency officials didn't learn about the complaint until February because of mail delays and a failure to escalate the Abbott employee's allegations. The new report stated that FDA's "inadequate processes and lack of clarity related to whistleblower complaints," may have delayed getting inspectors to the plant.

"Whistleblower complaints come into the agency in many different ways, from many different sources," said Dr. Steven Solomon, an FDA veterinary medicine official who oversaw the review. "One of the actions we've already taken is to make sure that however they come into the agency, they get triaged and escalated to the right leadership levels."

FDA inspectors collected bacterial samples from the plant for testing, but shipping issues by "third party delivery companies" delayed the results, according to the report. The FDA also faced challenges ramping up its testing capacity for *Cronobacter*, a rare but potentially deadly bacteria repeatedly linked to outbreaks in baby formula.

The FDA also noted that it had to reschedule its initial inspection of the Abbott plant due to cases of COVID-19 among company staff. That delay came on top of earlier missed inspections because the agency pulled its inspectors from the field during the pandemic.

The report concluded by listing new resources that Congress would need to authorize to improve infant formula inspections and standards, including:

- Increased funding and hiring authority to recruit experts to FDA's food division;
- Improved information technology to share data on FDA inspections, consumer complaints and testing results;
- New authority to compel manufacturers to turn over samples and records on manufacturing supply chains, manufacturing quality and safety.

U.S. inventories of baby formula have been improving, hitting in-stock rates above 80% last week, according to IRI, a market research firm. That's up from a low of 69% in mid-July. The U.S. has imported the equivalent of more than 80 million bottles of formula since May, according to White House figures, and the Biden administration is working to help foreign manufacturers stay on the market long term to diversify supply.

Califf has commissioned a separate external review of FDA's food division citing "fundamental questions about the structure, function, funding and leadership" of the program. That review is being led by former FDA commissioner Dr. Jane Henney, who led the agency during the final years of the Clinton administration.

Celebrities coming back to White House after Trump drought

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Celebrities are back at the White House following a pop-culture backlash during the Trump years, when just about anyone considered high-wattage refused to show up.

Rocker Elton John is bringing his farewell tour to the South Lawn on Friday, the White House announced Tuesday, one week after singer James Taylor and hosts Jonathan and Drew Scott, of HGTV's "Property

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Brothers," helped celebrate a new health care and climate change law.

John is among a slew of entertainers who refused to perform for then-President Donald Trump.

Taylor sang and strummed his guitar to open last week's event while the Scotts were among hundreds of people in the audience. They also joined second gentleman Doug Emhoff, Vice President Kamala Harris' husband, to film a snazzy video promoting the law's climate change provisions.

Since taking office during a pandemic, which put a pause on too much togetherness, the 79-year-old Biden has also opened the White House to teen singer Olivia Rodrigo, to talk about young people and COVID-19 vaccinations, and the South Korean boy band BTS, to discuss Asian inclusion and representation.

Last year, the Democratic president resumed the tradition of hosting an in-person White House reception for the artists receiving honors from the Kennedy Center.

Actor Jennifer Garner accompanied first lady Jill Biden to West Virginia last year to visit a school-based COVID-19 vaccination site in Charleston. Garner also hosted a PBS "In Performance" special celebrating the holidays at the White House.

John's concert is called "A Night When Hope and History Rhyme," a reference to a poem by Irishman Seamus Heaney that Biden often quotes. The performance is part of a collaboration with A+E Networks and the History Channel that "will celebrate the unifying and healing power of music, commend the life and work of Sir Elton John and honor the everyday history-makers in the audience," the White House said. Guests will include teachers, medical professionals, students, LGBTQ+ advocates and others.

John also has a gig scheduled for Saturday night at Nationals Park in Washington as part of a tour wrapping up his 50-plus-year career. He opened the final leg of his North American farewell series in Philadelphia in July.

The 75-year-old British singer is among celebrities who avoided the Trump White House, starting with the Republican's 2017 inauguration. John had declined an invitation to play at Trump's inaugural festivities, saying he didn't think it was appropriate for someone with British heritage to play at the swearing-in of an American president.

Trump had included high praise for John in a few of his books and played John's songs at his presidential campaign rallies, including "Rocket Man" and "Tiny Dancer." Trump had also nicknamed North Korean leader Kim Jong Un "rocket man" because of Kim's habit of test-firing missiles.

Country music singers Toby Keith and Lee Greenwood were among the more notable entertainers who performed to help usher Trump into office. Bigger names from other genres refused or weren't considered.

Hollywood has always leaned heavily Democratic.

For the inauguration of Democrat Biden, singers Lady Gaga, Jennifer Lopez and Garth Brooks were among those who performed.

Aretha Franklin and Beyonce were among celebrities who turned out in a huge show of force for Democrat Barack Obama, from fundraising to his two inaugurations to performances inside the White House or on the grounds.

They disappeared under Trump, but are returning for Biden.

Biden relied on celebrities during his 2020 presidential campaign, when in-person schmoozing was largely suspended because of the coronavirus. A parade of movie and TV stars, pop icons and sports standouts stepped up to help Biden raise money and energize supporters.

Sir Elton — he was knighted in 1998 by Queen Elizabeth II — has sold over 300 million records worldwide, played over 4,000 shows in 80 countries and recorded one of the best-selling singles of all-time, his 1997 reworking of "Candle In The Wind" to eulogize Princess Diana, which sold 33 million copies.

He has scored over 70 top 40 hits, including nine No. 1s, and released seven No. 1 albums in the 3 1/2-year period from 1972 to 1975, a pace second only to that of the Beatles. John has five Grammy awards, a Tony award for "Aida," and Academy Awards for songs from "The Lion King" and "Rocketman."

He has played at the White House in the past.

John and Stevie Wonder performed together at a 1998 state dinner hosted by Democratic President Bill Clinton honoring British Prime Minister Tony Blair. They performed under a tent on the West Colonnade roof.

John was critical of Republican President George W. Bush, telling a British magazine in November 2004 that Bush and his administration "are the worst thing that has ever happened to America."

But he was more diplomatic at a reception at the White House in December 2004 for a group of Kennedy Center honorees that included himself.

The rock legend said receiving the honor "is about the icing on the cake. ... It's incredible for someone who's British to be given such an accolade from America, which has given me so much already in my career."

Beyond Meat executive charged with biting man in fight

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

A top executive at plant-based food company Beyond Meat has been charged with felony battery after a fight outside a college football game in which he was accused of biting a man's nose.

Doug Ramsey was also charged with making a terroristic threat after the attack Saturday in a parking garage outside a University of Arkansas football game in Fayetteville.

Beyond Meat said Tuesday it has suspended Ramsey indefinitely.

According to a police report, Ramsey was angered when another driver inched in front of him in a traffic lane and made contact with the front passenger wheel on Ramsey's Ford Bronco SUV.

The police report alleges that Ramsey got out of his vehicle and punched through the back windshield of the other driver's car. The driver told police he got out of his car and Ramsey pulled him close and began punching him. Ramsey also bit the tip of the other driver's nose, ripping the flesh, according to the police report.

The driver and witnesses told police that Ramsey threatened to kill the other man. Occupants of both vehicles got out and separated the two men.

Washington County court records show Ramsey was released Sunday on a \$11,085 bond. A court appearance is scheduled for Oct. 19. Court officials were unable to provide the name of an attorney for Ramsey on Tuesday.

Ramsey, 53, spent more than 30 years at Springdale, Arkansas-based Tyson Foods before joining Beyond Meat as chief operating officer late last year. He held top leadership positions at Tyson, including president of its poultry division and president of its global McDonald's business.

At Beyond Meat, he has guided partnerships with fast food companies including McDonald's, Panda Express and KFC.

Beyond Meat said Jonathan Nelson, its senior vice president for manufacturing operations, will oversee the company's operations on an interim basis.

Beyond Meat shares hit a 52-week low of \$15.97 Tuesday before closing at \$16.03. The company's shares have tumbled more than 75% since the start of this year.

The El Segundo, California-based company has struggled as customers dealing with soaring grocery bills have bypassed its higher-priced products. McDonald's also recently ended a U.S. trial of its McPlant meatless burger — developed with Beyond Meat — without confirming future plans for the product.

Beyond Meat laid off 4% of its workforce in August.

DIARY: Queen's death reveals fragmented views about monarchy

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

WINDSOR, England (AP) — The silence was palpable when the imperial state crown was removed from the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II and placed on the altar of St. George's Chapel — the first time in 70 years the dazzling symbol of Britain's monarchy was separated from the sovereign.

My assignment covering a nation in mourning came down to parsing what those fleeting seconds has meant to this society, from the upper echelons of British nobility down to newly arrived migrants hoping to carve out a better life in a new country.

The 10 days I have spent here since Elizabeth's death has taken me from Windsor Castle's sumptuous interiors — the official residence of the royal family — to forgotten districts beyond the bustle of London,

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the glamorous British capital.

I've stood in line for hours with strangers devoted to the queen and desperate to say a final goodbye. Stood in the rain with thousands hoping to catch a glimpse of the hearse whizzing toward Buckingham Palace's imposing gates. I've witnessed countless tears shed by young and old, from people as far away as South Africa to as nearby as the English city of Reading.

In the spaces between the devoted and the apathetic, I have encountered Britons who are ambivalent or undecided about the significance of the monarchy in their lives — or completely indifferent.

Diaspora communities, whose forefathers suffered under the brutalities of British colonialism, are still struggling to come to terms with that legacy. A younger generation of immigrants have not yet reconciled that violent history with their own identity as Brits. Some told me they see themselves as "Londoners" — identifying with the hip, cosmopolitan capital — but not "British," part of the United Kingdom of which the monarch is the head of state.

I've also met people who downright don't care.

Some planned weekend getaways to avoid the crowds swooning over the late monarch. A relentless barrage of Twitter memes have been poking fun at the queen's demise.

Still, history weighed heavily inside St. George's Chapel in Windsor on Monday, the day of Elizabeth's funeral.

Founded in the 14th century by King Edward III, the ornate chapel has belonged to the monarchy for 1,000 years. It has been the scene of many royal events, from funerals to baptisms to royal weddings like that of Prince Harry and Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex.

Ornate stone craftsmanship draws the eye up to the ellipse-shaped roof, irreplaceable and meticulous woodwork lines the path toward the catafalque. Here, the chapter clerk of the chapel told a group of reporters how every step in the committal service, a more intimate gathering compared to the state funeral in Westminster Abbey, was plotted carefully by the queen.

Every hymn was her choice, except for the very last.

The removal of the crown was an extraordinary moment, the clerk explained. Though steeped in the spectacle of royal grandeur, it embodies a powerful moment of change: moving from head of sovereign's coffin to the altar, only to return to the head of a new sovereign — King Charles III — when he is crowned.

Yet the vast majority of the country is not privy to the intimate details of the life of the late monarch they loved — they have spent their entire lives watching from afar.

"We couldn't get as close as we wanted to see it properly," said Rachel Mfundiri, who was still standing outside the castle's imposing gates after Elizabeth was interred. She had come to witness history but now that it was over, she didn't quite know quite where to go.

"It's kind of unknown what happens next, to see how the monarchy changes," she said, as the first raindrops of the day began to fall. "It's sad, very sad."

In London, it was business as usual.

Restaurants and bars were buzzing with tourists until the late hours. In one bar, a singer dressed in 1930s garb raised a glass — "to our lovely queen" she said, followed by, "but I can't dedicate this next song to her." She proceeded to belt out a George Michael tune as the audience cheered.

I found support for the late queen in unexpected places.

Inside London Central Mosque, an old photo of Elizabeth's father, King George VI is plastered alongside bulletins announcing recent events.

The late king had opened the Islamic Cultural Center, now part of the grand mosque complex, in 1944, in recognition of Muslim efforts in fighting alongside the British Empire during World War II.

"We have always had strong links with the monarchy," said Ayaz Zuberi, a spokesman for the mosque.

Even among Elizabeth's ardent supporters, it was not possible to generalize their individual reasons for wanting to pay their respects to her years of service. For many it was personal: A family member had recently passed away, a deep sense of respect lingered.

Or, in Mili Patel's case, wanting to show her young daughter the importance of the past.

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Patel had folded up her lawn chair and was heading away from the lawns of the Long Walk, the processional route leading to Windsor Castle. She had come with her daughter Sybill, arriving at 5 a.m. and staying for 12 hours to see the queen — or at least her coffin — for the last time.

"It will be the last queen in (my daughter's) generation," she said. "I wanted her to see it."

'Serial' host: Evidence that freed Syed was long available

By BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

The creator of a true-crime podcast that helped free a Maryland man imprisoned for two decades said Tuesday that she feels a mix of emotions over how long it took authorities to act on evidence that's long been available.

The judge's order to release Adnan Syed and vacate his murder conviction Monday came after the local prosecutor started a unit to review sentencing and a new Maryland law relating to juvenile sentencing provided a mechanism for reexamining the case, all after the "Serial" podcast in 2014 turned the details of the case into an obsession for countless amateur sleuths.

Baltimore State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby immediately applauded the judge's decision as a victory for justice, but Syed's win came as a bittersweet reminder to those who had been aware of the gaps in the case for years. In a new episode of "Serial" released Tuesday, host Sarah Koenig noted that most or all of the evidence cited in prosecutors' motion to overturn the conviction was available since 1999.

"Yesterday, there was a lot of talk about fairness, but most of what the state put in that motion to vacate, all the actual evidence, was either known or knowable to cops and prosecutors back in 1999," Koenig said. "So even on a day when the government publicly recognizes its own mistakes, it's hard to feel cheered about a triumph of fairness. Because we've built a system that takes more than 20 years to self-correct. And that's just this one case."

Koenig argued that the case against Syed involved "just about every chronic problem" in the system, including unreliable witness testimony and evidence that was never shared with Syed's defense team.

On Monday, Circuit Court Judge Melissa Phinn in Baltimore ordered Syed's release after overturning his conviction for the 1999 murder of high school student Hae Min Lee, Syed's ex-girlfriend. Syed, 41, has always maintained his innocence but in 2019 the state's highest court had rejected his appeal for a new trial.

At the behest of prosecutors who said they had recently uncovered new evidence, Phinn ruled that the state violated its legal obligation to share evidence that could have bolstered Syed's defense. The judge said the state must decide whether to seek a new trial date or dismiss the case within 30 days.

Mosby, who entered office in 2015, filed a motion last week to vacate Syed's conviction, a filing that Koenig described as a "firework" coming from the same office that asked a jury to convict Syed years ago.

In the "Serial" episode posted Tuesday, Koenig broke down prosecutors' motion and described how some evidence they cited was featured in the podcast, while other evidence — including the evidence of other possible suspects — became public more recently.

Key to Monday's outcome was evidence uncovered by a unit that Mosby's office launched to reexamine cases in which juvenile defendants were given life sentences. That worked in tandem with a 2021 Maryland law that enables someone convicted as a juvenile to seek a reduced sentence after serving at least 20 years. Syed was 17 when Lee was killed.

Prosecutor Becky Feldman led the unit and found notes written by one of her predecessors describing two phone calls in which people gave them information before Syed's trial about someone with a motive to harm Lee. That information wasn't given to the defense at the time, according prosecutors, an omission that Phinn said violated Syed's rights.

Koenig noted that she knew who these two new potential suspects were — and so did detectives who investigated Syed two decades ago — but declined to name them because they haven't been charged.

"One of (the suspects) was investigated at the time, submitted to a couple of polygraphs. The other was investigated also, but not with much vigor, as far as I can tell," she said.

Other supporting evidence on the unreliability of a key witness and questions about cellphone data was

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previously featured on "Serial," Koenig said.

"If you've listened to our show you probably remember all of this," Koenig said.

Koenig said the show delved into questions about cellphone data that prosecutors used to bolster the witness's testimony. But she acknowledged that expert analysis used by prosecutors to arrive at their current motion wasn't fully explored on the show.

"We didn't get to the bottom of this incoming call problem back when we were reporting this story," she said.

In the years since "Serial" chronicled Syed's case and transformed the true-crime genre, a number of breakthroughs have come in other cases examined by like-minded podcasters.

In Sydney, Australia, last month, a 74-year-old man was convicted of killing his wife in 1982, charges brought after police launched a renewed investigation based on a circumstantial case made against him in the popular podcast "The Teacher's Pet."

A lengthy murder trial is also underway in Salinas, California, against a man for the death of Kirstin Smart, a freshman who vanished from California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo in 1996. The sheriff has said the "Your Own Backyard" podcast helped produce new information and prompted witnesses to speak with detectives.

And the podcast "In the Dark" obtained a recorded recantation from a jailhouse informant that, together with an analysis of racial bias by a Mississippi prosecutor in jury selection, preceded the U.S. Supreme Court's 2019 decision to overturn the murder conviction and death sentence of Curtis Flowers. Flowers, a Black man, had been convicted in the shooting death of four people in a furniture store in 1996. Mississippi prosecutors later dropped charges against him.

Jimmy Kimmel signs 3-year extension for ABC late-night show

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Jimmy Kimmel celebrated his 20th anniversary as ABC's late-night host early, signing a three-year contract extension for "Jimmy Kimmel Live!"

"After two decades at ABC, I am now looking forward to three years of what they call 'quiet quitting,'" Kimmel quipped in a statement Tuesday.

His show debuted in January 2003, and the new deal means he will remain with it into the 2025-26 season — giving him a generous window to make comedic hay out of politicians, who are favorite monologue targets, and the 2024 presidential election.

Among network late-night hosts, Kimmel, CBS' Stephen Colbert and James Corden and NBC's Seth Meyers wade regularly into political humor, with Kimmel amping up the focus during the Donald Trump years inside and outside of the White House.

Kimmel's decision contrasts with changes in late-night programming. Conan O'Brien wrapped his show in 2021, Corden announced that he's leaving "The Late Late Show" next year for other opportunities, and TBS said that "Full Frontal with Samantha Bee" was ending after seven seasons.

Besides his late-night job, Kimmel has become a mainstay as an awards host — including for 2017 Oscars when he tried to smooth over the best picture envelope mix-up that led presenters Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway to wrongly announce "La La Land" as the winner over "Moonlight."

The three-time Emmys host had a misstep of his own at the Sept. 12 TV awards ceremony, during the presentation of the comedy series writing trophy to Quinta Brunson, creator-star of ABC's comedy "Abbott Elementary."

A pretend-drunk Kimmel had been dragged on stage by co-presenter Will Arnett, who announced Brunson's award, and Kimmel remained flat on his back during her acceptance speech. He was roasted online as thoughtless by some and cited as an example of white-male arrogance by others, and offered an on-air apology to Brunson two days later on his show.

"The last thing I would ever want to do is upset you, because I think so much of you. I think you know that. I hope you know that," he told her, with Brunson replying, "It's very kind of you to say that."

Kimmel also hosts and, with Norman Lear, is executive producer of ABC's specials "Live in Front of a Studio Audience," which revisit episodes of classic Lear sitcoms including "All in the Family." Kimmel also is the creator of the game show, "Generation Gap," hosted by Kelly Ripa.

He'll be taking his late-night show, nominated 12 consecutive times for best variety-talk series, to Brooklyn for a week this month. Kimmel, whose long-time sidekick is Guillermo Rodriguez, is known for comedy bits including "I Told My Kids I Ate All Their Halloween Candy," which are seen on the show and on the YouTube channel that has extended his audience.

Craig Erwich, president of ABC Entertainment, said in a statement that Kimmel has not only entertained viewers with his irreverent humor and interviews but also "gotten us through some of the most momentous events in our history with optimism and heart."

The host has shared moving details about his young son's medical issue and called for health care reforms.

Mexico's earthquake coincidence drives anxiety for many

By FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — As the parents of children killed when a school collapsed during Mexico's 2017 earthquake celebrated a Mass in their memory, the ground began to shake again.

"No, not again! My God, not again!" they shouted when a magnitude 7.6 earthquake rattled the capital Monday, killing two people in the Pacific coast state of Colima.

Three powerful earthquakes have struck Mexico on Sept. 19 — in 1985, 2017 and now 2022. The unlucky coincidence has driven anxiety high for many. The last two quakes also came very shortly after the annual earthquake drill conducted every Sept. 19 to commemorate the devastating 1985 temblor.

Mexico's national Civil Defense Coordinator Laura Velázquez said Tuesday that the two deaths in Colima were due to parts of buildings collapsing. Ten people were injured -- nine in Colima and one in neighboring Michoacan.

More than 200 buildings were damaged, including dozens of schools and health centers, she said. Most of the damage was in those Pacific states, close to the Michoacan epicenter. Some 20 Mexico City buildings were damaged, but it was minor, she said.

On the morning of Sept. 19, 1985, an 8.0 magnitude earthquake devastated the center, south and west of the country, leaving some 9,500 dead.

"It's really strange, but a lot of people already don't like that day," said Jorge Ornelas, a call center coordinator. He said a lot of his acquaintances begin to worry about an earthquake come September.

"If we keep thinking that every Sept. 19 it's going to shake, it's going to continue happening every year, because what you think is always what happens," the 35-year-old Ornelas said.

Xyoli Pérez-Campos, a researcher in the seismology department at the National Autonomous University of Mexico's Geophysical Institute, said there was no physical reason for the coincidence of major earthquakes on a single day. Monday's earthquake was the result of the "interaction of the Cocos plate with the North America plate," which also generated the 1985 earthquake.

Five plates -- the North America, the Pacific, the Rivera, the Caribbean and the Cocos -- all run under Mexican territory.

"The plates break when it's their time to break," Pérez-Campos said. "What are they going to know about the calendar?"

GOP AGs push Visa, Mastercard, AmEx not to track gun sales

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A group of Republican attorneys general are pushing the major payment networks — Visa, Mastercard and American Express — to drop their plans to start tracking sales at gun stores, arguing the plans could infringe on consumer privacy and push legal gun sales out of the mainstream financial network.

The letter comes more than a week after the payment networks said they would adopt the International

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Organization for Standardization's new merchant code for sales at gun stores. The merchant code would categorize sales at gun stores not unlike how payment networks categorize sales at airlines, restaurants, and department stores.

In their letter, the AGs threaten to use all legal tools at their disposal to stop the payment networks from tracking gun sales.

"Categorizing the constitutionally protected right to purchase firearms unfairly singles out law-abiding merchants and consumers alike," the letter said.

In recent weeks gun control advocates argued that separately categorizing gun store sales could potentially flag a surge of suspicious sales activity to public safety officials. They have used the example from the 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, where the shooter purchased \$26,000 worth of ammunition ahead of the massacre.

But the Second Amendment lobby and its advocates have argued that the merchant code would do a poor job of tracking potential red flags and could unfairly flag legal gun purchases. A sale of a gun safe worth thousands of dollars would be categorized as a gun store sale just as much as someone buying thousands of dollars worth of ammunition, for example.

The payment networks said when they adopted the policy that they are just following the guidance from ISO. It will be largely up to the banks who issue the credit and debit cards to decide whether they want to stop sales under certain merchant codes.

The CEOs of the major banks will appear in front of Congress on Wednesday and Thursday this week, and they are almost certainly to be asked questions on the gun store sales tracking controversy.

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.

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!, EMILY's List's independent expenditure program which 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."

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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 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.

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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."

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."

Minnesota Ojibwe harvest sacred, climate-imperiled wild rice

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

ON LEECH LAKE, Minnesota (AP) — Seated low in her canoe sliding through a rice bed on this vast lake, Kendra Haugen used one wooden stick to bend the stalks and another to knock the rice off, so gently the stalks sprung right back up.

On a mid-September morning, no breeze ruffled the eagle feather gifted by her grandmother that Haugen wore on a baseball cap as she tried her hand at wild rice harvesting — a sacred process for her Ojibwe people.

"A lot of reservations are struggling to keep rice beds, so it's really important to keep these as pristine as we can. ... It renews our rice beds for the future," the 23-year-old college student said.

Wild rice, or manoomin (good seed) in Ojibwe, is sacred to Indigenous peoples in the Great Lakes region, because it's part of their creation story — and because for centuries it staved off starvation during harsh winters.

"In our origin story, we were told to go where food grew on water," said Elaine Fleming, a Leech Lake

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Band of Ojibwe elder whose manoomin class at Leech Lake Tribal College went harvesting last week. "It's our sacred food."

But changing climate, invasive species and pollution are threatening the plant even as its cultivated sibling rises in popularity nationwide as an exceptionally nutritious food, though often priced out of reach of urban Indigenous communities.

Those threats make it crucial to teach young band members to harvest wild rice respecting both rituals and the environment. That will help wild rice remain available as an essential element for ceremonies, but also as a much-needed income generator for the Leech Lake reservation, where nearly 40% of Native residents live in poverty.

The basic instructions for newbies reflect that dual reality — respect the rice by not breaking the stems, and if you lose balance, jump out to avoid tipping the canoe with its precious cargo.

Fleming gave everyone tobacco from a zip-close bag. Before scattering it on the calm water and setting out, the youths gathered around another elder praying in Ojibwe — to introduce the group to the natural elements around them, explain why it needed their help, ask for safe passage on the water and give thanks.

"Any time you take something from the earth, you want to thank the earth for what she's given us," said Kelsey Burns, a student and first-time ricer.

That reciprocity between humans and nature is essential to Ojibwe spirituality. In their stories, the Creator, before bringing to the earth Anishinaabe, the first Indigenous person, gathered all animals to ask how they could help.

"Plants were listening and chimed in and said, 'We have gifts too, so Anishinaabe can have a good life,'" Fleming explained. "Rice said, 'We'll feed Anishinaabe.'"

In two hours on the water, the pairs of polers, who stood steering with 20-foot poles, and knockers, who rained rice into the canoe until it formed a thick, green-brown carpet, gathered about 35 pounds. Experienced ricers can harvest a quarter ton a day.

This year, they can get \$6 per pound of rice, a high price because the two-week harvest is particularly meager, said Ryan White. A 44-year-old single dad, he takes his two boys and a nephew ricing to help cover the bills and for the kids to buy video games.

"You learn the essence of hard work out here," he said while knocking rice on a recent afternoon, with duct tape over his trousers' hem and shoes so not a grain would be wasted.

"Cleaning the boat real good," White explained later as he swiped the rice into a sack. "Because of stories we heard of old times, when ... even a handful like this meant a meal or two for the kids, and at the end of winter it actually might save your family."

"That manoomin is our brother, that saved us as a people many different ways," said Dave Bismarck, who was loading about 200 pounds of just-harvested rice at a nearby landing. "Ricing to me is real spiritual. There's a lot who have gone home already, and when I'm ricing, the harder I work ... the closer I am to them."

But the beds are "continually shrinking," said White, who's been ricing for three decades. And that endangers wild rice's spiritual and economic gifts.

While some natural cycling is normal, bad years for wild rice are becoming more frequent, said Ann Geisen, a wildlife lake specialist with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

"It seems to be tied to climate change," she added. "Bigger storm events when it's uprooted and wiped out, we seem to have more of these. A big bounce (in water levels) in the spring can wipe out an entire lake."

A warming climate can also damage the plant, whose seeds need to be close to freezing on shallow lake bottoms for months to germinate well, and brings destructive invasive species and fungi to Minnesota, Wisconsin and parts of Canada, wild rice's only natural habitats.

"It's going to completely ravish natural stands," said Jenny Kimball, a professor of agronomy and plant genetics at the University of Minnesota. She works on both conservation and developing more resistant breeds for cultivated wild rice growers, an industry she estimates adds about \$58 million to the state economy and has far outpaced natural production for decades.

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Most Ojibwe bands want to save natural stands, however, and several recently filed lawsuits fighting water contamination — including one dismissed this year in White Earth tribal court that named manoomin as the lead plaintiff in a novel “rights of nature” approach.

The suit accused the state of failing to protect water where wild rice grows by allowing the pumping of billions of gallons of groundwater from an oil pipeline project.

In July, two other northern Minnesota tribes sued the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency over its approval of state changes to water quality standards that the tribes allege would increase pollution and damage wild rice.

Leech Lake students and faculty discussed industrial pollution and controversial pipelines as they gathered outside the college for a feast celebrating their first day harvesting.

Before cooking the rice, they had to parch it, stirring it in a giant iron kettle for more than an hour; jiggle the husks loose by dancing over it as it lay in a hide-covered hole in the ground; and finally winnow it in birchbark baskets.

“We understand our responsibility, as nation, to this land. We’re supposed to think seven generations to the future,” Fleming said.

Burns, the student, was thinking of her son, who’s 5.

“I like learning everything that I can about our culture,” she said. “I didn’t learn much when I was younger, so I felt a part of me was missing. I want to keep teaching everything I learn.”

Video shows ‘unauthorized access’ to Ga. election equipment

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A Republican Party official in Georgia told a computer forensics team to copy components of the voting system at a rural elections office two months after the 2020 election and spent nearly all day there, contradicting her sworn deposition testimony about her role in the alleged breach of the equipment, a new court filing says.

The filing late Monday is part of a broader lawsuit challenging the security of the state’s voting machines that has been drawn into a separate investigation of former President Donald Trump’s efforts to overturn his loss in Georgia. The apparent breach happened on Jan. 7, 2021, the day after a violent attack on the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters seeking to stop the certification of the election.

Interior security camera video from the Coffee County elections office shows Cathy Latham, the county Republican Party chair at the time, welcomed the computer forensics team when it arrived, introduced the team to local election officials and spent nearly all day there. She also instructed the team what to copy, which turned out to be “virtually every component of the voting system,” the filing says. The video directly refutes Latham’s 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, a fellow Republican, suggesting he could “find” just enough votes to make Trump the winner.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, a Democrat who’s leading that investigation, has notified

Latham and the other fake electors that they could face criminal charges.

The Georgia secretary of state's office has described the copying of data from Coffee County's election system as an "alleged unauthorized access" and last month asked the Georgia Bureau of Investigation to get involved. 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 — which 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., and 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 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.

US adults should get routine anxiety screening, panel says

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

U.S. doctors should regularly screen all adults under 65 for anxiety, an influential health guidelines group proposed Tuesday.

It's the first time the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force has recommended anxiety screening in primary care for adults without symptoms. The proposal is open for public comment until Oct. 17, but the group usually affirms its draft guidance.

The recommendations are based on a review that began before the COVID-19 pandemic, evaluating studies showing potential benefits and risks from screening. Given reports of a surge in mental health problems linked with pandemic isolation and stress, the guidance is "very timely," said Lori Pbert, a task force member and co-author. Pbert is a psychologist-researcher at the University of Massachusetts' Chan Medical School.

The task force said evidence for benefits, including effective treatments, outweighs any risks, which include inaccurate screening results that could lead to unnecessary follow-up care.

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health complaints, affecting about 40% of U.S. women at some point in their lives and more than 1 in 4 men, Pbert noted.

Black people, those living in poverty, people who have lost partners and those who have other mental health issues are among adults who face higher risks for developing anxiety, which can manifest as panic attacks, phobias or feeling always on edge. Also, about 1 in 10 pregnant and postpartum women experience anxiety.

Common screening tools include brief questionnaires about symptoms such as fears and worries that interfere with usual activities. These can easily be given in a primary care setting, the task force said, although it didn't specify how often patients should be screened.

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"The most important thing to recognize is that a screening test alone is not sufficient to diagnose anxiety," Pbert said. The next step is a more thorough evaluation by a mental health professional, though Pbert acknowledged that finding mental health care can be difficult given shortages of specialists.

Megan Whalen, a 31-year-old marketing specialist who was diagnosed with anxiety in 2013, says regular doctors should screen for mental health issues as commonly as they do for physical problems.

"Health is health, whether the problem is visible or not," said Whalen, of Hoboken, New Jersey.

She has gotten help from medicine and talk therapy, but her symptoms worsened during the pandemic and she temporarily moved back home.

"The pandemic made me afraid to leave home, my anxiety telling me anywhere outside of my childhood house was unsafe," Whelan said. "I absolutely still struggle with feelings of dread and fear sometimes. It's just a part of my life at this point, and I try to manage it as best as I can."

The task force said there isn't enough solid research in older adults to recommend for or against anxiety screening in those aged 65 and up.

The group continues to recommend depression screening for adults and children, but said there isn't enough evidence to evaluate potential benefits and harms of suicide screening in adults who show no worrisome symptoms.

In April, the group issued similar draft guidance for children and teens, recommending anxiety screening but stating that more research is needed on potential benefits and harms of suicide screening kids with no obvious signs.

Guidelines from the task force often determine insurance coverage, but anxiety is already on the radar of many primary care doctors. In 2020, a group affiliated with the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommended routine primary care anxiety screening for women and girls starting at age 13.

Melissa Lewis-Duarte, a wellness coach in Scottsdale, Arizona, says rhythmic breathing, meditation and making a daily list of three things for which she is grateful have all helped with her anxiety.

"Doctors say, 'Make sure you're sleeping, control your stress.' Yeah, I get that," but not everyone knows how, said the 42-year-old mother of three. "It's difficult to prioritize self-care, but that's what's necessary."

At summer's end, indoor plants need attention too

By JESSICA DAMIANO Associated Press

As summer winds down, we tend to focus on enjoying the last of the season's harvests, clearing away spent plants and planning next year's garden. But indoor plants need our attention now, too.

PLANTS THAT ARE COMING INDOORS

Houseplants that spent the season vacationing outdoors need a proper transition back into the home to avoid shock.

If they have outgrown their containers during their holiday, this is a good time to replant them into a larger pot. Select a container no more than 2 inches wider than the current pot and replant in fresh potting mix, then water well.

Overgrown plants can often be divided into two or more. Spider plants (*Chlorophytum*), peace lilies (*Spathiphyllum*), flamingo flowers (*Anthurium*) and peacock plants (*Calathea*) are among those with clumping root systems that lend themselves to division.

If you find removing the plant from its pot difficult, check whether roots have emerged from the container's drainage holes. If so, pull or cut off any escaped root fibers to set the plant free.

Then, to divide the plant, carefully shake off as much soil as possible. Find the junction where the plant's top growth meets its root system, and either gently pull the roots apart or slice through them with a sharp knife, ensuring that at least three healthy leaves are attached above each root portion. Repot each new plant in its own container using fresh potting mix. Keep the plant well-watered (but never soggy) until new growth appears.

Whether or not repotting or dividing is necessary, all outdoor houseplants should be moved into a shaded spot for a week or so to gradually acclimate them to lower light levels before their move indoors. Continue

to water during this transition.

At the end of the week, inspect all plant parts for insects — including under leaves — and thoroughly rinse leaves and stems with water to avoid transporting hitchhiking pests into your home. To play it safe, you might spray the plant with a diluted Neem oil solution.

Complete the move before nighttime temperatures drop below 55 degrees outdoors.

PLANTS THAT HAVE STAYED INDOORS

Houseplants that haven't left their window perches all summer also will need special care as day lengths shorten and diminished sunlight slows their growth.

Although not technically dormant, most houseplants rest during fall and winter, which means they'll need less water and often no fertilizer until spring. Overwatering during this time will risk root rot and the proliferation of fungus gnats, which breed in soggy soil.

For most plants, it's best to wait until the top inch or two of soil is dry before watering. You can check for moisture by plunging your finger knuckle-deep into the pot.

Slower growth also means slower healing, so postpone pruning until spring. You can, however, trim away dead or dying leaves or leaf tips over winter.

Most houseplants are native to the tropics and, as such, require more humidity than is typically found in most homes, especially in colder areas where heating systems tend to dry the air. Run a humidifier in the room or place plants on a pebble-filled tray of water, which will create a humid microclimate around them as the water evaporates.

Never place plants on working radiators, and keep them away from cold drafts and heating vents.

Next spring, when temperatures are reliably higher than 60 degrees, it will be safe to move most plants outdoors. Tender tropicals like African violets, however, are homebodies, so leave them be.

Brad Pitt, Nick Cave make surprise art debut in Finland

By JARI TANNER Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — Hollywood's Brad Pitt and Australian musician Nick Cave have debuted as artists in an exhibition in Finland that displays sculptures and ceramics created by the movie star and the singer-songwriter.

The Sara Hilden Art Museum, located in the southern Finnish city of Tampere, was initially scheduled to exhibit solely the wide variety of works by British artist Thomas Houseago — known for his sculptures — but he reportedly persuaded the museum include works by his friends Pitt and Cave.

"Cave and Pitt are already renowned in their respective fields of music and cinema, but this is the first time ever they have exhibited their artwork — pieces which were created during the course of an ongoing dialogue with Houseago," the Finnish museum said.

Pitt and Cave traveled to Tampere, a university city known for its vibrant culture and music scene, for a pre-opening event on Saturday. Finnish media reported that both men acknowledged being excited and nervous about presenting their art in public for the first time.

Among the nine works on show by the 58-year-old Pitt is a house-shaped structure molded in clear silicon and shot with bullets and a plaster panel depicting a shooting scene. Pitt reportedly began making ceramic art following his divorce from Angelina Jolie in 2017.

Pitt told the Finnish public broadcaster YLE that his work was about "self-reflection."

"It's about, you know, where have I gotten it wrong in my relationships? Where have I misstepped? Where I am complicit?" he said.

"It was borne out of ownership of really what I call a radical inventory of self, getting really, brutally honest with me and ... taking account of those I may have hurt and moments I've just gotten wrong," the American Oscar-winning actor and film producer told YLE.

Cave, known for his dark baritone voice as the front man for his band Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, produced a series of ceramic figurines that depict the life of the devil. He designed, painted and glazed the 17 figures between 2020 and this year.

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"I wanted to do a devil because it was red. And I like the color of red glaze," Cave told YLE. "Eventually I decided to make the life story of the devil itself."

"For me, personally, it speaks into something about the idea of forgiveness or the need to be forgiven. It's a very personal work for me."

The exhibition opened Sunday and runs through Jan. 15, 2023.

With Griner in jail, WNBA players skip Russia in offseason

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 — nearly quadruple the base salary of top WNBA players — 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.

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.

With ceremonies over, King Charles III faces biggest task

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The cannons have sounded, the bells have rung and the mourners have paid their respects.

Now King Charles III faces the task of preserving a 1,000-year-old monarchy that his mother nurtured for seven decades but that faces an uncertain future. The challenge is immense.

Personal affection for the queen meant that the monarchy's role in British society was rarely debated in recent years. But now that she's gone, the royal family faces questions about whether it is still relevant in a modern, multicultural nation that looks very different than it did when Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1952.

Amid a global re-examination of the history of colonialism and slavery that has seen protesters tear down or deface statues in British cities and universities like Oxford and Cambridge change their course offerings, an institution that was once the symbol of the British Empire is likely to face renewed scrutiny.

Charles will try to "maintain continuity" while also signaling that the royals are prepared to change, said Anna Whitelock, a professor of history of modern monarchy at City University London. But he faces a raft of questions.

"What place does a monarchy have in a multi-faith, multi-ethnic society?" Whitelock asked. "And is it the right rallying point for the nation? And should it be the monarch representing the U.K. abroad? What does it say about us? Is it a bastion of tradition that people should applaud? Or is it actually a check on progress that actually doesn't represent the inclusive, diverse society that people would hope that Britain would now become?"

And there is another, more personal, question lurking in the background: Is a 73-year-old white man the best person to confront those issues?

Charles waited longer than any other heir to take the throne and in many ways embodies the modernization of the monarchy. He was the first monarch not educated at home, the first to earn a university degree and the first to grow up in the ever-intensifying glare of the media as deference to royalty faded.

He has been lauded as an early advocate of the environmental movement and won praise for working to improve the lives of young people in underprivileged communities.

But he also has a reputation, perhaps undeserved, as a somewhat stuffy older man who is more at home on the polo field or one of his country estates than the soccer-mad cities of modern Britain.

Charles also alienated many people with his messy divorce from the much-loved Princess Diana, and by straining the rules that bar royals from intervening in public affairs, wading into debates on issues such as environmental protection and architectural preservation.

As the U.K. mourned his mother, it quickly became clear that Charles was ready to be a more personal monarch. He has made a point of wading into the crowds of well wishers, stopping to shake hands and exchange a few words, more like a U.S. presidential candidate appealing for votes than a king who inherited the crown from a line of ancestors stretching back to 1066.

One woman even kissed him — a level of familiarity no one would have dared with Elizabeth.

At Monday's state funeral for the late queen, Bertram Leon embodied the challenges facing Charles.

A proud Briton whose roots stretch back to the Windrush generation of immigrants who came to the U.K. from the Caribbean after World War II, Leon was at Westminster Abbey to represent the St. Lucian community in honoring the queen. Now he expects Charles to take the monarchy in a new direction.

"The king is actually going to change, perhaps modernize the monarchy in the image that he thinks in the current day," Leon said, his British Empire Medal pinned to his chest. "We can't live back in the 1920s,

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'30s or '50s, when Elizabeth took over. We are now in the 21st century, and I think things are going to be regarded and looked at a bit different."

In addition to being king of the United Kingdom, Charles is head of state for 14 "realms" that retained the monarch as their sovereign after gaining independence from the former British Empire. It is in these far-flung nations, which stretch from Australia and New Zealand to the Caribbean that Charles may face his first challenges.

The pressures were clear earlier this year when Prince William and his wife, Kate, faced calls for a royal apology and reparations for slavery during a trip to Belize, Jamaica and the Bahamas to celebrate the queen's 70 years on the throne.

During that visit, Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness told the royals that his country was "moving on," a few months after Barbados severed its ties with the monarchy.

The royals have also faced criticism from within after Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, gave up royal duties and moved to California. In a widely publicized interview with U.S. television host Oprah Winfrey earlier this year, the couple alleged that palace had been insensitive toward Meghan, who is bi-racial, and that a member of the royal family had asked about the color of their first child's skin before he was born.

Charles sought to address the tensions at home and abroad in his first address as king.

"Wherever you may live in the United Kingdom, or in the realms and territories across the world, and whatever may be your background or beliefs, I shall endeavor to serve you with loyalty, respect and love, as I have throughout my life," he said.

Charles also confronted concerns about how he would conduct himself as king.

The laws and traditions that govern Britain's constitutional monarchy dictate that the sovereign must stay out of partisan politics, but Charles has spent much of his adult life speaking out on issues that are important to him, particularly the environment.

His words have caused friction with politicians and business leaders who accused the then-Prince of Wales of meddling in issues on which he should have remained silent.

The question is whether Charles will follow his mother's example and muffle his personal opinions now that he is king, or use his new platform to reach a broader audience.

"My life will, of course, change as I take up my new responsibilities," Charles said. "It will no longer be possible for me to give so much of my time and energies to the charities and issues for which I care so deeply. But I know this important work will go on in the trusted hands of others."

The king has been clear that he intends to slim down the monarchy, limiting the number of working royals and reducing the expense of supporting them.

But for 10 days, Britain spared no expense as it honored Elizabeth, who became a comforting symbol of stability over the tumultuous years of her long reign.

All the spectacle that has become synonymous with the royals was on display as uniformed members of the royal family walked solemnly behind a gun carriage carrying the queen's coffin away from Buckingham Palace, cannons and church bells sounded in lament and world leaders filled Westminster Abbey for her funeral.

But it was pageantry with a purpose, celebrating the queen's life while also reminding the public of the monarchy's role in public life and linking the people to the royal family in their time of shared grief.

"People often criticize the British monarchy or even laugh at it as pomp and circumstance and emptiness," said historian Robert Lacey, author of "Majesty: Elizabeth II and the House of Windsor."

"Well, an occasion like this shows it's not emptiness, that the pomp and circumstance stands for something."

Today in History: September 21, Senate confirms O'Connor

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Sept. 21, the 264th day of 2022. There are 101 days left in the year.

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Today's Highlights in History:

On Sept. 21, 1981, the Senate unanimously confirmed the nomination of Sandra Day O'Connor to become the first female justice on the Supreme Court.

On this date:

In 1792, the French National Convention voted to abolish the monarchy.

In 1937, "The Hobbit," by J.R.R. Tolkien, was first published by George Allen & Unwin, Ltd. of London.

In 1938, a hurricane struck parts of New York and New England, causing widespread damage and claiming some 700 lives.

In 1957, the legal mystery-drama "Perry Mason," starring Raymond Burr, premiered on CBS-TV.

In 1961, the first Boeing CH-47 Chinook military helicopter made its first hovering flight.

In 1973, the U.S. Senate confirmed Henry Kissinger to be Secretary of State.

In 1982, National Football League players began a 57-day strike, their first regular-season walkout ever.

In 1985, in North Korea and South Korea, family members who had been separated for decades were allowed to visit each other as both countries opened their borders in an unprecedented family-reunion program.

In 1989, Hurricane Hugo crashed into Charleston, South Carolina (the storm was blamed for 56 deaths in the Caribbean and 29 in the United States). Twenty-one students in Alton, Texas, died when their school bus, hit by a soft-drink delivery truck, careened into a water-filled pit.

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act denying federal recognition of same-sex marriages, a day after saying the law should not be used as an excuse for discrimination, violence or intimidation against gays and lesbians. (Although never formally repealed, DoMA was effectively overturned by U.S. Supreme Court decisions in 2013 and 2015.)

In 2001, Congress again opened the federal coffers to those harmed by terrorism, providing \$15 billion to the airline industry, which was suffering mounting economic losses since the Sept. 11 attacks.

In 2011, Josh Fattal and Shane Bauer, two Americans jailed in Iran as spies, left Tehran for the Gulf state of Oman, closing a high-profile drama that brought more than two years of hope and heartbreak for their families. The state of Texas executed Lawrence Russell Brewer for his role in the gruesome dragging death of James Byrd Jr.

Ten years ago: People lined up to buy Apple's iPhone5 as it went on sale in the United States and several other countries. A man was bitten multiple times after leaping from a monorail into a tiger exhibit at the Bronx Zoo in New York.

Five years ago: Millions on Puerto Rico faced the prospect of weeks or months without power in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly to discuss the ongoing crisis involving North Korea. Facebook said it would provide congressional investigators with the contents of 3,000 ads that had been bought by a Russian agency; it had already released the ads to federal authorities investigating Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election.

One year ago: In his first address before the U.N. General Assembly, President Joe Biden urged the world's nations to address the global issues of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and human rights abuses. A coroner confirmed that human remains found in remote northern Wyoming were those of Gabby Petito, a 22-year-old who disappeared while on a cross-country road trip with a boyfriend, Brian Laundrie. (Laundrie's body would be found in a Florida swamp in October; the FBI later said he had admitted killing Petito in a notebook that was discovered near his body.) Melvin Van Peebles, a playwright, musician and movie director whose work ushered in the "blaxploitation" films of the 1970s, died at his New York home; he was 89.

Today's Birthdays: Author-comedian Fannie Flagg is 81. Producer Jerry Bruckheimer is 79. Former Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear is 78. Musician Don Felder is 75. Author Stephen King is 75. Basketball Hall of Famer Artis Gilmore is 73. Actor-comedian Bill Murray is 72. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is 65. Movie producer-writer Ethan Coen is 65. Actor-comedian Dave Coulier is 63. Actor David James

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Elliott is 62. Actor Serena Scott Thomas is 61. Actor Nancy Travis is 61. Actor Rob Morrow is 60. Actor Angus Macfadyen is 59. Retired MLB All-Star Cecil Fielder is 59. Actor Cheryl Hines is 57. Country singer Faith Hill is 55. Rock musician Tyler Stewart (Barenaked Ladies) is 55. Country singer Ronna Reeves is 54. Actor-talk show host Ricki Lake is 54. Rapper Dave (De La Soul) is 54. Actor Billy Porter is 53. Actor Rob Benedict is 52. Actor James Lesure is 51. Actor Alfonso Ribeiro (rih-BEHR'-oh) is 51. Actor Luke Wilson is 51. Actor Paulo Costanzo is 44. Actor Bradford Anderson is 43. Actor Autumn Reeser is 42. TV personality Nicole Richie is 41. Actor Maggie Grace is 39. Actor Joseph Mazzello is 39. Actor Ahna O'Reilly is 38. Rapper Wale (WAH'-lay) is 38. R&B singer Jason Derulo is 36. Actor Ryan Guzman is 35. Actor Nikolas Brino is 24.