

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 1 of 75

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Dress up days winners](#)
- [4- Jark Auction Ad](#)
- [5- SD Newswatch: As 2022 election approaches, vast majority of South Dakota voters see civility declining in America](#)
- [10- Preschool Developmental Screening](#)
- [11- Weather Pages](#)
- [15- Daily Devotional](#)
- [16- 2022 Community Events](#)
- [17- Subscription Form](#)
- [18- News from the Associated Press](#)

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.

Friday, Sept. 23

Dress-up: Black & Gold Spirit Day.

School Breakfast: Cereal

School Lunch: Homecoming hotdogs, baked beans.

Senior Menu: Tuna noodle casserole, peas and car-

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

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



rots, swedish apple pie square, whole wheat bread.

1 p.m.: Homecoming Parade

TigerPalooza, 2:30 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. at GHS Gym.

FFA Serving Meal at Homecoming Football Game beginning at 5:30 p.m.

7 p.m.: Football hosts Sisseton

UMC: Newsletter Items Due

NO OUTDOOR WATERING!

Effective immediately, no outdoor watering is permitted in the City of Groton until further notice. (About 4-6 weeks)

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 2 of 75



Monday's Dress-up Winners - Country Club or Country

Left to right are Adeline Kotzer, Liby Cole, Addison Hoeft, Brenna Imrie, Colby Dunker, Brevin Fiehs, Rylee Dunker and Emma Kutter; in front are Camyrn Kurtz, Marlee Tollefson and Addison Hoffman; not pictured is Lincoln Krause and Cole Bisbee. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Tuesday's- Dress Up like the first letter of your name

Left to right are Shaydon Wood, Bradyn Wipf, Karrah-Jo Johnson, Holden Sippel, Logan Ringgenberg, Logan Warrington, Drake Peterson, Tegan Hanten and Liby Althoff; not pictured is Ashtyn Bahr and Lincoln Shilhanek. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 3 of 75



Wednesday's Dress-up Winners -

Dress Like Your Parent

In back, left to right, are Corbin Weismantel, Jaedyn Penning, Carly Guthmiller, Anna Bisbee, Brenna Carda, Abby Yeadon, Liby Althoff and Emily Clark; in front, left to right, are Tali Wright, Cadance Tullis, Kyleigh Kroll and TC Schuster; not pictured is Madison Herrick, Avery Crank.

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Brenna Carda and Anna Bisbee are having a little fun with their outfits. (Photo

by Jeslyn Kosel)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 4 of 75

ANOTHER JARK/WORLIE AUCTION



RETIREMENT CEMENT TOOLS & EQUIPMENT AUCTION

Saturday, Oct. 1, 2022
Sale Time: 10:00 AM

507 E. RR Ave, Groton, SD



SKID STEER – WHEEL LOADER

• **Mustang 2056 Turbo** w/2 speed Cab, AC/Heat, Hydr. Tach, 6' Bucket, 2302 hours, ('10) • **5' Mustang Skid Steer Bucket** (cement) • **Kobelco LK300A Wheel Loader** w/Bucket, Forks, 16.9-24 Tires, Eng. Overhauled 4084 hrs ago (\$23,000)– Runs/Works.

GUN SAFE - TOOLS – EQUIP – TANKS

- Safari 24 Gun Safe (NIB)
- Husqvarna FS309 Cement Saw -Nice
- Subaru Robin Ex17 Cement Saw
- DP-75ASB Diesel Generator (New)
- Wen 5500 Generator (New)!
- Screeds w/Honda & B&S Motors
- **BNT-40** 14.4v Lithium **Rebar Cutter**
- **Honda Drive Motor** w/Vibrating Cable & Water Pump
- **Impala 30 ton Hydr. Press**
- **Mikasa MVC-88GH Packer** (Honda)
- **Wacker VPA1750 Packer** (Honda)
- **Wacker Power Float** (Honda)
- **DeWalt & Jet Table Saws**
- **Insulated Concrete Blankets**
- **8 Sets of Scaffolding**
- **Bosch Elec. Jack Hammer**
- **Stihl TS 400 & TS 500 Cement Saws**
- **Weldmark 135+ Welder**
- **DP Air Compressor**
- **Older Floats, Packers & Screeds**
- **Hammer Drills**
- **Hand Tools, Trowels, Air Hose Reel**
- **5/8" Rod** (4', 8', 20')
- **4) 6"x6"x15' St. Tubes** (1/4")
- **90) 4x8 Wall Forms**
- **4' & 8' Corner Forms**
- **Newer 2' Forms**
- **Stakes & Wire Ties**
- **2x4's, 2x6's, 2x10's,**
- **Several 2x12's** (15' & 20')
- **500 gal. Propane Tank** (needs valve)
- **500 gal. Diesel Tank** (1/2 full)
- **Lots of Hand Tools**

TRACTOR – LOADER – SNOWMOBILE

Case IH 50 CVT FWA Tractor w/L350 Loader, Bucket, Forks, 3 pt, PTO, 2 Hydr, 575 hours! • **Case IH BS172H 6' Snow Blower** (Nice) • **Case IH TLX180H 80" 3 pt. Tiller** • **Farm King 847 7' Leveler** • **Fimco 3 pt. Sprayer** w/ 50 gal. Tank, Folding Booms • **King Kutter 3 pt. 6' Disk** • **Field Svc Tank** • '08 **Polaris RMK 700 Snowmobile** w/155" Track/ 2 1/4" Lugs (all consigned)





As 2022 election approaches, vast majority of South Dakota voters see civility declining in America

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

With the 2022 midterm elections approaching soon, a vast majority of South Dakotans feel that our nation has become less civil — and they place the responsibility for improving civility on a variety of institutions and individuals, including themselves, according to a new statewide poll.

Nearly eight in 10 registered voters (79.0%) who responded to the poll said that civility in America has gotten worse over the past five years, while only 2.6% said civility has improved during that time. In addition, 16.4% said civility has remained the same, while 2.0% were unsure, according to the poll.

Civility, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is defined as “courtesy and politeness” or “a polite act or expression,” though definitions of civility may vary widely among individuals.

Meanwhile, registered voters who responded to the poll said they believed that political leaders have the most responsibility for improving civility in America. However, respondents also placed a significant responsibility on themselves for making the country more civil.

The cell phone and landline poll of 500 registered voters was conducted in late July by the Mason-Dixon Polling & Strategy firm and was commissioned by South Dakota News Watch and the Chiesman Center for Democracy at the University of South Dakota. The 500 registered voters surveyed closely match the breakdown of the statewide electorate in terms of political affiliation, gender, age and geography. The margin of error was plus or minus 4.5%.

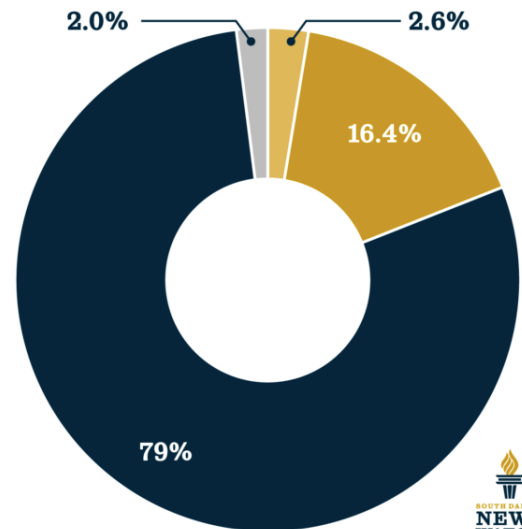
To further examine and understand the poll results, News Watch interviewed three experts on civility in South Dakota to get their views and insights on civility in America. Here are their responses.

Larry Pressler — an elder statesman with grave concerns

Larry Pressler, 80, a native of Humboldt, S.D., is a Rhodes Scholar and Harvard Law graduate who served two tours of combat duty in the Vietnam War before launching a political career that included two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives (1975 to 1979) and three terms as a U.S. senator (1979 to 1997). Pressler served in Congress as a Republican, but ran as an Independent in an unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Senate in 2014.

Pressler, who is battling two forms of cancer, now splits his time between Washington, D.C., and South Dakota, but will move permanently back to the Mount Rushmore state in the coming

How does the level of civility in America today compare to five years ago?



Source: Mason-Dixon poll of 500 South Dakota registered voters; margin of error +/- 4.5%. Chart by Matt Jensen Marketing



Larry Pressler

LARRY PRESSLER DEFINES CIVILITY: "It's put very simply in the Bible: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and speak well of others. That's a good, basic start to obtaining civility."

months.

Interviewed by phone, Pressler said the News Watch poll results provide more evidence of what he says has been a troubling shift toward negativity and division in American politics and government.

As civility has declined, Pressler said, it has become more difficult for groups and individuals to make progress on critical issues because they can't seem to get beyond their distrust or disagreements with others.

"The lack of civility is very unproductive and it makes life miserable," Pressler said. "Some people seem to like all this conflict, but I don't; I like a conflict-free environment. I like to work together with people on a friendly basis when I can."

Pressler describes himself politically as a "moderate" and a "centrist," and he is dismayed by what he sees as a "very serious problem" in regard to increasing negativity and a worsening lack of civility in America.

"Sometimes conflict is necessary, and when you don't approve of what they're doing or saying, then you have to speak up," he said. "But I'm a great centrist; I'm a passionate, extreme centrist. I believe in the middle of the road in politics and in life, and I believe in compromise as a way forward."

The increasing divisiveness, he said, has resulted in a growing unwillingness of lawmakers to work on real problems in a bipartisan fashion. The trend has manifested itself over the past 30 years on both sides of the two-party political system, he said.

"When I first started out in politics, in 1978, I ran issue-based campaigns, and one could still talk about issues, such as labor, spending, communications, and farm issues," Pressler said. "I didn't engage in a lot of flashy language and harsh criticisms. I stuck to the issues, but I'm not sure you could even do that now and win."

Pressler said many political leaders have gone negative in campaigns because they have seen that the American public tunes into, remembers and reacts to messages of conflict and negativity.

"I got defeated because it got so negative, and even as my consultants advised me to go negative, I chose not to and I lost," Pressler said. "What I found is that people love to listen to negative ads, that they respond to those, and that's too bad because as a result, a lot of good people have gotten out of politics."

Pressler said the news media has exacerbated the incivility in politics because reporters often tend to seek out conflict to report on, placing lawmakers in a position where any perceived misstep is highlighted or overanalyzed. Working with members of an opposing political party or agreeing across the aisle is now seen as weakness or a lack of conviction, whereas in the past the ability to work in a bipartisan fashion was celebrated, Pressler said.

"Each party is afraid to socialize with the other...so you're constantly on guard when you're around members of the other party, and that's really unfortunate," he said.

While in Congress, Pressler, then a Republican, said he used to sit next to former U.S. Rep. Rick Nolan, D-Minn., on flights from Washington to Minneapolis and the two would cordially talk about issues and seek out bipartisan solutions to major problems.

Pressler, an avid news consumer, said he'd recently read about lower church attendance in America and lower participation in civic and service clubs such as 4-H. At the same time, Pressler said he is troubled by an increase in road-rage incidents and more harsh language being used by leaders in politics, government and industry. He noted how impressed he was by coverage of the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II of England that showed thousands of British mourners waiting in line for hours without any pushing or shoving or

incidents of anger or violence.

"It's the mood of our country, that there's a mean-spiritedness in the country right now," he said. "I think we're becoming less religious, less God-centered, less willing to serve other people. We must resolve to get back to our basic values."

Pressler said the path to greater civility may require a return to some of the long-held tenets of American life and can begin in homes, schools, churches and service clubs. To increase civility and improve society, Pressler said, individuals must make a choice to be more caring, accepting and respectful to others, and he encouraged parents and educators to foster a sense of civility and social responsibility in children from a young age.

"For starters, we can go to church more, and we can have discussions about morals and ethics in our schools. In our homes, we can teach our children and grandchildren to do something nice for somebody else today, just the basic old-fashioned concept of love and service to our fellow man," Pressler said.

"It sounds sort of goofy and a little idealistic, but I think we can do it, and I think we'll be all right, but we have to be careful because we're becoming a very coarse nation. We have a lot of work to do, because we're at a critical point in our nation's history for some reason, and I'm worried about that."

Matthew Moen — a scholar in search of civility



Matthew Moen

Matthew Moen is a former dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of South Dakota who has spent years studying civility in government and politics while also trying to improve civility in South Dakota and the country as a whole.

Moen, 64, has been on two sojourns to better understand the growing lack of civility in American politics and to try to counter the trend.

In 2015-2016, he received a grant from the Chiesman Center for Democracy to travel across South Dakota and speak to residents about civility and how to increase it. Then, in 2017-2020, he traveled 28,000 miles around the U.S. to talk about civility in American public life as president of the Gettysburg Foundation.

Moen said the American system of government was built around accepting and encouraging both conflict and compromise, and the three branches of government are in place to ensure that even as people or groups disagree, the favored and expected outcome is one in which no single person or group has too much power that can be abused.

"The system is really predicated on and structured on good will and acceptance of outcome, and compromise, based on the fact that there's a deliberate diffusion of political power," he said. "The whole system is predicated on people being able to work together in order to advance public policies that improve peoples' lives, and if you don't have that, you have constant turmoil rather than resolution of intractable public policy problems in a large, complicated, diverse country."

Moen said political scholars began to document the decline in civility years ago, long before the 2016 presidential election brought a noted, highly visible decline in established decorum.

"People saw this coming and began to write about it, and it's almost like it accelerated; it's like the old adage that revolutions sometimes happen slowly and then they happen fast, and it seems like with incivility it was building slowly and then it may have happened rather quickly," Moen said.

POLL QUESTION: WHO IS MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPROVING CIVILITY IN AMERICA?

Poll respondents were asked to choose the level of responsibility certain American institutions or groups have for improving civility. These percentages show which groups were rated by poll respondents as being "very responsible" for improving civility.

Political leaders	—	54.8%
Yourself	—————	47.8%
News outlets	————	44.6%
Social media	————	34.8%
American public	—	34.0%
Education system	—	32.4%
Religious groups	—	22.4%

Source: Mason-Dixon poll of 500 registered South Dakota voters in late July 2022; margin of error +/- 4.5%

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 8 of 75

MATTHEW MOEN DEFINES CIVILITY: "I suppose civility is good manners, and in a lot of ways, political civility is also just good manners. But beyond that, it's reasoned, thoughtful conversation aimed at reconciling differences in a system that is predicated on compromise and conciliation and acceptance of outcome, and those seem to be some of the ingredients we've lost."

Given the consistent doses of harsh commentary and conduct present in modern American politics, Moen said he is not surprised that South Dakotans who responded to the News Watch poll were well aware of the decline in civility.

"We're witnessing it firsthand, we feel it in our hearts, and I think we have a growing unease that this is becoming more of a permanent fixture in our politics," he said.

In his work for the Gettysburg Foundation, Moen used examples from the Battle of Gettysburg — an 1863 Civil War battle in which as many as 50,000 soldiers were killed or wounded — to illustrate the value of civility in the wake of such tragedy.

"After the battle was over, the citizens of the community came together to care for soldiers on both sides without regard to uniform," Moen said. "You have the biggest battle in the history of North America, and afterwards that are incredible acts of kindness and gentility and care."

Moen said he uses the Battle of Gettysburg to illustrate that if civility could rule the day after such a horrific conflict, then Americans today can surely find the will to act in civil ways.

"It became a lot of what I talked about, the policy prescriptions to improve civility in American public life, and my message was that we can get through this season of ill will that has risen among us in America," he said.

Moen noted that civility in politics tends to falter when party control of Congress is unsettled or in question, as it is heading into the 2022 midterm elections and in recent congressional elections.

"Compromise is really the lifeblood of how the American system is structured, and compromise and conciliation are now seen as vices and not virtues by many partisans on both sides," he said.

A lack of collegiality in Congress may also be due to fundamental changes in how lawmakers behave, Moen said, as they spend less time in Washington, less time working together as a group, with more time and energy devoted to fundraising or pushing political agendas not tied to real issues and problems.

"What we all feel uneasy about is that the lines are shifting, and the boundaries are moving partly because the political leadership is willing to move them with an eye toward national public policies and national politics rather than with an eye toward solving intractable public policy problems with their colleagues," he said.

Moen equates civility closely to good manners, and notes that in a basic sense, "It's much better to live in a country where people have good manners."

Moen said his mood about the current state of civility in America shifts regularly back and forth between optimism and pessimism. But he insists that working passionately toward greater civility is well worth the effort.

"Some people have asked me, 'Why do you even bother?' And I would say to them that we have to try, that I don't know what else to do," he said. "The alternative is just to accept that this is how American public life now is, but we have to keep after it and keep trying even if at times it seems kind of futile."

Moen said there may be some institutional-level changes that can increase civility, such as enacting ranked-choice voting and campaign-finance reform, and further regulating big technology companies.

But Moen also pointed to ways that individuals can and should try to heighten civility in their communities, and thereby in society as a whole.

"More rhetoric around kindness and acceptance and love and compassion by individuals and institutional leaders would be helpful," he said. "It would also be helpful to put problem-solving as the focus and purpose of American politics, rather retaining the boxing match it's turned into."

Moen added: "There are many solutions out there and things that can be done, but one big question is, 'Are people currently in the mood to do them?'"

Jason Herrboldt — a civic leader banking on better times ahead



Jason Herrboldt

JASON HERRBOLDT DEFINES CIVILITY: "I think you know it when you see it ... if people listen to understand, and are mindful about how they're talking with one another, that leads to a civil discussion. The more we do that as a society, the more we'll be civil, and it comes down to day-to-day interactions with people who see things differently than us."

Jason Herrboldt, 43, is the chief banking officer at First Bank & Trust in Sioux Falls who just completed a one-year term as the president of the Sioux Falls Downtown Rotary, where he led efforts to expand civic engagement and civility in eastern South Dakota.

Herrboldt said he does not typically experience incivility during his regular personal and professional interactions with people in Sioux Falls and across South Dakota.

And yet, after reviewing the News Watch poll results, Herrboldt said he understood why many respondents felt that civility was in decline in American government and society.

"There are so many issues right now that are very charged, and a lot are political in nature, and our politicians and leaders in other fields should take ownership over how we are talking to one another about these very important and charged subjects," he said.

Herrboldt said the recent poll results should be "a wake-up call" that everyone in society should improve their behavior, even if it's difficult at times.

"The statistics are pretty stark, and I am, of course, discouraged and disheartened," he said. "But I think that just tells us there is a lot of work to do, and to remember that no worthy cause comes easy."

Improving civility, Herrboldt said, will require people to eschew the quick-hit, sensational responses to issues and problems that dominate social media and much of the political discourse these days. Instead, he said, civil behavior requires an investment of an individual's time and energy into listening to others, learning facts and gaining context, and then approaching discussions of problems with trust and openness.

"If you start with good intentions, which isn't always easy, but if you believe someone on the other side of a discussion comes with good intentions, that's a wonderful place to start," Herrboldt said. "If you assume the person on another side of a discussion is coming with bad intentions, it's very hard to listen with the goal of understanding, and it's very, very difficult to communicate verbally in a way that is respectful."

Herrboldt called on individuals to reconsider how they speak to and interact with others in their daily lives, but he placed an additional burden of improving civility on those in leadership positions in politics, government, business and civic institutions.

"The burden of leadership is very real, and we as leaders need to raise the bar on ourselves because people are listening," he said. "It should be a wake-up call and lead us to do more and to raise the bar on how we are interacting with each other, because people are always paying attention and taking cues

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 10 of 75

from leaders.”

While Herrboldt was disappointed to see the News Watch poll results, he added that he is hopeful that with greater thoughtfulness, increased kindness and more respectful interactions, America can become more civil over time.

“It’s not going to happen overnight, and we’re not just going to wake up the next day and say, ‘Wow, everything is so much better,’” he said. “But if people listen to understand, and are mindful of how they are talking with one another, that leads to a civil discussion, and the more we do that, the more civil our society will be.”

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit journalism organization located online at SDNewsWatch.org.

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.

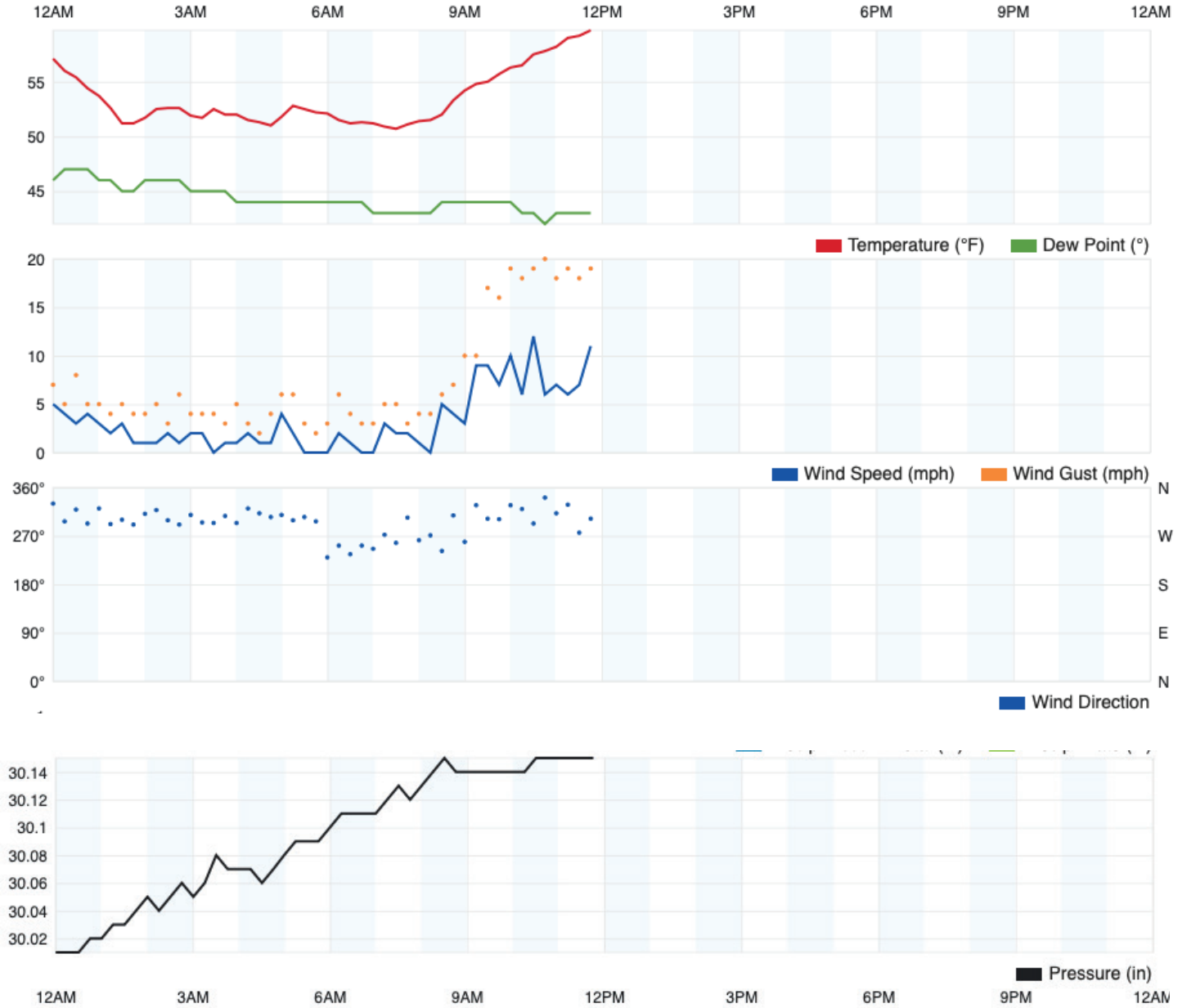
If your child is already receiving services or enrolled at Groton Elementary School they will not need to be screened. If your child has already been screened but you have concerns please contact the elementary school. If you are new to the district and have a child under the age of 5, we also ask you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

Groton Daily Independent


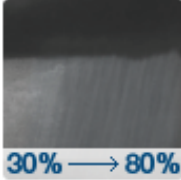



Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 11 of 75

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

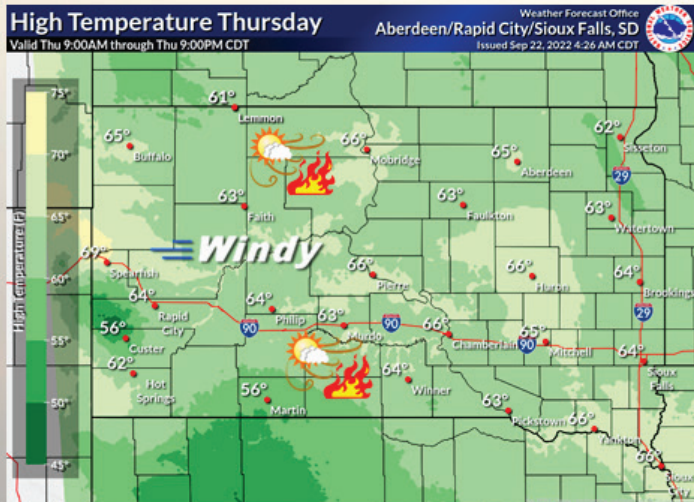
Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 12 of 75

Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Patchy Frost then Mostly Sunny	30% → 80% Chance Showers then Showers	40% Chance Showers and Breezy	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 65 °F	Low: 48 °F	High: 71 °F	Low: 48 °F	High: 70 °F

Cool and Breezy Today, Rain Tonight

Strongest Winds Western/Central SD
Very High Fire Danger

Precipitation Chances Today/Tomorrow



	Probability of Precipitation Forecast												
	9/22 Thu				9/23 Fri				9/24 Sat				
	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am
Aberdeen	1	1	7	36	75	61	42	24	34	34	34	3	3
Britton					74	87	53	46	52	52	10	10	
Eagle Butte	26	33	47	48	25	13	8	6	6	2	2	0	0
Eureka	2	3	22	83	81	24	25	25	29	29	29	1	1
Gettysburg	7	13	42	79	45	15	12	12	12	11	11	0	0
Kennebec	8	20	50	59	47	40	15	2	2	1	1	0	0
McIntosh	2	22	70	66	25	10	30	30	30	12	12	0	0
Milbank					1	1	27	75	81	74	74	40	40
Miller	3	7	32	53	51	47	20	14	14	11	11	1	1
Mobridge	5	12	52	79	33	11	21	21	16	16	16	0	0
Murdo	19	28	54	51	31	23	8	1	1	1	1	0	0
Pierre	10	18	46	64	33	17	8	3	3	3	3	0	0
Redfield	1	4	22	35	49	49	26	19	19	18	18	2	2
Sisseton					2	2	43	80	75	58	58	49	49
Watertown					1	7	7	42	77	62	52	28	28
Webster					1	6	6	59	80	53	44	39	39
Wheaton							1	0	10	72	77	70	70

*Table values in %
**Created: 5 am CDT Thu 9/22/2022
***Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.

Updated: 9/22/2022 5:32 AM CST

Light winds and chilly temperatures this morning will give way to increasing south to southeast winds this afternoon, especially west of the James River and into central and western South Dakota. Because of the gusty winds and lowering humidity, very high fire danger will be in place this afternoon west of the Missouri River. We'll be watching a system moving through the region later this afternoon, overnight, and into Friday morning. Good chances for rainfall for many areas, although not very heavy, with most locations receiving less than three-quarters of an inch.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 13 of 75

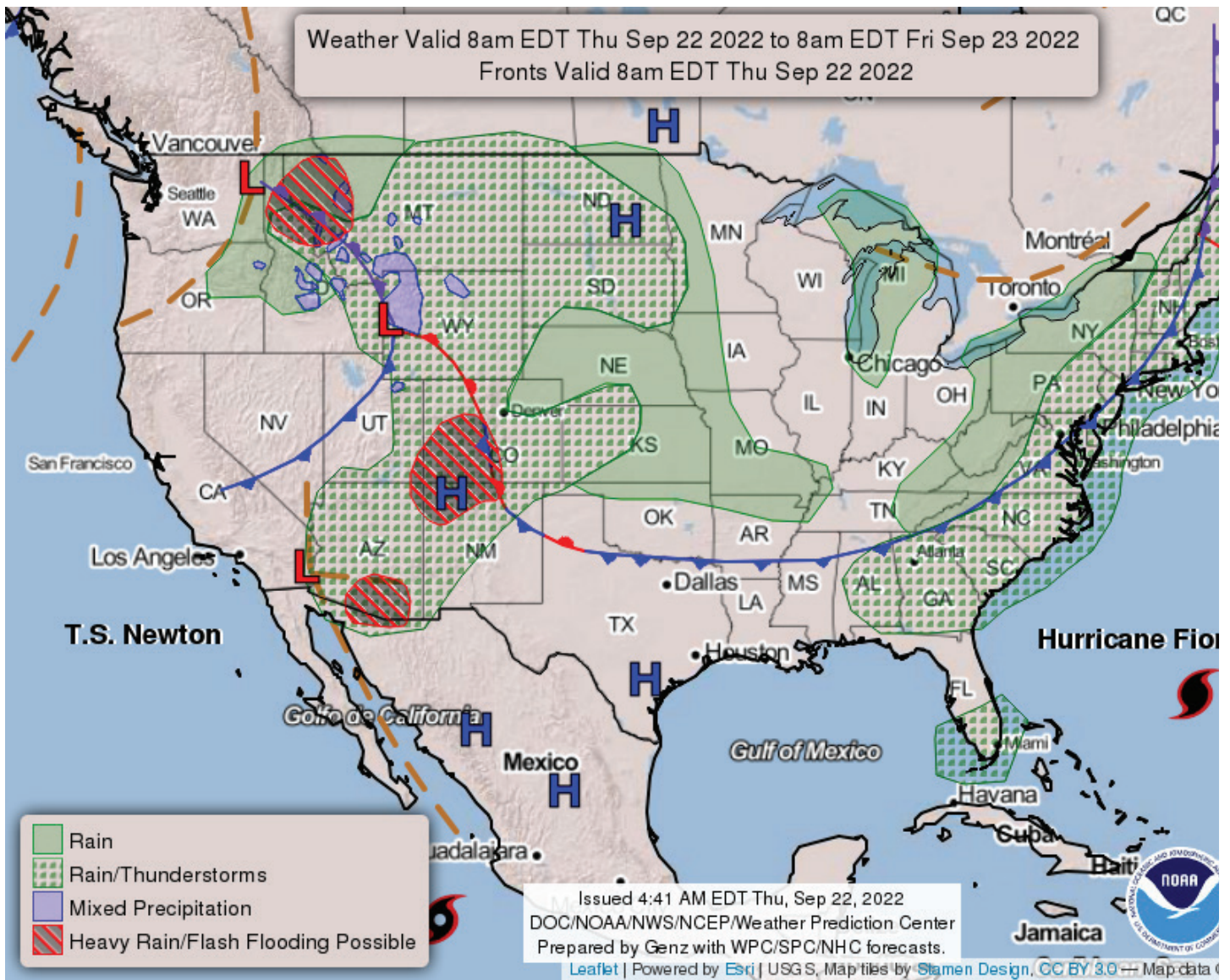
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 66 °F at 4:29 PM
Low Temp: 46 °F at 11:59 PM
Wind: 25 mph at 2:51 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 13 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 103 in 1936
Record Low: 20 in 1995
Average High: 73°F
Average Low: 44°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 1.47
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.07
Average Precip to date: 17.81
Precip Year to Date: 16.05
Sunset Tonight: 7:31:42 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:19:33 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 14 of 75

Today in Weather History

September 22, 1936: Abnormally warm conditions brought record temperatures to much of central and northeast South Dakota along with west central Minnesota on this day in 1936. Temperatures rose into the upper 90s and lower 100s during the afternoon hours. Pierre and Watertown set record highs of 99 degrees. Mobridge and Sisseton warmed to record highs of 101 degrees. Finally, Kennebec and Aberdeen rose to record highs of 102 and 103 degrees, respectively.

1810: A tornado striking Fernhill Heath had a width between 0.5 to 1 mile; making it the widest path ever in Britain.

1890: A severe hailstorm struck Strawberry, Arizona. Five days after the storm hail still lay in drifts 12 to 18 inches deep.

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)

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 - 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)

2006: The tristate area of Missouri, Illinois, and Kentucky was struck by the worst tornado outbreak in the recorded history during the month of September. One supercell produced a long-track F4 tornado across southeastern Missouri into southwestern Illinois. This tornado traveled 27.5 miles.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 15 of 75

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

"MAKES SENSE TO ME!"

That's the problem. It may make sense to the person making the decision, but no one else. So, Solomon warns, "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice." And, that's not always easy!

Taking advice from others is a statement, to some, of being inadequate or incomplete. It is a public admission that "You, of all people, could actually keep me from being wrong? You, keep me, from making a mistake? How dare you think I don't know everything!"

It is sometimes difficult to admit our limitations. No, perhaps most of the time it is difficult to admit we cannot handle things by ourselves and have limited information about choices that confront us. We think and reason, talk and ask questions, but if what we hear does not agree with what we already have in mind, we readily dismiss it, whether it could keep us from disaster.

Closed minded, stubborn, insecure and threatened individuals who refuse advice, or counsel, are usually very defensive. They are quick to argue and anger, usually impatient and insecure, closed and lonely people. They are self-destructive, and in the process usually destroy others because every decision impacts the lives of others.

Looking to others for insight and understanding, for knowledge and information requires humility. And that may be the real problem. To be humble is to admit that "I don't have all the answers! Only God does."

If after searching His Word and praying, we do not have His peace, He'll send the right "advisor" if we ask.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to be strong enough to become weak, wise enough to seek advice, and then trust You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice. Proverbs 12:15



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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 16 of 75

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)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 17 of 75

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

09-15-19-20-31

(nine, fifteen, nineteen, twenty, thirty-one)

Estimated jackpot: \$68,000

Lotto America

06-32-38-43-45, Star Ball: 8, ASB: 2

(six, thirty-two, thirty-eight, forty-three, forty-five; Star Ball: eight; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$23,430,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 301,000,000

Powerball

06-33-34-45-54, Powerball: 7, Power Play: 2

(six, thirty-three, thirty-four, forty-five, fifty-four; Powerball: seven; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$270,000,000

Aberdeen Dermatology Associates Is First in South Dakota to Offer Non-Surgical Technology for Treating Common Skin Cancers

BURR RIDGE, Ill., Sept. 21, 2022 /PRNewswire/ -- SkinCure Oncology, the world leader in providing a comprehensive model for the delivery of Image-Guided Superficial Radiotherapy (Image-Guided SRT), the most advanced non-surgical technology for the treatment of common skin cancers, today announced the availability of the technology in South Dakota. That state's first installation is at Aberdeen Dermatology Associates where the announcement was made earlier today.

Image-Guided SRT is the only treatment for nonmelanoma skin cancer (basal and squamous cell carcinomas) that uses ultrasound images to help clinicians direct low-level X-ray energy to targeted areas of the skin, killing cancer cells. A study published in the peer-reviewed journal *Oncology and Therapy* showed that Image-Guided SRT produces a 99.3 percent cure rate, making it just as effective as traditional Mohs surgery.

"Skin cancer is prevalent in South Dakota, and we encourage everyone to get a complete body exam once a year by a board-certified dermatologist," said Ty Hanson, D.O., director of Aberdeen Dermatology Associates. "For those dealing with common skin cancer, we are excited to provide a new, non-surgical treatment alternative. It's covered by Medicare and most insurance plans, and it's being recognized as the new standard of care."

"As some 9,000 South Dakotans will likely be diagnosed with nonmelanoma skin cancer this year, we are pleased to be partnering with Aberdeen Dermatology Associates to offer a highly effective, non-surgical treatment option for their patients," said Kerwin Brandt, CEO of SkinCure Oncology.

S. Dakota social studies hearings pit teachers against Noem

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 19 of 75

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gov. Kristi Noem sued over release of travel expense records

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem is facing a lawsuit after her office refused to release expense records on five out-of-state trips this year to a liberal watchdog group.

American Oversight, an organization that files open records requests and litigation against Republican officials, filed a lawsuit Tuesday against Noem, who is in the midst of a reelection campaign and eyeing a bid for the GOP's 2024 presidential ticket. It alleges that the governor's office did not follow the state's open records law by claiming that releasing the records would create a threat to the governor's safety.

In May, the organization had requested expense records, including lodging and travel, for 2022 trips Noem had taken to a Las Vegas hunting convention, a pair of Republican Party events in Wyoming and New York, the Conservative Political Action Conference and a campaign event for Republican U.S. Sen. Mike Lee in Utah.

American Oversight also said that South Dakota's Department of Labor and Regulation has not responded to its records request for legal expenses associated with negotiating a \$200,000 settlement agreement with a former state employee, Sherry Bren. She had filed an age discrimination complaint after she was pressured to retire by Marcia Hultman, Noem's Labor Secretary. Hultman began asking for Bren's retirement in the weeks after Noem's daughter, Cassidy Peters, completed her real estate appraiser licensure — a process in which Noem took a hands-on role.

"We have asked Governor Noem to disclose what certain high-profile matters have cost South Dakota, specifically for her travel expenses and costs related to her involvement in her daughter's real estate licensing," said Heather Sawyer, executive director of American Oversight. "South Dakota law requires disclosure of public spending and the public has a right to see how Governor Noem is spending their money."

As Noem has reached national prominence in the GOP and traveled the country to speak at events, she has faced scrutiny for the costs of her travel, including inquiries of what it costs taxpayers to provide her security during out-of-state campaign events. Noem's office has declined to release those costs, saying it would threaten her security.

She is also facing an investigation into whether using a state-owned airplane to travel to 2019 events hosted by political organizations was a legal use of the aircraft. Noem has defended those trips as part of her job being an "ambassador" for the state. She did not use a state-owned airplane on the 2022 trips.

The governor's office and the Department of Labor and Regulation did not immediately comment on the lawsuit.

Ian Fury, Noem's campaign spokesman, said in a statement, "This is a baseless political attack by an activist liberal organization. They have no interest in the truth. Their tactics are typical election year propaganda."

He did not respond to a question on whether Noem's political funds paid for expenses such as lodging when she traveled to political events.

Henkel expands Brandon facility to support EV and electronics manufacturing

Adhesive Technologies invests in future-ready operations

BRANDON, S.D., Sept. 21, 2022 /PRNewswire/ -- Henkel, a global leader of adhesives, sealants and functional coatings, and leading manufacturer of well-known consumer brands, broke ground on a 35,000 square foot expansion of its production facility in Brandon, South Dakota. The expanded facility will bring state-of-the-art manufacturing capabilities and allow Henkel to increase production of thermal interface materials used to manufacture high-performance electronics and electric vehicles (EV).

"The investment in our Brandon facility is a key part of our commitment to create value through our operations and supply chain infrastructure to efficiently meet the growing demand of our customers," said

Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 21 of 75

Christof Becker, Senior Vice President Operations and Supply Chain, Henkel Americas. "The expansion demonstrates our ambition to implement advanced production technologies and capabilities across our manufacturing network. We're thankful for the ongoing support and partnership from the City of Brandon, Brandon Development Foundation, and the State of South Dakota as we pursue our strategy of purposeful growth."

Henkel's Brandon facility manufactures thermal interface material adhesives under the leading brands Loctite and Bergquist*, which are used in the electronics and automotive industry, with a specific focus on next generation electric car capabilities and components. With an increasing demand on domestic electric vehicle manufacturing, thermal interface materials become an essential part of the supply chain, supporting safe and efficient battery performance during charging and discharging cycles.

As part of Henkel's commitment to build value through comprehensive sustainable operations strategies, the company will pursue LEED certification for both the expansion and existing facility. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the most widely used green building rating system in the world and promotes the use of efficient building strategies that are good for people as well as the environment.

The company's facility in Brandon was built in 2009, covers 36,000 square feet, and employs 120 employees. The expansion will create approximately 20 new jobs and is expected to be operational by the fourth quarter of 2023. Henkel's \$30 million investment in Brandon was initially announced in October 2021.

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About Henkel in North America

Bank of England hikes rates but avoids more aggressive step

LONDON (AP) — Britain's central bank raised its key interest rate by another half-percentage point Thursday, avoiding more aggressive steps to tame inflation that the U.S. Federal Reserve and other banks have taken.

It is the Bank of England's seventh straight move to increase borrowing costs as rising food and energy prices fuel a cost-of-living crisis that is considered the worst in a generation. Despite facing a slumping currency, tight labor market and inflation near its highest in four decades, officials decided against acting more boldly as large hikes threaten to tip the economy into recession.

The bank matched its half-point increase last month — the biggest in 27 years — to bring its benchmark rate to the highest level in 14 years at 2.25%. The decision was delayed for a week as the United Kingdom mourned Queen Elizabeth II and comes after new Prime Minister Liz Truss' government announced a cap on spiraling energy bills for households and businesses.

The energy relief package means consumer prices will peak at 11% in October, lower than the previously expected, the bank's monetary policy committee said.

"Nevertheless, energy bills will still go up and, combined with the indirect effects of higher energy costs, inflation is expected to remain above 10% over the following few months, before starting to fall back," the bank said.

The U.K. decision comes during a busy week for central bank action marked by much more aggressive moves to bring down soaring consumer prices. The U.S. Federal Reserve hiked rates Wednesday by three-quarters of a point for the third consecutive time and forecast that more large increases were ahead.

Also Thursday, the Swiss central bank enacted its biggest-ever hike to its key interest rate.

Surging inflation is a worry for central banks because it eats away at consumers' purchasing power. The traditional tool to combat inflation is raising interest rates, which reduces demand and therefore prices, by making it more expensive to borrow money.

Inflation in the United Kingdom is running at 9.9%, close to its highest level since 1982 and five times higher than the Bank of England's 2% target. The British pound is at its weakest against the dollar in 37 years, contributing to imported inflation.

Since then, Truss' government has unveiled a massive relief program for energy bills that have soared

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 22 of 75

as Russia's war in Ukraine has helped drive up the price of natural gas needed for heating. Economists say the measures mean inflation will peak at a lower level and then fall faster next year.

The Bank of England avoided pressure to go bigger even as other banks around the world take aggressive action against inflation fueled by the global economy's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and then the war in Ukraine.

This month, Sweden's central bank raised its key interest rate by a full percentage point, while the European Central Bank delivered its largest-ever rate increase with a three-quarter point hike for the 19 countries that use the euro currency.

Trump docs probe: Court lifts hold on Mar-a-Lago records

By ERIC TUCKER, NOMAAN MERCHANT and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a stark repudiation of Donald Trump's legal arguments, a federal appeals court on Wednesday permitted the Justice Department to resume its use of classified records seized from the former president's Florida estate as part of its ongoing criminal investigation.

The ruling from a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit amounts to an overwhelming victory for the Justice Department, clearing the way for investigators to continue scrutinizing the documents as they consider whether to bring criminal charges over the storage of top-secret records at Mar-a-Lago after Trump left the White House. In lifting a hold on a core aspect of the department's probe, the court removed an obstacle that could have delayed the investigation by weeks.

The appeals court also pointedly noted that Trump had presented no evidence that he had declassified the sensitive records, as he maintained as recently as Wednesday, and rejected the possibility that Trump could have an "individual interest in or need for" the roughly 100 documents with classification markings that were seized by the FBI in its Aug. 8 search of the Palm Beach property.

"If you're the president of the United States, you can declassify just by saying 'It's declassified.' Even by thinking about it...You're the president, you make that decision," Trump claimed in a Fox News Channel interview recorded Wednesday before the appeals court ruling.

The government had argued that its investigation had been impeded, and national security concerns swept aside, by an order from U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon that temporarily barred investigators from continuing to use the documents in its inquiry. Cannon, a Trump appointee, had said the hold would remain in place pending a separate review by an independent arbiter she had appointed at the Trump team's request to review the records.

The appeals panel agreed with the Justice Department's concerns.

"It is self-evident that the public has a strong interest in ensuring that the storage of the classified records did not result in 'exceptionally grave damage to the national security,'" they wrote. "Ascertaining that," they added, "necessarily involves reviewing the documents, determining who had access to them and when, and deciding which (if any) sources or methods are compromised."

An injunction that delayed or prevented the criminal investigation "from using classified materials risks imposing real and significant harm on the United States and the public," they wrote.

Two of the three judges who issued Wednesday's ruling — Britt Grant and Andrew Brasher — were nominated to the 11th Circuit by Trump. Judge Robin Rosenbaum was nominated by former President Barack Obama.

Lawyers for Trump did not return an email seeking comment on whether they would appeal the ruling. The Justice Department did not have an immediate comment.

The FBI last month seized roughly 11,000 documents, including about 100 with classification markings, during a court-authorized search of the Palm Beach club. It has launched a criminal investigation into whether the records were mishandled or compromised, though it is not clear whether Trump or anyone else will be charged.

Cannon ruled on Sept. 5 that she would name an independent arbiter, or special master, to do an independent review of those records and segregate any that may be covered by claims of attorney-client

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 23 of 75

privilege or executive privilege and to determine whether any of the materials should be returned to Trump. Raymond Dearie, the former chief judge of the federal court based in Brooklyn, has been named to the role and held his first meeting on Tuesday with lawyers for both sides.

The Justice Department had argued that a special master review of the classified documents was not necessary. It said Trump had no plausible basis to invoke executive privilege over the documents, nor could the records be covered by attorney-client privilege because they do not involve communications between Trump and his lawyers.

It had also contested Cannon's order requiring it to provide Dearie and Trump's lawyers with access to the classified material. The court sided with the Justice Department on Wednesday, saying "courts should order review of such materials in only the most extraordinary circumstances. The record does not allow for the conclusion that this is such a circumstance."

Though Trump's lawyers have said a president has absolute authority to declassify information, they have notably stopped short of asserting that the records were declassified. The Trump team this week resisted providing Dearie with any information to support the idea that the records might have been declassified, saying the issue could be part of their defense in the event of an indictment.

The Justice Department has said there is no indication that Trump took any steps to declassify the documents and even included a photo in one court filing of some of the seized documents with colored cover sheets indicating their classified status. The appeals court, too, made the same point.

"Plaintiff suggests that he may have declassified these documents when he was President. But the record contains no evidence that any of these records were declassified," the judges wrote. "In any event, at least for these purposes, the declassification argument is a red herring because declassifying an official document would not change its content or render it personal."

Puerto Rico struggles to reach areas cut off by Fiona

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

CAGUAS, Puerto Rico (AP) — Hurricane Fiona left hundreds of people stranded across Puerto Rico after smashing roads and bridges, with authorities still struggling to reach people four days after the storm smacked the U.S. territory, causing historic flooding.

For now, government officials are working with religious groups, nonprofits and others braving landslides, thick mud and broken asphalt by foot to provide food, water and medicine for people in need, but they are under pressure to clear a path so vehicles can enter isolated areas soon.

Nino Correa, commissioner for Puerto Rico's emergency management agency, estimated that at least six municipalities across the island had areas that were cut off by Fiona, which struck as a Category 1 hurricane and was up to Category 4 power Wednesday as it headed toward Bermuda.

Living in one of those areas is Manuel Veguilla, who has not been able to leave his neighborhood in the north mountain town of Caguas since Fiona swept in on Sunday.

"We are all isolated," he said, adding that he worries about elderly neighbors including his older brother who does not have the strength for the long walk it takes to reach the closest community.

Veguilla heard that municipal officials might open a pathway Thursday, but he doubted that would happen because he said large rocks covered a nearby bridge and the 10-foot space beneath it.

Neighbors have shared food and water dropped off by nonprofit groups, and the son of an elderly woman was able to bring back basic supplies by foot Wednesday, he said.

Veguilla said that in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, a Category 4 storm that struck five years ago and resulted in nearly 3,000 deaths, he and others used picks and shovels to clear the debris. But Fiona was different, unleashing huge landslides.

"I cannot throw those rocks over my shoulder," he said.

Like hundreds of thousands of other Puerto Ricans after Fiona, Veguilla had no water or electricity service, but said they there is a natural water source nearby.

Fiona sparked an islandwide blackout when it hit Puerto Rico's southwest region, which already was still

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 24 of 75

trying to recover from a series of strong earthquakes in recent years. Some 62% of 1.47 million customers were without power four days after the storm amid an extreme heat alert issued by the National Weather Service. Some 36% of customers, or nearly half a million, did not have water service.

The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency has sent hundreds of additional personnel to help local officials as the federal government approved a major disaster declaration and announced a public health emergency on the island.

Neither local nor federal government officials had provided any damage estimates as Puerto Rico struggles to recover from the storm, which dropped up to 30 inches of rain in some areas. More than 470 people and 48 pets remained in shelters.

"Our hearts go out to the people of Puerto Rico who have endured so much suffering over the last couple of years," said Brad Kieserman, vice president of operations and logistics at the Red Cross.

After Puerto Rico, Fiona pummeled the Dominican Republic and then swiped past the Turks and Caicos Islands as it strengthened into a Category 4 storm. Officials there reported relatively light damage and no deaths, though the eye of the storm passed close to Grand Turk, the small British territory's capital island, on Tuesday.

"God has been good to us and has kept us safe during this period when we could have had a far worse outcome," Deputy Gov. Anya Williams said.

Fiona was forecast to pass near Bermuda early Friday, and then hit easternmost Canada early Saturday, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said.

The center said Fiona had maximum sustained winds of 130 mph (215 kph) on Thursday morning. It was centered about 485 miles (780 kilometers) southwest of Bermuda, heading north-northeast at 13 mph (20 kph).

The hurricane was forecast to pass just west of Bermuda late Thursday. A hurricane warning was in effect for the British territory.

Fugitive in massive Navy bribery case caught in Venezuela

SAN DIEGO (AP) — A Malaysian defense contractor nicknamed "Fat Leonard" who orchestrated one of the largest bribery scandals in U.S. military history has been arrested in Venezuela after fleeing before his sentencing, authorities said Wednesday.

The international manhunt for Leonard Glenn Francis ended with his arrest by Venezuelan authorities Tuesday morning at the Caracas airport as he was about to board an airplane for another country, the U.S. Marshals Service said.

Interpol Venezuela Director General Carlos Garate Rondon said in a statement posted on Instagram that Francis came to Venezuela from Mexico. Rondon said he was headed to Russia.

The arrest came on the eve of his scheduled sentencing in a federal court in California for a bribery scheme that lasted more than a decade and involved dozens of U.S. Navy officers.

There was no immediate word on when he might be extradited to the United States.

Francis was under home arrest in San Diego when he cut off his GPS ankle bracelet and escaped on Sept. 4. Ten U.S. agencies searched for Francis and authorities issued a \$40,000 reward for his arrest.

U.S. authorities also issued a red notice, which asks law enforcement worldwide to provisionally arrest someone with the possibility of extradition. Malaysia and Singapore both have extradition agreements with the United States.

Francis pleaded guilty in 2015 to offering prostitution services, luxury hotels, cigars, gourmet meals and more than \$500,000 in bribes to Navy officials and others to help his Singapore-based ship servicing company, Glenn Defense Marine Asia Ltd. or GDMA. Prosecutors said the company overcharged the Navy by at least \$35 million for servicing ships, many of which were routed to ports he controlled in the Pacific.

Francis had been allowed to remain in home confinement to receive medical care while he cooperated with the prosecution. With his help, prosecutors secured convictions of 33 of 34 defendants, including more than two dozen Navy officers.

No let-up in hostilities in Ukraine despite prisoner swap

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian missile strikes in the southern city of Zaporizhzhia left one person dead and five others wounded, Ukrainian officials said Thursday, while officials in the Russian-controlled city of Donetsk said Ukrainian shelling killed at least five people.

It was a stark signal that hostilities haven't diminished despite a high-profile prisoner swap just hours earlier.

Zaporizhzhia Gov. Oleksandr Starukh said Russian forces targeted infrastructure facilities and also damaged nearby apartment buildings.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, the deputy of the Ukrainian president's office, said a hotel in the central part of the city was struck and rescuers were on the scene trying to free people trapped in the rubble.

The Zaporizhzhia region is one of four in which Russia is planning to hold referendums starting Friday on becoming part of Russia, but the city itself is in Ukrainian hands.

Meanwhile, Donetsk city mayor Alexei Kulemzin said at least five people were killed when Ukrainian shelling Thursday hit a covered market and a passenger minibus.

Just hours before the latest attacks, a high-profile prisoner swap saw 215 Ukrainian and foreign fighters exchanged — 200 of them for a single person, an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Among the freed fighters were Ukrainian defenders of a steel plant in Mariupol during a long Russian siege and 10 foreigners, including five British nationals and two U.S. military veterans, who had fought with Ukrainian forces.

A video on the BBC news website Thursday showed two of the released British men, Aiden Aslin and Shaun Pinner, speaking inside a plane. It said they had arrived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

"We just want to let everyone know that we're now out of the danger zone and we're on our way home to our families," Aslin said in the video, as Pinner added: "By the skin of our teeth."

The speed with which the Russian missile attack came after the swap suggested that the Kremlin was seeking to dispel any notion of weakness or waning determination to achieve its war aims following recent battlefield losses and setbacks that gravely undercut the aura of Russian military might.

Those losses culminated Wednesday in Putin's order for a partial mobilization of reservists Wednesday to bolster his forces in Ukraine that sparked rare protests in the Russia and was derided in the West as an act of weakness and desperation.

The partial call-up was short on details, raising concerns of a wider draft that sent some Russians scrambling to buy plane tickets to flee the country.

The move preceded referendums that authorities in Russian-controlled regions in eastern and southern Ukraine are preparing to hold on becoming part of Russia — a move that could allow Moscow to escalate the war. The votes start Friday in the Luhansk, Kherson and partly Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions.

Foreign leaders are already calling the votes illegitimate and nonbinding. Zelenskyy said they were a "sham" and "noise" to distract the public.

Constitution stops Charles becoming Britain's 'green' king

By SYLVIA HUI and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — On a blustery November day last year Britain's future king stood before world leaders to deliver a rallying cry that they should "act with all despatch, and decisively" to confront a common enemy.

The clarion call — in the vast, windowless hall of a Glasgow convention center at the opening of the U.N. climate conference — concerned an issue long dear to the heart of the then-Prince Charles.

Climate change and loss of biodiversity were no different from the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping the globe, he said. "In fact, they pose an even greater existential threat, to the extent that we have to put ourselves on what might be called a war-like footing."

He warned leaders that time was running out to reduce emissions, urging them to push through reforms that are "radically transforming our current fossil fuel-based economy to one that is genuinely renewable

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 26 of 75

and sustainable.”

“We need a vast military-style campaign to marshal the strength of the global private sector,” he said, adding that the trillions at businesses’ disposal would go far beyond what governments could muster and offered “the only real prospect of achieving fundamental economic transition.”

It was a fierce call to arms quite unlike the gentle appeal delivered by his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in a video message that evening.

For decades, Charles has been one of Britain’s most prominent environmental voices, blasting the ills of pollution. Now that he’s monarch, he is bound to be more careful with his words and must stay out of politics and government policy in accordance with the traditions of Britain’s constitutional monarchy.

“Charles will have very little freedom of maneuver now that he is King,” said Robert Hazell, an expert on British constitutional affairs at University College London.

“All of his speeches are written or vetted by the government,” Hazell added. “If he makes an impromptu remark which seems at odds with government policy, the press will pounce on him to point out the inconsistency, and the government will rein him in; he will have to be far less outspoken than he has been in the past.”

Still, many say it’s unlikely he will abruptly stop discussing climate change and the environment – not least because they are issues that are above political ideology.

Australia’s Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said last week that it would be “perfectly acceptable” for the monarch to advocate for climate action, even though his role is meant to be apolitical.

“It’s important that the monarchy distance from party political issues,” Albanese told Australian Broadcasting Corp. “But there are issues like climate change where I think if he chooses to continue to make statements in that area, I think that is perfectly acceptable.”

“It should be something that’s above politics, the need to act on climate change,” he added.

Keeping mum on climate may be particularly tricky for Charles in light of the current Conservative government’s ambivalent stance.

While the government says it remains committed to the goal of cutting greenhouse gas emissions to “net zero” by mid-century, the administration led by new Prime Minister Liz Truss is encouraging more North Sea oil drilling and reversing a ban on fracking in a bid to boost the domestic energy supply.

Britain’s government formally confirmed Thursday it was lifting a 2019 ban on fracking — or hydraulic fracking, the controversial method of extracting shale gas — in England. Officials brushed away criticism from environmental groups and argued that the move would reduce U.K. dependence on international gas prices, which have soared amid Russia’s war on Ukraine.

Truss’ government also announced a new round of licensing for companies to search for oil and gas in the North Sea.

Energy Secretary Jacob Rees-Mogg has said Britain should keep burning the fossil fuels at its disposal.

“We need to be thinking about extracting every last cubic inch of gas from the North Sea,” he said in a recent radio interview, citing the need for energy security.

In the past Rees-Mogg has spoken out against building more on-shore wind farms in Britain and questioned the effect that rising carbon dioxide emissions are having on the climate, even though experts say the warming effects of increasing CO2 levels are clear.

As environment secretary in 2014, Truss called large-scale solar farms “a blight on the landscape” and scrapped subsidies for farmers and landowners to build them.

Speaking in a 2018 BBC documentary marking Charles’ 70th birthday, his sons William and Harry revealed the frustration their father feels at the world’s failure to tackle environmental challenges. They recalled how, as teenagers, Charles would make them go litter picking during the holidays and obsess over the need to turn off lights.

Such small actions pale in comparison to the air miles the monarch has racked up over a lifetime of jetting around the world — though he claims to have converted his Aston Martin to run on surplus white wine and cheese.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 27 of 75

Charles' lament that many people "simply pay no attention to science" on climate change has also been called out by those who point out that he has long been an advocate of unproven naturopathic therapies.

Some of Charles' subjects want him to continue the fight against climate change, even as king.

Yet the new king himself has acknowledged that his role as eco-warrior cannot last, at least in its current form.

"I'm not that stupid," he told the BBC four years ago on being asked whether he would continue his activism as before.

The battles of a prince are not those of a king, he explained, but made clear that they can still be fought by the next in line, Prince William.

In his first address as sovereign to the nation on Sept. 9, Charles emphasized that, saying "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," he added.

Like Charles, William, 40, has made climate change one of his main advocacy topics. Last year he made his mark by awarding the first Earthshot Prize, an ambitious "legacy project" the prince founded to award millions of pounds in grants for environmental initiatives around the world over the next 10 years. His efforts, however, have been undermined by criticism that his conservation charity invested in a bank that is one of the world's biggest backers of fossil fuels.

Ukraine's Mariupol defenders, Putin ally in prisoner swap

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine announced a high-profile prisoner swap early Thursday that was the culmination of months of efforts to free many of the Ukrainian fighters who defended a steel plant in Mariupol during a long Russian siege. In exchange, Ukraine gave up a prominent ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and 55 other prisoners.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his government had won freedom from Russian custody for 215 Ukrainian and foreign citizens, with the help of Turkish and Saudi mediation efforts. He said many were soldiers and officers who had faced the death penalty in Russian-occupied territory.

Russian officials didn't immediately confirm or otherwise comment on what appeared to be the biggest prisoner swap during the nearly seven-month war.

Of the total, 200 Ukrainians were exchanged for just one man — pro-Russian opposition leader Viktor Medvedchuk, who is Ukrainian. The 68-year-old oligarch escaped from house arrest in Ukraine several days before Russia's invasion Feb. 24 but was recaptured in April. He faced up to life in prison on charges of treason and aiding and abetting a terrorist organization for mediating coal purchases for the separatist, Russia-backed Donetsk republic in eastern Ukraine.

Medvedchuk came to know Putin while serving as chief of staff for former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma. The Russian leader is the godfather of Medvedchuk's daughter. His detention sparked a heated exchange between officials in Moscow and Kyiv.

Medvedchuk is the head of the political council of Ukraine's pro-Russian Opposition Platform-For Life party, the largest opposition group in Ukraine's parliament. The Ukrainian government has suspended the party's activity; Putin has repeatedly spoken about Medvedchuk as a victim of political repression.

"It is not a pity to give up Medvedchuk for real warriors," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video speech. "He has passed all the investigative actions provided by law. Ukraine has received from him everything necessary to establish the truth in the framework of criminal proceedings."

In another swap, Ukraine gained the release of five commanders who led Ukraine's defense of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol in exchange for 55 Russian prisoners it was holding, Zelenskyy said.

More than 2,000 defenders, many in the Azov Regiment, marched out of the Azovstal steel plant's twisted wreckage into Russian captivity in mid-May, ending a nearly three-month siege of the port city of Mariupol.

Zelenskyy said the five leaders, including Azov Regiment commanders Denys Prokopenko and Svyatoslav

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 28 of 75

Palamar, are in Turkey, where they will remain as part of the deal "in complete safety" until the end of the war, under the protection of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The complex prisoner swap also brought the release of 10 foreigners, including five British nationals and two U.S. military veterans, who had fought with Ukrainian forces. They were released by Russian-backed separatists as part of an exchange mediated by Saudi Arabia, U.S. and Saudi officials said.

A video on the BBC news website Thursday showed two of the released British men, Aiden Aslin and Shaun Pinner, speaking inside a plane.

"We just want to let everyone know that we're now out of the danger zone and we're on our way home to our families," Aslin said in the video, as Pinner added: "By the skin of our teeth."

The BBC reported that the two men, along with a third British detainee, John Harding, have arrived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It said they appeared to be accompanied by a group of Saudi officials.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the exchanges, calling them "no small feat," but adding that "much more remains to be done to ease the suffering caused by the war in Ukraine," his spokesman said. The U.N. chief reiterates the need to respect international law on the treatment of prisoners and will continue to support further prisoner exchanges, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

The exchanges drew angry comments from some nationalist commentators in Russia. Igor Strelkov, a Russian officer who led the Moscow-backed separatists in the Donbas when a conflict there erupted in 2014, described the swap as an act of treason, saying that "it's worse than a crime, worsen than a mistake, it's just sheer stupidity or sabotage."

6.8 magnitude earthquake shakes Mexico, 1 dead

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A powerful earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.8 struck Mexico early Thursday, causing buildings to sway and leaving at least one person dead in the nation's capital.

The earthquake struck shortly after 1 a.m., just three days after a 7.6-magnitude earthquake shook western and central Mexico, killing two.

The U.S. Geological Survey said Thursday's earthquake, like Monday's, was centered in the western state of Michoacan near the Pacific coast. The epicenter was about 29 miles (46 kilometers) south-southwest of Aguililla, Michoacan, at a depth of about 15 miles (24.1 kilometers).

Michoacan's state government said the quake was felt throughout the state. It reported damage to a building in the city of Uruapan and some landslides on the highway that connects Michoacan and Guerrero with the coast.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said via Twitter that it was an aftershock from Monday's quake and was also felt in the states of Colima, Jalisco and Guerrero.

Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum said via Twitter that one woman died in a central neighborhood when she fell down the stairs of her home. Residents were huddled in streets as seismic alarms blared.

The earthquake rattled an already jittery country. Monday's more powerful quake was the third major earthquake to strike on Sept. 19 — in 1985, 2017 and now 2022. The 2017 and 2022 Sept. 19 quakes came very shortly after the annual earthquake drill conducted every Sept. 19 to commemorate the devastating 1985 temblor that killed some 9,500 people.

The politicians vying to lead Italy's next government

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The main candidates in Italy's general election Sunday to elect a new Parliament and determine who next governs the country include some familiar names and some lesser-known ones. They range from from three-time Premier Silvio Berlusconi to far-right opposition leader Giorgia Meloni, who is ahead in opinion polls and intent on becoming Italy's first woman to hold the premiership.

Here are the main players in the Sept. 25 election:

GIORGIA MELONI

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 29 of 75

Riding high in voter opinion surveys for weeks now, Meloni might become Italy's first far-right premier since the end of World War II, and its first ever female leader. Her Brothers of Italy party has enjoyed a meteoric rise in popularity since the vote in 2018, when it polled just over 4%.

In the now-expiring legislature, Meloni refused to have her party, which she co-founded in 2012, join any coalition government, including the pandemic unity government under outgoing Premier Mario Draghi.

At 45, Meloni would also be one of Italy's youngest premiers. She contends that the European Union is too bureaucratic but has said she wouldn't push for any "Italexit" – pulling the country out of the shared euro currency — and depicts herself as a staunch backer of NATO. She rallies against what she calls LGBT "lobbies" and promotes what she says is Europe's "Christian identity."

But in sharp contrast to her fellow leaders on Italy's right — anti-migrant Matteo Salvini and former Premier Silvio Berlusconi, who have both openly admired Russian President Vladimir Putin — Meloni backs military aid for Ukraine.

She is dogged by contentions she hasn't made an unambiguous break with her party's neo-fascist roots.

ENRICO LETTA

Letta, the 56-year-old leader of the Democratic Party, Italy's main center-left force, is Meloni's chief election rival.

Letta served as premier in a coalition including center-right forces after a 2013 election failed to yield a clear-cut majority. But he lost the premiership after barely 10 months when an ambitious fellow Democrat, Matteo Renzi, maneuvered to take the office for himself.

Burned by the ouster, Letta headed to teach in Paris at the prestigious Sciences Po university. With infighting chronically plaguing the Democrats, he returned to Italy to take back the reins of the party in March 2021.

Letta was foiled in his quest to build a solid center-left electoral alliance to challenge Meloni and her allies when the populist 5-Star Movement, the largest party in the outgoing Parliament, helped to collapse Draghi's government this summer.

MATTEO SALVINI

Salvini, the 49-year-old League party leader, had been the unchallenged face of right-wing leadership in Italy until Giorgia Meloni's far-right party took off.

His party has roots in Italy's industrial north. In a surprise move, he cut a deal in 2018 to govern with the 5-Star Movement, even after deriding the populist forces. A little more than a year later, he maneuvered to oust 5-Star leader Giuseppe Conte from the premiership, so he could take the office for himself. But Conte outmaneuvered Salvini and cut his own deal with the Democratic Party, forming a coalition government that left the League in the opposition.

As interior minister in Conte's first government, Salvini pushed his hard line against migrants, especially those arriving by the tens of thousands in smugglers' boats launched from Libya. Under his tenure, migrants rescued by humanitarian ships were kept for days or weeks aboard the overcrowded vessels because he refused to quickly let them disembark. Prosecutors in Sicily had him indicted on kidnapping charges over his policy. He has been found innocent in one case; another trial in Palermo is still going on.

SILVIO BERLUSCONI

Berlusconi pioneered populist politics in Italy in the 1990s when he formed his own party and named it Forza Italia after a stadium soccer cheer. With his 86th birthday on Sept. 29, and Forza Italia's popularity shrinking in recent years, the former three-term premier is not gunning for a fourth term but instead hoping for a Senate seat. Nearly a decade ago, the Senate expelled him because of a tax fraud conviction stemming from his media empire.

Berlusconi promises to exercise a moderating influence on the two bigger parties in the right-wing alliance: those of Meloni and Salvini.

Berlusconi's last premiership ended abruptly in 2011 when financial markets lost confidence that the billionaire media magnate could manage his country's finances during Europe's sovereign debt crisis.

GIUSEPPE CONTE

A lawyer specializing in mediation, Conte, now 58, was plucked out of political obscurity to become premier in 2018 after the populist, euroskeptic 5-Star Movement he now heads stunned Italy's establishment by sweeping nearly 33% of the vote to become Parliament's largest party. When neither then-5-Star leader Luigi Di Maio nor right-wing leader Matteo Salvini budged on who would become premier, Conte got the job.

Some 15 months later, Conte's government collapsed when Salvini made a botched move to take the premiership for himself. But Conte outsmarted Salvini by forming a new government that replaced the League with the center-left Democratic Party.

Early in his second stint as premier, Italy became the first nation in the West to be slammed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Conte enforced one of the world's strictest coronavirus lockdowns. But in January 2021, 16 months into Conte's second government, it collapsed after Matteo Renzi, a former premier, yanked his small centrist party from the coalition.

Secret vaccinations help Zimbabwe mothers protect children

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Dozens of women holding babies rushed to take their places on wooden benches at a clinic in Zimbabwe while a nurse took a separate group of anxious mothers and their children through a back door and into another room. The nurse quickly closed the door behind them.

The women were all at the Mbare Polyclinic in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare, to get their children vaccinated against measles amid a deadly outbreak in the southern African country. But those who were taken to the back room were getting their children vaccinated in secret, and in defiance of religious doctrine that forbids them from using modern medicines.

"The advent of the measles outbreak saw children dying so they are now coming secretly and we are helping them," said Lewis Foya, a nurse at the clinic.

More than 700 children have died from measles in Zimbabwe in an outbreak first reported in April. Many were unvaccinated because of religious reasons, Information Minister Monica Mutsvangwa said.

The government has announced a vaccination drive but, as with COVID-19, some religious groups are stubbornly opposed to vaccines and have hindered the campaign.

Apostolic groups that infuse traditional beliefs into a Pentecostal doctrine are among the most skeptical of modern medicine in Zimbabwe. Followers instead put their faith in prayer, holy water and other measures to ward off disease or cure illnesses.

"They have a belief that if they get vaccinated, they become unholy so that's the doctrine that they pass down to the women," said Foya. He said the patriarchy in the church means women have "no power to openly say no" to instructions. Children are then in danger.

There has been little detailed research on Apostolic churches in Zimbabwe but studies by the United Nations children's agency, UNICEF, estimate it is the largest denomination with around 2.5 million followers in a country of 15 million. Some allow members to seek health care. Many are still resistant.

So to save their children, some mothers visit clinics in secret, sometimes under the cover of night and without their husbands knowing. A group of Apostolic church members who are open to modern medicine have been trying to change church attitudes, but also advise women to go against church rules if it means helping their children.

"We encourage women to get their children vaccinated, maybe at night," said Debra Mpfu, a member of the Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust. "It's really necessary for the women to protect their children so it's important for them to just sneak out."

The secrecy is necessary because members found to have visited health care centers are shamed and forbidden from taking part in church activities.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 31 of 75

The World Health Organization warned in April of an increase in measles in vulnerable countries due to COVID-19 disruptions, with more than 40 countries postponing or suspending their regular immunization campaigns. In July, UNICEF said about 25 million children worldwide had missed out on routine immunizations against common childhood diseases, calling it a “red alert” for child health.

Globally, WHO and UNICEF reported a 79% spike in measles in the first two months of 2022 alone and warned of the potential for large outbreaks. Children and pregnant women are most at risk of severe disease from measles, which is among the most infectious diseases and easily preventable with a vaccine. More than 95% of measles deaths occur in developing countries.

Zimbabwe’s outbreak was first reported in the eastern Manicaland province following church gatherings and has spread across the country. The government, with support from UNICEF, the WHO and other non-governmental organizations, has embarked on a vaccination campaign targeting millions of children.

At the Mbare clinic, one mother said people had learned from the vaccine hesitancy prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“A lot of people were misinformed during that COVID-19 period because they were told that when you get vaccinated there will be after-effects,” said the mother, Winnet Musiyarira. “So due to that a lot of people lost their lives and it was important for everybody to take that serious. So when I heard about measles I just said I have to take my kids to hospital and get them vaccinated.”

Musiyarira said she wasn’t a member of a religious group. Some women wearing matching white headscarves to indicate they are part of an Apostolic church and who were at the Mbare clinic to get their children vaccinated secretly declined to speak to The Associated Press for fear of reprisal from church leaders.

Apostolic groups are notoriously wary of outsiders.

In a bushy area in the impoverished Epworth region outside Harare, Apostolic congregants wearing white robes gathered outdoors recently, as is their tradition, to worship. Some knelt before self-proclaimed prophets as a man scooped ashes from a fireplace and put them in plastic bag to take home to be used to heal illness.

It is one of many congregations that Mpofu’s Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust has approached. On this occasion, and after intense negotiations, Mpofu and her team were allowed to address the congregants and distribute vaccination fliers. The church leader, James Katsande, also agreed to allow his followers to take their children to clinics.

But there was a condition: They should approach the church’s prophets to be blessed before going to a clinic.

“First we need to protect them with the Holy Spirit to cast out any demons and bad luck,” said Katsande, a tall man wearing white robes and a white headscarf with a cross on it. “We remain the first port of call,” he added.

In Ukraine’s retaken battlefields, soldiers recover bodies

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

PRUDYANKA, Ukraine (AP) — The four soldiers lay in the grass, sleeping bags and cans of food, some opened, scattered around them. Beneath nearby trees, their cars were smashed and torn by shrapnel. The men had been dead for months.

This region of rolling fields and woodland near the Russian border was the site of fierce battles for months during the summer. Only now, after Ukrainian forces retook the area and pushed Russian troops back across the border in a blistering counteroffensive, has the retrieval of bodies scattered across the battlefield been possible.

The area was of strategic importance as its high ground is among the positions where Russian artillery could easily strike Kharkiv, Ukraine’s hard-hit second-largest city, said Col. Vitalii Shum, deputy commander of the 3rd Brigade of Ukraine’s National Guard, whose team has been collecting the battlefield dead — both Ukrainian and Russian — for days.

For the soldiers’ families, news of the body recovery will be final, incontrovertible confirmation that their

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 32 of 75

son, brother, father or husband will not be coming home.

Even if they had been notified that their loved ones died in combat, without a body to mourn over a glimmer of hope remained.

"They would be hoping that he was captured, and this is the worst," Shum said. Once the bodies' identities are verified through DNA tests, "a difficult and hard procedure will take place," he added: notifying the family the body has been found, and all hope of their loved one again walking through the front door is lost.

During the retrieval mission on Monday, Shum's team photographed the site for evidence and unpacked body bags as soldiers checked the surroundings, and the bodies themselves, for booby-traps and mines. One of the dead soldiers had a hand grenade on him — he never had time to use it as the Russians closed in.

After the search for explosives was finished, a soldier went through the pockets of the dead men's uniforms for identity cards and personal belongings, placing them in plastic bags before the decomposing bodies were lifted into body bags.

The task was performed matter-of-factly, quietly, gently. The body bags were zipped up, numbered and carried along a muddy track to a waiting truck.

The battle here occurred in June, and it was as ferocious as it was bloody. It included close-quarters combat as well as the use of tanks and artillery, said 1st Lt. Mykyta Sydorenko, a 24-year-old commander of an anti-tank unit who participated in the fight and was now back to help collect the remains of his fellow soldiers.

In all, the Ukrainians had four positions in the area, and were determined to hold them. The Russian troops attacked and captured four Ukrainian soldiers, and the Ukrainians launched a rescue bid. An all-day battle ensued, Sydorenko said. Ukrainian reinforcements came in, but the Russians just kept coming.

"They were coming like ants, I just don't know how to describe it in another way," he said.

The losses were heavy on both sides. Sydorenko said at least 16 Russian soldiers were killed, with the Russians using artillery to keep the Ukrainians at bay while they collected their dead and wounded.

Of the Ukrainians, all six holding one position were captured, he said, and all eight holding another were wounded. Of the roughly 17 or 18 men at Sydorenko's position, three were killed and two were wounded.

He's not sure what happened to the six men holding the fourth position. The area where the bodies of the four men were found was an evacuation point set up for the wounded, he said.

Eventually, faced with the Russian onslaught, the surviving Ukrainians, Sydorenko among them, were forced to retreat through a minefield and a swamp.

Returning to where he lost his comrades wasn't easy for the young officer. It is "unpleasant, frankly," he said. "There are not many good memories from this place."

Nearby, a Russian tank lay burned, its tracks blown off its wheels, a blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flag now fluttering atop it. A few days earlier, Shum's men found the remains of a Russian soldier inside, which they collected and delivered to the Kharkiv morgue.

With the chilly autumn wind swaying the weeds and withered sunflowers growing wild in the fallow fields, Shum and his men continued their search. There was another Ukrainian soldier's body by the side of the track, and nearby, the remains of another who appeared to have been run over by the now-disabled tank.

Further up a hill, a destroyed armored vehicle and a car, scattered boxes of ammunition and pieces of equipment were testament to the ferocity of the fight. Inside the armored vehicle was the body of another soldier.

The same procedure was repeated, and the body was lifted through the vehicle's broken window. The soldier lifting the body's feet gagged, but waited until his task was completed before heading for the bushes.

In all, Shum and his men collected seven Ukrainian soldiers' bodies and found the hand of a Russian soldier among discarded Russian body armor and backpacks. All the remains were taken to the Kharkiv morgue.

Soon, the notification of the families will begin.

Drowning island nations: 'This is how a Pacific atoll dies'

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 33 of 75

By PIA SARKAR Associated Press

While world leaders from wealthy countries acknowledge the “existential threat” of climate change, Tuvalu Prime Minister Kausea Natano is racing to save his tiny island nation from drowning by raising it 13 to 16 feet (4 to 5 meters) above sea level through land reclamation.

While experts issue warnings about the eventual uninhabitability of the Marshall Islands, President David Kabua must reconcile the inequity of a seawall built to protect one house that is now flooding another one next door.

That is the reality of climate change: Some people get to talk about it from afar, while others must live it every day.

Natano and Kabua tried to show that reality on Wednesday on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly. Together they launched the Rising Nations Initiative, a global partnership aimed to preserve the sovereignty, heritage and rights of Pacific atoll island nations whose very existence have been threatened by climate change.

Natano described how rising sea levels have impacted everything from the soil that his people rely on to plant crops, to the homes, roads and power lines that get washed away. The cost of eking out a living, he said, eventually becomes too much to bear, causing families to leave and the nation itself to disappear.

“This is how a Pacific atoll dies,” Natano said. “This is how our islands will cease to exist.”

The Rising Nations Initiative seeks a political declaration by the international community to preserve the sovereignty and rights of Pacific atoll island countries; the creation of a comprehensive program to build and finance adaptation and resilience projects to help local communities sustain livelihoods; a living repository of the culture and unique heritage of each Pacific atoll island country; and support to acquire UNESCO World Heritage designation.

The initiative has already gained the support of countries like the United States, Germany, South Korea and Canada, all of which have acknowledged the unique burden that island nations like Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands must shoulder.

A U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report released in February spelled out the vulnerability of small island developing states and other global hotspots like Africa and South Asia, whose populations are 15 times more likely to die from extreme weather compared to less vulnerable parts of the world.

If warming exceeds a few more tenths of a degree, it could lead to some areas — including some small islands — becoming uninhabitable, said report co-author Adelle Thomas of Climate Analytics and the University of the Bahamas. On Wednesday, Natano noted that Tuvalu and its Pacific neighbors “have done nothing to cause climate change,” with their carbon emission contribution amounting to less than .03% of the world’s total.

“This is the first time in history that the collective action of many nations will have made several sovereign countries uninhabitable,” he said.

Representatives from other nations who attended Wednesday’s event did not deflect responsibility. But whether they will do enough to turn things around remains to be seen.

Several have pledged money to help island nations pay for early warning systems and bring their buildings up to code to better protect them from hurricanes and other weather events. But there was less talk of mitigating the problem of climate change and more about how to adapt to the devastation it has already wrought.

“We see this train coming, and it’s coming down the track, and we need to get out of the way,” said Amy Pope, deputy director general of the International Organization for Migration.

Germany’s climate envoy, Jennifer Morgan, who also attended Wednesday’s event, spoke of her country’s target to reach carbon neutrality by 2045. But while Germany remains committed to phasing out coal as a power source by 2030, it has had to reactivate coal-fired power plants to get through the coming winter amid energy shortages as a result of Russia’s war in Ukraine.

For the president of the Marshall Islands, wealthy nations could be doing much more. During his speech to the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday, Kabua urged world leaders to take on sectors that rely on

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 34 of 75

fossil fuels, including aviation and shipping. He pointed to the Marshall Islands' carbon levy proposal for international shipping that he says "will drive the transition to zero emission shipping, channeling resources from polluters to the most vulnerable."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has likewise encouraged going after the world's largest polluters. During his opening remarks to the assembly on Tuesday, he pushed for richer countries to tax the profits of energy companies and redirect the funds to both "countries suffering loss and damage caused by the climate crisis" and those struggling with the rising cost of living.

In the meantime, as wealthy countries urge action instead of words in their own U.N. speeches, Kabua, Natano and their fellow island nation leaders will continue to grapple with their daily climate change reality — and try to continue to exist.

AP: Probe finds evidence of bank boss' romance with top aide

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Investigators say they found evidence a former Trump official who heads Latin America's biggest development bank carried on a romantic relationship with his chief of staff — a bond they allegedly forged in a pact scribbled on the back of a restaurant place mat: "We deserve absolute happiness."

The Associated Press obtained a copy of a confidential report by a law firm hired by the Inter-American Development Bank's board to investigate an anonymous complaint of misconduct against its president, Mauricio Claver-Carone.

In it, investigators said it is reasonable to conclude the relationship between the two existed since at least 2019, when both held senior positions on the National Security Council. They said the purported relationship prompted one U.S. official at the time to warn that it posed a counterintelligence risk.

Exhibit A in the 21-page report is a "contract" that the two purportedly drew up on the back of a place mat in the summer of 2019 while they dined at a steakhouse in Medellin, Colombia. Both were there attending the annual meeting of the Organization of American States.

In it, they allegedly outline a timeline for divorcing their spouses and getting married. There is also a "breach clause" stating that any failure to fulfill the terms would bring "sadness and heartbreak" that could only be mitigated by "candlewax and a naughty box" from an oceanfront hotel in Claver-Carone's native Miami.

"We deserve absolute happiness. May only God part w/ this covenant," according to the contract, a photo of which was provided to investigators by the woman's former husband, who told investigators he found the place mat in her purse when she returned from the trip.

The purported contract is one of several details in the report that have Claver-Carone fighting to save his job. They include allegations he had a 1 a.m. hotel room rendezvous with his chief of staff, sent her a poem on a Sunday morning titled "My Soul is in a Hurry" and — perhaps most troubling — awarded her 40% pay raises in violation of the bank's conflict-of-interest policies.

Claver-Carone has disputed the report's accuracy, strongly denouncing the manner in which the review was conducted and offering no hint that he is considering resignation.

According to investigators, he has denied ever having — now or before — a romantic relationship with his longtime right hand.

His chief of staff denied the allegations in the anonymous complaint and told investigators she never violated the IDB's code of ethics, the report said. In a written submission to investigators, she also complained that she had been denied due process.

The AP isn't naming Claver-Carone's aide because the report, which is labeled "confidential," hasn't been made public.

"Neither I nor any other IDB staff member has been given an opportunity to review the final investigative report, respond to its conclusions, or correct inaccuracies," Claver-Carone said in a statement Tuesday.

The findings recall accusations of ethical lapses against another Republican atop a multilateral institution, former Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, who resigned as head of the World Bank in 2007 for

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 35 of 75

arranging a generous pay raise for his girlfriend.

The Inter-American Development Bank is the biggest multilateral lender to Latin America, disbursing as much as \$23 billion every year in efforts to alleviate poverty in the region.

Representatives of the bank's 48 members met Wednesday to discuss the report but it was unclear what action, if any, they might take.

The U.S. is the largest shareholder in the Washington-based bank and some inside the White House have made no secret of their dislike for Claver-Carone, whose election as IDB chief in the final months of the Trump presidency broke with tradition that a Latin American head the bank.

Some of the more salacious claims referenced in the report could not be substantiated by New York-based Davis Polk. The law firm also found no evidence that Claver-Carone knowingly broke the bank's travel policies to cover up a romantic relationship, or retaliated against any bank employees, as was alleged in an anonymous complaint sent in March to the bank's board.

Still, Davis Polk harshly criticized Claver-Carone and his chief of staff for failing to cooperate fully with their investigation — considering it a violation of bank policies and principles.

For example, the report said Claver-Carone failed to hand over his bank-issued mobile phone for analysis although he did provide a forensic report conducted by a consultant. Claver-Carone also didn't share messages from his personal phone or Gmail account with his chief of staff, the report said.

"Particularly in light of their failure to cooperate, it would be reasonable to conclude that the evidence of a prior relationship, and the additional circumstantial evidence of a current relationship while they were both at the Bank, constitute a violation of the applicable Bank policies," the report said.

Davis Polk's report said Claver-Carone raised his aide's pay by 40% within a year. It said that one of the raises and a change of title was ordered by Claver-Carone a day after an email exchange in which she complained about not getting sufficient respect from her co-workers.

"You figure it out. It's your bank," she wrote, according to the report.

Davis Polk, which also conducted the investigation that led to Andrew Cuomo's resignation as governor of New York, faulted Claver-Carone for making employment decisions about someone with whom it believes he had been romantically involved. However, it said that other executives received similarly-sized increases and his chief of staff's current salary of \$420,000 is in line with her predecessor's compensation.

Claver-Carone when confronted with photographs of the purported place mat "contract" during an interview this month told investigators that he had never seen the document and denied it was his handwriting or signature. He stated that the document was fraudulent and part of a scheme by his aide's ex-husband to harm her.

In a letter to the bank's general counsel, seen by AP, divorce lawyers for the chief of staff said her former husband had a history of cruelty and revenge that was raised in divorce proceedings. They said any evidence he supplied investigators should not be deemed credible.

However, two independent handwriting experts, one who previously worked for the FBI, concluded there was a high probability that the handwriting on the place mat — excerpts of which are displayed in the report — match Claver-Carone's penmanship in bank documents. Claver-Carone refused to submit a handwriting sample as part of the probe, the report said.

Alex Jones set to testify in trial over Sandy Hook hoax lies

By DAVE COLLINS and PAT EATON-ROBB Associated Press

WATERBURY, Conn. (AP) — Seven days into his trial for calling the Sandy Hook school shooting a hoax, conspiracy theorist Alex Jones is expected make his first courtroom appearance and begin testifying Thursday, as he and his lawyer try to limit damages he must pay to families who lost loved ones in the massacre.

Jones has been in Connecticut this week in preparation for his testimony, but appeared only briefly in the courthouse Tuesday and did not enter the courtroom. The Infowars host has bashed the proceedings as a "travesty justice" and the judge as a "tyrant" in comments outside the courthouse in Waterbury, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) from the scene of the 2012 shooting in Newtown.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 36 of 75

Twenty first graders and six educators were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Several victims' relatives, meanwhile, have given emotional testimony during the trial about being traumatized by people calling the shooting fake, including confrontations at their homes and in public and messages including death and rape threats. The plaintiffs include an FBI agent who responded to the shooting and relatives of eight of the victims.

Judge Barbara Bellis last year found Jones liable by default for damages to plaintiffs without a trial, as punishment for what she called his repeated failures to turn over documents to their lawyers. The six-member jury only will be deciding how much Jones and Free Speech Systems, Infowars' parent company, should pay the families for defaming them and intentionally inflicting emotional distress.

Bellis said in court on Wednesday that she was prepared to handle any incendiary testimony from Jones, with contempt of court proceedings if necessary.

Bellis also was expected to tell Jones, when he first takes the stand and with the jury not in the courtroom, what topics he cannot talk about — including free speech rights and the Sandy Hook families \$73 million settlement earlier this year with gun maker Remington, which made the Bushmaster rifle used to kill the victims at Sandy Hook.

Jones also was found liable by default in two similar lawsuits over the hoax lies in his hometown of Austin, Texas, where a jury in one of the trials ordered Jones last month to pay nearly \$50 million in damages to the parents of one of the children killed. A third trial in Texas is expected to begin near the end of the year.

When Jones faced the Texas jury last month and testified under oath, he toned down his rhetoric. He said he realized the hoax lies were irresponsible and the school shooting was "100% real."

"I unintentionally took part in things that did hurt these people's feelings," testified Jones, who also acknowledged raising conspiracy claims about other mass tragedies, from the Oklahoma City and Boston Marathon bombings to the mass shootings in Las Vegas and Parkland, Florida, "and I'm sorry for that."

Jones had portrayed the Sandy Hook shooting as staged by crisis actors as part of gun control efforts.

Testimony at the current trial also has focused on website analytics data run by Infowars employees showing how its sales of dietary supplements, food, clothing and other items spiked around the time Jones talked about the Sandy Hook shooting.

Evidence, including internal Infowars emails and depositions, also shows dissent within the company about pushing the hoax lies.

Jones' lawyer Norman Pattis is arguing that any damages should be limited and accused the victims' relatives of exaggerating the harm the lies caused them.

The relatives have testified that they continue to fear for their safety because of what the hoax believers have done and might do.

Jennifer Hensel, whose 6-year-old daughter Avielle Richman was among the slain, testified Wednesday that she still monitors her surroundings, even checking the back seat of her car, for safety reasons. She said she is trying to shield her two children, ages 7 and 5, from the hoax lies. A juror cried during her testimony.

"They're so young," she said of her children. "Their innocence is so beautiful right now. And at some point there are a horde of people out there who could hurt them."

At UN, Russia's war in Ukraine is both text and subtext

By MALLIKA SEN Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — After two years of discourse dominated by the coronavirus pandemic, this year's U.N. General Assembly has a new occupant of center stage: the war in Ukraine.

The pleas made by leaders from around the world for peace were both an altruistic amplification of besieged Ukrainians' plight as well as born from self-interest. As several speeches made clear, the repercussions of the Russian invasion have been felt even thousands of miles away.

"It is not just the dismay that we feel at seeing such deliberate devastation of cities and towns in Europe in the year 2022. We are feeling this war directly in our lives in Africa," Ghanaian President Nana Addo

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 37 of 75

Dankwa Akufo-Addo said Wednesday. "Every bullet, every bomb, every shell that hits a target in Ukraine, hits our pockets and our economies in Africa."

The speeches that elided any direct reference to the conflict were few, but the war resonated even in the absence of its direct invocation. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the president of Kazakhstan, never let the words "Ukraine" or "Russia" slip from his lips, but he made several seemingly pointed allusions.

He opened his remarks by painting a bleak picture of a world catapulted into a "new, increasingly bitter period of geopolitical confrontation" that's engendered "the prospect of the use of nuclear weapons, and not even as a last resort."

Just hours later, Russian President Vladimir Putin — who is not attending the U.N. General Assembly — declared that he would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons to defend his country's territory.

Russia is a key ally of Kazakhstan, and the war in Ukraine has left the former Soviet country in an awkward spot. Tokayev performed a similar dance last week during Pope Francis' visit, refusing to speak directly about Ukraine while generally decrying a morbid state of affairs.

On Tuesday, Tokayev laid out "three primordial principles: the sovereign equality of states, the territorial integrity of states, and peaceful coexistence between states."

"These three principles are interdependent. To respect one is to respect the other two. To undermine one is to undermine the other two," he said.

The theme of territorial sovereignty resonated in other speeches, as countries who have faced infringements invoked their own traumas or cited the fate of Ukraine as a fear.

"We must not be silent in Bosnia and Herzegovina either. We owe that to our vivid memories of the horrors of war and aggression," Šefik Džaferović, chair of the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, said Wednesday. "The United Nations system was unable to prevent or stop the war in my country in the period between 1992 and 1995. Unfortunately, that happened again with Ukraine."

Russia has long been accused of trying to destabilize the Balkans anew — including Bosnia and Herzegovina. Džaferović's turn at the rostrum came a day after Putin met with a Bosnian Serb separatist leader in Moscow.

Russian peacekeepers have been stationed in Transnistria, a breakaway region in Moldova, since the end of a separatist war in 1992. Sandwiched between description of how the war in Ukraine — "our neighbor and friend" — has affected her country, Moldovan President Maia Sandu called for the "complete and unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops" from Transnistria.

Poland is the Ukrainian ally that has taken in the most refugees, and President Andrzej Duda made 34 references to the country in his speech Tuesday.

"We must not forget those who are suffering," Duda said. "Let us remember that six months of Russian aggression in Ukraine has brought the biggest humanitarian crisis in Europe since World War II."

But Duda also highlighted how Ukraine has captured the world's attention when many other momentous crises outside of Europe have not.

"Were we equally resolute during the tragedies of Syria, Libya, Yemen? Did we not return to business as usual after two great tragedies of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the wars in the Horn of Africa, and while condemning the invasion of Ukraine, do we give equal weight to fighting mercenaries who seek to destabilize the Sahel and threaten many other states in Africa?" he said.

On the first day alone, Ukraine drew more than 150 mentions across speeches from leaders, including the U.N. secretary-general. Antonio Guterres opened the General Assembly by touting Ukraine and Russia's deal — with the help of Turkey — over grain shipments as an example of successful multilateral diplomacy. The war was threaded throughout his speech, as he turned to its gloomier yields.

"The fighting has claimed thousands of lives. Millions have been displaced. Billions across the world are affected," he said.

In the lone video address to the General Assembly, for which he was given special dispensation, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy himself called out the seven countries who voted against the allowance: "Seven. Seven who are afraid of the video address. Seven who respond to principles with a red button."

Only seven.”

None of those seven had yet spoken. But even if those countries had somehow prevailed, Slovakian President Zuzana Čaputová said it was incumbent on other countries to advocate for Ukraine.

“The democratic world and all of us must be a voice of Ukraine. The voice that won’t be silent, voice that will continue to testify about Russia’s crimes in Ukraine,” she said Tuesday. “The voice that will remember, and that will act — so no one is ever allowed to commit such atrocities again.”

Ukraine’s Zelenskyy lays out his case against Russia to UN

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Ukraine’s president laid out a detailed case against Russia’s invasion at the United Nations and demanded punishment from world leaders in a speech delivered just hours after Moscow made an extraordinary announcement that it would mobilize some reservists for the war effort.

Buoyed by a counteroffensive that has retaken swaths of territory that the Russians seized, Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed in a video address Wednesday that his forces would not stop until they had reclaimed all of Ukraine.

“We can return the Ukrainian flag to our entire territory. We can do it with the force of arms,” the president said in a speech delivered in English. “But we need time.”

Video speeches by Zelenskyy in an olive green T-shirt have become almost commonplace. But this speech was one of the most keenly anticipated at the U.N. General Assembly, where the war has dominated.

The topic popped up in speeches by leaders from all over the world who deplored the invasion not least because they said it was not consistent with the cornerstone principles of the United Nations — including respect for sovereignty.

“It’s an attack on this very institution where we find ourselves today,” said Moldovan President President Maia Sandu, whose country borders Ukraine.

U.S. President Joe Biden’s address, too, focused heavily on the war in Ukraine.

“This war is about extinguishing Ukraine’s right to exist as a state, plain and simple, and Ukraine’s right to exist as a people. Whoever you are, wherever you live, whatever you believe, that should make your blood run cold,” he said. “If nations can pursue their imperial ambitions without consequences, then we put at risk everything this very institution stands for. Everything.”

The war will remain front and center at the gathering on Thursday, when the Security Council plans to take up the issue.

Russia hasn’t yet had its turn to speak at the gathering.

Putin, who is not attending the General Assembly, has said he sent his armed forces into Ukraine because of risks to his country’s security from what he considers a hostile government in Kyiv; to liberate Russians living in Ukraine — especially its eastern region of the Donbas — from what he views as the Ukrainian government’s oppression; and to restore what he considers to be Russia’s historical territorial claims on the country.

Zelenskyy’s speech was distinguished by its context. It took place after Moscow’s extraordinary mobilization announcement. It was the first time Zelenskyy addressed the world’s leaders gathered together since Russia invaded in February. And it wasn’t delivered at the rostrum where other presidents, prime ministers and monarchs speak — but instead by video after Zelenskyy was granted special permission to not come in person.

Putin’s decree Wednesday about the mobilization was sparse on details. Officials said as many as 300,000 reservists could be tapped. It was apparently an effort to seize momentum after the Ukrainian counteroffensive.

But the first such call-up in Russia since World War II also brought the fighting home in a new way for Russians and risked fanning domestic anxiety and antipathy toward the war. Shortly after Putin’s announcement, flights out of the country rapidly filled up, and more than 1,000 people were arrested at rare antiwar demonstrations across the country.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 39 of 75

Zelenskyy didn't discuss the developments in detail. But he suggested any Russian talk of negotiations was only a delaying tactic, and that Moscow's actions speak louder than its words.

"They talk about the talks but announce military mobilization. They talk about the talks but announce pseudo-referendums in the occupied territories of Ukraine," he said.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, meanwhile, contended that the mobilization was a sign was is "failing and flailing" in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy asserted that Moscow wants to spend the winter preparing its forces in Ukraine for a new offensive, or at least preparing fortifications while mobilizing more troops in the largest military conflict in Europe since World War II

"Russia wants war. It's true. But Russia will not be able to stop the course of history," he said, declaring that "mankind and the international law are stronger" than what he called a "terrorist state."

Powell's stark message: Inflation fight may cause recession

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve delivered its bluntest reckoning Wednesday of what it will take to finally tame painfully high inflation: Slower growth, higher unemployment and potentially a recession.

Speaking at a news conference, Chair Jerome Powell acknowledged what many economists have been saying for months: That the Fed's goal of engineering a "soft landing" — in which it would manage to slow growth enough to curb inflation but not so much as to cause a recession — looks increasingly unlikely.

"The chances of a soft landing," Powell said, "are likely to diminish" as the Fed steadily raises borrowing costs to slow the worst streak of inflation in four decades. "No one knows whether this process will lead to a recession or, if so, how significant that recession would be."

Before the Fed's policymakers would consider halting their rate hikes, he said, they would have to see continued slow growth, a "modest" increase in unemployment and "clear evidence" that inflation is moving back down to their 2% target.

"We have got to get inflation behind us," Powell said. "I wish there were a painless way to do that. There isn't."

Powell's remarks followed another substantial three-quarters of a point rate hike — its third straight — by the Fed's policymaking committee. Its latest action brought the Fed's key short-term rate, which affects many consumer and business loans, to 3% to 3.25%. That's its highest level since early 2008.

Falling gas prices have slightly lowered headline inflation, which was a still-painful 8.3% in August compared with a year earlier. Those declining prices at the gas pump might have contributed to a recent rise in President Joe Biden's public approval ratings, which Democrats hope will boost their prospects in the November midterm elections.

On Wednesday, the Fed officials also forecast more jumbo-size hikes to come, raising their benchmark rate to roughly 4.4% by year's end — a full point higher than they had envisioned as recently as June. And they expect to raise the rate again next year, to about 4.6%. That would be the highest level since 2007.

By raising borrowing rates, the Fed makes it costlier to take out a mortgage or an auto or business loan. Consumers and businesses then presumably borrow and spend less, cooling the economy and slowing inflation.

In their quarterly economic forecasts, the Fed's policymakers also projected that economic growth will stay weak for the next few years, with unemployment rising to 4.4% by the end of 2023, up from its current level of 3.7%. Historically, economists say, any time unemployment has risen by a half-point over several months, a recession has always followed.

"So the (Fed's) forecast is an implicit admission that a recession is likely, unless something extraordinary happens," said Roberto Perli, an economist at Piper Sandler, an investment bank.

Fed officials now foresee the economy expanding just 0.2% this year, sharply lower than their forecast of 1.7% growth just three months ago. And they envision sluggish growth below 2% from 2023 through 2025. Even with the steep rate hikes the Fed foresees, it still expects core inflation — which excludes

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 40 of 75

volatile food and gas costs — to be 3.1% at the end of 2023, well above its 2% target.

Powell warned in a speech last month that the Fed's moves will "bring some pain" to households and businesses. And he added that the central bank's commitment to bringing inflation back down to its 2% target was "unconditional."

Short-term rates at a level the Fed is now envisioning will force many Americans to pay much higher interest payments on a variety of loans than in the recent past. Last week, the average fixed mortgage rate topped 6%, its highest point in 14 years, which helps explain why home sales have tumbled. Credit card rates have reached their highest level since 1996, according to Bankrate.com.

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. On Sunday, Biden said on CBS' "60 Minutes" that he believed a soft landing for the economy was still possible, suggesting that his administration's recent energy and health care legislation would lower prices for pharmaceuticals and health care.

The law may help lower prescription drug prices, but outside analyses suggest it will do little to immediately bring down overall inflation. Last month, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office judged it would have a "negligible" effect on prices through 2023. The University of Pennsylvania's Penn Wharton Budget Model went even further to say "the impact on inflation is statistically indistinguishable from zero" over the next decade.

Even so, some economists are beginning to express concern that the Fed's rapid rate hikes — the fastest since the early 1980s — will cause more economic damage than necessary to tame inflation. Mike Konczal, an economist at the Roosevelt Institute, noted that the economy is already slowing and that wage increases — a key driver of inflation — are levelling off and by some measures even declining a bit.

Surveys also show that Americans are expecting inflation to ease significantly over the next five years. That is an important trend because inflation expectations can become self-fulfilling: If people expect inflation to ease, some will feel less pressure to accelerate their purchases. Less spending would then help moderate price increases.

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

Climate Migration: Indian kids find hope in a new language

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL AP Science Writer

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Eight-year-old Jerifa Islam only remembers the river being angry, its waters gnawing away her family's farmland and waves lashing their home during rainy season flooding. Then one day in July of 2019, the mighty Brahmaputra River swallowed everything.

Her home in the Darrang district of India's Assam state was washed away. But the calamity started Jerifa and her brother, Raju 12, on a path that eventually led them to schools nearly 2,000 miles (3,218 kilometers) away in Bengaluru, where people speak the Kannada language that is so different from the children's native Bangla.

Those early days were difficult. Classes at the free state-run schools were taught in Kannada, and Raju couldn't understand a word of the instruction.

But he persisted, reasoning that just being in class was better than the months in Assam when submerged roads kept him away from school for months. "Initially I didn't understand what was happening, then with the teacher explaining things to me slowly, I started learning," he said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 41 of 75

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of an ongoing series exploring the lives of people around the world who have been forced to move because of rising seas, drought, searing temperatures and other things caused or exacerbated by climate change.

The children were born in a low-lying village, flanked by the Himalayas and the river. Like many parts of northeastern India, it was no stranger to heavy rains and naturally occurring floods.

But their father, Jaidul Islam, 32, and mother Pinjira Khatun, 28, knew something had changed. The rains had become more erratic, flash floods more frequent and unpredictable. They were among the estimated 2.6 million people in the Assam state affected by floods the year they decided to move to Bengaluru, a city of over 8 million known as India's Silicon Valley.

No one in their family had ever moved so far from home, but any lingering doubts were outweighed by dreams of a better life and a good education for their children. The couple spoke a little Hindi — India's most widely used language — and hoped that would be enough to get by in the city, where they knew nearby villagers had found work.

The two packed what little they could salvage into a large suitcase they hoped to someday fill with new belongings. "We left home with nothing. Some clothes for the kids, a mosquito net, and two towels. That was it," said Islam.

The suitcase is now filling up with school exercise books — and the parents, neither with any formal education, said their lives center on ensuring their kids have more opportunities. "My children will not face the same problems that I did," the father said.

The family fled the low-lying Darrang district, which receives heavy rainfall and natural flooding. But rising temperatures with climate change have made monsoons erratic, with the bulk of the season's rainfall falling in days, followed by dry spells. The district is among the most vulnerable to climate change in India, according to a New-Delhi based thinktank.

Floods and droughts often occur simultaneously, said Anjal Prakash, a research director at India's Bharti Institute of Public Policy. The natural water systems in the Himalayan region that people had relied on for millennia are now "broken," he said.

In the past decade, Prakash said, the number of climate migrants in India has been growing. And over the next 30 years, 143 million people worldwide will likely be uprooted by rising seas, drought and unbearable heat, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported this year.

India estimates it has around 139 million migrants, but unclear is how many had to move because of climate change. By 2050, cities like Bengaluru are predicted to become the preferred destination for the nearly 40 million people in South Asia forced by climate change to leave their homes, according to a 2021 World Bank report.

"Especially if you've aspirations for your second generation, you have to move," said Prakash.

In the suburban area where Jerifa and her family now live, most people are from Assam state, many forced to migrate because of climate change and dreaming of a better future: There is Shah Jahan, 19, a security guard who wants to be a YouTube influencer. There is Rasana Begum, a 47-year-old cleaner who hopes her two daughters will become nurses. Their homes, too, were washed away in floods.

Pinjira and Jaidul have both found work with a contractor who provides housekeeping staff to the offices of U.S. and Indian tech companies. Jaidul earns \$240 a month, and his wife about \$200 — compared to the \$60 he'd made from agriculture. Raju's new private school fees cost a third of their income, and the family saves nothing. But, for the first time in years, in their new home — a 10 feet by 12 feet (3 meters by 3.6 meters) room with a tin roof and sporadic electricity — they feel optimistic about the future.

"I like that I can work here. Back home, there was no work for women. ... I am happy," said Pinjira.

For now, Raju dreams of doing well at his new school. He has benefitted from a year-long program run by Samridhi Trust, a non-profit that helps migrant children get back to the education system by teaching them basic Kannada, English, Hindi and math. Teachers test students every two months to help them transition into state-run free schools that instruct in Kannada — or in some cases, like Raju's, English.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 42 of 75

"My favorite subject is math," said the 12-year-old, adding that his favorite time of day was the bus ride to school. "I love looking out of the window and seeing the city and all the big buildings."

His sister, who wants to be a lawyer someday, has picked up Kannada faster than he has and chats happily with new classmates at her nearby government school, switching easily between her native and adopted tongues.

Their parents work alternate shifts to ensure somebody is home in case of emergencies. "They are young and can get into trouble, or get hurt," said Khatun. "And we don't know anybody here."

Their anxiety isn't unique. Many parents worry about safety when they send their children to schools in unfamiliar neighborhoods, said Puja, who uses only one name and coordinates Samridhi Trust's after-school program.

Children of migrants often tend to drop out, finding classes too hard. But Raju considers his school's "discipline" refreshing after chaotic life in a poor neighborhood.

His mother misses her family and speaks with them over the phone. "Maybe I'll go back during their holidays," she said.

Her husband does not want to return to Assam — where floods killed nine people in their district this year — until the children are in a higher grade. "Maybe in 2024 or 2025," he said.

Every afternoon, the father waits patiently, scanning the street for Raju's yellow bus. When home, the boy regales him with stories about his new school. He says he now knows how to say "water" in Kannada, but that none of his new classmates know what a "real flood" looks like.

'Art of the steal': Trump accused of vast fraud in NY suit

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump padded his net worth by billions of dollars and habitually misled banks and others about the value of prized assets like golf courses, hotels and his Mar-a-Lago estate, New York's attorney general said Wednesday in a lawsuit that seeks to permanently disrupt the Republican's ability to do business in the state.

Attorney General Letitia James dubbed it "The art of the steal."

The lawsuit, filed in state court in Manhattan, is the culmination of the Democrat's three-year civil investigation into Trump and the Trump Organization. Trump's three eldest children, Donald Jr., Ivanka and Eric Trump, were also named as defendants, along with two longtime company executives.

In its 222 pages, the suit struck at the core of what made Trump famous, taking a blacklight to the image of wealth and opulence he's embraced throughout his career — first as a real estate developer, then as a reality TV host on "The Apprentice" and later as president.

It details dozens of instances of alleged fraud, many involving claims made on annual financial statements that Trump would give to banks, business associates and financial magazines as proof of his riches as he sought loans and deals.

For example, according to the lawsuit, Trump claimed his Trump Tower apartment — a three-story penthouse replete with gold-plated fixtures — was nearly three times its actual size and valued the property at \$327 million. No apartment in New York City has ever sold for close to that amount, James said.

Trump applied similar fuzzy math to his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, the lawsuit alleged, by valuing the private club and residence as high as \$739 million — more than 10 times a more reasonable estimate of its worth. Trump's figure is based on the idea that the property could be developed for residential use, but deed terms prohibit that.

"This investigation revealed that Donald Trump engaged in years of illegal conduct to inflate his net worth, to deceive banks and the people of the great state of New York," James said at a news conference.

"Claiming you have money that you do not have does not amount to the art of the deal. It's the art of the steal," she said, referring to the title of Trump's 1987 memoir, "The Art of the Deal."

James said the investigation also uncovered evidence of potential criminal violations, including insurance fraud and bank fraud, but that her office was referring those findings to outside authorities for further investigation.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 43 of 75

Trump, in a post to his Truth Social platform, decried the lawsuit as "Another Witch Hunt" and denounced James as "a fraud who campaigned on a 'get Trump' platform."

Later, in an interview with Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity, Trump said his company's financial disclosures warned banks not to trust the information provided.

"We have a disclaimer right on the front," he said, that warned banks: "You're at your own risk.' ... 'Be careful because it may not be accurate. It may be way off.' ... 'Get your own people. Use your own appraisers. Use your own lawyers. Don't rely on us.'"

Trump's lawyer, Alina Habba, said the allegations are "meritless" and the lawsuit "is neither focused on the facts nor the law — rather, it is solely focused on advancing the Attorney General's political agenda."

In the lawsuit, James asked the court to ban Trump and his three eldest children from ever again running a company based in the state.

She is also seeking payment of at least \$250 million, which she said was the estimated worth of benefits derived from the alleged fraud. And she wants Trump and the Trump Organization from entering into commercial real estate acquisitions for five years, among other sanctions.

James' lawsuit comes amid a whirlwind of unprecedented legal challenges for a former president, including an FBI investigation into Trump's handling of classified records and inquiries into his efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

While James' lawsuit is being pursued in civil court, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg has been working with James' office on a parallel criminal investigation.

Trump cited fear of prosecution in August when he refused to answer questions in a deposition with James, invoking his Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination more than 400 times.

The odds of a criminal prosecution have been seen as falling in recent months after Bragg allowed a grand jury to disband without bringing charges. Bragg said again Wednesday, though, that the criminal investigation was "active and ongoing."

A criminal prosecution would have a far higher burden of proof than a civil lawsuit. And in a criminal case, prosecutors would have to prove that Trump intended to break the law, something not necessarily required in a civil case.

"Generally in criminal cases you have to prove intent. In civil cases, just negligence or intentional misrepresentation give rise to liability," said Neema Rahmani, a former federal prosecutor in San Diego who now practices law at a Los Angeles firm.

The U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan said it was aware of James' referral of potential criminal violations, but otherwise declined comment. The Internal Revenue Service's criminal investigation division said it "doesn't confirm the existence of investigations until court documents are publicly available."

The Trump Organization is set to go on trial in October in a criminal case alleging that it schemed to give untaxed perks to senior executives, including its longtime finance chief Allen Weisselberg, who alone took more than \$1.7 million in extras.

Weisselberg, 75, pleaded guilty Aug. 18. His plea agreement requires him to testify at the company's trial before he starts a five-month jail sentence. If convicted, the Trump Organization could face a fine of double the amount of unpaid taxes.

Weisselberg and another Trump Organization executive, Jeffrey McConney, were also named as defendants in James' lawsuit.

At the same time, the FBI is continuing to investigate Trump's storage of sensitive government documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, and a special grand jury in Georgia is investigating whether Trump and others attempted to influence state election officials.

All of the legal drama is playing out ahead of the November midterm elections, where Republicans are trying to win control of one or both houses of Congress.

Meanwhile, Trump has been laying the groundwork for a potential comeback campaign for president in 2024 and has accused President Joe Biden's administration of targeting him to hurt his political chances.

Trump's previous refusal to answer questions in testimony could be held against him if a lawsuit ever

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 44 of 75

reaches a jury. In civil cases, courts are allowed to draw negative inference from such Fifth Amendment pleadings.

"If Trump wanted to argue that some accounting decision was harmless instead of malicious, he might have already passed up the opportunity when he decided to stay silent," said Will Thomas, an assistant professor of business law at the University of Michigan.

In a previous clash, James oversaw the closure of Trump's charity for alleging misusing its assets to resolve business disputes and boost his run for the White House. A judge ordered Trump to pay \$2 million to an array of charities to settle the matter.

James, who campaigned for office as a Trump critic and watchdog, started scrutinizing his business practices in March 2019 after his former personal lawyer Michael Cohen testified to Congress that Trump exaggerated his wealth on financial statements provided to Deutsche Bank while trying to obtain financing to buy the NFL's Buffalo Bills.

Renowned author Joan Didion honored by hundreds at memorial

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Joan Didion's precision with words extended even to ones she would never live to hear, such as those used during a small, private service this spring at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

"She left very clear directions about what she wanted to happen at that service," the Very Rev. Patrick Malloy said Wednesday night, at the start of a memorial tribute at the Cathedral. "She wanted it to be very brief and she specified the texts she wanted us to use, all from the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, which is what you'd expect from an Episcopalian who wrote a book called 'A Book of Common Prayer.'"

The texts she chose were "remarkably dour," Malloy went on to explain, and they were not from the contemporary edition of the Book of Common Prayer, but from an older, more ornate printing. It was Didion's way of reminding everyone that the sounds of the words, and their rhythm, meant as much as the words themselves.

Didion, a master of rhythm and of the meaning of the unsaid, was remembered Wednesday as an inspiring and fearless writer and valued, exacting and sometimes eccentric friend, the kind who didn't like to speak on the phone unless asked to or who might serve chocolate soufflés at a child's birthday party because she didn't know how to bake a cake.

Hundreds were presented with programs and laminated hand fans as they entered the Cathedral on a summer-ish late afternoon — the first day of autumn — where the scale of the building was too vast for the expense of air conditioning. Carl Bernstein, Donna Tartt and Fran Lebowitz were among those attending, along with relatives, friends and editors and other colleagues from The New Yorker and her last publishing house, Penguin Random House.

Didion, who died last December at age 87, left behind no immediate family members: Her husband, fellow author and screenwriting partner John Gregory Dunne died in 2003, followed less than two years later by their only child, Quintana Roo. But the speakers did span much of her life, from Sacramento and Malibu in California to the Upper Side East of Manhattan, from her years as a child already preoccupied with language to her prime as an uncommonly astute observer of contemporary society to her time as an elder sage and prototype for younger authors.

Retired Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, here in his capacity as a generational peer and a fellow Sacramento native, remembered Didion as a close friend of his older sister Nancy's and a frequent dinner guest. She was a gifted and "pensive" girl, cerebral beyond her years, who would "think and write and think and write, all over again." Former California Governor Jerry Brown, speaking via a taped video feed, also shared Sacramento memories and of Didion as a college friend of his sister's.

"She and Joan would share a smoke together and talk about the novels they were reading," he said. "Years later, my sister's most vivid memory was of Joan coming down for breakfast in a pink chenille robe, drinking a cup of coffee and smoking cigarettes."

Calvin Trillin read from Didion's biting coverage of the 1988 political conventions, when she famously

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 45 of 75

observed that in high school she preferred being around people who hung out at gas stations — a setting not otherwise invoked during a ceremony more populated by stories of parties, literary craft and the Rolling Stones.

Vanessa Redgrave, her white hair tied in back and otherwise covered by a dark fedora, read from Didion's celebrated memoir about grief, "The Year of Magical Thinking," which Redgrave years ago had performed on stage as Didion sat in the wings for every show.

Didion's longtime friend and fellow author Susanna Moore distilled decades of conversation into a few of Didion's aphorisms: "Evil is the absence of seriousness." "Crazy is never interesting." "I would drop this whole idea of knowing the truth." Actor Susan Traylor, a childhood friend of Roo's, spoke of feeling homesick while spending Christmas in Hawaii with the Didions.

"Without raising the issue she (Joan Didion) reached out and stroked my head," Traylor recalled. "What you should know is that your mother told me that the reason she let you miss Christmas at home is she thought it would be good for you to know you could do it without her.' And I was fine."

The show began with reflections on the Book of Common Prayer, and ended in secular scripture, Patti Smith performing Bob Dylan's "Chimes of Freedom." Backed by Tony Shanahan on acoustic guitar, Smith sang at a piercing, steady clip, as if mimicking the cadence of Didion's prose.

Putin orders partial military call-up, sparking protests

By KARL RITTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a partial mobilization of reservists Wednesday to bolster his forces in Ukraine, a deeply unpopular move that sparked rare protests across the country and led to almost 1,200 arrests.

The risky order follows humiliating setbacks for Putin's troops nearly seven months after they invaded Ukraine. The first such call-up in Russia since World War II heightened tensions with Ukraine's Western backers, who derided it as an act of weakness and desperation.

The move also sent some Russians scrambling to buy plane tickets to flee the country.

In his 14-minute nationally televised address, Putin also warned the West that he isn't bluffing about using everything at his disposal to protect Russia — an apparent reference to his nuclear arsenal. He has previously rebuked NATO countries for supplying weapons to Ukraine.

Confronted with steep battlefield losses, expanding front lines and a conflict that has raged longer than expected, the Kremlin has struggled to replenish its troops in Ukraine, reportedly even resorting to widespread recruitment in prisons.

The total number of reservists to be called up could be as high as 300,000, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said. However, Putin's decree authorizing the partial mobilization, which took effect immediately, offered few details, raising suspicions that the draft could be broadened at any moment. Notably, one clause was kept secret.

Despite Russia's harsh laws against criticizing the military and the war, protesters outraged by the mobilization overcame their fear of arrest to stage protests in cities across the country. Nearly 1,200 Russians were arrested in anti-war demonstrations in cities including Moscow and St. Petersburg, according to the independent Russian human rights group OVD-Info.

Associated Press journalists in Moscow witnessed at least a dozen arrests in the first 15 minutes of a nighttime protest in the capital, with police in heavy body armor tackling demonstrators in front of shops, hauling some away as they chanted, "No to war!"

"I'm not afraid of anything. The most valuable thing that they can take from us is the life of our children. I won't give them life of my child," said one Muscovite, who declined to give her name.

Asked whether protesting would help, she said: "It won't help, but it's my civic duty to express my stance. No to war!"

In Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city, police hauled onto buses some of the 40 protesters who were detained at an anti-war rally. One woman in a wheelchair shouted, referring to the Russian president:

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 46 of 75

"Goddamn bald-headed 'nut job'. He's going to drop a bomb on us, and we're all still protecting him. I've said enough."

The Vesna opposition movement called for protests, 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?"

The Moscow prosecutor's office warned that organizing or participating in protests could lead to up to 15 years in prison. Authorities have issued similar warnings ahead of other protests. Wednesday's were the first nationwide anti-war protests since the fighting began in late February.

Other Russians responded by trying to leave the country, and flights out quickly became booked.

In Armenia, Sergey arrived with his 17-year-old son, saying they had prepared for such a scenario. Another Russian, Valery, said his wife's family lives in Kyiv, and mobilization is out of the question for him "just for the moral aspect alone." Both men declined to give their last names.

The state communication watchdog Roskomnadzor warned media that access to their websites would be blocked for transmitting "false information" about the mobilization.

Residents in Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, appeared despondent about the mobilization as they watched emergency workers clear debris from Russian rocket attacks on two apartment buildings.

"You just don't know what to expect from him," said Kharkiv resident Olena Milevska, 66. "But you do understand that it's something personal for him."

In calling for the mobilization, Putin cited the length of the front line, which he said exceeds 1,000 kilometers (more than 620 miles). He also said Russia is effectively fighting the combined military might of Western countries.

Western leaders said the mobilization was in response to Russia's recent battlefield losses.

President Joe Biden told the U.N. General Assembly that Putin's new nuclear threats showed "reckless disregard" for Russia's responsibilities as a signer of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Hours later, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged world leaders at the gathering to strip Russia of its vote in international institutions and its U.N. Security Council veto, saying that aggressors need to be punished and isolated.

Speaking by video, Zelenskyy said his forces "can return the Ukrainian flag to our entire territory. We can do it with the force of arms. But we need time."

Putin did not attend the meeting.

Following an emergency meeting of European Union foreign ministers Wednesday night, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell promised more sanctions on Russia over its escalation of the Ukraine conflict. He said he was certain there would be "unanimous agreement" for sanctioning both Russia's economy and individual Russians.

"It's clear that Putin is trying to destroy Ukraine. He's trying to destroy the country by different means since he's failing militarily," Borrell said.

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said the mobilization means the war "is getting worse, deepening, and Putin is trying to involve as many people as possible. ... It's being done just to let one person keep his grip on personal power."

The partial mobilization order came two days before Russian-controlled regions in eastern and southern Ukraine plan to hold referendums on becoming part of Russia — a move that could allow Moscow to escalate the war. The votes start Friday in the Luhansk, Kherson and partly Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions.

Foreign leaders are already calling the votes illegitimate and nonbinding. Zelenskyy said they were a "sham" and "noise" to distract the public.

Michael Kofman, head of Russian studies at the CNA think tank in Washington, said Putin has staked his regime on the war, and that annexation "is a point of no return," as is mobilization "to an extent."

"Partial mobilization affects everybody. And everybody in Russia understands ... that they could be the next wave, and this is only the first wave," Kofman said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 47 of 75

Shoigu, Russia's defense minister, said only some of those with relevant combat and service experience will be mobilized. He said about 25 million people fit that criteria, but only about 1% of them will be mobilized.

It wasn't clear how many years of combat experience or what level of training soldiers must have to be mobilized. Another clause in the decree prevents most professional soldiers from terminating their contracts until after the partial mobilization.

Putin's mobilization gambit could backfire by making the war unpopular at home and hurting his own standing. It also concedes Russia's underlying military shortcomings.

A Ukrainian counteroffensive this month seized the military initiative from Russia and captured large areas in Ukraine from Russian forces.

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

Russian political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin said it seemed "an act of desperation."

"People will evade this mobilization in every possible way, bribe their way out of this mobilization, leave the country," he said.

He described the announcement 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."

In his address, Putin accused the West of engaging in "nuclear blackmail" and cited alleged "statements of some high-ranking representatives of the leading NATO states about the possibility of using nuclear weapons of mass destruction against Russia."

He did not elaborate.

"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.

In other developments, relatives of two U.S. military veterans who disappeared while fighting Russia with Ukrainian forces said they had been released after about three months in captivity. They were part of a swap arranged by Saudi Arabia of 10 prisoners from the U.S., Morocco, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Croatia.

And in another release, Ukraine announced early Thursday that it had won freedom from Russian custody of 215 Ukrainian and foreign citizens, including fighters who had defended a besieged steel plant in the city of Mariupol for months. Zelenskyy posted a video showing an official briefing him on the freeing of the citizens, in exchange for pro-Russian opposition leader Viktor Medvedchuk and 55 others held by Ukraine.

Biden: Russia's Ukraine abuses 'make your blood run cold'

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — President Joe Biden declared at the United Nations on Wednesday that Russia has "shamelessly violated the core tenets" of the international body with its war in Ukraine as he summoned nations around the globe to stand firm in backing the Ukrainian resistance.

Delivering a forceful condemnation of Russia's seven-month invasion, Biden said reports of Russian abuses against civilians and its efforts to erase Ukraine and its culture "should make your blood run cold." He referenced President Vladimir Putin's announcement Wednesday that he had ordered a partial mobilization of reservists, a deeply unpopular step that sparked protests in Russia.

And Putin's new nuclear threats against Europe showed "reckless disregard" for Russia's responsibilities as a signer of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Biden said.

He also criticized Russia for scheduling "sham referenda" this week in territory it has forcibly seized in Ukraine.

"A permanent member of the U.N Security Council invaded its neighbor, attempted to erase a sovereign state from the map. Russia has shamelessly violated the core tenets of the U.N. charter," he told his U.N. audience.

Biden's speech was part of an effort to maintain Russia's isolation on the global stage as the costs of war

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 48 of 75

mount, worries about energy this winter loom and Congress is likely to look more skeptically on spending more on military defense. The president called on all nations, whether democracies or autocracies, to speak out against Russia's "brutal, needless war" and to bolster's Ukraine effort to defend itself.

"We will stand in solidarity against Russia's aggression, period," Biden said.

Biden also highlighted consequences of the invasion for the world's food supply, pledging \$2.9 billion in global food security aid to address shortages caused by the war and the effects of climate change. He praised a U.N.-brokered effort to create a corridor for Ukrainian grain to be exported by sea, and called on the agreement to be continued despite the ongoing conflict.

Biden, during his time at the U.N. General Assembly, met with Secretary General António Guterres and held his first meeting with new British Prime Minister Liz Truss, during which they discussed Russia's war, energy security and China. He also met with French President Emmanuel Macron, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.

Biden also pressed nations to meet an \$18 billion target to replenish the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, reiterating the U.S. commitment of \$6 billion to that goal.

"Now is the moment to accelerate our efforts to reduce health inequities, and to address barriers to access including gender and human rights barriers to build a more inclusive healthcare systems, to leave no one behind, to end AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria for good," Biden said, as he was joined by leaders from Japan, Germany, France, Canada and the EU for the announcement.

But the heart of the president's visit to the U.N. this year was his full-throated censure of Russia as its war nears the seven-month mark. One of Russia's deputy U.N. ambassadors, Gennady Kuzmin, was sitting in Russia's seat during Biden's speech.

The address came as Russian-controlled regions of eastern and southern Ukraine have announced plans to hold Kremlin-backed referendums on becoming part of Russia and as Moscow was losing ground in the invasion.

Putin's decision to "wave around the nuclear card" in televised remarks falls in line with previous menacing rhetoric he's used during the war, according to a senior Biden administration official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity. The official added that the administration has gleaned "no specific information, signals or moods" from Putin that suggest he's taking action to prepare for utilizing Russia's nuclear weaponry.

The White House said the global food security funding includes \$2 billion in direct humanitarian assistance through the United States Agency for International Development. The balance of the money will go to global development projects meant to boost the efficiency and resilience of the global food supply.

"This new announcement of \$2.9 billion will save lives through emergency interventions and invest in medium- to long-term food security assistance in order to protect the world's most vulnerable populations from the escalating global food security crisis," the White House said.

Biden was confronting no shortage of difficult issues as leaders gathered 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.

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 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 extensive international inspection.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 49 of 75

"While the United States is prepared for a mutual return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, if Iran steps up to its obligations, the United States is clear: We will not allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons," Biden said.

U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said administration officials would be consulting with fellow signers of the 2015 agreement 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.

China's President Xi Jinping opted not to attend this year's U.N. gathering, but his country's conduct and intentions loomed large.

Weeks after tensions flared across the Taiwan Strait as China objected to the visit to Taiwan of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Biden called for "peace and stability" and said the U.S. would "oppose unilateral changes in the status quo by either side." That came days after Biden repeated that the U.S. would militarily assist Taiwan if China sought to invade.

China's government on Monday said Biden's statement in a CBS "60 Minutes" interview that American forces would defend the self-ruled island was a violation of U.S. commitments on the matter, but it gave no indication of possible retaliation.

Biden on Wednesday also declared that "fundamental freedoms are at risk in every part of our world," citing last month's U.N. human rights office report raising concerns about possible "crimes against humanity" in China's western region against Uyghurs and other largely Muslim ethnic groups.

He also singled out for criticism the military junta in Myanmar, the Taliban controlling Afghanistan, and Iran, where he said the U.S. supports protests in Iran that sprang up in recent days after a 22-year-old woman died while being held by the morality police for violating the country's Islamic dress code.

"Today we stand with the brave citizens and the brave women of Iran, who right now are demonstrating to secure their basic rights," Biden said.

Biden also highlighted his administration's new investments in addressing climate change, primarily through last month's passage of Democrats' massive "Inflation Reduction Act" which marks the largest single U.S. investment in addressing climate change.

He encouraged other nations to meet their own environmental commitments. "And none too soon — we don't have much time."

Zelenskyy vows Ukraine will win as Russia redoubles effort

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Ukraine's president implored the world Wednesday to punish Russia for its invasion, even as the leader vowed his forces would win back every inch of territory despite Moscow's decision to redouble its war effort.

In a much-anticipated video address to the U.N. General Assembly hours after Russia announced it would mobilize some reservists, Volodymyr Zelenskyy portrayed the declaration as evidence the Kremlin wasn't ready to negotiate an end to the war — but insisted his country would prevail anyway.

"We can return the Ukrainian flag to our entire territory. We can do it with the force of arms," the president said. "But we need time."

Putin's decree Wednesday about the mobilization was sparse on details. Officials said as many as 300,000 reservists could be tapped. It was apparently an effort to seize momentum after a Ukrainian counteroffensive this month retook swaths of territory that Russians had held.

But the first such call-up in Russia since World War II also brought the fighting home in a new way for Russians and risked fanning domestic anxiety and antipathy toward the war. Shortly after Putin's announcement, flights out of the country rapidly filled up, and more than 1,000 people were arrested at rare antiwar demonstrations across the country.

A day earlier, Russian-controlled parts of eastern and southern Ukraine announced plans for referendums on becoming parts of Russia. Ukrainian leaders and their Western allies consider the votes illegitimate.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 50 of 75

Zelenskyy didn't discuss the developments in detail. But he suggested that any Russian talk of negotiations was only a delaying tactic, and that Moscow's actions speak louder than its words.

"They talk about the talks but announce military mobilization. They talk about the talks but announce pseudo-referendums in the occupied territories of Ukraine," he said.

Russia hasn't yet had its turn to speak at the gathering.

Putin, who is not attending the event, has said he sent his armed forces into Ukraine because of risks to his country's security from what he considers a hostile government in Kyiv; to liberate Russians living in Ukraine — especially its eastern Donbas region — from what he views as the Ukrainian government's oppression; and to restore what he considers to be Russia's historical territorial claims on the country.

Zelenskyy's speech was striking not only for its contents but also its context. It took place after the extraordinary mobilization announcement. It was the first time he addressed the world's leaders gathered together since Russia invaded in February.

It wasn't delivered at the august rostrum where other presidents, prime ministers and monarchs speak — but instead by video from a nation at war after Zelenskyy was granted special permission to not come in person.

He appeared as he has in many previous video appearances — in an olive green T-shirt. He sat at a table with a Ukrainian flag behind his right shoulder and large image of the U.N. flag and Ukraine's behind his left shoulder.

Zelenskyy's speech was one of the most keenly anticipated at international diplomacy's most prominent annual gathering, which has dwelled this year on the war in his country. Officials from many countries are trying to prevent the conflict from spreading and to restore peace in Europe — though diplomats do not expect any breakthroughs this week.

Still, the topic popped up in speeches by leaders from all over the world. Overwhelmingly, the sentiment was similar: Russia's invasion was not consistent with the cornerstone principles of the United Nations — including peace, dialogue and respect for sovereignty.

"It's an attack on this very institution where we find ourselves today," said Moldovan President President Maia Sandu, whose country borders Ukraine.

U.S. President Joe Biden's address, too, focused heavily on the war in Ukraine.

"This war is about extinguishing Ukraine's right to exist as a state, plain and simple, and Ukraine's right to exist as a people. Whoever you are, wherever you live, whatever you believe, that should make your blood run cold," he said. "If nations can pursue their imperial ambitions without consequences, then we put at risk everything this very institution stands for. Everything."

Zelenskyy opined that Moscow wants to spend the winter preparing its forces in Ukraine for a new offensive, or at least preparing fortifications while mobilizing more troops in the largest military conflict in Europe since the Second World War.

"Russia wants war. It's true. But Russia will not be able to stop the course of history," he said, declaring that "mankind and the international law are stronger" than what he called a "terrorist state."

Laying out various "preconditions for peace" in Ukraine that sometimes reached into broader prescriptions for improving the global order, he urged world leaders to strip Russia of its vote in international institutions and U.N. Security Council veto, saying that aggressors need to be punished and isolated.

The fighting has already prompted some moves against Russia in U.N. bodies, particularly after Moscow vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution that would have demanded a stop to its attack on Ukraine days after it began.

The veto galled a number of other countries and led to action in the broader General Assembly, where resolutions aren't binding but there are no vetoes.

The assembly voted overwhelmingly in March to deplore Russia's aggression against Ukraine, call for an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of all Russian forces, and urge protection for millions of civilians. The next month, members agreed by a smaller margin to suspend Russia from the U.N. Human Rights Council.

Despite the attention he drew, Zelenskyy was just one of dozens of leaders speaking Wednesday —

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 51 of 75

among them Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Kenya's newly elected president, William Ruto. Nearly 150 heads of state and government are set to appear during six days of speeches.

It also wasn't the first time the Ukrainian leader has been in the spotlight at the assembly's annual meeting. His 2019 debut speech came as Zelenskyy suddenly found himself embroiled in a political scandal that was absorbing the U.S. — then-President Donald Trump's effort to get the Ukrainian to investigate his eventual rival Biden and his son Hunter.

Zelenskyy steered clear of the affair in his speech that year, but he was barraged with questions about it at a news conference with Trump. The episode ultimately led to Trump's first impeachment.

At last year's General Assembly, Zelenskyy memorably compared the U.N. to "a retired superhero who's long forgotten how great they once were" as he repeated appeals for action to confront Russia over its 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula and its support for the separatists.

Federer on GOAT debate in AP Interview: How can you compare?

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

LONDON (AP) — Roger Federer is a father of four — two girls who are 13, two boys who are 8 — and so perhaps that is why, as he wraps up his playing career, he thinks about the "GOAT" debate that has engulfed the tennis world the way parents might look at their children.

Folks love to ask: Who's the "Greatest of All-Time" in men's tennis, Federer, Rafael Nadal or Novak Djokovic?

"People always like to compare. I see it every day with my twins. Without wanting, you compare them. You shouldn't — ever," Federer said during an interview with The Associated Press on Wednesday, hours after his farewell news conference at the arena that will host the 20-time Grand Slam champion's final competition, the Laver Cup.

"Naturally, we do the same in tennis. ... I am my own career, my own player, that needed those challenges. They needed a challenger like myself," he said, leaning back on a couch, having traded in the blue blazer and polo shirt he wore earlier for a post-practice navy pullover, white T-shirt and black jogger pants. "We made each other better. So at the end of the day, we'll all shake hands and be like, 'That was awesome.' Now is somebody going to be happier than the other? I mean, in moments, maybe."

He called the topic "a good conversation, let's be honest" and "definitely a fun debate" that "you can endlessly talk about."

But he also used the word "silly," given all that he, 22-time major champ Nadal and 21-time major champ Djokovic have accomplished.

"I always say it's wonderful to be part of that selective group," he began, talking about the so-called Big Three rivals, then paused to sigh.

"How can you compare? What's better? To win when you're old or when you're young? I have no idea, you know. Is it better to win on clay or grass? Don't know. Is it better to have super dominant years or come back from injury? I don't know," he said. "It really is impossible to grasp."

Referring to Nadal, who is 36 and is expected to be Federer's doubles partner for his final match Friday, and Djokovic, who is 35, Federer said: "What I know is they are truly amazing and greats of the game and forever and will go down as one of the — maybe THE — greatest."

Federer, who is Swiss, grew up a basketball fan, and brought up the Michael Jordan vs. LeBron James back-and-forth from hoops.

"Who is the greatest? Probably MJ. But is it LeBron? Some stats say he is. I think it's a phenomenon of (social) media. Everybody calling each other 'GOAT.' 'GOAT.' 'GOAT.' 'GOAT.' 'GOAT.' 'GOAT.' I'm like, Come on, OK? There cannot be possibly that many 'GOATs,'" Federer said, then cracked himself up with a Dad joke: "In Switzerland, we have a lot of them, but they're in the fields."

Federer promises he won't make a comeback; his surgically repaired right knee won't allow it. His age, 41, doesn't help.

He is adamant, though, that he will remain connected to tennis. That will include showing up at certain

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 52 of 75

tournaments, he said, "to say farewell or goodbye, because I've been a part of those tournaments for 20 years."

It will include watching on TV, some of the time, and keeping an eye on results, all of the time.

He plans to keep tabs on Nadal, who won the Australian Open and French Open this season, and Djokovic, who won Wimbledon but couldn't enter the Australian Open or U.S. Open because he isn't vaccinated against COVID-19 ("It's been quite strange not seeing Novak in a lot of the draws," Federer observed).

"At this point, once either they surpassed you, or you're not playing anymore, it doesn't matter how far up they go," Federer said. "For me, as long as I could be a part of it and control some of it, I cared more."

When it comes to the pursuit of more Grand Slam titles by Nadal and Djokovic, he said: "I hope they go and do everything they want. I really hope so. Because it would be great for the game and nice for their fans, for their family. As long as it makes them happy."

At one point during the nearly half-hour conversation with the AP, Federer mentioned the idea of a player "falling out of love" with the game.

What did he mean by that?

Essentially: It's not possible to always love every minute of every facet of the life of a pro tennis player.

"You go through phases. As a kid, you have this vision of the tour as this fantastic place: 'It's the coolest thing. I can share the locker room with the guys. I walk out to stadiums, there's fans screaming my name. I can sign autographs, take pictures. On top of the world.' But then at some point, comes a time, you're like: 'I didn't read the small print, you know?' Where it said: 'And, oh, by the way, you need to do it in another language, and we need one more promo shot and you need to travel now and miss a plane and wait for hours and hours in rain delays.' We knew it was probably going to happen, but was it going to be this intense? This is the part a lot of people don't know about — what the athletes have to go through at that level," Federer said.

"Not looking for any 'Aw, you poor guys.' We're doing well. We're making loads of money and we have the chance to entertain millions of people. But I'm just saying, sometimes you have to second-guess yourself. Question yourself. Like, 'Am I truly enjoying it like I'm supposed to?' Because it's a dream come true," he continued. "And here you are, living the dream, yet it doesn't feel so special anymore, because now it's gotten normal. 'Normal' can be dangerous. 'Normal' can be no good, you know?"

That, Federer explained, is when the trick is to make things exciting for yourself — maybe "you fake it" or maybe "you have people around you that help you."

He gave credit to the various coaches and other members of his team through the years for helping push him.

"People see me on the court and they're like," he said, then lowered his voice to a whisper, "Oh, my God! He's so gifted! Like, he can do it all by himself!"

That, Federer said, is nonsense.

"We need inspiration. We need motivation. We need people to kick our ass and tell you, 'OK, put on your shoes and go for a run. Put on your shoes and let's go practice. I know you don't want to do it here. I actually also don't want to be here, but let's still do it. And then you can go relax,'" he said. "It's a challenge. But a good one. And I would do it all over again."

And then he smiled.

Steel plant defenders, Putin ally exchanged in prisoner swap

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine announced a high-profile prisoner swap early Thursday that culminated months of efforts to free many of the Ukrainian fighters who defended a steel plant in Mariupol during a long Russian siege. In exchange, Ukraine gave up an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his government had won freedom from Russian custody for 215 Ukrainian and foreign citizens. He said many were soldiers and officers who had faced the death penalty in Russian-occupied territory.

Russia officials didn't immediately confirm or otherwise comment on the swap.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 53 of 75

Of the total, 200 Ukrainians were exchanged for just one man — pro-Russian opposition leader Viktor Medvedchuk, who is Ukrainian. The 68-year-old oligarch escaped from house arrest in Ukraine several days before Russia's invasion Feb. 24 but was recaptured in April. He faced up to life in prison on charges of treason and aiding and abetting a terrorist organization for mediating coal purchases for the separatist, Russia-backed Donetsk republic in eastern Ukraine.

Putin is believed to be the godfather of Medvedchuk's youngest daughter. His detention sparked a heated exchange between officials in Moscow and Kyiv. Medvedchuk is the head of the political council of Ukraine's pro-Russian Opposition Platform-For Life party, the largest opposition group in Ukraine's parliament. The government has suspended the party's activity.

"It is not a pity to give up Medvedchuk for real warriors," Zelenskyy said in a post on his website. "He has passed all the investigative actions provided by law. Ukraine has received from him everything necessary to establish the truth in the framework of criminal proceedings."

In another swap, Ukraine gained the release of five more citizens in exchange for 55 Russian prisoners it was holding, Zelenskyy said.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the exchanges, calling them "no small feat," but adding that "much more remains to be done to ease the suffering caused by the war in Ukraine," his spokesman said. The U.N. chief reiterates the need to respect international law on the treatment of prisoners and will continue to support further prisoner exchanges, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

According to Zelenskyy, many of those freed belonged to Ukraine's Azov regiment, whom he called heroes. More than 2,000 defenders, many in the Azov unit, marched out of the Azovstal steel plant's twisted wreckage into Russian captivity in mid-May, ending a nearly three-month siege of the port city of Mariupol. Five of the released Azov commanders are now living in Turkey, according to a post on Zelenskyy's website.

Virginia Thomas agrees to interview with Jan. 6 panel

By ERIC TUCKER and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Conservative activist Virginia Thomas, the wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, has agreed to participate in a voluntary interview with the House panel investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection, her lawyer said Wednesday.

Attorney Mark Paoletta said Thomas is "eager to answer the committee's questions to clear up any misconceptions about her work relating to the 2020 election."

The committee has for months sought an interview with Thomas in an effort to know more about her role in trying to help former President Donald Trump overturn his election defeat. She texted with White House chief of staff Mark Meadows and contacted lawmakers in Arizona and Wisconsin in the weeks after the election.

Thomas's willingness to testify comes as the committee is preparing to wrap up its work before the end of the year and is writing a final report laying out its findings about the U.S. Capitol insurrection. The panel announced Wednesday that it will reconvene for a hearing on Sept. 28, likely the last in a series of hearings that began this summer.

The testimony from Thomas — known as Ginni — was one of the remaining items for the panel as it eyes the completion of its work. The panel has already interviewed more than 1,000 witnesses and shown some of that video testimony in its eight hearings over the summer.

The extent of Thomas' involvement ahead of the Capitol attack is unknown. In the days after The Associated Press and other news organizations called the presidential election for Biden, Thomas emailed two lawmakers in Arizona to urge them to choose "a clean slate of Electors" and "stand strong in the face of political and media pressure." The AP obtained the emails earlier this year under the state's open records law.

She has said in interviews that she attended the initial pro-Trump rally the morning of Jan. 6 but left before Trump spoke and the crowds headed for the Capitol.

Thomas, a Trump supporter long active in conservative causes, has repeatedly maintained that her

political activities posed no conflict of interest with the work of her husband.

"Like so many married couples, we share many of the same ideals, principles, and aspirations for America. But we have our own separate careers, and our own ideas and opinions too. Clarence doesn't discuss his work with me, and I don't involve him in my work," Thomas told the Washington Free Beacon in an interview published in March.

Justice Thomas was the lone dissenting voice when the Supreme Court ruled in January to allow a congressional committee access to presidential diaries, visitor logs, speech drafts and handwritten notes relating to the events of Jan. 6.

Ginni Thomas has been openly critical of the committee's work, including signing onto a letter to House Republicans calling for the expulsion of Reps. Liz Cheney of Wyoming and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois from the GOP conference for joining the Jan. 6 congressional committee.

CNN first reported that Thomas agreed to the interview.

It's unclear if the committee's hearing next week will provide a general overview of what the panel has learned or if it will focus on new information and evidence, such as any evidence provided by Thomas. The committee also conducted several interviews at the end of July and into August with Trump's Cabinet secretaries, some of whom had discussed invoking the constitutional process in the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office after the insurrection.

Cheney, the committee's Republican vice chairwoman, said at the panel's most recent hearing in July that the committee "has far more evidence to share with the American people and more to gather."

Around 200 stranded whales die in pounding surf in Australia

HOBART, Australia (AP) — A day after 230 whales were found stranded on the wild and remote west coast of Australia's island state of Tasmania, only 35 were still alive despite rescue efforts that were to continue Thursday.

Half the pod of pilot whales stranded in Macquarie Harbour were presumed to still be alive on Wednesday, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania said.

But pounding surf took a toll overnight, Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service manager Brendon Clark said. "We've triaged the animals yesterday as part of the preliminary assessment and we've identified those animals that had best chance of survival of the approximately 230 that stranded. Today's focus will be on rescue and release operations," Clark told reporters at nearby Strahan.

"We've got approximately 35 surviving animals out on the beach ... and the primary focus this morning will be on the rescue and release of those animals," Clark added.

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 said.

"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,"

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 55 of 75

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.

Review: Sidney Poitier documentary shows a constant striving

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

Sidney Poitier was not expected to live. He was born two months premature to uneducated tomato farmers in the Caribbean. His father planned to use a shoe box as a makeshift coffin.

Poitier's rise from that humble origin to become an Oscar-winning box office draw and civil rights figure who remade Hollywood seems almost scripted, almost too good to be true, but such was Poitier, a life well-lived.

The new documentary "Sidney" respectfully traces that life, delivering a portrait of a striver hoping to improve everything he did every day. "I truly, truly try to be better tomorrow than I was today," he says to the camera.

Written by Jesse James Miller and directed by Reginald Hudlin, "Sidney" is executive produced by Oprah Winfrey — who lent several hours of her own interviews with Poitier — and members of his family. It glows with respect for a man who earned it.

Poitier became the first Black actor to win an Academy Award for best lead performance and the first to be a top box-office draw. He died this year at 94.

For much of the film, a grey-haired Poitier addresses the camera in a grey suit jacket with a pocket square and a white open-necked button-down shirt — flawlessly elegant, as always. Sometimes old interviews are added from a younger Poitier, making it seem as if he is in conversation with himself.

Highlights include the devastating confrontation with racism as a teen in Miami, the fun story of his first encounter with a subway and how a classified ad looking for actors changed his life. "I can be many things here," he thought. Tossed out of the American Negro Theater for being lousy, he took acting classes and lost his Caribbean accent by buying a radio for \$14 and learning to mimic a newsreader he admired.

The filmmakers have a charismatic change-maker as their focus, but credit to them for also exploring when he missed his high ethical standards, as when he had a long affair with Diahann Carroll, triggering a divorce that split the family.

Poitier's moral compass was stronger than most. Early in his career, he turned down an exploitive part, an unheard of decision at the time. And then after he had made his way to the top and opened the door for other unrepresented actors, he was criticized.

Some called him out for being too accommodating in "The Defiant Ones," chained and helping a white Tony Curtis, or for loving a white woman in "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" The pioneer became passe as Black militancy grew strength. So Poitier pivoted to directing and producing, still helping others up the ladder.

The film benefits from the candid memories of Poitier's children and ex-wife, as well as friends like Morgan Freeman, Harry Belafonte, Quincy Jones, Andrew Young, Spike Lee, Denzel Washington, Louis Gosset Jr. and Robert Redford.

Other voices are less effective, showing a star-pulling flex but with little connection to the man. Barbra Streisand adds little — "He was like, Wow! Movie stars should be, 'Wow!'" — and we learn that Halle Berry wanted to marry him.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 56 of 75

Even Oprah seems a little suspect interviewing herself but she makes it count when she recalls meeting Poitier for the first time at her 42nd birthday, a time in her life when she was being criticized by the Black community for not doing enough, just as Poitier had been.

"It's difficult when you're carrying other peoples' dreams," he told her. "And so you have to hold on to the dream that is inside yourself and know that if you are true to that, that's all that matters."

For those unfamiliar with some of Poitier's more famous moments, news of a pivotal slap will come as a surprise. Fifty-five years before Will Smith smacked Chris Rock at the Oscars, Poitier's Detective Virgil Tibbs slapped an actor playing a white plantation owner onscreen in the film "In the Heat of the Night." It was electrifying, coming in 1967 as the civil rights movement was reaching its heights. Listening to how it profoundly affected future Black stars is powerful.

Another rich vein is revealed in the relationship between Poitier and Belafonte, which one of the former's children likens to having the dynamic of an old married couple. They bonded, they fought, they reconciled, they once even outran the KKK. There seems almost to be another film here about these two charismatic men.

But let us first celebrate Poitier, a man of impossible dignity and ethics, a man who Lenny Kravitz in the film says "came to this Earth to move it."

"Sidney," an Apple TV+ release in select theaters and on Apple TV+, is rated PG-13 for adult themes and racial slurs. Running time: 112 minutes. Three stars out of four.

Suspended Sarver says he's decided to sell Suns, Mercury

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Robert Sarver says he has started the process of selling the Phoenix Suns and Phoenix Mercury, a move that came barely a week after he was suspended by the NBA over workplace misconduct that included racist speech and hostile behavior toward employees.

The decision was quickly applauded by many — among them, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver, the National Basketball Players Association and even Sarver's partners in the ownership group that operates the Suns and Mercury.

Sarver made the announcement Wednesday, saying selling "is the best course of action," although he initially hoped he would be able to keep control of the franchises — pointing to his record that, he claims, paints a dramatically different picture of who he is and what he stands for.

"But in our current unforgiving climate, it has become painfully clear that that is no longer possible — that whatever good I have done, or could still do, is outweighed by things I have said in the past," Sarver wrote in a statement. "For those reasons, I am beginning the process of seeking buyers for the Suns and Mercury."

Silver said he "fully" supports Sarver's decision.

"This is the right next step for the organization and community," Silver said.

Sarver bought the teams in July 2004 for about \$400 million — then a record price for an NBA franchise. He is not the lone owner of the Suns and Mercury, but the primary one. Suns Legacy Partners LLC, the ownership group, said its work to create a "culture of respect and integrity" would continue.

"As we've shared with our employees, we acknowledge the courage of the people who came forward in this process to tell their stories and apologize to those hurt," the partners said.

Assuming no other team is sold in the interim, it would be the first sale in the NBA since a group led by Qualtrics co-founder Ryan Smith bought the Utah Jazz in 2021 for about \$1.7 billion.

It's not known if Sarver has established an asking price. Forbes recently estimated the value of the Suns at \$1.8 billion. Any new owners would have to be vetted by the NBA, which is standard procedure.

An independent report that was commissioned by the NBA last November — following an ESPN report into Sarver's workplace conduct — took about 10 months to complete. That probe found Sarver "repeated or purported to repeat the N-word on at least five occasions spanning his tenure with the Suns," though added that the investigation "makes no finding that Sarver used this racially insensitive language with the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 57 of 75

intent to demean or denigrate.”

The study also concluded that Sarver used demeaning language toward female employees, including telling a pregnant employee that she would not be able to do her job after becoming a mother; making off-color comments and jokes about sex and anatomy; and yelling and cursing at employees in ways that would be considered bullying “under workplace standards.”

Once that report was completed, Silver suspended Sarver for one year and fined him \$10 million — the maximum allowed by league rule.

“Words that I deeply regret now overshadow nearly two decades of building organizations that brought people together — and strengthened the Phoenix area — through the unifying power of professional men’s and women’s basketball,” Sarver wrote. “As a man of faith, I believe in atonement and the path to forgiveness. I expected that the commissioner’s one-year suspension would provide the time for me to focus, make amends and remove my personal controversy from the teams that I and so many fans love.”

Barely a week later, Sarver evidently realized that would not be possible.

His decision comes after a chorus of voices — from players such as Suns guard Chris Paul and Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James, to longtime team sponsors like PayPal, and even the National Basketball Players Association — said the one-year suspension wasn’t enough.

James weighed in again Wednesday, shortly after Sarver’s statement went public: “I’m so proud to be a part of a league committed to progress!” he tweeted.

Added retired NBA player Etan Thomas, also in a tweet: “Sarver is cashing out so this is not really a punishment for him but definitely glad he will be gone.”

NBPA President CJ McCollum said the union thanks Sarver “for making a swift decision that was in the best interest of our sports community.”

Suns vice chairman Jahm Najafi called last week for Sarver to resign, saying there should be “zero tolerance” for lewd, misogynistic and racist conduct in any workplace. Najafi, in that same statement, also said he did not have designs on becoming the team’s primary owner.

“I do not want to be a distraction to these two teams and the fine people who work so hard to bring the joy and excitement of basketball to fans around the world,” Sarver wrote. “I want what’s best for these two organizations, the players, the employees, the fans, the community, my fellow owners, the NBA and the WNBA. This is the best course of action for everyone.”

Sarver, through his attorney, argued to the NBA during the investigative process that his record as an owner shows a “longstanding commitment to social and racial justice” and that it shows he’s had a “commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.” Among the examples Sarver cited was what he described as a league-best rate of 55% employment of minorities within the Suns’ front office and how more than half of the team’s coaches and general managers in his tenure — including current coach Monty Williams and current GM James Jones — are Black.

Russian separatists release 10, including 2 US veterans

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Two U.S. military veterans who disappeared three months ago while fighting Russia with Ukrainian forces were among 10 prisoners, including five British nationals, released by Russian-backed separatists as part of a prisoner exchange mediated by Saudi Arabia, officials said Wednesday.

Alex Druke, 40, and Andy Huynh, 27, went missing in the Kharkiv region of northeastern Ukraine near the Russian border June 9. They had traveled to Ukraine on their own and became friends because both are from Alabama.

Their families announced their release in a joint statement from Dianna Shaw, an aunt of Druke.

“They are safely in the custody of the U.S. embassy in Saudi Arabia and after medical checks and debriefing they will return to the states,” the statement said.

Shaw said both men have spoken with relatives and are in “pretty good shape,” according to an official with the U.S. embassy.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 58 of 75

President Joe Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan welcomed the releases and thanked the governments of Ukraine and Saudi Arabia for their work to secure the detainees' freedom. "We look forward to our citizens being reunited with their families," he said in a tweet.

In a later statement, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States "is appreciative of Ukraine including all prisoners of war, regardless of nationality, in its negotiations" and thanked Saudi government partners for securing the release of the 10 prisoners, including the two Americans.

The Saudi embassy released a statement saying it helped secure the release of 10 prisoners from Morocco, the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Croatia. Shaw confirmed that Druke and Huynh were part of the group.

The United Kingdom said five British nationals had been released, and lawmaker Robert Jenrick said one of them was Aiden Aslin, 28, who had been sentenced to death after he was captured in eastern Ukraine.

"Aiden's return brings to an end months of agonising uncertainty for Aiden's loving family in Newark who suffered every day of Aiden's sham trial but never lost hope. As they are united as a family once more, they can finally be at peace," Jenrick tweeted.

British Prime Minister Liz Truss heralded the news on social media.

"Hugely welcome news that five British nationals held by Russian-backed proxies in eastern Ukraine are being safely returned, ending months of uncertainty and suffering for them and their families," she tweeted.

Moroccan media reported that the released prisoners included Brahim Saadoun, 21, who was sentenced to death in June after being accused of terrorism and trying to overturn the constitutional order. Captured by Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine, the court claimed he was a mercenary, while Saadoun's father said he had enlisted in Ukraine's regular army.

Russian state television had previously said Druke and Huynh were being held by Russian-backed separatists in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. The U.S. does not recognize the sovereignty of the Donetsk People's Republic and has no diplomatic relations with them, making it necessary for others to lead efforts to get the men released.

Druke joined the Army at age 19 after the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and he believed he could help Ukrainian fighters because of his training and experience with weapons, Shaw said previously. Druke left in mid-April.

Druke's mother received a call from Saudi Arabia on Wednesday morning and an embassy worker handed the phone to the man, Shaw said.

"He got on the phone and said, 'Hi mom, it's your favorite child,'" she said.

Huynh moved to north Alabama two years ago from his native California and lives about 120 miles (193 kilometers) from Druke. Before leaving for Europe, Huynh told his local newspaper, The Decatur Daily, he couldn't stop thinking about Russia's invasion.

"I know it wasn't my problem, but there was that gut feeling that I felt I had to do something," Huynh told the paper. "Two weeks after the war began, it kept eating me up inside and it just felt wrong. I was losing sleep. ... All I could think about was the situation in Ukraine."

Huynh told his fiance he wants a meal from McDonald's and a Pepsi-Cola when he returns home, Shaw said.

The two men bonded over their home state and were together when their unit came under heavy fire. Relatives spoke with Druke several times by phone while the two were being held.

Ohio GOP House candidate has misrepresented military service

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and JAMES LAPORTA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Campaigning for a northwestern Ohio congressional seat, Republican J.R. Majewski presents himself as an Air Force combat veteran who deployed to Afghanistan after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, once describing "tough" conditions including a lack of running water that forced him to go more than 40 days without a shower.

Military documents obtained by The Associated Press through a public records request tell a different story.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 59 of 75

They indicate Majewski never deployed to Afghanistan but instead completed a six-month stint helping to load planes at an air base in Qatar, a longtime U.S. ally that is a safe distance from the fighting.

Majewski's account of his time in the military is just one aspect of his biography that is suspect. His post-military career has been defined by exaggerations, conspiracy theories, talk of violent action against the U.S. government and occasional financial duress.

Still, thanks to an unflinching allegiance to former President Donald Trump — Majewski once painted a massive Trump mural on his lawn — he also stands a chance of defeating longtime Democratic Rep. Marcy Kaptur in a district recently redrawn to favor Republicans.

Majewski is among a cluster of GOP candidates, most running for office for the first time, whose unvarnished life stories and hard-right politics could diminish the chances of a Republican "red wave" on Election Day in November. He is also a vivid representation of a new breed of politicians who reject facts as they try to emulate Trump.

"It bothers me when people trade on their military service to get elected to office when what they are doing is misleading the people they want to vote for them," Don Christensen, a retired colonel and former chief prosecutor for the Air Force, said of Majewski. "Veterans have done so much for this country and when you claim to have done what your brothers and sisters in arms actually did to build up your reputation, it is a disservice."

Majewski's campaign declined to make him available for an interview and, in a lengthy statement issued to the AP, did not directly address questions about his claim of deploying to Afghanistan. A spokeswoman declined to provide additional comment when the AP followed up with additional questions.

"I am proud to have served my country," Majewski said in the statement. "My accomplishments and record are under attack, meanwhile, career politician Marcy Kaptur has a forty-year record of failure for my Toledo community, which is why I'm running for Congress."

With no previous political experience, Majewski is perhaps an unlikely person to be the Republican nominee taking on Kaptur, who has represented the Toledo area since 1983. But two state legislators who were also on the ballot in the August GOP primary split the establishment vote. That cleared a path for Majewski, who previously worked in the nuclear power industry and dabbled in politics as a pro-Trump hip-hop performer and promoter of the QAnon conspiracy theory. He was also at the U.S. Capitol during the insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021.

Throughout his campaign Majewski has offered his Air Force service as a valuable credential. The tagline "veteran for Congress" appears on campaign merchandise. He ran a Facebook ad promoting himself as "combat veteran." And in a campaign video released this year, Majewski marauds through a vacant factory with a rifle while pledging to restore an America that is "independent and strong like the country I fought for."

More recently, the House Republican campaign committee released a biography that describes Majewski as a veteran whose "squadron was one of the first on the ground in Afghanistan after 9/11." A campaign ad posted online Tuesday by Majewski supporters flashed the words "Afghanistan War Veteran" across the screen alongside a picture of a younger Majewski in his dress uniform.

A biography posted on his campaign website does not mention Afghanistan, but in an August 2021 tweet criticizing the U.S. withdrawal from the country, Majewski said he would "gladly suit up and go back to Afghanistan."

He's been far less forthcoming when asked about the specifics of his service.

"I don't like talking about my military experience," he said in a 2021 interview on the One American Podcast after volunteering that he served one tour of duty in Afghanistan. "It was a tough time in life. You know, the military wasn't easy."

A review of his service records, which the AP obtained from the National Archives through a public records request, as well as an accounting provided by the Air Force, offers a possible explanation for his hesitancy.

Rather than deploying to Afghanistan, as he has claimed, the records state that Majewski was based at Kadena Air Base in Japan for much of his active-duty service. He later deployed for six months to Qatar in May 2002, where he helped load and unload planes while serving as a "passenger operations specialist,"

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 60 of 75

the records show.

While based in Qatar, Majewski would land at other air bases to transfer military passengers, medics, supplies, his campaign said. The campaign did not answer a direct question about whether he was ever in Afghanistan.

Experts argue Majewski's description of himself as a "combat veteran" is also misleading.

The term can evoke images of soldiers storming a beachhead or finding refuge during a firefight. But under the laws and regulations of the U.S. government, facing live fire has little to do with someone earning the title.

During the Persian Gulf War, then-President George H.W. Bush designated, for the first time, countries used as combat support areas as combat zones despite the low-risk of American service members ever facing hostilities. That helped veterans receive a favorable tax status. Qatar, which is now home to the largest U.S. air base in the Middle East, was among the countries that received the designation under Bush's executive order — a status that remains in effect today.

Regardless, it rankles some when those seeking office offer their status as a combat veteran as a credential to voters without explaining that it does not mean that they came under hostile fire.

"As somebody who was in Qatar, I do not consider myself a combat veteran," said Christensen, the retired Air Force colonel who now runs Protect Our Defenders, a military watchdog organization. "I think that would be offensive to those who were actually engaged in combat and Iraq and Afghanistan."

Majewski's campaign said that he calls himself a combat veteran because the area he deployed to — Qatar — is considered a combat zone.

Majewski also lacks many of the medals that are typically awarded to those who served in Afghanistan.

Though he once said that he went more than 40 days without a shower during his time in the landlocked country, he does not have an Afghanistan campaign medal, which was issued to those who served "30 consecutive days or 60 nonconsecutive days" in the country.

He also did not receive a Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, which was issued to service members before the creation of the Afghanistan campaign medal if they deployed overseas in "direct service to the War on Terror."

Matthew Borie, an Air Force veteran who worked in intelligence and reviewed Majewski's records at AP's request, said it's "odd" that Majewski lacks many of the "medals you would expect to see for someone who deployed to Afghanistan."

There's also the matter of Majewski's final rank and reenlistment code when he left active duty after four years of service.

Most leave the service after four years having received several promotions that are generally awarded for time served. Majewski exited at a rank that was one notch above where he started. His enlistment code also indicated that he could not sign up with the Air Force again.

Majewski's campaign said he received what's called a nonjudicial punishment in 2001 after getting into a "brawl" in his dormitory, which resulted in a demotion. Nonjudicial punishments are designed to hold service members accountable for bad behavior that does not rise to the level of a court-martial.

Majewski's resume exaggeration isn't limited to his military service, reverberating throughout his professional life, as well as a nascent political career that took shape in an online world of conspiracy theories.

Since gaining traction in his campaign for Congress, Majewski has denied that he is a follower of the QAnon conspiracy theory while playing down his participation in the Capitol riot.

The baseless and apocalyptic QAnon belief is based on cryptic online postings by the anonymous "Q," who is purportedly a government insider. It posits that Trump is fighting entrenched enemies in the government and also involves satanism and child sex trafficking.

"Let me be clear, I denounce QAnon. I do not support Q, and I do not subscribe to their conspiracy theories," Majewski said in his statement to the AP.

But in the past Majewski repeatedly posted QAnon references and memes to social media, wore a QAnon shirt during a TV interview and has described Zak Paine, a QAnon influencer and online personality who goes by the nom de guerre Redpill78, as a "good friend."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 61 of 75

During a February 2021 appearance on a YouTube stream, Majewski stated, "I believe in everything that's been put out from Q," while characterizing the false posts as "military-level intelligence, in my opinion." He also posted, to the right-wing social media platform Parler, a photo of the "Trump 2020" mural he painted on his lawn that was modified to change the zeros into "Q's," as first reported by CNN.

Then there's Majewski's participation in the Jan. 6 insurrection. Majewski has said that he raised about \$25,000 to help dozens of people attend the "Stop the Steal" rally that preceded the attack on the Capitol. He also traveled to the event with his friend Paine, the QAnon influencer, and the two later appeared in social media postings near the Capitol.

Majewski acknowledged he was outside the Capitol, but denies entering the building. Still, he lamented the decision on a QAnon livestream a week after the attack, stating that he was "pissed off at myself" for not going into the building.

"It was a struggle, because I really wanted to go in," Majewski said on the livestream, which was first unearthed by the liberal group Media Matters.

Majewski has not been charged in connection with the attack. But he has falsely stated that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump and said that the insurrection "felt like a setup" by police who were targeting Trump supporters.

In his statement, Majewski said, "I deeply regret being at the Capitol that day" and "did not break the law," while calling for those who did to be "punished to the fullest extent of the law."

The mischaracterizations extend to his professional career, in which he has repeatedly described himself as an "executive in the nuclear power industry," including in a campaign ad last spring.

But a review of his now-deleted resume on the website LinkedIn and a survey of his former employers do not support the claim.

He most recently worked for Holtec International, a Florida-based energy conglomerate that specializes in handling spent nuclear fuel. But he is not listed among the executives and members of the corporate leadership teams in current or archived versions of the company's website.

A spokesman confirmed Majewski was a former Holtec employee, but declined to offer details on his position or role, which Majewski's LinkedIn page described as "senior director, client relations."

Majewski's campaign declined to address his claim of being an executive, but said he participated in weekly conference calls with executives.

Majewski also described himself on LinkedIn as "project manager - senior consultant" for First Energy, an Ohio based power company, a position that he stated he held since shortly after leaving the military. The company, Majewski explained in a biography posted to his website, quickly recognized him for his "intellect and leadership capabilities"

Yet records from his 2009 bankruptcy raise questions about his seniority. They show he was an "out-age manager" who earned about \$51,000 a year. In the bankruptcy, Majewski and his wife gave up their home, two cars and a Jet Ski to settle the case, court records show.

Still, in a nationalized political environment, some Republicans suggest none of this will matter to voters.

"At the end of the day, this will be a question of whether they want Nancy Pelosi leading the House or Kevin McCarthy," said Tom Davis, a former congressman who led the House Republican campaign arm during George W. Bush's presidency. "These elections have become less about the person. I wouldn't say candidates don't matter, but they don't matter like they used to."

Federer's farewell to be in doubles; comeback? 'No, no, no'

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

LONDON (AP) — Roger Federer leaned back on a couch, the picture of relaxation in a navy blue pull-over, black jogger pants and white sneakers. He had just showered and changed after a practice session Wednesday at the arena that will be used for the final match of his career, grinning as he talked about getting into the flow with a racket in hand.

"It was funny, hitting on the court — nice lighting, nice everything — how your level starts going up, you

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 62 of 75

know?" he said in an interview with The Associated Press, following a farewell news conference. "Whereas if you play at home, in like just a normal tennis hall, things are fast, the lights aren't great, advertising is all around you, you can never find this kind of rhythm."

So is it time to cancel his retirement?

"No," he said with a laugh. "No. No. No."

Federer is known for his elegant style of play, for his longevity, for his 20 Grand Slam titles — and for occasional tears in his most emotional post-match moments, whether after victory or defeat.

There was none of that sort of sadness Wednesday, just some chuckles at his own jokes, as Federer discussed his retirement from professional tennis at age 41 after a series of knee operations. He will close his playing days with a doubles match at the Laver Cup on Friday — perhaps alongside longtime rival Rafael Nadal.

Federer said he is at peace with the decision to walk away, which comes a few weeks after Serena Williams played what is expected to be her last match at the U.S. Open, and he wants this farewell to be a celebration.

"I really don't want it to be a funeral," Federer said. "I want it to be really happy and powerful and party mode."

Wearing a blue blazer with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows and a white polo shirt, Federer took questions from various media outlets during the news conference ahead of the team competition founded by his management company.

"I'm nervous going in, because I haven't played in so long," he said. "I hope I can be somewhat competitive."

Federer, who announced last week via social media that he would be retiring after the Laver Cup, 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 in July during his rehabilitation from what was his third surgery on his right knee in about 1 1/2 years.

"You try to go to the next level in training, and I could feel it was getting difficult. ... Then, I guess, I was also getting more tired, because you have to put more effort into it to be able to sort of believe that it was going to turn around. You start getting too pessimistic. Then I also got a scan back, which wasn't what I wanted it to be," Federer explained.

"At some point, you sit down and go, 'OK, we are at an intersection here, at a crossroad, and you have to take a turn. Which way is it?' I was not willing to go into the direction of: 'Let's risk it all.' I'm not ready for that. I always said that was never my goal."

And the hardest part came when he knew he needed to stop.

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

The last procedure on his knee came shortly after a quarterfinal loss to Hubert Hurkacz at Wimbledon in July 2021, which will go into the books as the last singles match of a superlative career that began in the 1990s and included 103 tournament titles, a Davis Cup championship for Switzerland, Olympic medals and hundreds of weeks at No. 1 in the ATP rankings.

In his online farewell message last week, Federer referred to retirement as a "bittersweet decision."

He was asked Wednesday at the news conference what aspect was most bitter and what was most sweet.

"The bitterness: You always want to play forever," he said. "I love being out on court. I love playing against the guys. I love traveling. ... It was all perfect. I love my career from every angle."

And then he added: "The sweet part was that I know everybody has to do it at one point; everybody has to leave the game. It's been a great, great journey. For that, I'm really grateful."

He will play doubles for Team Europe against Team World on Day 1 of the event, and then give way to 2021 Wimbledon runner-up Matteo Berrettini for singles over the weekend. That plan was run by the ATP and both team captains, John McEnroe and Bjorn Borg, Federer said.

"I grew up watching him, rooting for him, trying to learn from him," Berrettini said. "His charisma, his class will be missed — everything he brought to tennis on the court and off."

Those sentiments were echoed by other Laver Cup players, such as 2021 French Open runner-up Ste-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 63 of 75

fanos Tsitsipas ("My biggest memory of him is watching him lift trophies at almost every Grand Slam he played when I was a kid") or U.S. Open semifinalist Frances Tiafoe ("I don't think we'll see another guy like Roger — the way he played, and the grace he did it with, and who he is as an individual").

As for Federer's doubles partner for the last hurrah? Federer would not say definitively — he said that's up to Borg — but the not-so-hidden secret is that it is expected to be Nadal, who holds the men's record of 22 major championships.

While other contemporaries of Federer and stars of the sport are on Team Europe, such as 21-time Slam champ Novak Djokovic and three-time major winner Andy Murray, the Federer vs. Nadal matchup will go down in history as among the greatest rivalries in tennis or any other sport.

They played each other 40 times in all (Nadal won 26), with 14 Grand Slam matchups (Nadal won 10). Nadal came out on top in their classic 2008 Wimbledon final, considered by some the greatest match in history; Federer won their last showdown, in the 2019 semifinals at the All England Club.

"It could be quite, I don't know, a unique situation, if it were to happen," Federer said about the doubles pairing.

As for his future?

The father of two sets of twins — girls who are 13; boys who are 8 — wouldn't say exactly what he has planned, other than a vacation, but he did say he would remain connected to tennis in some capacity.

Recalling the way Borg stayed away from the sport for years after retiring, Federer sought to reassure his own fans by saying: "I won't be a ghost."

Cornered by war, Putin makes another nuclear threat

By The Associated Press undefined

In a harsh warning, President Vladimir Putin declared that he won't hesitate to use nuclear weapons to protect Russian territory, a threat that comes as Moscow is poised to annex swaths of Ukraine that Moscow has taken over after hastily called referendums there.

While the West has heard such rhetoric from him before, the circumstances are starkly different.

The Kremlin has orchestrated referendums in the occupied areas of Ukraine that are set to start Friday. Residents will be asked whether they want to become part of Russia — a vote that is certain to go Moscow's way. That means Russia could absorb those lands as early as next week.

Putin then raised the stakes by announcing a partial mobilization and vowed to use "all available means" to deter future attacks against Russia — a reference to Russia's nuclear arsenal in a chilling new round of brinkmanship.

Some observers see Putin's move to annex Ukrainian territory along with the mobilization and renewed nuclear threats as a last-ditch attempt to force Ukraine and its Western backers into accepting the current status quo after a successful Ukrainian counteroffensive earlier this month.

Tatiana Stanovaya, an independent political expert who follows the Kremlin's decision-making, described Putin's rushed moves on the referendums as a pretext for upping the ante.

"This is a blunt Russian ultimatum to Ukraine and the West: Ukraine must back off or there will be a nuclear war," Stanovaya said. "For Putin, the annexation would legitimize the right to resort to nuclear threats to protect the Russian territory."

In a televised address to the nation Wednesday, Putin said Moscow's nuclear arsenal is more modern than NATO's and declared his readiness to use them.

"This is not a bluff," Putin added somberly in an apparent reference to those in the West who described his earlier nuclear threats as a blustery attempt to weaken the international support for Ukraine.

Russian military doctrine envisages the use of atomic weapons in response to a nuclear attack or aggression involving conventional weapons that "threatens the very existence of the state," vague wording that offers ample room for interpretation.

In his brief speech, Putin accused the U.S. and its allies of arming and training Ukraine's military and encouraging Kyiv to attack Russian territory. He seemed to push the threshold for using nuclear weapons

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 64 of 75

even lower.

"In the event of a threat to the territorial integrity of our country and to defend Russia and our people, we will certainly use all means available to us," he said.

In recent weeks, Russian officials have repeatedly warned Washington that supplies of longer-range missiles to Ukraine would effectively make the U.S. a party to the conflict.

U.S.-supplied HIMARS rocket launchers and other Western weapons played an important role in the Ukrainian counteroffensive in the northeastern Kharkiv region that represented Moscow's biggest military defeat since it was forced to withdraw its troops from Kyiv after a botched attempt to seize the Ukrainian capital early in the war. It raised the prospect of more battlefield successes for Ukraine, which has vowed to reclaim control over all Russian-occupied territories, including the Crimean Peninsula that Moscow annexed in 2014.

Ukraine's success has been a humiliating blow to Putin, who has cast the campaign as a "special military operation" and has tried to win it with a limited contingent of volunteer troops. Western estimates put Russia's invading force at about 200,000 at the start of the war, and it has suffered heavy losses in seven months of fighting. British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace recently put Russian losses at over 25,000 dead.

While Ukraine has declared a sweeping mobilization with a goal of forming a 1 million-member military, the Kremlin so far has tried to avoid the unpopular move, recruiting volunteer soldiers and even prisoners. Hawkish circles in Moscow long have pushed for a mobilization, arguing it's impossible to fend off Ukraine's assaults along a 1,000-kilometer (over 500-mile) front line with the currently outnumbered Russian force.

The mobilization that Putin declared Wednesday is the first such move in Russia since World War II. The Soviet Union used a draft to fight its 10-year war in Afghanistan, and Russia also relied on conscripts during the two wars in Chechnya in the 1990s and early 2000s.

While Putin and his defense minister promised only a partial mobilization aimed at calling up about 300,000 reservists with previous military service, analysts say the move will severely strain the corrupt and inefficient government system and fuel instability that would threaten Putin's hold on power.

The mobilization order immediately triggered protests in Moscow and other cities that were quickly disbanded by police who detained hundreds of demonstrators.

Kirill Rogov, an independent political analyst, described the mobilization order as an "explosive mixture of madness, incompetence and despair." He noted that Putin risks losing support from the bulk of the Russian public that until now has seen the war as a "distant and limited development."

Alexander Baunov of the Carnegie Endowment noted the mobilization has broken Putin's pact with his political base that expected him to deliver stability and a vision of Russian grandeur without the need for personal sacrifice.

"Now sacrifice is required, and it's a violation of the past unwritten agreements that would trigger more repressions," Baunov wrote.

He noted that Putin's move to annex Russia-controlled regions amounts to a warning: "You dared to fight us in Ukraine, now try to fight us in Russia, or more precisely, what we call such."

In a Feb. 24 speech announcing the invasion, Putin already brandished the nuclear sword, threatening any foreign country attempting to interfere with "consequences you have never seen."

The latest threat underlined the Russian leader's dogged determination to safeguard Russian gains even at the risk of a nuclear escalation.

Putin's previous statements about all-out nuclear conflict have been delivered with frightening nonchalance.

Talking about Russian strategy at a 2018 meeting of international foreign policy experts, Putin acknowledged that a nuclear exchange "would naturally mean a global catastrophe," but he promised that Russia will not strike first.

And he added with a smirk: "We would be victims of an aggression and would get to heaven as martyrs and they will just croak and not even have time to repent."

'Sanctuary' cities navigate migrant influx from GOP states

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 65 of 75

NEW YORK (AP) — There are few places in the U.S. with a more deeply ingrained reputation as a refuge for immigrants than New York City, where the Statue of Liberty rises from the harbor as a symbol of welcome for the worn and weary.

But for Mayor Eric Adams, reconciling that image with an influx of migrants landing in the city, including thousands being bused there by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas, is proving difficult. The city is struggling to accommodate what Adams says has totaled more than 13,000 asylum seekers, leading him to explore whether New York can ease its practices for sheltering the homeless or even temporarily house migrants on cruise ships. Both ideas have drawn blowback from liberal advocates who are influential in the city's politics.

Adams is one of several leaders of Democratic-leaning jurisdictions facing a sudden test of their commitment to being "sanctuary" cities or states. The designation, in which local officials pledge to limit their cooperation with federal immigration authorities, has long proved popular among progressives pressing to ensure the government treats migrants humanely.

But officials say the policy is being exploited by leaders hoping to make a political point.

"We are not telling anyone that New York can accommodate every migrant in the city. We're not encouraging people to send eight, nine buses a day. That is not what we're doing," Adams said this week about his request for Abbott to coordinate with the city about the buses of migrants he's sending. "We're saying that as a sanctuary and a city with right to shelter, we're going to fulfill our obligation."

The GOP effort began in the spring when Abbott and Gov. Doug Ducey of Arizona put migrants on buses to Washington and later New York. The move was intended to draw attention to what the GOP governors deemed failed border and immigration policies under Democrats and the Biden administration. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis intensified the tactic, chartering a flight last week to Martha's Vineyard, an elite Massachusetts vacation spot.

The unpredictability that Adams referenced is precisely what the governors say they're trying to accomplish.

"If you believe in open borders, then it's the sanctuary jurisdictions that should have to bear the brunt of the open borders," DeSantis said at a news conference Tuesday.

Abbott's office has dismissed complaints and says Democratic officials should call for President Joe Biden to secure the border "instead of complaining about fulfilling their sanctuary city promises."

Sanctuary cities or states are not legal terms but have come to symbolize a pledge to protect and support immigrant communities and decline to voluntarily supply information to immigration enforcement officials. Advocates say they are havens for immigrants to feel safe and be able to report crime without fear of deportation.

Adams isn't the only leader struggling to navigate the challenge.

In Washington, D.C., where Abbott has sent about 8,000 migrants this year, Democratic Mayor Muriel Bowser has declared a limited state of emergency. She sought help from the National Guard, which the Pentagon has denied. The D.C. Council on Tuesday voted to create an Office of Migrant Services to help asylum seekers.

Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker of Illinois brought in the Illinois National Guard to assist more than 750 migrants who have arrived in Chicago since late August, but officials in some Chicago-area suburbs have complained that they got no notice when dozens of asylum-seekers were put up in local hotels for emergency housing.

Burr Ridge Mayor Gary Grasso, a Republican, said both Pritzker and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot apologized for not giving him advance notice, echoing complaints by Democrats that the Republican governors had not provided a warning the migrants were coming. But Grasso's town has not been asked to provide any resources to help with the migrants, and all the hotel rooms are being paid for by the state, county and city of Chicago, according to Pritzker's office.

Laura Mendoza, an immigration organizer for advocacy organization The Resurrection Project, said putting migrants in suburban hotels has helped relieve some pressure but finding everyone a place to stay has been a challenge.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 66 of 75

Mendoza said she has lost count of how many buses she has helped welcome at Chicago's Union Station as they arrive from Texas. After a 24-hour bus ride with minimal breaks, she said, some of the people disembark dehydrated and with swollen legs from sitting so long. Others have bruises and scars from their journey, Mendoza said.

"Unfortunately," she said, "we don't have a lot of answers other than: 'You're going to have a safe place to sleep tonight.'"

Tens of thousands of migrants who cross the border illegally are released in the United States each month to pursue their immigration cases, a practice that accelerated during Donald Trump's presidency and has reached new levels during the Biden administration.

To avoid the time-consuming task of scheduling court appearances, the Border Patrol has sharply expanded use of humanitarian parole. Migrants are released with an order to appear at a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office.

In New York City, Adams said he is considering legal action against the GOP governors. He said Monday that the city had opened an investigation after one woman seeking asylum died by an apparent suicide over the weekend at a New York City shelter.

His administration has been strained by a long-standing court-ordered "right to shelter" law requiring the city's homeless services to provide shelter to anyone without a roof over their head. Adams has recently suggested reassessing how the city complies with the law, but he said Tuesday he would not consider trying to send the migrants back to border states.

"It would be the wrong thing to do, and it would send the wrong message," he said. "When I look at the large number of other communities that have come from other places to experience the American dream, what would've happened if we would've sent them back? That is not who we are as a country."

New York City opened a resource center last week to connect migrants with services like legal help, housing and medical care. Adams is exploring whether New York can get the migrants permits to work, perhaps in the city's short-staffed restaurants.

Sandro Hidalgo, a Venezuelan construction worker who arrived last week on a bus sent from El Paso, is among those being sheltered in New York and said he's looking for work.

"I feel like there is an intention to help, but there is no organization," he said. "There are no beds to sleep. I slept on the floor last night, inside, but on the floor. I am trying to get out of the shelter, but the city is very expensive."

Iranians see widespread internet blackout amid mass protests

By The Associated Press undefined

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iranians experienced a near-total internet blackout on Wednesday amid days of mass protests against the government over the death of a woman held by the country's morality police for allegedly violating its strictly-enforced dress code.

An Iranian official had earlier hinted that such measures might be taken out of security concerns. The loss of connectivity will make it more difficult for people to organize protests and share information about the government's rolling crackdown on dissent.

Iran has seen nationwide protests over the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who was detained for allegedly wearing the mandatory Islamic headscarf too loosely. Demonstrators have clashed with police and called for the downfall of the Islamic Republic itself, even as Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi addressed the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday.

The protests continued for a fifth day on Wednesday, including in the capital, Tehran. Police there fired tear gas at protesters who chanted "death to the dictator," and "I will kill the one who killed my sister," according to the semiofficial Fars news agency.

London-based rights group Amnesty International said security forces have used batons, birdshot, tear gas, and water cannons to disperse protesters. It reported eight deaths linked to the unrest, including four people killed by security forces. It said hundreds more have been wounded.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 67 of 75

Iranian officials have reported three deaths, blaming them on unnamed armed groups.

Witnesses in Iran, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal, said late Wednesday they could no longer access the internet using mobile devices.

"We're seeing internet service, including mobile data, being blocked in Iran in the past couple of hours," Doug Madory, director of internet analysis at Kentik, Inc., a network intelligence company, said late Wednesday.

"This is likely an action by the government given the current situation in the country," he said. "I can confirm a near total collapse of internet connectivity for mobile providers in Iran."

NetBlocks, a London-based group that monitors internet access, had earlier reported widespread disruptions to both Instagram and WhatsApp.

Facebook parent company Meta, which owns both platforms, said it was aware that Iranians were being denied access to internet services. "We hope their right to be online will be reinstated quickly," it said in a statement.

Earlier on Wednesday, Iran's Telecommunications Minister Isa Zarepour was quoted by state media as saying that certain restrictions might be imposed "due to security issues," without elaborating.

Iran already blocks Facebook, Telegram, Twitter and YouTube, even though top Iranian officials use public accounts on such platforms. Many Iranians get around the bans using virtual private networks, known as VPNs, and proxies.

In a separate development, several official websites, including those for Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the presidency and the Central Bank, were taken down at least briefly as hackers claimed to have launched a cyberattack on state agencies.

Hackers linked to the shadowy Anonymous movement said they targeted other Iranian state agencies, including state TV.

Central Bank spokesman Mostafa Qamarivafa denied that the bank itself was hacked, saying only that the website was "inaccessible" because of an attack on a server that hosts it, in remarks carried by the official IRNA news agency. The website was later restored.

Iran has been the target of several cyberattacks in recent years, many by hackers expressing criticism of its theocracy. Last year, a cyberattack crippled gas stations across the country, creating long lines of angry motorists unable to get subsidized fuel for days. Messages accompanying the attack appeared to refer to the supreme leader.

Amini's death has sparked protests across the country. The police say she died of a heart attack and was not mistreated, but her family has cast doubt on that account, saying she had no previous heart issues and that they were prevented from seeing her body.

In a phone interview with BBC Persian on Wednesday her father, Amjad Amini, accused authorities of lying about her death. Each time he was asked how he thinks she died, the line was mysteriously cut.

The U.N. human rights office says the morality police have stepped up operations in recent months and resorted to more violent methods, including slapping women, beating them with batons and shoving them into police vehicles.

President Joe Biden, who also spoke at the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday, voiced support for the protesters, saying "we stand with the brave citizens and the brave women of Iran, who right now are demonstrating to secure their basic rights."

The U.K. also released a statement Wednesday calling for an investigation into Amini's death and for Iran to "respect the right to peaceful assembly."

Raisi has called for an investigation into Amini's death. Iranian officials have blamed the protests on unnamed foreign countries that they say are trying to foment unrest.

Iran has grappled with waves of protests in recent years, mainly over a long-running economic crisis exacerbated by Western sanctions linked to its nuclear program.

The Biden administration and European allies have been working to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear accord, in which Iran curbed its nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief, but the talks have been deadlocked for months.

In his speech at the U.N., Raisi said Iran is committed to reviving the nuclear agreement but questioned whether it could trust America's commitment to any accord.

Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes. It began ramping up its nuclear activities after then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 agreement, and experts say it now likely has enough highly-enriched uranium to make a bomb if it chooses to do so.

2 claim Mega Millions prize; 3rd-largest US lottery jackpot

CHICAGO (AP) — Two people who wish to remain anonymous have claimed a \$1.337 billion Mega Millions jackpot after a single ticket to the late July drawing was sold in a Chicago suburb, opting to take a lump sum payment of \$780.5 million, lottery officials said Wednesday.

The Illinois Lottery said the prize for the July 29 drawing, which was the nation's third-largest lottery prize, was claimed by two individuals who had agreed to split the prize if they won. The two, who followed the lead of the vast majority of winners who choose to remain anonymous, had until Sept. 27 to opt in favor of the lump sum payment, said Emilia Mazur, spokeswoman for Camelot Illinois, the private manager of the Illinois Lottery.

The Illinois Lottery said it was unable to share any information about the winners except to say that they must be absolutely "over the moon" with their Mega Millions win. Illinois is one of at least 16 states where winners can remain anonymous.

Lottery officials said the two people have spent the past few weeks working with professional legal and financial advisors to support the claim process — something experts recommend lottery winners do.

"These winners are now in the enviable position of deciding what to do with their newfound fortune," said Illinois Lottery Director Harold Mays.

According to megamillions.com, one jackpot-winning ticket was bought at a Speedway gas station and convenience store in Des Plaines.

The winning numbers were: 13-36-45-57-67, Mega Ball: 14.

The jackpot grew so large because no one had matched the game's six selected numbers since April 15. That's 29 consecutive draws without a jackpot winner. Because nobody has won the Mega Millions jackpot since the July 29 drawing, the jackpot now stands at an estimated \$301 million.

World Cup captains want to wear rainbow armbands in Qatar

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

GENEVA (AP) — FIFA came under pressure Wednesday from several European soccer federations who want their captains to wear an armband with a rainbow heart design during World Cup games in Qatar to campaign against discrimination.

France and Germany, the last two World Cup champions, were among eight of the 13 European soccer teams going to Qatar who joined the "OneLove" campaign, which started in the Netherlands. The Dutch team plays Qatar in Group A on Nov. 29.

FIFA rules prohibit teams from bringing their own armband designs to the World Cup and insist they must use equipment provided by the governing body.

Armbands are the latest battleground for players to push political messages linked to the World Cup hosted in Qatar, where homosexual acts are illegal and the treatment of migrant workers building projects for the tournament has been a decade-long controversy.

"Wearing the armband together on behalf of our teams will send a clear message when the world is watching," England captain Harry Kane said in a statement.

The Swiss soccer federation said it wanted captain Granit Xhaka to wear an armband on which "you can see a heart with diverse colors which represent the diversity of humanity."

Soccer players have embraced their platform to make statements in recent years. Taking a knee on the field was routine before Premier League games for two seasons after the death of George Floyd, a Black

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 69 of 75

man killed by a police officer in the United States.

FIFA supported taking a knee and now has to decide whether to back some of its most influential member federations in a gesture that could embarrass Qatar.

"A request to FIFA has also been submitted asking that permission be provided for the armbands to be worn throughout the FIFA World Cup," the Welsh soccer federation said in a statement.

FIFA did not immediately comment on the request.

European soccer body UEFA said it "fully supports the OneLove campaign, which was initially developed by the (Dutch federation)."

The armbands will also be worn at UEFA-organized games in the Nations League this week, including by both captains when Belgium hosts Wales on Thursday.

UEFA previously let Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer wear a rainbow captain's armband at European Championship games last year, including against tournament co-host Hungary where lawmakers passed anti-gay legislation during the tournament.

The campaign for armbands was launched one day after the Emir of Qatar spoke at the United Nations General Assembly in New York promising a World Cup without discrimination.

"The Qatari people will receive with open arms football fans from all walks of life," Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani said in a speech to other world leaders.

The eight European teams backing the "OneLove" campaign for human rights also included Belgium and Denmark. The five European qualifiers for the World Cup not taking part Wednesday were Croatia, Poland, Portugal, Serbia and Spain.

However, Poland captain Robert Lewandowski — a two-time FIFA world player of the year — said this week he would take an armband in the blue and yellow colors of Ukraine's flag to Qatar.

Poland refused to play Russia, the 2018 World Cup host, in a playoff match in March. Before the game, FIFA and European soccer body UEFA banned Russian teams from international competitions because the country invaded Ukraine.

The campaign for the armbands emerged while a panel of UEFA member federations has monitored progress in Qatar on labor law reforms and other human rights ahead of the tournament.

That panel includes the Norwegian soccer federation, whose president Lise Klaveness delivered a scathing criticism of the Qatari project at an annual FIFA meeting in March in Doha on the eve of the tournament draw.

England and Wales were among the federations Wednesday acknowledging progress made in Qatar since the wealthy emirate won the World Cup hosting vote in December 2010.

However, the English federation said players would meet with some migrant workers who will be invited to its training camp in Al Wakrah.

England also added to support already expressed in Germany this week for FIFA and World Cup organizers to compensate the families of construction workers who died or were injured after coming to Qatar to help build stadiums, metro lines and hotels.

Amnesty International has suggested FIFA should pay \$440 million in reparations to equal the prize money being paid to the 32 teams in Qatar.

At a German federation event on Monday, an invited fan who is gay used the platform to urge the Qatari ambassador that his country should abolish laws against homosexuality. The ambassador, Abdulla bin Mohammed bin Saud Al Thani, complained that human rights issues were distracting from the tournament.

Southern Baptists cut ties with LGBTQ-friendly church

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

The Southern Baptist Convention's top administrative body voted to cut ties with two congregations on Tuesday — an LGBTQ-friendly church in North Carolina that had itself quit the denomination decades ago and a New Jersey congregation it cited for "alleged discriminatory behavior."

The votes of the Executive Committee came at the end of a two-day meeting in Nashville, Tennessee,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 70 of 75

even as the committee copes with a Department of Justice investigation. The federal-level scrutiny follows a blistering report by a consultant earlier this year into sexual abuse in Southern Baptist settings and mistreatment of survivors by past Executive Committee officials.

The committee on Tuesday approved a statement that College Park Baptist Church of Greensboro, North Carolina, was not in "friendly cooperation" due to its "open affirmation, approval and endorsement of homosexual behavior," which conflicts with the denomination's theological conservative positions.

In fact, College Park had voted in 1999 to leave the denomination, and its website makes a point of stating it's not a member of the Southern Baptist Convention but rather of more progressive Baptist bodies.

It wasn't immediately clear why the Executive Committee decided now to put the matter to a vote. But Executive Committee Chairman Jared Wellman said afterward that the convention still had the congregation on its rolls until now.

On its website, the church describes itself as an "LGBTQIA Affirming Baptist Church" and says it "fully welcomes and affirms all persons without distinction regarding race, ethnicity, national origin, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other human category."

The committee, in a separate vote, declared that Amazing Grace Community Church of Franklinville, New Jersey, was no longer in friendly cooperation. It cited its "lack of cooperation ... to resolve concerns regarding alleged discriminatory behavior."

Requests for comment from both congregations via phone and email were not immediately returned.

Since Baptist congregations are self-governing, the denomination can't force them to follow their policies, but it can effectively expel them by declaring them not in "friendly cooperation" if they don't conform to denominational stances in particular areas, such as for pro-LGBTQ policies, alleged support for racism or alleged failure in responding adequately to child sexual abuse, such as employing offenders as pastors.

There could be more congregations in the last category in the pipeline.

The committee learned that more than 200 referrals had been made to a newly established hotline about alleged mishandling of abuse cases by SBC churches or organizations.

That news came from the Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force — created after the release of consultant Guidepost Solutions' scathing report earlier this year into the sexual abuse of children in SBC settings and the mistreatment of survivors by the Executive Committee.

Mike Keahbone, vice chair of the task force, said it is working to hire personnel to receive and investigate reports of abuse and of mishandling abuse in Southern Baptist circles.

The convention said in August that the U.S. Department of Justice is investigating the convention. The DOJ didn't confirm the report, but the convention suggested in a statement that it related to sexual abuse. On Tuesday, the committee voted to transfer \$500,000 from investments to its operating budget, in part to respond to that investigation.

The Executive Committee on Tuesday also added a "Caring Well Sunday" to the official Southern Baptist calendar of activities, which would aim to spread awareness and education about abuse. Churches have the option whether to observe such dates. But Wellman urged them to do so: "We want to be building a culture that addresses and prevents abuse, and this is a really great educational opportunity."

"Our dream ... is that our churches would be safe for the vulnerable and unsafe for abusers," Wellman said, citing numerous reforms underway. "There is no place, there is no tolerance for abuse in a Southern Baptist church."

Some abuse survivors, following the meeting on social media, found the committee's actions lacking. Long-time advocate and survivor Christa Brown criticized it for "self-congratulatory" talk on Twitter and said it's failed to take concrete steps toward making amends to survivors or to take disciplinary steps toward former officials faulted in the Guidepost report.

Keahbone said he understands the criticism and that compared to what survivors endured, "there's nothing we could say or do that would be worthy of any praise at all." He said the task force is doing what it can to implement reforms correctly.

"We're not celebrating anything," he said. "We're just trying to have markers of improvement."

Wellman echoed the thought. "I've just grieved and been broken-hearted for what they've experienced," he said. "We recognize we have a really long way to go."

Record spending over California's legal gambling initiative

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.

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.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 72 of 75

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 proposition 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."

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 for her allegedly loose headscarf, or hijab, has triggered daring displays of defiance, in the face of beatings and possible arrest.

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.

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

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN IRAN?

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.

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.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 73 of 75

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

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 has 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 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 during protests 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 then-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. The negotiations appear deadlocked, as nonproliferation experts warn Iran has enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear bomb if it chooses 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 coun-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 74 of 75

try'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.

Today in History: September 22, Cy Young's last win

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Sept. 22, the 265th day of 2022. There are 100 days left in the year. Autumn arrives at 3:20 p.m. EDT.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 22, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, declaring all slaves in rebel states should be free as of January 1, 1863.

On this date:

In 1776, during the Revolutionary War, Capt. Nathan Hale, 21, was hanged as a spy by the British in New York.

In 1911, pitcher Cy Young, 44, gained his 511th and final career victory as he hurled a 1-0 shutout for the Boston Rustlers against the Pittsburgh Pirates at Forbes Field.

In 1949, the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb.

In 1961, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued rules prohibiting racial discrimination on interstate buses.

In 1975, Sara Jane Moore attempted to shoot President Gerald R. Ford outside a San Francisco hotel, but missed.

In 1980, the Persian Gulf conflict between Iran and Iraq erupted into full-scale war.

In 1985, rock and country music artists participated in "Farm Aid," a concert staged in Champaign, Illinois, to help the nation's farmers.

In 1993, 47 people were killed when an Amtrak passenger train fell off a bridge and crashed into Big Bayou Canot near Mobile, Alabama. (A tugboat pilot lost in fog had pushed a barge into the railroad bridge, knocking the tracks 38 inches out of line just minutes before the train arrived.)

In 1994, the situation comedy "Friends" debuted on NBC-TV.

In 1995, an AWACS plane carrying U.S. and Canadian military personnel crashed on takeoff from Elmendorf Air Force Base near Anchorage, Alaska, killing all 24 people aboard.

In 2014, the United States and five Arab nations launched airstrikes against the Islamic State group in Syria, sending waves of planes and Tomahawk cruise missiles against an array of targets.

In 2020, U.S. deaths from the coronavirus topped 200,000, by far the highest confirmed death toll from the virus in the world at that point, according to a count by Johns Hopkins University.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama campaigned before a crowd of 18,000 in Wisconsin, the home state of GOP vice-presidential candidate Paul Ryan. In the aftermath of the killing of the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans, residents of the Libyan city of Benghazi protested at the compounds of several militias, vowing to rid themselves of armed factions and Islamic extremists.

Five years ago: As the scale of the damage from Hurricane Maria started to become clearer, Puerto Rican officials said they could not contact more than half of the communities in the U.S. territory, where all power had been knocked out to the island's 3.4 million people. President Donald Trump said NFL owners should fire players who kneel during the national anthem. The federal government told election officials in 21 states that hackers had targeted their systems before the 2016 presidential election. Sen. John McCain declared his opposition to the GOP's last-ditch effort to repeal and replace "Obamacare," the second time in three months McCain had emerged as the destroyer of his party's signature promise to voters.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 22, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 077 ~ 75 of 75

One year ago: At a virtual "vaccine summit" on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, President Joe Biden said the United States was doubling, to 1 billion doses, its purchases of Pfizer's COVID-19 shots to share with the world. Bargainers from both parties said bipartisan congressional talks on overhauling policing practices had ended without agreement; the effort had begun after killings of unarmed Black people by officers sparked protests across the U.S.

Today's Birthdays: Dancer/choreographer/singer Toni Basil is 79. Actor Paul Le Mat is 77. Musician King Sunny Adé (ah-DAY') is 76. Capt. Mark Phillips is 74. Rock singer David Coverdale (Deep Purple, Whitesnake) is 71. Actor Shari Belafonte is 68. Singer Debby Boone is 66. Country singer June Forester (The Forester Sisters) is 66. Singer Nick Cave is 65. Rock singer Johnette Napolitano is 65. Actor Lynn Herring is 65. Classical crossover singer Andrea Bocelli (an-DRAY'-ah boh-CHEL'-ee) is 64. Singer-musician Joan Jett is 64. Actor Scott Baio is 62. Actor Catherine Oxenberg is 61. Actor Bonnie Hunt is 61. Actor Rob Stone is 60. Actor Dan Bucatinsky (TV: "24: Legacy") is 57. Musician Matt Sharp is 53. Rock musician Dave Hernandez is 52. Rapper Mystikal is 52. R&B singer Big Rube (Society of Soul) is 51. Actor James Hillier (TV: "The Crown") is 49. Actor Mireille Enos is 47. Actor Daniella Alonso is 44. Actor Michael Graziadei (GRAHT'-zee-uh-day-ee) is 43. Actor Ashley Eckstein is 41. Actor Katie Lowes is 40. Rock musician Will Farquarson (Bastille) is 39. Actor Tatiana Maslany is 37. Actor Ukweli Roach (TV: "Blindspot") is 36. Actor Tom Felton is 35. Actor Teyonah Parris is 35. Actor Juliette Goglia is 27. Actor Dalya Knapp is 12.