

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, Oct. 7

Senior Menu: Taco salad, Mexican rice, seasonal fresh fruit, bread stick.

10 a.m.: Lake Region Marching Festival in Groton

Saturday, Oct. 8

9 a.m.: Gypsy Day Parade in Aberdeen

Common Cents Community Thrift Store Open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 209 N Main.

Sunday, Oct. 9

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.

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

St. John's Lutheran: Worship (St. John's 9:00 am, Zion 11:00 am)

UMC: Conde worship, 8:30 p.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday school after children's sermon during worship.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

Monday, Oct. 10

No School - Native American Day

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

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear."

AMBROSE REDMOON



Tuesday, Oct. 11

Northwestern Middle School Music Festival

PSAT Pre-Administration

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

Wednesday, Oct. 12

8:30 a.m.: PSAT Grades 10 and 11 (Optional)

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult

Bible Study begins at 7 pm

UMC: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

Thursday, Oct. 13

Region 1A Cross Country Meet at Webster, 3:30 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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The beauty of fall is in the air!
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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2022 Lake Region Marching Festival Lineup

**10:00- Groton Area 8-12 Marching Band
(EXHIBITION)**

Combined Division

10:05- Aberdeen Roncalli

10:10- Faulkton

10:15- Langford

10:20- Leola

10:25- Ipswich

10:30- Frederick

High School Division

10:35- Great Plains Lutheran

10:40- Northwestern

10:45- Pierre T.F. Riggs, Emerald Regiment

Middle School Division

10:50- Milbank Middle School

10:55- Simmons/Holgate Middle School

11:00- Groton Area 6-7 Marching Band

(EXHIBITION)

Awards after parade

The event will be broadcast on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Weismantel Insurance Agency of Columbia. In town, you may also be able to listen to the announcer on 89.3 FM.

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Groton's C team wins at Milbank

Groton's Volleyball team traveled to Milbank on Thursday where the C team came home with a 2-0 win over the Bulldogs. Both the junior varsity and varsity teams lost their matches in straight sets.

The C team never trailed winning its games by scores of 25-14 and 25-9. Talli Wright had five kills and three ace serves, Emerlee Jones had six kills and two aces, Kayla Lehr two kills, Kella Tracy four kills, five aces and one block, Chesney Weber three kills and an ace serve, Cali Tollifson one kill, Carly Gilbert three ace serves, London Bahr one ace serve and Rylee Dunker two ace serves and one kill. Kendra Roggenbuck led Milbank with three kills.

The junior varsity team never led in its games as Milbank won by game scores of 25-11 and 25-16. Talli Wright, Faith Traphagen and Kella Tracy each had two kills, Carly Gilbert and London Bahr each had an ace serve, Jaedyn Penning had two kills and an ace serve and Emma Kutter had one kill. Claire Snaza led Milbank with nine kills and four blocks.

The first set in the varsity match was tightly contested with the set being tied 10 times and there were six lead changes before the Bulldogs got the upper hand. It was last tied at 15 as Milbank went on to win, 25-22. After a one time both sets two and three, Milbank surged ahead and never trailed to win, 25-16 and 25-21.

Sydney Leight led Groton Area with 13 kills and three ace serves, Aspen Johnson had nine kills and a block, Anna Fjeldheim had three kills and an ace, Lydia Meier had three kills, Emma Kutter had two kills and a block, Elizabeth Flihs had two ace serves, Laila Roberts had a kill and Carly Guthmiller had an ace serve.

Rachel Schulte led Milbank with 19 kills and two blocks. Addisyn Krause had five ace serves, Halle Schulte two ace serves, Averie Engebreston and Rylie Overby each had four kills and two ace serves, Skyler Skoog had five kills and a block, Claire Snaza had three kills and two blocks, Isabella Andeson had three kills and Cassie Seezs had one kill.

Groton Area is now 7-10 on the season and Milbank goes to 12-7.

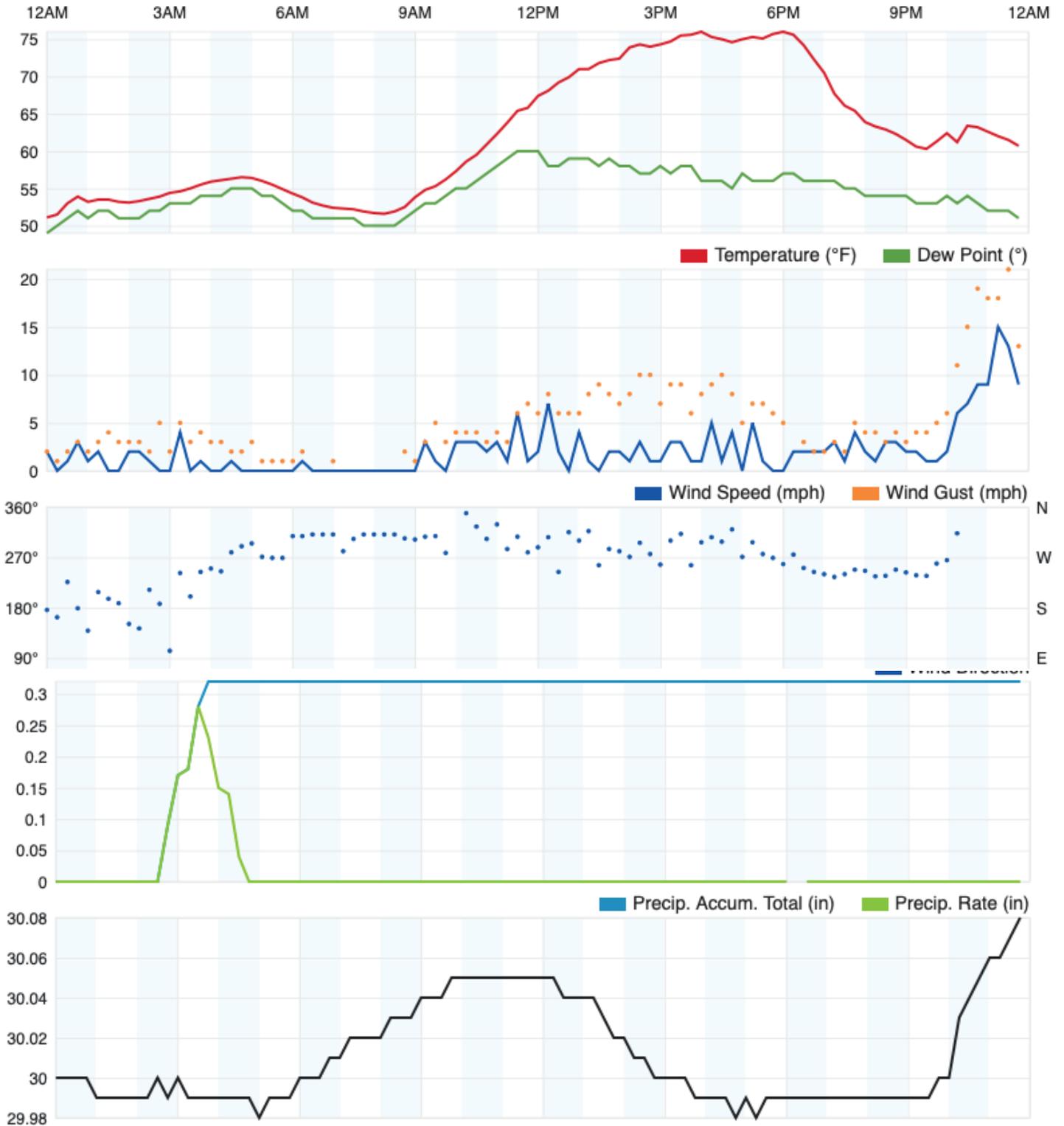
The C match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Rutgear605.com. The junior varsity match had an anonymous sponsor. The varsity was sponsored by Bahr Spray Foam, John Sieh Agency, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Locke Electric, Dacotah Bank, SD Army National Guard, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc, Groton Area Chamber of Commerce.

Justin Hanson and Ryan Tracy provided the play-by-play announcing.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
Frost then Sunny	Clear	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 52 °F	Low: 26 °F	High: 66 °F	Low: 39 °F	High: 65 °F



Temperature Outlook Through The Weekend

	Maximum Temperature Forecast															Maximum							
	10/7 Fri					10/8 Sat					10/9 Sun												
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am		3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	23	38	46	51	51	38	32	29	30	51	63	66	62	52	47	44	44	56	65	66	61	51	66
Britton	22	37	45	49	48	35	31	30	31	49	62	65	60	50	45	43	43	55	63	63	57	48	65
Eagle Butte	27	38	48	49	48	41	36	34	35	49	62	65	61	53	47	44	45	55	65	66	62	53	66
Eureka	24	35	45	50	49	37	33	30	31	49	62	64	62	50	44	43	43	55	63	63	59	49	64
Gettysburg	24	37	45	49	47	37	33	31	33	49	60	63	60	49	45	42	44	54	63	64	59	50	64
Kennebec	28	40	48	52	51	41	37	33	33	51	62	66	61	51	45	42	45	57	66	68	64	53	68
McIntosh	23	35	47	52	50	40	36	34	35	51	63	66	63	53	47	45	44	54	63	63	61	50	66
Milbank	39	39	45	48	47	36	32	35	37	53	61	64	58	51	47	46	47	57	63	64	59	50	64
Miller	26	39	49	52	49	36	31	30	31	52	64	66	62	50	45	44	45	58	67	68	62	51	68
Mobridge	24	37	49	54	53	41	37	34	36	50	64	68	65	56	50	47	47	57	66	68	65	55	68
Murdo	30	39	50	52	52	40	37	32	34	48	61	64	60	50	46	43	44	55	66	67	63	53	67
Pierre	34	38	48	53	51	42	37	34	31	47	64	67	63	54	49	46	46	56	67	68	64	55	68
Redfield	26	40	47	51	50	36	31	27	29	49	64	67	64	51	46	43	44	56	65	66	62	51	67
Sisseton	33	40	48	50	48	36	35	37	40	54	63	65	60	53	49	48	48	58	63	64	59	50	65
Watertown	29	38	45	48	45	34	30	28	28	48	59	61	57	49	45	43	43	55	63	64	58	49	64
Webster	27	37	42	46	44	34	30	30	31	48	59	62	59	49	46	44	44	54	61	61	56	48	62
Wheaton	36	38	45	48	46	36	33	34	37	51	62	64	61	50	46	44	43	55	62	63	59	49	64

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



A high pressure system overhead will keep the weather quiet with light winds. Temperatures still below average for today and warming back up to around average for the weekend.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 60 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 34 °F at 11:38 PM

Wind: 27 mph at 7:02 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 26 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 91 in 1909

Record Low: 14 in 2012

Average High: 65°F

Average Low: 38°F

Average Precip in Oct.: .54

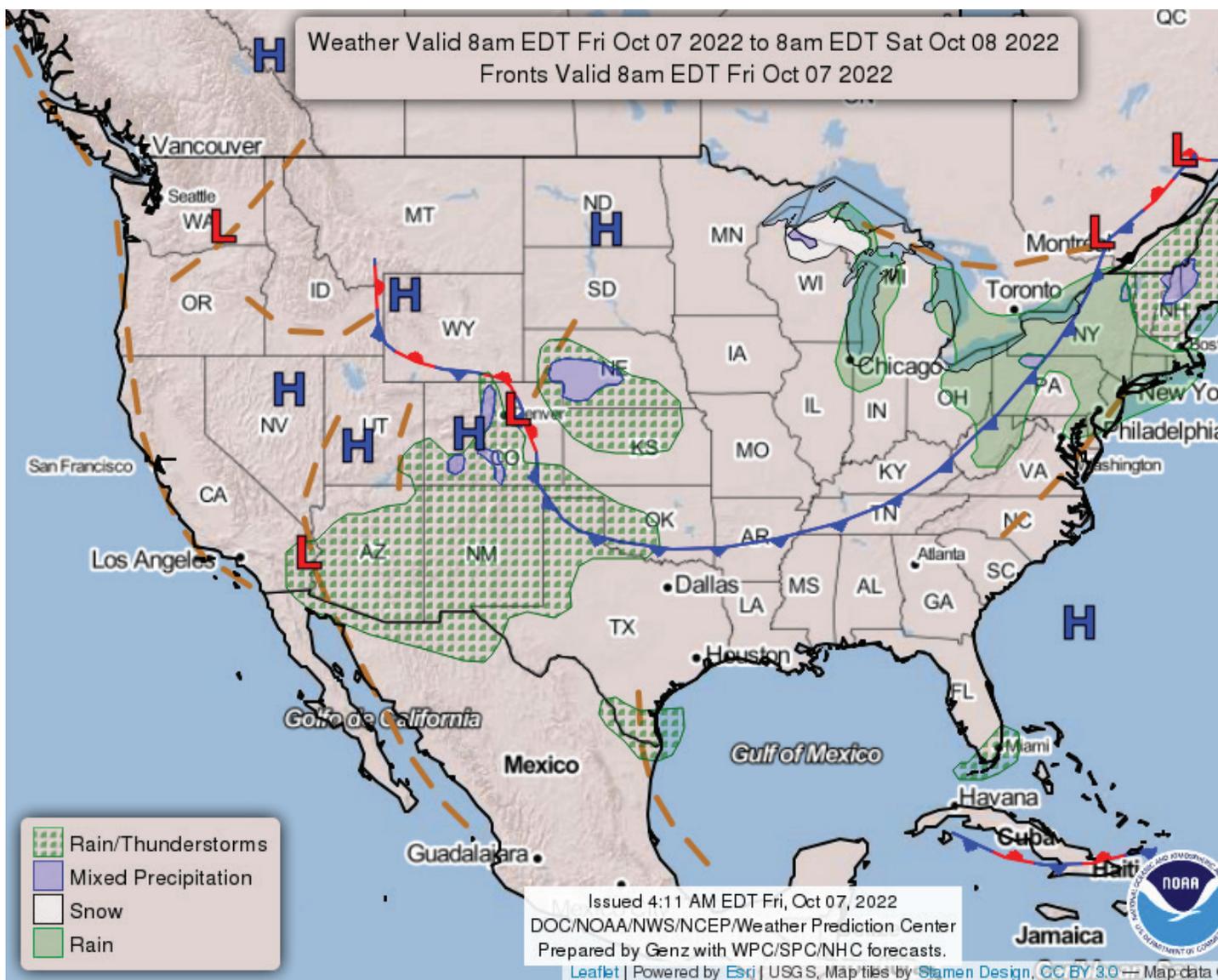
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.45

Average Precip to date: 18.87

Precip Year to Date: 16.50

Sunset Tonight: 7:03:09 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:38:24 AM



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Today in Weather History

October 7, 1970: On October 7th through the 10th, 1970, a record-breaking early season snowstorm hit parts of southern South Dakota. Snowfall of 5 to 9 inches was typical across the southwest and south-central on the 7th. Late on October 8th and into the 9th of 1970, the state's southeast portion was hit. The 5 inches that fell in Sioux Falls is the earliest significant snow on record for the area.

The heavy snows also affected portions of Kansas, Nebraska, western Iowa, and western Minnesota. Amounts of up to 7 inches were recorded in northwest Iowa. The heavy, wet snow snapped many tree branches and downed power lines. Sioux City recorded their heaviest snow for so early in the season. The snow was very wet and heavy but melted quickly over the next several days.

1825: Raging forest fires in the Miramichi region of New Brunswick, Canada, destroy over 3 million acres of forest. As many as 500 people were killed. The blaze has been partly attributed to unusually hot weather in the fall and summer of 1825, coupled with outdoor fires by settlers and loggers.

1849: High winds swept the passengers of the St. John out to sea. This resulted in a loss of 143 people.

1959: The Soviet spacecraft, Luna 3, captured the first images of the far side of the Moon. The first image was taken at 3:30 UTC on the 7th of October.

1970 - Widespread flooding took place across Puerto Rico. Rainfall amounts for the day ranged up to seventeen inches at Aibonito. A slow moving tropical depression was responsible for six days of torrential rains across the island. Totals in the Eastern Interior Division averaged thirty inches, with 38.4 inches at Jayuya. Flooding claimed eighteen lives, and resulted in 62 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1981 - Seattle, WA, received four inches of rain in 24 hours, a record for the city. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - It was another hot day in the southwestern U.S. Tucson, AZ, hit 101 degrees for the second day in a row to again equal their record for the month of October. Phoenix AZ reported a record high of 103 degrees, and Blythe CA and Yuma AZ tied for honors as the hot spot in the nation with afternoon highs of 108 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Morning fog in the central U.S. reduced the visibility to near zero at some locations. Morning lows of 28 degrees at Rockford IL and 24 degrees at Waterloo IA were records for the date. Afternoon highs of 92 degrees at Hollywood FL and Miami FL were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Morning thunderstorms in central Texas drenched San Antonio with 3.10 inches of rain in six hours causing local flooding in northeastern sections of the city. Temperatures dipped below the freezing mark from the Northern Rockies to the Upper Mississippi Valley. (The National Weather Summary)

2016: Hurricane Matthew was off the northeast coast of Florida. Matthew brought intense rainfall to the Carolinas on the 8th and 9th.

2017: A tornado touched down near Jenner in Alberta, Canada. 2018: Only 8 hours after becoming a depression, the National Hurricane Center upgraded the system to Tropical Storm Michael. Tropical storm force winds and torrential downpours were affecting portions of the coastal east-central Yucatan Peninsula.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

HEART HEALTH – LIFE HEALTH

While waiting for my appointment with a surgeon, I decided to take my pulse. It was beating slowly, well within the normal limits. Suddenly the nurse called my name and directed me to a consultation room. After I sat down, she took my temperature and blood pressure. My temperature was normal, but my blood pressure was extremely high, which was not normal for me. Then she placed two fingers on my wrist to take my pulse. From the waiting room to the consultation room my heart rate increased dramatically – over twenty beats per minute. Fear got the best of my peaceful heart.

There is a direct connection with our emotional well-being and our physical well-being. When a fear of the unknown - the possibility of surgery - was about to become known, or, facing the reality that I would be scheduled for surgery, my fear could actually be measured!

The “heart” is much more than a muscle in life and in the Bible. It is the center of our being: the source of our thoughts, our emotions, our ambitions, and where decisions are made, problems are solved, and choices sorted out. According to Scripture, the heart affects every part of our life - positively or negatively.

Solomon understood that and wisely wrote, “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the body.” It is obvious from what Solomon wrote and what science has now confirmed: our emotional - or inner - state greatly impacts our physical wellbeing and health.

Notice the impact of “envy.” It’s an emotion we all deal with. For some, the desire to want something that God has not given us can become so intense that it has the same results as cancer - it eats away life.

Beware of envy.

Prayer: Grant us Your peace, Lord, to meet the problems we face each day. May we look to You for help, healing, and hope in times of trouble and pain. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. Proverbs 14:30



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

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2022-23 Community Events

- 07/21/2022: Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/22/2022: Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
07/24/2022: Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
07/27/2022: Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm
08/05/2022: Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
08/12/2022: GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
No Date Set: Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot
09/10/2022: Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
09/11/2022: 6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3-5pm
09/11/2022: Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10 a.m.
09/02-04: Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/01/2022: Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/07/2022: Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
10/31/2022: Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2022: United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/19/2022: Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course
12/10/2022: Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm
01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
07/04/2023 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start (4th of July)
07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Christian def. Wilmot, 26-24, 22-25, 26-24, 22-25, 15-13

Aberdeen Roncalli def. Britton-Hecla, 25-10, 25-12, 25-13

Beresford def. Alcester-Hudson, 25-23, 26-24, 14-25, 25-22

Brandon Valley def. Yankton, 21-25, 25-22, 25-22, 25-22

Bridgewater-Emery def. Avon, 25-23, 18-25, 25-23, 25-21

Burke def. Corsica/Stickney, 25-6, 25-16, 25-16

Canton def. Garretson, 26-24, 22-25, 25-21, 25-18

Dakota Valley def. Madison, 25-18, 25-10, 25-17

Edgemont def. Sioux County, Neb., 25-19, 25-19, 13-25, 25-15

Elkton-Lake Benton def. Deubrook, 25-11, 25-21, 25-16

Estelline/Hendricks def. Dell Rapids St. Mary, 25-20, 18-25, 25-17, 25-15

Florence/Henry def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-3, 25-11, 25-7

Great Plains Lutheran def. Langford, 25-22, 25-17, 25-11

Hamlin def. Sisseton, 25-14, 25-15, 25-19

Howard def. Canistota, 25-22, 25-19, 26-24

Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-19, 25-8, 25-10

Jones County def. Dupree, 25-19, 25-19, 12-25, 25-15

McCook Central/Montrose def. West Central, 25-18, 25-13, 25-20

Milbank def. Groton Area, 25-22, 25-16, 25-21

Miller def. Hitchcock-Tulare, 25-14, 25-13, 25-7

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. Chamberlain, 25-15, 25-11, 25-18

Northwestern def. Faulkton, 25-15, 25-12, 25-15

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland def. DeSmet, 15-25, 25-19, 23-25, 25-15, 15-6

Platte-Geddes def. Gregory, 25-11, 25-10, 25-18

Redfield def. Clark/Willow Lake, 25-16, 25-18, 25-21

Scotland def. Centerville, 20-25, 25-21, 25-20, 27-29, 15-8

Sioux Falls Christian def. Southwest Minnesota Christian, Minn., 25-18, 25-12, 25-23

Sioux Falls Lutheran def. Viborg-Hurley, 25-17, 25-15, 25-16

Spearfish def. Sturgis Brown, 25-16, 25-12, 25-20

St. Francis Indian def. Little Wound, 25-19, 25-19, 28-26

Tiospa Zina Tribal def. Deuel, 25-17, 25-17, 18-25, 25-17

Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Sanborn Central/Woonsocket, 25-12, 25-21, 25-19

Wall def. Custer, 22-25, 25-15, 25-16, 29-27

Hay Springs Triangular=

Hemingford, Neb. def. Lakota Tech, 25-11, 25-19, 28-26

PREP FOOTBALL=

Lower Brule 46, Crow Creek 0

Standing Rock, N.D. 46, McLaughlin 0

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

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

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By The Associated Press undefined
Yankton Press & Dakotan. October 3, 2022.

Editorial: An Election-Year Switch On Food Tax

Gov. Kristi Noem's apparent change of heart regarding the sales tax on food in South Dakota looks plainly like an election-season conversion of convenience.

She is suddenly embracing an idea that 1) is popular with state residents; and 2) she has been fighting against for years, including the last legislative session when it appeared, at long last, the idea might see the light of day. But that didn't happen — despite the robust state economy we keep hearing about — and it left South Dakota as one of 13 states in the U.S. that still taxes food.

Noem announced last week that she would back the repeal of the tax now due to what she called the current "Biden inflation," which further casts her switch as a political maneuver. (One wonders what inflation is called in all the other countries experiencing this problem, which is literally all the other countries.)

It may also be seen as an attempt to undercut her Democratic rival, Jamie Smith, who has fought for such a repeal in the Legislature. Again, political fingerprints are all over this.

Then again, what is said on the campaign trail doesn't mean this is a done deal. The Legislature would still have to approve it, and if Noem wins, she will still have to advocate for the idea come January and not cite a subsequent change in circumstances that might compel her to withdraw her support or to attach a sunset clause to the idea.

But, for the moment, let's embrace the possibility that the food tax repeal will be pushed by whoever is sitting in the governor's chair in January.

As we've noted on this page a couple of times this year, the repeal would save South Dakota taxpayers about \$82 million a year, and it would come at a time when the state is seeing solid revenue both internally and from federal funding. The repeal would help the poorest South Dakotans the most.

Now, about last session: The idea got an unexpected boost last winter when the South Dakota House surprisingly passed the repeal by a 47-22 margin, with Republicans joining Democrats who have long pushed for the move. But that push vanished when the Republican-dominated State Senate chose not to concur with the House amendments and refused to not even set up a conference committee to reconcile the details.

Nevertheless, this long battle made it that far before it was derailed yet again.

Noem's apparent change of heart may be a political calculation, but for now, it does give the effort its greatest hope yet.

Whether that possibility is sustained after Nov. 8 remains to be seen.

END

Amid end to COVID help, homelessness surging in many cities

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE, MICHAEL CASEY and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — In California's capital, massive tent encampments have risen along the American River and highway overpasses have become havens for homeless people, whose numbers have jumped a staggering nearly 70% over two years.

Among the 9,300 without a home is Eric Santos, who lost his job at a brewery and was evicted from his apartment in July. Now he carries a list of places where free meals are available and a bucket to mix soap and water to wash his hands, and to sit on.

"The bucket is part of my life now," the 42-year-old said, calling it his version of Wilson, the volleyball that becomes Tom Hanks' companion in the film "Castaway."

Cities big and small around the country are facing a similar experience to Sacramento.

Fueled by a long-running housing shortage, rising rent prices and the economic hangover from the pandemic, the overall number of homeless in a federal government report to be released in coming months is expected to be higher than the 580,000 unhoused before the coronavirus outbreak, the National Alliance to End Homelessness said.

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The Associated Press tallied results from city-by-city Point in Time surveys conducted earlier this year and found the number of people without homes is up overall compared with 2020 in areas reporting results so far.

Some of the biggest increases are in West Coast cities such as Sacramento and Portland, Oregon, where growing homelessness has become a humanitarian crisis and political football. Numbers are also up in South Dakota, Prince George's County, Maryland, and Asheville, North Carolina.

Research has shown places seeing spikes in homelessness often lack affordable housing. Making matters worse, pandemic government relief programs — including anti-eviction measures, emergency rental assistance and a child tax credit that kept people housed who may have been on the streets otherwise — are ending.

In Sacramento, where rents are soaring and officials disagree on how best to deal with the problem, homelessness has jumped 68% from 2020 to 2022 — the most among larger cities reporting results so far.

The surge has been driven in part by the city's legacy of being more affordable than other California cities, which has attracted new residents, overwhelming the housing market.

A Zillow analysis found the average rent in July was \$2,300 — a 28% increase since July 2019, before the pandemic began. Sacramento County's median income was about \$70,000 in 2020, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg has made reducing homelessness a priority since he took office in 2017. But so far, it hasn't been enough.

"People are becoming homeless much faster than we are getting them off the street," Steinberg told the AP.

Steinberg has advocated for adopting a legal right to shelter and a legal obligation for people to accept it when offered. The approach has drawn some criticism from advocates who say it's just a means of taking the problem out of the public eye, without providing meaningful help for those who need it.

County officials voted in August to ban camping along Sacramento's American River Parkway, with a misdemeanor charge for people who don't comply. City voters will decide in November on a ballot measure requiring the city to open hundreds more shelter beds. But it would only take effect if the county agrees to pony up money for mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Still, the rise in homelessness is not uniform across the country.

In Boston, the number of people sleeping on the streets and in shelters has dropped 25% over two years as advocates focused on finding permanent housing for those on the streets the longest.

In some cities, "housing first" policies intended to move the homeless into permanent homes have paid off. And while the pandemic brought economic chaos, an eviction moratorium, boosted unemployment payments and family tax credits prevented some people from becoming homeless at all.

Along with Boston, numbers have fallen sharply in Houston, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Even in California, homeless counts are down in San Francisco, and growth has slowed significantly in Los Angeles.

In Boston, Steven Hamilton moved into a new apartment in September after decades staying on a friend or relative's couch or in a homeless shelter.

With the help of a program run by the Boston Medical Center, he was able to get a subsidized apartment in a public housing development. His portion of monthly rent is \$281 — or about 30% of his Social Security payments.

"I'm grateful," he said. "I am not looking to move nowhere else. I am going to stay here until eternity. I lost a lot of stuff. I'm not going through that again."

Hamilton's studio apartment is the result of a Boston strategy whereby the city and area nonprofits use extensive outreach to get people who've been on the streets for over a year into apartments and then provide services such as drug treatment and life-skills training like budgeting with the help of case managers.

Those efforts were bolstered last year by a city program that pulled together a list of homeless individuals to target for housing and other services. The city also moved to shut down one of its biggest homeless encampments, going tent-to-tent to assess the needs of those living there and referring more than 150

to shelters and other housing.

The city has been able to reduce the number of homeless people to about 6,000, down 25% since 2020. Boston's shelters have become less crowded even as Zillow found the city's average rent rose to \$2,800 this summer — up 13% from three years earlier.

Housing advocates say prioritizing chronically homeless people ensures funds have the greatest impact, since the long-term homeless spend so much time in shelters. It also costs less to provide permanent housing than to provide temporary shelter.

Police: 2 dead, 6 injured in stabbings along Las Vegas Strip

LAS VEGAS (AP) — An attacker with a large kitchen knife killed two people and wounded six others in stabbings along the Las Vegas Strip before he was arrested Thursday, police said.

Three people were hospitalized in critical condition and another three were in stable condition, according to Las Vegas police, who said they began receiving 911 calls about the stabbings around 11:40 a.m. across the street from the Wynn casino and hotel.

Yoni Barrios, 32, was booked into the Clark County Detention Center on two counts of murder and six counts of attempted murder, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department said in a statement.

It wasn't immediately known whether Barrios had a lawyer who could comment on his behalf.

Barrios, who is not a Las Vegas resident, was detained by Sands security guards and Metropolitan Police officers while running on a Strip sidewalk, police said.

"This was an isolated incident," Metropolitan Police Deputy Chief James LaRochelle said in a statement. "All evidence indicates Barrios acted alone and there are no outstanding suspects at this time."

Police said they were continuing to investigate the motive but do not believe there was an altercation before the attacks.

The Clark County coroner's office identified the victims who were killed as Brent Allan Hallett, 47, and Maris Mareen Digiovanni, 30, both Las Vegas residents.

The names of those wounded in the attack were not immediately released.

The initial stabbing was unprovoked and on the eastern sidewalk of Las Vegas Boulevard. The suspect then headed south and stabbed others, LaRochelle said.

The man fled and was followed by 911 callers before he was taken into custody, authorities said. Police recovered the "large knife with a long blade" believed to have been used, LaRochelle said, calling the case a "hard-to-comprehend murder investigation."

There were no other suspects in the case and "the Strip is secure," Clark County Sheriff Joe Lombardo said.

"Locals and tourists are the victims of this crime," Lombardo said.

Witnesses told Las Vegas TV stations that some of the victims appeared to be showgirls or street performers who take pictures with tourists on the Strip.

The suspect told a woman that he was a chef who wanted to take a picture with some of the showgirls with his knife, but he started stabbing people when the group declined the man's offer, the woman told KTNV.

Jason Adams told KLAS that he witnessed the attack on a showgirl.

"This guy came, ran up, and started stabbing this lady in front of me and she ran around the escalators and she tried to get up under the bridge and her girlfriend was trying to help her," Adams said, adding that the attack happened very quickly.

Pierre Fandrich, a tourist from Canada, told KTNV that he did not see the stabbing suspect as he was walking along the Strip. But he said he thought he heard "three or four showgirls laughing," and it turned out to be screaming.

Fandrich said he saw "a lot of blood" as one woman ran across a bridge, one was on the ground, and another had a stab wound on her back as she tried to help the fallen woman.

Fandrich also told KTNV that he thought one of the victims fell from the bridge because there was so

much blood on the ground.

Democratic Gov. Steve Sisolak posted a message on social media saying, "Our hearts are with all those affected by this tragedy."

"At the State level, we will continue to work with partners in law enforcement to make resources available on the ground and ensure the Las Vegas Strip remains a safe and welcoming place for all to visit," Sisolak said.

Thais mourn dozens, mainly kids, killed in day care attack

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and DAVID RISING Associated Press

UTHAI SAWAN, Thailand (AP) — Relatives wailed and some collapsed as they grieved Friday over the small coffins carrying children slain by a fired police officer who stormed a day care center in rural Thailand during naptime.

Thailand's deadliest mass killing left virtually no one untouched in the small community nestled among rice paddies in one of the nation's poorest regions. Grief also gripped the rest of the country, where flags were lowered to half-staff and schoolchildren said prayers to honor the dead.

At least 24 of the 36 people killed in Thursday's grisly gun and knife attack were children, mostly preschoolers.

"I cried until I had no more tears coming out of my eyes. They are running through my heart," said Seksan Sriraj, 28, whose pregnant wife was due to give birth this month and who worked at the Young Children's Development Center in Uthai Sawan.

"My wife and my child have gone to a peaceful place. I am alive and will have to live. If I can't go on, my wife and my child will be worried about me, and they won't be reborn in the next life," he said.

A stream of people, including Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, other government representatives and relatives themselves, have left flowers at the day care center. By afternoon, bouquets of white roses and carnations lined the wall outside, along with five tiny juice boxes, bags of corn chips and a stuffed animal.

Later, relatives received the bodies at the local Buddhist temple. As the small, white coffins were opened, some screamed, while others fainted. Paramedics revived them with smelling salts. For a time, the grounds outside the temple were crowded with people overcome by grief.

"It was just too much. I can't accept this," said Oy Yodkhao, 51, sitting on a bamboo mat in the oppressive heat as relatives gave her water and gently mopped her brow.

Her 4-year-old grandson Tawatchai Sriphu was killed, and she said she worried for the child's siblings. The family of rice farmers is close, with three generations living under one roof.

Som-Mai Pitfai collapsed when she saw the body of her 3-year-old niece.

"When I looked, I saw she had been slashed in the face with a knife," the 58-year-old said, holding back tears.

King Maha Vajiralongkorn and Queen Suthida were expected later in the day to go to hospitals, where seven of the 10 people wounded remain. A vigil was planned in a central park in Bangkok, the nation's capital.

Police identified the attacker as Panya Kamrap, 34, a former police sergeant fired earlier this year because of a drug charge involving methamphetamine. He had been due to appear in court Friday. An employee told a Thai TV station that Panya's son had attended the day care but hadn't been there for about a month.

Witnesses said the attacker shot a man and child in front of the center before walking toward it. Teachers locked the glass front door, but the gunman shot and kicked his way through it. The children, mainly preschoolers, had been taking an afternoon nap, and photos taken by first responders showed their tiny bodies still lying on blankets. In some images, slashes to the victims' faces and gunshots to their heads could be seen.

Panya took his own life after killing his wife and child at home.

In an interview with Amarin TV, Satita Boonsom, who worked at the day care center, said staff locked the door to the building after seeing the assailant shoot a child and his father out front. But the attacker

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broke the glass and went on to attack the children and workers with his knife and firearm.

Satita said she and three other teachers climbed the center's fence to escape and call police and seek help. By the time she returned, the children were dead. She said one child who was covered by a blanket survived the attack, apparently because the assailant assumed he was dead.

She said the center usually has around 70 to 80 children, but there were fewer at the time of the attack because the semester had ended for older children and rain prevented a school bus from operating.

"They wouldn't have survived," she said.

Satita added that the attacker's son hadn't been to the day care center recently because he was sick.

One of the youngest survivors is a 3-year-old boy who was riding a tricycle close to his mother and grandmother when the assailant began slashing them with the knife. The mother died from her wounds, and the boy and grandmother were being treated at hospitals, according to local media.

Mass shootings are rare but not unheard of in Thailand, which has one of the highest civilian gun ownership rates in Asia, with 15.1 weapons per 100 people compared to only 0.3 in Singapore and 0.25 in Japan. That's still far lower than the U.S. rate of 120.5 per 100 people, according to a 2017 survey by Australia's GunPolicy.org nonprofit organization.

Support and condolences poured in from around the world. "All Australians send their love and condolences," Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese tweeted. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called the violence "senseless and heartbreaking."

Pope Francis offered prayers for all those affected by such "unspeakable violence."

"I'm profoundly saddened by the heinous shooting at a childcare centre in Thailand," U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres tweeted.

Thailand's previous worst mass killing involved a disgruntled soldier who opened fire in and around a mall in the northeastern city of Nakhon Ratchasima in 2020, killing 29 people and holding off security forces for some 16 hours before eventually being killed by them.

Nearly 60 others were wounded in that attack. Its death toll surpassed that of the previously worst attack on civilians, a 2015 bombing at a shrine in Bangkok that killed 20 people. It was allegedly carried out by human traffickers in retaliation for a crackdown on their network.

Last month, a clerk shot co-workers at Thailand's Army War College in Bangkok, killing two and wounding another before he was arrested.

Nobel Peace Prize to activists from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine

By HANNA ARHIROVA and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Activists from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia won the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday, a strong rebuke to Russian President Vladimir Putin whose invasion of Ukraine has outraged the international community and highlighted his authoritarian rule.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the 2022 prize to imprisoned Belarus rights activist Ales Bialiatski, the Russian group Memorial and the Ukrainian organization Center for Civil Liberties.

Berit Reiss-Andersen, chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, said the panel wanted to honor "three outstanding champions of human rights, democracy and peaceful coexistence."

"Through their consistent efforts in favor of human values and anti-militarism and principles of law, this year's laureates have revitalized and honored Alfred Nobel's vision of peace and fraternity between nations, a vision most needed in the world today," she told reporters in Oslo.

Asked whether the Nobel Committee was intentionally sending a signal to Putin, who celebrated his 70th birthday Friday, Reiss-Andersen said that "we always give a prize for something and to somebody and not against anyone."

"This prize is not addressing President Putin, not for his birthday or in any other sense, except that his government, as the government in Belarus, is representing an authoritarian government that is suppressing human rights activists," she said.

Bialiatski was one of the leaders of the democracy movement in Belarus in the mid 1980s and has

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continued to campaign for human rights and civil liberties in the authoritarian country. He founded the non-governmental organization Human Rights Center Viasna.

He was detained following protests in 2020 against the re-election of Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko, a close ally of Putin. He remains in jail without trial.

"Despite tremendous personal hardship, Mr Bialiatski has not yielded one inch in his fight for human rights and democracy in Belarus," Reiss-Andersen said, adding that the Nobel panel was calling on Belarusian authorities to release him.

Exiled Belarus opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, visiting Paris, told The Associated Press that the award would further increase the spotlight on Belarusian political prisoners and said she felt "honored and delighted" that Bialiatski was among the laureates, calling him a "famous human rights defender in Belarus and in the world" and a "wonderful person."

"For sure, it will attract more attention to (the) humanitarian situation in our country," she said of the award.

Tsikhanouskaya, whose husband is also imprisoned, said Bialiatski "is suffering a lot in punishment cells" in prison in Belarus.

"But there are thousands of other people who are detained because of their political views, and I hope that it will raise awareness about our country and practical steps will have been done in order to release those people who sacrificed with their freedom," she told the AP.

Memorial was founded in the Soviet Union in 1987 to ensure the victims of communist repression would be remembered. It has continued to compile information on human rights abuses and tracked the fate of political prisoners in Russia. The country's highest court ordered it shut down in December, the latest move in a relentless crackdown on rights activists, independent media and opposition supporters.

Tatyana Glushkova, a board member of the Memorial Human Rights Defense Center, said she learned about the award from the news. "It was a shock," she told the AP. "We are very, very happy."

"For us, this is a sign that our work, whether it is recognized by the Russian authorities or not, it is important for the world, it important for people in Russia," Glushkova said.

Glushkova noted that the award was handed to the group on the day when it once again had to appear in court in Moscow — this time on a case related to its office building in central Moscow.

International Memorial owned the building, but after the group was shut down, it gave the building to one of its affiliate organizations, the Memorial Research and Education Center. Russian authorities are contesting the deal in court, and the Prosecutor General's office filed a motion to invalidate it. Memorial considers the move an attempt to seize the building and hinder the organization's operation.

The Center for Civil Liberties was founded in 2007 to promote human rights and democracy in Ukraine during a period of turmoil in the country.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, the group has worked to document Russian war crimes against Ukrainian civilians.

"The center is playing a pioneering role with a view to holding the guilty parties accountable for their crimes," said Reiss-Andersen.

A representative of the center, Volodymyr Yavorskyi, said the award was important for the organization because "for many years we worked in a country that was invisible."

"This is a surprise for us," he told the AP. "But human rights activity is the main weapon against the war."

This year's award follows a tradition of highlighting groups and activists trying to prevent conflicts, alleviate hardship and protect human rights.

Last year's winners have faced a tough time since receiving the prize. Journalists Dmitry Muratov of Russia and Maria Ressa of the Philippines have been fighting for the survival of their news organizations, defying government efforts to silence them

They were honored last year for "their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace."

The prize carries a cash award of 10 million Swedish kronor (nearly \$900,000) and will be handed out

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on Dec. 10. The money comes from a bequest left by the prize's creator, Swedish inventor Alfred Nobel, in 1895.

K-pop group BTS members face possible military conscription

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's military appears to want to conscript members of the K-pop supergroup BTS for mandatory military duties, as the public remains sharply divided over whether they should be given exemptions.

Lee Ki Sik, commissioner of the Military Manpower Administration, told lawmakers on Friday that it's "desirable" for BTS members to fulfill their military duties to ensure fairness in the country's military service.

Earlier this week, Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup made almost identical comments about BTS at a parliamentary committee meeting, and Culture Minister Park Bo Gyeon said his ministry would soon finalize its position on the issue.

Whether the band's seven members must serve in the army is one of the hottest issues in South Korea because its oldest member, Jin, faces possible enlistment early next year after turning 30 in December.

Under South Korean law, all able-bodied men are required to perform 18-21 months of military service. But the law provides special exemptions for athletes, classical and traditional musicians, and ballet and other dancers who have won top prizes in certain competitions that enhance national prestige.

Without a revision of the law, the government can take steps to grant special exemptions. But past exemptions for people who performed well in non-designated competitions triggered serious debate about the fairness of the system.

Since the draft forces young men to suspend their professional careers or studies, the dodging of military duties or creation of exemptions is a highly sensitive issue.

In one recent survey, about 61% of respondents supported exemptions for entertainers such as BTS, while in another, about 54% said BTS members should serve in the military.

Several amendments of the conscription law that would pave the way for BTS members to be exempted have been introduced in the National Assembly, but haven't been voted on with lawmakers sharply divided on the matter.

Lee, the defense minister, earlier said he had ordered officials to consider conducting a public survey to help determine whether to grant exemptions to BTS. But the Defense Ministry later said it would not carry out such a survey.

In August, Lee said if BTS members join the military, they would likely be allowed to continue practicing and to join other non-serving BTS members in overseas group tours.

People who are exempted from the draft are released from the military after three weeks of basic training. They are also required to perform 544 hours of volunteer work and continue serving in their professional fields for 34 months.

Missiles, drones hit Zaporizhzhia again as death toll rises

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The death toll from a missile attack on apartment buildings in a southern Ukrainian city rose to 11 as more Russian missiles and — for the first time — explosive packed drones targeted Ukrainian-held Zaporizhzhia on Friday.

As the war sparked by Russia's February invasion of its neighbor ground on, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to human rights organizations in Russia and Ukraine, and an activist jailed in Russian ally Belarus.

Asked by a reporter whether the prize shared by Belarus rights activist Ales Bialiatski, the Russian group Memorial and the Ukrainian organization Center for Civil Liberties should be seen as a "birthday gift" to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who turned 70 on Friday, committee chair Berit Reiss-Andersen said no.

"The prize is not addressing President Putin, not for his birthday or in any other sense, except that his

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government, as the government in Belarus, is representing an authoritarian government that is suppressing human rights activists," Reiss-Andersen said.

Putin this week illegally claimed four regions of Ukraine as Russian territory, including the Zaporizhzhia region that is home to a sprawling nuclear power plant under Russian occupation; the city of the same name remains under Ukrainian control.

With its army losing ground to a Ukrainian counteroffensive in the country's south and east, Russia has deployed Iranian-made drones to attack Ukrainian targets. The unmanned, disposable "kamikaze drones" are cheaper and less sophisticated than missiles but have proved effective at causing damage to targets on the ground.

The regional governor, Oleksandr Starukh, said Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones damaged two infrastructure facilities in the city of Zaporizhzhia, the first time they were used there. He said missiles also struck the city again, injuring one person.

The Emergency Services of Ukraine said the toll of Russian S-300 missile strikes on the city a day earlier rose to 11 and another 21 people were rescued from the rubble of destroyed apartments.

"This was not a random hit, but a series of missiles aimed at multi-story buildings," Starukh wrote on his Telegram channel.

Russia was reported to have converted the S-300 from its original use as a long-range anti-aircraft weapon into a missile for ground attacks because of a shortage of other, more suitable weapons.

The Ukrainian military said most of the drones it shot down Thursday and into Friday were the Iranian-made Shahed-136. The weapons are unlikely to significantly affect the course of the war, however, the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said.

"They have used many drones against civilian targets in rear areas, likely hoping to generate nonlinear effects through terror. Such efforts are not succeeding," analysts at the think tank wrote.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's ability to capture and put back into service Russian tanks and other equipment continues to be an important factor in its forces' push to repel the invasion.

Ukrainian forces have captured at least 440 tanks and about 650 armored vehicles since the start of the war, Britain's Ministry of Defense said Friday.

"The failure of Russian crews to destroy intact equipment before withdrawing or surrendering highlights their poor state of training and low levels of battle discipline," the British said. "With Russian formations under severe strain in several sectors and increasingly demoralized troops, Russia will likely continue to lose heavy weaponry."

The Ukrainian military also said Friday that 500 former criminals have been mobilized to reinforce Russian ranks in the eastern Donetsk region, where Ukrainian forces have retaken some territory. The new units are commanded by officers drawn from law enforcement, the military said.

U.S. President Joe Biden warned Thursday that Putin has driven the risk of nuclear "Armageddon" to the highest level since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Russian officials have spoken of the possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons to defend Russia's territory, including the newly annexed regions of Ukraine.

Speaking at a fundraiser for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, Biden said Putin was "not joking when he talks about the use of tactical nuclear weapons or biological or chemical weapons."

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held another telephone call with Putin on Friday to discuss bilateral ties and the war in Ukraine.

Erdogan told Putin that Turkey was ready to fulfil its part for a "peaceful resolution of the Ukraine issue in a manner that would be to the benefit of everyone," according to a statement from the Turkish leader's office.

In the Czech capital, European Union leaders converged on Prague Castle to try to bridge significant differences over a natural gas price cap as winter approaches and Russia's war on Ukraine fuels a major energy crisis.

As the Europeans bolster their support for Ukraine in the form of weapons, money and aid, Russia has reduced or cut off natural gas to 13 member nations, leading to surging gas and electricity prices that

could climb higher as demand peaks during the cold months.

Macron at Europe's center stage with new summit initiative

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PRAGUE (AP) — Smile flashing, giving a thumbs-up, Emmanuel Macron appears at Europe's center stage again — literally.

The photo of over 40 European leaders surrounding the French president Thursday ensured a symbolic image of unity of the continent faced with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, making the inaugural summit of the European Political Community an initial success for Macron, who launched the idea a few months ago.

"It's a great day for you," Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala told Macron when welcoming him for the meeting at the Prague castle in the Czech Republic.

The forum aimed at boosting security and prosperity across the continent brought together existing EU members, aspiring partners in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, as well as Britain and Turkey. Russia was the one major European power not invited, along with its neighbor and supporter in the war, Belarus.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who made a speech via videoconference, said, "We have received not just another format of cooperation in Europe, but an extremely powerful opportunity to restore peace in Europe."

Other leaders thanked Macron for his initiative, despite initial concerns from some that it might slow down expansion of the European Union.

Some countries that have been candidates for years to get into the bloc, especially in the Western Balkans, had feared the new forum would be a way to put them in the EU waiting room for an indefinite period. Macron and other EU leaders insisted it is not a substitute for the membership process, which is to be handled in separate discussions.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, whose country is an EU candidate but maintains relations with Russia and refused to join Western sanctions against Moscow, still voiced support Thursday for the initiative. "We gathered to show that we belong to Europe. It is very useful for us, an ideal opportunity to have good meetings, to find out some things," he told reporters.

At a news conference, Macron said the meeting had sent a "powerful" message. "At the scale of the continent, we're trying to fix problems," he said.

The next meeting will be held in Moldova in the spring.

In Prague, Macron continued his diplomatic activism. That went from improving the complex French-British relations to trying to ease some regional tensions.

British Prime Minister Liz Truss, who had recently expressed her desire to "re-engage" with France following post-Brexit tensions, called Macron "a friend."

"What we're talking about is how the UK and France can work more closely together" she said.

Alongside European Council President Charles Michel, Macron was able to gather around the table the leaders of historic foes Turkey and Armenia as well as Azerbaijan. Last month, Armenia and Azerbaijan negotiated a cease-fire to end a flare-up of fighting that killed 155 soldiers on both sides.

Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also met successively with the leaders of Kosovo and Serbia. The EU has overseen years of unsuccessful talks to normalize relations between the two countries, saying that is one of the main preconditions for their eventual membership in the 27-nation bloc. Serbia refused to recognize Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence.

First elected in 2017, Macron has always promoted an ambitious pro-European approach and at each occasion sought to play a key role in global diplomacy. Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 only reinforced his views.

In April, Macron was reelected for a second term, winning over far-right, nationalist rival Marine Le Pen in the second round.

It bolstered his standing as a senior player in Europe, as the other heavy weight, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, is still relatively new to the job after succeeding Angela Merkel last year.

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Macron also held the rotating presidency of the European Union during the first half of the year, championing sanctions on Moscow as punishment for its war on Ukraine.

At home, though, he appeared weakened after June parliamentary elections made him lose his majority at the lower house of parliament, the National Assembly, forcing him into political maneuvering.

Yet his popularity remained relatively high throughout summer, in part thanks to a series of domestic measures to help the French cope with rising prices of food and energy, including a cap on gas and electricity prices.

A strong advocate of multilateralism, Macron will soon get other occasions to promote his views on the international stage.

He is expected to head next month to Egypt for the next United Nations summit on climate change and to the summit of the Group of 20 leading rich and developing nations in Bali, Indonesia.

He will then travel in early December to Washington for the first state visit of President Joe Biden's tenure, in a sign that relations between Paris and Washington have come full circle. The relationship tanked last year after the United States announced a deal to sell nuclear submarines to Australia. The decision by the U.S. undermined a deal that had been in place for France to sell diesel-powered submarines to Australia.

The Biden administration since has heaped praise on Macron for being among the most vociferous Western allies in condemning Russia's attack on Ukraine.

US carrier, S. Korea warships start new drills amid tensions

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan launched a new round of naval drills with South Korean warships on Friday, a day after North Korea fired more ballistic missiles and flew warplanes in an escalation of tensions with its rivals.

The Reagan and its battle group returned to the waters near the Korean Peninsula after North Korea earlier this week launched a nuclear-capable missile over Japan in response to the carrier group's earlier training with South Korean navy ships. North Korea views U.S.-South Korean military exercises as a practice to invade the country.

The latest two-day drills, which also involve U.S. and South Korean destroyers and other ships, were taking place in international waters off the peninsula's east coast. The drills are aimed at bolstering the allies' defense capabilities and will involve training to escort the Reagan southeast of South Korea's southern island of Jeju, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

"We will continue to strengthen our firm operational capabilities and readiness to respond to any provocations by North Korea," the statement said.

North Korea may react to the new drills with more missile tests. The North's Foreign Ministry said Thursday the carrier group's redeployment poses "a serious threat to the stability of the situation on the Korean Peninsula and in its vicinity."

Later Friday, the top nuclear envoys of South Korea, the United States and Japan had trilateral phone talks and agreed to increase their efforts to block the North's alleged cryptocurrency thefts and other means to finance its nuclear and missile programs. The envoys also decided to solidify an international cooperation to check North Korea's attempts to evade U.N. sanctions such as banned ship-to-ship transfers on the sea, according to South Korea's Foreign Ministry.

North Korea's record pace of weapons testing this year is intended to expand its arsenal so that it can credibly threaten the U.S. mainland and regional allies with nuclear arms, then engage in negotiations with the U.S. from a stronger position as a recognized nuclear state. Its two ballistic missile launches on Thursday were the North's sixth round of weapons firings in less than two weeks.

The intermediate-range North Korean missile tested Tuesday was likely a Hwasong-12 missile which is capable of reaching the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam, observers say. Other missiles launched recently are short-range weapons that target South Korea.

North Korea is ready to conduct its first nuclear test in five years and is preparing to test a new liquid-

fueled intercontinental ballistic missile and a submarine-launched ballistic missile, Heo Tae-keun, South Korea's deputy minister of national defense policy, told lawmakers earlier this week.

On Friday, Heo had trilateral video calls with his U.S. and Japanese counterparts to discuss North Korea's recent missile tests. They stressed the security cooperation among the three countries would be bolstered if the North continues its provocations, the South Korean Defense Ministry said in a statement.

On Thursday, naval destroyers of the three countries conducted one-day joint drills off the peninsula's east coast to hone their abilities to search, track and intercept North Korean ballistic missiles. Last week, they held anti-submarines exercises involving the Reagan in the area.

North Korea also flew 12 warplanes dozens of kilometers (miles) from the inter-Korean border, prompting the South to scramble 30 military aircraft in response. There were no clashes.

The eight North Korean fighter jets and four bombers were believed to have conducted air-to-surface firing drills, South Korea's military said. Yonhap news agency reported it was likely North Korea's biggest warplane mobilization for such an exercise near the border.

GOP steps up crime message in midterm's final stretch

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The graphic surveillance video shows a man on a sidewalk suddenly punching someone in the head, knocking them to the ground.

With muted screams and gunshots in the background, the video stitches together other surveillance clips of shootings and punching on streets and subway trains as a voiceover says, "You're looking at actual violent crimes caught on camera in Kathy Hochul's New York."

That's not exactly true.

The ad from Rep. Lee Zeldin, the Republican challenging New York Gov. Kathy Hochul in next month's election, included video of an assault in California. Some of the footage depicted crimes that took place before Hochul took office last year. While acknowledging a mistake, Zeldin's campaign defended the ad and said the message was clear: violent crime is out of control.

That's a theme GOP candidates across the U.S. are sounding in the final month of the critical midterm elections. The issue of crime is dominating advertising in some of the most competitive Senate races, including those in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Nevada, along with scores of House and governors campaigns such as the one in New York.

The rhetoric is sometimes alarmist or of questionable veracity, closely echoing the language of former President Donald Trump, who honed a late-stage argument during the 2020 campaign that Democratic-led cities were out of control. That didn't help Trump avoid defeat, but experts say Democrats would be wrong to ignore the potency of the attacks.

"When violence is going up, people are concerned, and that's when we tend to see it gain some traction as a political issue," said Lisa L. Miller, professor of political science at Rutgers University, who focuses on crime as a political issue in countries across the world.

The FBI released annual data this week that found violent crime rates didn't increase substantially last year, though they remained above pre-pandemic levels. The report presents an incomplete picture, in part because it doesn't include some of the nation's largest police departments.

More broadly, rates of violent crime and killings have increased around the U.S. since the pandemic, in some places spiking after hitting historic lows. Non-violent crime decreased during the pandemic, but the murder rate grew nearly 30% in 2020, rising in cities and rural areas alike, according to an analysis of crime data by The Brennan Center for Justice. The rate of assaults went up 10%, the analysis found.

The rise defies easy explanation. Experts have pointed to a number of potential causes from worries about the economy and historically high inflation rates to intense stress and the pandemic that has killed more than 1 million people in the U.S.

There is a history of candidates relying on racist tropes when warning of rising crime rates. During the 1988 presidential campaign, supporters of George H.W. Bush released the so-called Willie Horton ad that

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has become one of the most prominent examples of race-baiting in politics.

In this year's elections, Republicans often blame crime on criminal justice reforms adopted after George Floyd's killing by Minneapolis police, including changes to bail laws that critics had long contended disproportionately impacted communities of color, along with accusations that Democrats have not been sufficiently supportive of law enforcement.

Some GOP candidates are trying to make their case in communities of color. Zeldin, for instance, has delivered his anti-crime message while speaking at buildings and bodegas in diverse New York City neighborhoods.

In Pennsylvania, the Republican nominee for Senate, heart surgeon-turned-TV talk show host Dr. Mehmet Oz, has toured the state holding "safe streets" forums in Black communities.

Asked by a reporter about his focus on crime, Oz pointed to a conversation he had with Black Republican ward leaders in Philadelphia that turned from economic issues to struggling Black-owned businesses.

"The African Americans in the group said, 'Well, the deep problem is ... people don't feel safe,'" Oz said in an interview.

Malcolm Kenyatta, a Democratic state lawmaker from Philadelphia, said Oz is using crime victims to get votes but rejects steps like limiting the availability of firearms that would reduce gun violence.

"Oz does not live in a community that is struggling with this kind of crime and nobody, nobody believes that he actually cares and would actively advance policy solutions that would help deal with this problem," Kenyatta said.

Despite the GOP messaging, it's not clear that crime is a top priority for voters.

In an AP-NORC poll conducted in June that allowed U.S. adults to name up to five issues they consider most important for the government to be working on in the next year, 11% named crime or violence, unchanged since December and well below the percentage naming many of the other top issues for Americans. A September Fox News poll asking people to name one issue motivating them to vote this year found just 1% named crime, even as most said they were very concerned about crime when asked directly.

Still, Democrats are responding to Republican efforts to portray them as soft on crime.

Hochul in recent days announced the endorsement of several law enforcement unions and released her own ad with a public safety message titled, "Focused on it," to remind voters that she toughened the state's gun laws.

During a debate last week in Colorado, Democratic Gov. Jared Polis responded to his Republican opponent Heidi Ganahl, who has repeatedly portrayed him as soft on crime, by suggesting her plan to cut taxes would "defund the police" by cutting prison and police budgets.

Ganahl denied that, calling herself a "law-and-order girl," and blamed Polis for rising crime rates.

In Oregon, the Republican candidate for governor is making crime a top issue in a three-person race, where an independent candidate who is a former Democratic state lawmaker could take enough votes from the Democratic nominee to help the GOP win the top office in a blue state.

Democrat Tina Kotek has joined her opponents in pledging to increase police funding but has also backed tougher gun laws as part of a plan to tackle crime.

That approach is one embraced by gun control group Everytown for Gun Safety Victory Fund, which is spending \$2.4 million combined on ads in Wisconsin and Georgia to convince voters that Republicans who don't support tougher gun laws are actually the ones "soft" on crime.

"We can reset this narrative and neutralize the GOP's, what I would call, artificial advantage on the issue," said Charlie Kelly, a senior political advisor to Everytown.

In some states, candidates are raising alarm about crime rates that remain relatively low or have even fallen.

Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont, a Democrat, said in a recent debate as he runs for reelection that the state's crime is "going down despite some of the fearmongering you hear."

State data shows violent crime rates in Connecticut dropped 9% in 2021 from 2020, which Lamont pointed out in a recent debate with his Republican challenger, Bob Stefanowski, who has made "out of

control" crime a central plank of his campaign.

When asked how he can keep making the argument that crime is on the rise when the numbers tell a different story, Stefanowski said people are afraid of rising crime, but he denied stoking those fears.

"If we weren't highlighting this, we wouldn't be doing our job. I can tell you when we're out there, people are afraid. I'm not trying to make them afraid," he said. "They're coming to me afraid and saying, 'What are you going to do about it?'"

To buy Twitter, Musk has to keep banks, investors on board

By TOM KRISHER and MATT O'BRIEN AP Business Writers

If the squabbling ever stops over Elon Musk's renewed bid to buy Twitter, experts say he still faces a huge obstacle to closing the \$44 billion deal: Keeping his financing in place.

Earlier this week, Musk reversed course and said he'd go through with acquiring the social media company under the same terms he agreed to in April. But after months of tweetstorms and legal barbs, there are scars and suspicions on both sides.

Experts say that behind the scenes, banks could be scrambling to find buyers for \$12.5 billion in debt from the deal, and Musk is trying to hold together a group of equity investors that is pitching in billions more. The erratic billionaire is on the hook for the rest.

The fighting continued Thursday, when Musk's attorneys said Twitter is refusing to accept his revived bid to buy the company. They sought to delay an upcoming trial on Twitter's lawsuit that could force him to complete the deal.

But Twitter's attorneys said it's Musk who is holding everything up, and his effort to put the trial on hold "is an invitation to further mischief and delay."

In the end, a judge agreed to give Musk more time to close the deal but said the trial will go ahead in November if he doesn't.

It's still possible the sale could close. But with so much at play, here's what could throw the deal off track, again:

BANK FINANCING

A group of banks, including Morgan Stanley and Bank of America, signed on to loan \$12.5 billion of the money Musk needs for the deal. In Thursday's court motion, Musk alleges that Twitter doesn't want to set the lawsuit aside because of a "baseless" fear that Musk could fail to get the bank financing.

"No such failure has occurred to date," the motion said. "Counsel for the debt financing parties has advised that each of their clients is prepared to honor its obligations."

The banks are "essentially cemented" to the deal by solid contracts, Wedbush analyst Dan Ives said. But the debt market has changed dramatically since April. The stock market has tumbled, inflation is high, and interest rates are up as the Federal Reserve tries to slow the economy.

Banks would sell the debt to institutional investors, but there's not much appetite now to take part in takeovers that saddle companies with big debts. Banks could be on the hook to make loans themselves.

"The banks would be really happy to not have to take the risk of funding these loans," said Erik Gordon, a law and business professor at the University of Michigan. "The agreements seem to be very strong, but I think the banks have their lawyers pulling all-nighters trying to get them out of it if they can."

EQUITY INVESTORS

Investors who would get equity in Twitter are supposed to kick in billions. Ives estimates they had agreed to \$15 billion to \$16 billion. But some investors may be skittish about staying in given the market changes and Musk's repeated accusations against Twitter about the number of bots on the platform.

Qatar's sovereign wealth fund declined comment this week on the \$375 million its subsidiary pledged in May. Several other investors didn't respond to requests for comment on whether they were still chipping in.

Musk's equity commitments — including \$1 billion from Musk's friend and Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison — are on shakier ground if any in that diverse group of backers have changed their minds, said Kevin Kaiser, an adjunct finance professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

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"Nobody knows — I don't know anyway — what their commitment is," Kaiser said. "So are they able to back out? Because if they're able to back out, he is on the hook."

MUSK MONEY

Musk, the world's richest person with a net worth of \$231 billion according to Forbes, has to kick in his own money, but just how much depends on how many equity investors stay in.

Most of his wealth is tied up in stock of the electric car company that he runs, Tesla Inc. Since April, he has sold more than \$15 billion worth of Tesla stock, presumably to pay his share.

If any equity investors drop out, though, Musk will either have to replace them or throw in more money, fueling speculation that he might have to sell more Tesla shares. Musk's share of the original deal was about \$15.5 billion, Ives estimated.

THE GUARANTEE

It's clear that Twitter's board is very suspect of Musk because he has trashed the company for months now, alleging that it has far fewer daily users than it reports to investors, said Gordon.

That has diminished Twitter's value and made investing in the deal less attractive, he says. And because Musk already tried to back out of the deal once, Twitter will want a guarantee of some sort that he won't back out again.

That, Ives said, is likely to be a large chunk of money held in a non-refundable escrow account that would go to Twitter if Musk doesn't deliver.

SIGNS OF PROGRESS

There are some signs that the deal will yet go through. Twitter says it looks forward to closing the deal by Oct. 28. Musk's deposition in the lawsuit, scheduled for Thursday in Austin, Texas, was postponed. Musk's motion says the bankers are still in. And the original group of investors is not talking publicly about bailing out.

Putin's path: from pledges of stability to nuclear threats

By The Associated Press undefined

As he turns 70, Russian President Vladimir Putin finds himself in the eye of a storm of his own making: His army is suffering humiliating defeats in Ukraine. Hundreds of thousands of Russians are fleeing his mobilization order, and his top lieutenants are publicly insulting military leaders.

With his room for maneuvering narrowing, Putin has repeatedly signaled that he could resort to nuclear weapons to protect the Russian gains in Ukraine — a harrowing threat that shatters the claims of stability he has repeated throughout his 22-year rule.

"This is really a hard moment for him, but he can't accuse anyone else. He did it himself," said Andrei Kolesnikov, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment. "And he is going straight ahead to big, big problems."

By unleashing the disastrous war in Ukraine, Europe's largest military conflict since World War II, Putin has broken an unwritten social contract in which Russians tacitly agreed to forgo post-Soviet political freedoms in exchange for relative prosperity and internal stability.

Mikhail Zygar, a journalist who has had extensive contacts among the Kremlin elite and published a bestselling book about Putin and his entourage, noted that the invasion came as a complete surprise not only for the public but for Putin's closest associates.

"All of them are in shock," Zygar said. "None of them wanted to see the developments unfold in such a way just because they are going to lose everything. Now they are all stained by blood, and they all understand they have nowhere to run."

Stanislav Belkovsky, a longtime political consultant with extensive contacts among the ruling class, described the invasion as a mechanism of "self-destruction for Putin, his regime and the Russian Federation."

With the Russian army retreating under the blows of Ukrainian forces armed with Western weapons, Putin raised the stakes by annexing four Ukrainian regions and declaring a partial mobilization of up to 300,000 reservists to buttress the crumbling front line.

The poorly organized call-up has triggered broad chaos. The military is struggling to provide supplies

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for new recruits, many of whom were told to buy medical kits and other basics themselves and were left to sleep on the floor while waiting to be sent to the front.

Social networks have been abuzz with discussions about how to dodge recruitment, and hundreds of thousands of men fled the mobilization, swarming Russia's borders with ex-Soviet neighbors.

The mobilization, Kolesnikov noted, has eroded Putin's core support base and set the stage for potential political upheavals. "After the partial mobilization, it's impossible to explain to anyone that he stabilized the system. He disrupted the foundation of stability," he said.

The military setbacks also drew public insults from some of Putin's top lieutenants directed toward military leaders. The Kremlin has done nothing to halt the criticism, a signal that Putin could use it to set the stage for a major shakeup of the top brass and blame them for the defeats.

"The infighting between powerful clans in Putin's entourage could destabilize the system and significantly weaken Putin's control over the situation in the country," Belkovsky said.

The widening turmoil marks a dramatic contrast with the image of stability Putin has cultivated since taking helm in 2000. He has repeatedly described the turbulent rule of his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, as a time of decay when national riches were pilfered by Kremlin-connected tycoons and the West while millions were plunged into poverty.

Russians have eagerly embraced Putin's promises to restore their country's grandeur amid oil-driven economic prosperity, and they have been largely indifferent to the Kremlin's relentless crackdown on political freedoms.

Insiders who have closely studied Putin's thinking say he still believes he can emerge as a winner.

Belkovsky argued that Putin hopes to win by using energy as an instrument of pressure. By reducing the gas flow to Europe and striking a deal with OPEC to reduce oil output, he could drive prices up and raise pressure on the U.S. and its allies.

Putin wants the West to tacitly accept the current status quo in Ukraine, resume energy cooperation with Russia, lift the most crippling sanctions and unfreeze Russian assets, Belkovsky said.

"He still believes that he will get his way in the long showdown with the West, where the situation on the Ukrainian front line is just one important, but not decisive, element," Belkovsky said.

At the same time, Putin threatened to use "all means available" to defend the newly annexed Ukrainian territories in a blunt attempt to force Ukraine and its Western allies to back off.

The U.S. and its allies have said they are taking Putin's threats seriously but will not yield to what they describe as blackmail to force the West to abandon Ukraine. Ukraine vowed to press its counteroffensive despite the Russian rhetoric.

Kolesnikov described Putin's nuclear threats as a reflection of growing desperation.

"This is the last step for him in a sense that this is a suicidal" move, Kolesnikov said. "If he's ready for the step, it means that we are witnessing a dictator who is even worse than Stalin."

Some observers have argued that NATO could strike Russia with conventional weapons if Putin presses the nuclear button.

Belkovsky warned that Putin firmly believes that the U.S. and its allies wouldn't dare to strike back if Russia used a low-yield nuclear weapon in Ukraine.

"If the U.S. believes that there is no psychologically readiness for that, it's mistaken," he said.

Zygar compared the Russian leader to a fighter pilot who tries to win a dogfight by attacking the enemy head-on and waiting for him to turn away first.

"He thinks he has the nerve, and he believes he must escalate to the end," Zygar said.

He noted that pundits failed to predict Putin's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the current invasion just because they were using rational criteria.

"Our past perceptions about rational limits all have proven false," he said. "There are no such limits."

Colts grind out 12-9 win over Broncos in injury-filled game

By ARNIE STAPLETON AP Pro Football Writer

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DENVER (AP) — Matt Ryan kept the faith through all the sacks, interceptions, fumbles and three-and-outs that made for a streaming snooze-fest Thursday night.

"It was just kind of a slog of a game," the Indianapolis quarterback said after Stephon Gilmore batted away Russell Wilson's pass to Courtland Sutton in the end zone on fourth-and-1 from the 5 to give the Colts a 12-9 overtime victory over the Denver Broncos.

The game featured seven field goals, a dozen punts, 25 third-down stops, four interceptions and six fumbles — none of which were recovered by the otherwise disruptive defenses.

"Our defense played lights out," said Ryan, who emerged victorious despite getting sacked six times, giving him 21 so far this season, throwing a pair of interceptions to Caden Sterns and fumbling for the 10th time this season.

"We need to play better for sure, but I'm proud of the guys," Ryan said. "Wins are what we need. We're right in the mix. ... I thought the two drives at the end showed a lot of guys. You just keep battling — and it helps when your defense is shutting them down, too."

Gilmore also intercepted Wilson's pass just before the 2-minute mark of the fourth quarter to set up Chase McLaughlin's tying field goal with 5 seconds left.

"That's the definition of a big-time player making big plays in the moment," Colts coach Frank Reich said about Gilmore. "Isn't it awesome you can have a game like that and still win?"

McLaughlin connected from 47 yards 4:10 into overtime to give the Colts (2-2-1) the lead in the first game in NFL history that pitted quarterbacks with at least four Pro Bowl appearances each yet featured zero touchdowns.

The Broncos (2-3) decided against a tying chip-shot field goal by Brandon McManus or even a first-down play on fourth-and-less-and-a-yard from the 5, and Wilson lined up in the shotgun next to running back Melvin Gordon, then threw incomplete over the middle.

"We wanted to win the game," Broncos coach Nathaniel Hackett said. "We hadn't moved the ball very well the whole night and I thought we had a spectacular drive to get all the way down there."

Wide open and uncovered — but unseen by Wilson — was KJ Hamler, who tore off his helmet and slammed it to the ground after Wilson's final pass was batted away, sending the Broncos and their awful offense to their second loss in four days.

"There's going to be a bunch of what-ifs," Broncos guard Dalton Risner said. "You know what, if we score that touchdown, everyone thinks it's the best call in the world."

McLaughlin sent it to overtime with a 31-yarder after Gilmore intercepted Wilson's pass to Tyrie Cleveland in the end zone on third-and-4 from the 13.

"Just can't throw that," lamented Wilson. "Got to throw it out of bounds if it's not there."

Wilson was sacked four times and picked off twice. His four TD throws through five games marks the worst start of his 11-year career and he hasn't looked anything like the Broncos expected after giving him a \$245 million contract extension before his first snap for Denver.

"It's very simple: at the end of the day I got to be better," Wilson said. "I got to play better. I let the team down tonight. One thing I know about myself is I'm going to respond."

The game pitted veteran quarterbacks struggling with their new teams. It looked like neither team practiced much during the week because neither team did as they worked in new running backs and key defensive replacements on a short work week.

And as is common on Thursday nights, there was a rash of injuries with the most serious to Indy's Kwity Payne (leg) and Denver's Garrett Bolles (right knee), both of whom were carted off.

With reigning NFL champion Jonathan Taylor (ankle, toe) out for Indy and the Broncos lamenting the loss of Javonte Williams to a shredded right knee, the grind-it-out nature of the game was entirely expected.

The Colts came in averaging 14.3 points, the lowest in Ryan's 16-year career, and the Broncos entered the night averaging 16.5 points, the worst in Wilson's 11-year career.

Nyheim Hines got the start for Indy, but he went out with a head injury after his third snap when D.J. Jones knocked him down and Hines' helmet bounced on the ground. He wobbled as he tried to leave the field on his own and had to be guided to the sideline, where he was evaluated for a concussion.

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REVENGE OR REDEMPTION

Many fans were wondering if this game would be one of revenge — Phillip Lindsay returning to his hometown to beat the Broncos — or redemption — Gordon atoning for his big fumble Sunday that was returned 68 yards for a touchdown by the Raiders.

It turned out to be neither.

Lindsay ran for 40 yards on 11 carries and Gordon had 54 yards on 15 carries, and he was flipped by safety Rodney McLoyd Jr. at the 6 on his way to the end zone when it appeared he had an open path to the winning touchdown.

KICKING HIMSELF

While McLaughlin was good from 52, 51, 31 and 48 yards, Brandon McManus was good from 33, 44 and 45 yards but his 34-yard attempt was blocked by Grover Stewart in the third quarter.

INJURIES

Paye was injured on Rodney Thomas II's 35-yard interception return. Starting C Ryan Kelly (hip) and WR Austin Dulin (foot) also got hurt.

The Broncos lost two starting defenders to knee injuries just before halftime, ILB Josey Jewell and CB Ronald Darby. DE Dre'Mont Jones (head) and LB Baron Browning (wrist) got hurt in the second half as did Bolles.

UP NEXT

The Colts host the Jacksonville Jaguars on Sunday, Oct. 16, and the Broncos visit the Los Angeles Chargers on Monday night, Oct. 17.

EXPLAINER: Fewer people cross Mediterranean; many still die

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The back-to-back shipwrecks of migrant smuggling boats off Greece has once again put the spotlight on the dangers of the Mediterranean migration route, the risks migrants and refugees are willing to take and the political infighting that has thwarted a safe European response to people fleeing war, poverty and climate change.

Here's a look at the migration situation across the Mediterranean Sea:

WHAT HAPPENED TO TWO SMUGGLERS' BOATS OFF GREECE?

Bodies floated amid splintered wreckage off a Greek island on Thursday as the death toll from separate sinkings of two migrant boats rose to 22, with about a dozen still missing. The vessels went down hundreds of miles apart, in one case prompting a dramatic overnight rescue effort as island residents and firefighters pulled shipwrecked migrants to safety up steep cliffs.

The Greek shipwrecks came just days after Italy commemorated the ninth anniversary of one of the deadliest Mediterranean shipwrecks in recent memory, the Oct. 3, 2013 capsizing of a migrant ship off Lampedusa, Sicily, in which 368 people died.

WHAT ARE THE TRENDS IN MEDITERRANEAN MIGRANT ARRIVALS?

So far this year, the International Organization of Migration has recorded around 109,000 "irregular" arrivals to the Mediterranean countries of Italy, Spain, Greece, Cyprus and Malta by land or sea. This has made immigration a hot political topic in those European Union nations.

U.N. refugee officials note that overall numbers of migrants seeking to come to Europe this way has decreased over the years, to an average of around 120,000 annually. They call that a relatively "manageable" number, especially compared to the 7.4 million Ukrainians who have fled their homeland this year to escape Russia's invasion, and were welcomed by European countries.

"We've seen how quickly and how rapidly a response was mounted to deal with that situation in a very humane and commendable way," said Shabia Mantoo, spokesperson for the U.N. refugee agency in Geneva. "If we can see that happen very concretely in this situation, why can't it be applied for 120,000 people that are coming across to Europe on a yearly basis?"

Others see Europe's harsh response to Mediterranean migrants, who often come from Africa, and its

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welcoming of Slavic Ukrainian migrants as racist.

HOW DANGEROUS IS THE MEDITERRANEAN?

So far this year the IOM has reported 1,522 dead or missing migrants in the Mediterranean. Overall, the IOM says 24,871 migrants have died or gone missing in the Mediterranean since 2014, with the real number believed to be even higher given the number of shipwrecks that never get reported.

"The voyage toward Italy has been confirmed to be the most dangerous," said the ISMU foundation in Italy, which conducts research on migration trends.

The Central Mediterranean migration route that takes migrants from Libya or Tunisia north to Europe is the deadliest known migration route in the world, accounting for more than half of the reported deaths in the Mediterranean that IOM has tracked since 2014. The route has Italy as its prime destination.

WHAT ARE THE DEADLIEST KNOWN SMUGGLING SHIPWRECKS?

On April 18, 2015, the Mediterranean's deadliest known shipwreck in living memory occurred when an overcrowded fishing boat collided 77 nautical miles off Libya with a freighter that was trying to come to its rescue. Only 28 people survived. At first it was feared the hull held the remains of 700 people. Forensic experts who set out to try to identify all the dead concluded in 2018 that there were originally 1,100 people on board.

On Oct. 3, 2013, a trawler packed with more than 500 people, many from Eritrea and Ethiopia, caught fire and capsized within sight of an uninhabited islet off Italy's southern island of Lampedusa. Local fishermen rushed to try to help save lives. In the end, 155 survived and 368 people died.

One week later, a shipwreck occurred on Oct 11, 2013, further out at sea, 60 miles south of Lampedusa in what has become known in Italy as the "slaughter of children." In all, more than 260 people died, among them 60 children. The Italian newsweekly L'Espresso in 2017 published the audio recordings of the migrants' desperate calls for help and Italian and Maltese authorities seemingly delaying the rescue.

WHAT ARE OTHER MEDITERRANEAN MIGRATION ROUTES TO EUROPE?

The Western Mediterranean route is used by migrants seeking to reach Spain from Morocco or Algeria. The Eastern Mediterranean route, where the shipwrecks occurred this week off Greece, has traditionally been used by Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan and other non-African migrants who flee first to Turkey and then try to reach Greece or other European destinations.

Greece was a key transit point for hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees entering the EU in 2015-16, many fleeing wars in Iraq and Syria, though the numbers dropped sharply after the EU and Turkey reached a deal in 2016 to limit smugglers. Greece has since toughened its borders and built a steel wall along its land border with Turkey. Greece has also been accused by Turkey and some migration experts of pushing back migrants, a charge it denies.

For its part, Greece says Turkey has failed to stop smugglers active on its shoreline and has been using migrants to apply political pressure to the whole European Union.

HOW HAS MIGRATION DIVIDED THE EU'S 27 nations?

Mediterranean countries have for years complained that they have been left to bear the brunt of welcoming and processing migrants, and have long demanded other European countries step up and take them in.

Poland, Hungary and other Eastern European nations refused an EU plan to share the burdens of carrying for the migrants.

Human rights groups have condemned how the EU in recent years has outsourced migrant rescues to the Libyan coast guard, which brings the migrants back to horrific camps on land where many are beaten, raped and abused.

"Over the years, the routes have changed but not the tragedies," said the Sant'Egidio Community as it commemorated the 2013 Lampedusa anniversary this week. Working with other Christian groups, the Catholic charity has brought more than 5,000 refugees to Italy via "humanitarian corridors" and has called for more safe passages to be organized so migrants don't have to risk dangerous Mediterranean crossings with smugglers.

Hurricane Ian floods leave mess, insurance questions behind

By REBECCA SANTANA and MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

NORTH PORT, Fla. (AP) — Christine Barrett was inside her family's North Port home during Hurricane Ian when one of her children started yelling that water was coming up from the shower.

Then it started coming in from outside the house. Eventually the family was forced to climb on top of their kitchen cabinets — they put water wings on their 1-year-old — and were rescued the next day by boat.

After the floodwaters had finally gone down Barrett and her family were cleaning out the damp and muddy house. On the front lawn lay chairs, a dresser, couch cushions, flooring planks and a pile of damp drywall. Similar scenes played out across the block as residents tried to clear out the soggy mess before mold set in.

North Port is about 5 miles (8 kilometers) inland and the Barretts - like many of its residents - live in areas where flood insurance isn't required and therefore, don't have it. Now many wonder how they'll afford much-needed repairs.

"Nobody in this neighborhood has flood insurance because we are a nonflooding area," she said. "But we got 14 inches of water in our house."

Many people associate hurricanes with wind damage — downed power lines, shingles or roofing materials ripped off, trees blown over into homes or windows smashed by flying objects, and Hurricane Ian's 150-mph (241-kph) winds certainly caused widespread damage.

But hurricanes can also pack a massive storm surge as Ian did in places like Naples or Fort Myers Beach.

Heavy rains from hurricanes can also cause widespread flooding far from the beach. Ian dumped rain for hours as it lumbered across the state, sending waterways spilling over their banks and into homes and businesses far inland from where Ian made landfall. People were using kayaks to evacuate their flooded homes, and floodwaters in some areas have still not gone down a week after landfall.

"This is such a big storm, brought so much water, that you're having basically what's been a 500-year flood event," said Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

But flooding is not covered by a homeowner's insurance policy.

It must be purchased separately — usually from the federal government. Although most people have the option of purchasing flood insurance, it is required only on government-backed mortgages that sit in areas that the Federal Emergency Management Agency deems highest risk. Many banks require it in high-risk zones, too. But some homeowners who pay off their mortgage drop their flood insurance once it's not required. Or if they purchase a house or mobile home with cash they may not opt for it at all. And flooding can and does happen outside those high risk areas where flood insurance is required.

There have long been concerns that not enough people have flood insurance especially at a time when climate change is making strong hurricanes even stronger and making storms in general wetter, slower and more prone to intensifying rapidly. According to the Insurance Information Institute, only about 4% of homeowners nationwide have flood insurance although 90% of catastrophes in the U.S. involve flooding. In Florida that number is only about 18%.

"We have experienced catastrophic flood events across the U.S. this year, including in Kentucky and Missouri, where virtually no one had flood insurance," said the Institute's Mark Friedlander.

Hurricane Ian caused extensive flooding in areas outside of the high-risk zones. According to the consulting firm Milliman, roughly 18.5% of homes in counties that were under an evacuation order had federally issued flood insurance. In areas under an evacuation order that were outside of high-risk zones, 9.4% of homes had a policy.

Last year, FEMA updated its pricing system for flood insurance to more accurately reflect risk called Risk Rating 2.0. The old system considered a home's elevation and whether it was in a high-risk flood zone. Risk Rating 2.0 looks at the risk that an individual property will flood, considering factors like its distance to water. The new pricing system raises rates for about three-quarters of policyholders and offers price decreases for the first time.

FEMA has long said the new ratings would attract new policyholders. However, a FEMA report to the

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treasury secretary and a handful of congressional leaders last year said far fewer people would buy flood insurance as prices rise. Since the new rating system has gone into effect in Florida, the number of policies in the state has dropped by roughly 50,000 since August 2021.

After a federally declared disaster, homeowners with flood insurance are likely to receive more money, more quickly, to recover and rebuild than the uninsured.

After major flooding in Louisiana in 2016, for example, the average payment to a flood insurance policyholder was \$86,500, according to FEMA. Uninsured homeowners could get individual assistance payments for needs like temporary housing and property damage, but they averaged roughly \$9,150.

Congress sometimes provides additional aid after major disasters although that can take months to years to arrive.

"Unless you have flood insurance, the federal government is not going to give you enough assistance to rebuild your home," said Rob Moore, water and climate team director at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

In the North Port neighborhood that was cleaning up from Ian, Ron Audette wasn't sure whether he would get flood insurance going forward because of the cost. The retired U.S. Navy sailor was cleaning up his one-story home on a corner lot after floodwaters buckled the laminate flooring, swelled wood furniture and left the leather reclining sofa where he watched Patriots games a muddy, watery mess.

"I don't think we could live here if we had to buy flood insurance," he said.

But down the street, his neighbor Barrett was definitely planning to get it.

"Get flood insurance even if it's not required," she advised. "Because we definitely will now."

EXPLAINER: Jurors weigh cost of Alex Jones' Sandy Hook lies

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

WATERBURY, Conn. (AP) — For a decade, the parents and siblings of people killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting have been tormented and harassed by people who believe the mass shooting was a hoax.

How do you put a price tag on their suffering?

That's part of the task faced by a Connecticut jury that has been asked to decide how much Infowars host Alex Jones and his company should pay for spreading a conspiracy theory that the massacre never happened.

The six jurors deliberated for less than an hour Thursday before breaking for the evening. Their work was set to resume Friday.

Jones now acknowledges his conspiracy theories about the shooting were wrong, but says he isn't to blame for the actions of people who harassed the families. His lawyers also say the 15 plaintiffs have exaggerated stories about being subjected to threats and abuse.

Here are some questions and answers about the deliberations.

COULD THE JURY DECIDE THAT WHAT JONES DID IS PROTECTED BY THE FIRST AMENDMENT?

No. A judge has already ruled that Jones is liable for defamation, infliction of emotional distress, invasion of privacy and violating Connecticut's unfair trade practices law. The jury's job is to decide how much he owes for harming the people who sued him over his lies.

HOW MUCH COULD JONES PAY?

Jones, who lives in Austin, Texas, could be ordered to pay as little as \$1 to each plaintiff or potentially hundreds of millions of dollars to them. The decision will be based on whether the jury determines the harm to the families was minimal or extensive.

Christopher Mattei, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said the jury should award the plaintiffs at least \$550 million. Jones' lawyer, Norm Pattis, says any damages awarded should be minimal.

HOW DOES THE JURY COME UP WITH THE DOLLAR FIGURES?

In her instructions to the jury, Judge Barbara Bellis said there are no mathematical formulas for determining dollar amounts. Jurors, she said, should use their life experiences and common sense to award

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damages that are "fair, just and reasonable."

The jury, however, heard evidence and testimony that Jones and his company, Free Speech Systems, made millions of dollars from selling nutritional supplements, survival gear and other items. A company representative testified it has made at least \$100 million in the past decade.

WHAT KIND OF DAMAGES ARE THE JURY CONSIDERING?

Jurors could award both compensatory and punitive damages.

Compensatory damages are often meant to reimburse people for actual costs such as medical bills and income loss, but they also include compensation for emotional distress than can reach into the millions of dollars.

Punitive damages are meant to punish a person for their conduct. If the jury decides Jones should pay punitive damages, the judge would determine the amount.

DOES CONNECTICUT CAP DAMAGES?

No, and yes. The state does not limit compensatory damages, while punitive damages are limited in many cases to attorney's fees and costs. So if the jury says Jones should pay punitive damages, he would potentially have to shell out hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Sandy Hook families' lawyers' costs.

IS THIS THE FIRST TIME JONES HAS FACED A VERDICT LIKE THIS?

No. At a similar trial in Texas in August, a jury ordered Jones to pay nearly \$50 million to the parents of one of the children killed in the school shooting for pushing the hoax lie on his Infowars show.

But legal experts say Jones probably won't pay the full amount. In most civil cases, Texas law limits how much defendants have to pay in "exemplary," or punitive, damages to twice the "economic damages" plus up to \$750,000. But jurors are not told about this cap. Eye-popping verdicts are often hacked down by judges.

A third trial in Texas involving the parents of another child slain at Sandy Hook is expected to begin near the end of the year.

Sheriff: Killing of kidnapped California family 'pure evil'

By STEFANIE DAZIO and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The suspect in the kidnapping and killings of an 8-month-old baby, her parents and an uncle had worked for the family's trucking business and had a longstanding feud with them that culminated in an act of "pure evil," a sheriff said Thursday.

The bodies of Aroohi Dheri; her mother Jasleen Kaur, 27; father Jasdeep Singh, 36; and uncle Amandeep Singh, 39, were found by a farm worker late Wednesday in an almond orchard in a remote area in the San Joaquin Valley, California's agricultural heartland.

Investigators were preparing a case against the suspect — a convicted felon who tried to kill himself a day after the kidnappings — and sought a person of interest believed to be his accomplice. Relatives and fellow members of the Punjabi Sikh community, meanwhile, were shocked by the killings.

"Right now, I've got hundreds of people in a community that are grieving the loss of two families, and this is worldwide. These families are across different continents," Merced County Sheriff Vern Warnke told The Associated Press. "We've got to show them that we can give them justice."

The suspect, 48-year-old Jesus Salgado, was released from the hospital and booked into the county jail Thursday night on suspicion of kidnapping and murder, the Sheriff's Office said. It wasn't clear if he had a lawyer who could speak on his behalf.

Earlier, Warnke called for prosecutors to seek the death penalty. The sheriff called it one of the worst crimes he has seen over his 43 years in law enforcement and pleaded for Salgado's accomplice to turn himself in.

"There's some things you'll take to the grave. This to me was pure evil," he said in an interview Thursday.

The city of Merced, where the family's trucking business was located, will hold evening vigils in their memory Thursday through Sunday. The victims' bodies were found near the town of Dos Palos, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) south of Merced.

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Warnke on Thursday would not discuss the condition of the adults' remains in the orchard but said it was unclear how the baby died. Warnke said the child had no visible trauma and an autopsy will be conducted.

Salgado was previously convicted of first-degree robbery with the use of a firearm in Merced County, attempted false imprisonment and an attempt to prevent or dissuade a victim or witness. Sentenced to 11 years in state prison in that case, he was released in 2015 and discharged from parole three years later, according to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. He also has a conviction for possession of a controlled substance, the department said.

Relatives of Salgado contacted authorities and told them he had admitted to them his involvement in the kidnapping, Warnke told KFSN-TV on Tuesday. Salgado tried to take his own life before police arrived at a home in Atwater — where an ATM card belonging to one of the victims was used after the kidnapping — about 9 miles (14 kilometers) north of Merced. Efforts to reach Salgado's family were unsuccessful Thursday.

The victims were Punjabi Sikhs, a community in central California that has a significant presence in the trucking business with many of them driving trucks, owning trucking companies or other businesses associated with trucking.

Public records show the family owns Unison Trucking Inc. and relatives said they had opened an office in the last few weeks in a parking lot the Singh brothers also operated. The feud with Salgado dated back a year, the sheriff said, and "got pretty nasty" in text messages or emails. Other details about Salgado's employment and the nature of the dispute were not immediately available.

Warnke said he believes the family was killed within an hour of the Monday morning kidnapping, when they were taken at gunpoint from their business.

Surveillance video showed the suspect — later identified as Salgado — leading the Singh brothers, who had their hands zip-tied behind their backs, into the back seat of Amandeep Singh's pickup truck. He drove the brothers away and returned several minutes later.

The suspect then went back to the trailer that served as the business office and led Jasleen Kaur, who was carrying her baby in her arms, out and into the truck before the suspect drove them away shortly before 9:30 a.m.

Hours later, firefighters on Monday found Amandeep Singh's truck on fire in the town of Winton, 10 miles (16 kilometers) north of Merced. Police officers went to Amandeep Singh's home, where a family member tried to reach him and the couple. When they were not able to reach their family members, they called the sheriff's to report them missing.

They were likely already dead.

10 days later, Cubans still recovering from Hurricane Ian

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

LA COLOMA, Cuba (AP) — Soldiers fix roofs and raise power poles under a blazing sun, while teachers salvage wet school books and residents cook over wood fires in La Coloma, a fishing and industrial town on Cuba's coast that took the brunt of Hurricane Ian.

Ten days after the storm left still unquantified devastation across western Cuba, and knocked out the power grid nationwide, many Cubans are still without electricity, water or basic goods. The destruction from Ian has piled onto the hardship of people who had already been suffering through scarcity and shortages in recent years.

"The ceiling was damaged, the mattress got wet," said homemaker Yaneysi Polier, who looked scared as she stirred a pot with pressed ham and lard cooking over coals on the floor of the patio of her house. Her still-wet mattress was in the sun drying.

"The refrigerator was found in the mud by our neighbor's house. We set up something to sleep on. The water was up to our chests," she said.

Only 15% of western Pinar del Río province has electricity and no one has their power back in La Coloma, a town of some 7,000 people 125 miles (200 kilometers) southwest of Havana.

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Repeated blackouts on Cuba's already fragile electric grid were among the causes of the island's largest social protests in decades in July 2021. Thousands of people, weary of power failures and shortages of goods exacerbated by the pandemic and U.S. sanctions, turned out in cities across the island to vent their anger and some also lashed out at the government. Hundreds were arrested and prosecuted, prompting harsh criticism of the administration of President Miguel Diaz-Canel.

The recent arrival of Ian caused three deaths and in Pinar del Rio province damaged 63,000 homes, thousands of which were destroyed. Cuba had a deficit of about 800,000 houses even before the hurricane struck.

La Coloma is home to the state Industrial Fishing Combine, which processes 40% of the lobster caught on the island, most of which is exported. It also processes bonito and snapper fish, and residents say it was high season when Ian struck. Twelve fishing boats were damaged, some sunk.

Maribel Rodríguez is staying in an emergency shelter in a primary school along with her pregnant daughter-in-law, who is about to give birth. She said they will name the baby Ian.

"This hurricane took everything from me," Rodríguez said. "My house was not good, but it had many things of value — a refrigerator, a television, living room furniture, beds and kitchenware — and I had earned those with my sacrifice. This is very painful."

Both Rodríguez and her son work in the fishing plant complex and they worry about it shutting down in the middle of lobster season.

"Here, the only place to work is the combine and I have been there for many years. You have to make a living," she said.

Ian hit Cuba with winds of more than 125 mph (200 kph) on Sept. 27. It not only affected Pinar de Rio, but also the provinces of Artemisa, Mayabeque and Havana. More than 30,000 people were evacuated ahead of the hurricane's arrival.

Besides the damage to houses, the power infrastructure and industry, the Ministry of Agriculture estimated that Ian damaged 8,583 hectares (21,210 acres) of crops in the three provinces, especially bananas, cassava, sweet potatoes, corn, rice and tomatoes.

Cuba's gross domestic product fell 11% in 2020 amid the pandemic and only rose 2% in 2021. Tourism has not recovered from the COVID-19 travel paralysis and U.S. sanctions pressing for political change in the island continue to squeeze its economy. Authorities expect the damage from Ian to further batter the economy.

Along with La Coloma, one of the hardest hit municipalities was nearby San Luis, a region that produces some of the best tobacco in the world.

Tobacco grower Hiroshi Robaina, looking at his devastated drying houses and seedbeds, thinks that this year he will have to plant his fields with beans.

"I doubt very much there can be any tobacco production this year because there is no infrastructure," he said. "The damage to the nurseries was monstrous."

Robaina, whose plantation is so important it has its own brand, said, "A miracle has to happen."

He said at least 100 small tobacco farmers suffered losses of 100% and called for the government to subsidize reconstruction. Pinar del Río contributes 80% of the tobacco that Cuba produces.

"Tobacco, although it is not something that is going to save the Cuban economy, is an export item," said Ricardo Torres, a Cuban economist and researcher at the Center for Latin American Studies at American University in Washington. "In Cuba, with what little there is, what is lost is very bad news."

"This is a country that at this time does not have resources," Torres said.

Biden: Nuclear 'Armageddon' risk highest since '62 crisis

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Joe Biden said Thursday that the risk of nuclear "Armageddon" is at the highest level since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, as Russian officials speak of the possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons after suffering massive setbacks in the eight-month invasion of Ukraine.

Speaking at a fundraiser for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, Biden said Russian Presi-

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dent Vladimir Putin was “a guy I know fairly well” and the Russian leader was “not joking when he talks about the use of tactical nuclear weapons or biological or chemical weapons.”

Biden added, “We have not faced the prospect of Armageddon since Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis.” He suggested the threat from Putin is real “because his military is — you might say — significantly underperforming.”

U.S. officials for months have warned of the prospect that Russia could use weapons of mass destruction in Ukraine as it has faced a series of strategic setbacks on the battlefield, though Biden’s remarks marked the starkest warnings yet issued by the U.S. government about the nuclear stakes.

It was not immediately clear whether Biden was referring to any new assessment of Russian intentions. As recently as this week, though, U.S. officials have said they have seen no change to Russia’s nuclear forces that would require a change in the alert posture of U.S. nuclear forces.

“We have not seen any reason to adjust our own strategic nuclear posture, nor do we have indication that Russia is preparing to imminently use nuclear weapons,” White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Tuesday.

The 13-day showdown in 1962 that followed the U.S. discovery of the Soviet Union’s secret deployment of nuclear weapons to Cuba is regarded by experts as the closest the world has ever come to nuclear annihilation. The crisis during President John F. Kennedy’s administration sparked a renewed focus on arms control on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Biden also challenged Russian nuclear doctrine, warning that the use of a lower-yield tactical weapon could quickly spiral out of control into global destruction.

“I don’t think there is any such a thing as the ability to easily use a tactical nuclear weapon and not end up with Armageddon,” Biden said.

He added that he was still “trying to figure” out Putin’s “off-ramp” in Ukraine.

“Where does he find a way out?” Biden asked. “Where does he find himself in a position that he does not not only lose face but lose significant power within Russia?”

Putin has repeatedly alluded to using his country’s vast nuclear arsenal, including last month when he announced plans to conscript Russian men to serve in Ukraine.

“I want to remind you that our country also has various means of destruction ... and when the territorial integrity of our country is threatened, to protect Russia and our people, we will certainly use all the means at our disposal,” Putin said Sept. 21, adding with a lingering stare at the camera, “It’s not a bluff.”

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said last week that the U.S. has been “clear” to Russia about what the “consequences” of using a nuclear weapon in Ukraine would be.

“This is something that we are attuned to, taking very seriously, and communicating directly with Russia about, including the kind of decisive responses the United States would have if they went down that dark road,” Sullivan said.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said earlier Thursday that Putin understood that the “world will never forgive” a Russian nuclear strike.

“He understands that after the use of nuclear weapons he would be unable any more to preserve, so to speak, his life, and I’m confident of that,” Zelenskyy said.

Biden’s comments came during a private fundraiser for Democratic Senate candidates at the Manhattan home of James and Kathryn Murdoch. He tends to be more unguarded — often speaking with just rough notes — in such settings, which are open only to a handful of reporters without cameras or recording devices.

Ian evacuees return to mud, rubble as death toll hits 101

By STEPHEN SMITH and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

SANIBEL ISLAND, Fla. (AP) — Rotting fish and garbage lie scattered in Sanibel Island’s streets. On the mainland, debris from washed-away homes is heaped in a canal like matchsticks. Huge shrimp boats sit perched amid the remains of a mobile home park.

“Think of a snow globe. Pick it up and shake it — that’s what happened,” said Fred Szott.

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For the past three days, he and his wife Joyce have been making trips to their damaged mobile home in Fort Myers, cleaning up after Hurricane Ian slammed into Florida's Gulf Coast.

As for the emotional turbulence, he says: "You either hold on, or you lose it."

The number of storm-related deaths rose to at least 101 on Thursday, eight days after the storm made landfall in southwest Florida. According to reports from the Florida Medical Examiners Commission, 92 of those deaths were in Florida. Five people were also killed in North Carolina, three in Cuba and one in Virginia.

Ian is the second-deadliest storm to hit the mainland U.S. in the 21st century behind Hurricane Katrina, which left more than 1,800 people dead in 2005. The deadliest hurricane ever to hit the U.S. was the Great Galveston Hurricane in 1900 that killed as many as 8,000 people.

Residents of Florida's devastated barrier islands are starting to return, assessing the damage to homes and businesses despite limited access to some areas. Pamela Brislin arrived by boat to see what she could salvage.

Brislin had stayed through the storm, but is haunted by what happened afterward. When she checked on a neighbor, she found the woman crying. Her husband had passed away, his body laid out on a picnic table until help could arrive. Another neighbor's house caught fire. The flames were so large that they forced Breslin to do what the hurricane could not — flee with her husband and a neighbor's dog.

Ian, a Category 4 storm with sustained winds of 150 miles per hour (240 kilometers per hour), unleashed torrents of rain and caused extensive flooding and damage. The deluge turned streets into gushing rivers. Backyard waterways overflowed into neighborhoods, sometimes by more than a dozen feet (3.5 meters), tossing boats onto yards and roadways. Beaches disappeared, as ocean surges pushed shorelines far inland. Officials estimate the storm has caused billions of dollars in damage.

The broken causeway to Sanibel Island might not be passable until the end of the month. Officials on the island had ordered a complete curfew after the storm passed, allowing search and rescue teams to do their work. That meant residents who evacuated were technically blocked from returning.

The city of about 7,000 started allowing residents back from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Wednesday. City manager Dana Souza told residents in a Facebook Live stream that he wished the municipality had resources to provide transportation but that, for now, residents would have to arrange visits by private boat.

Pine Island is closer to the mainland than Sanibel, and temporary repairs to its causeway were finished on Wednesday.

But the island was hit hard by the storm. Cindy Bickford's house is still standing. Much of the damage was from flooding, which left a thick layer of rancid muck on her floors. She's hopeful that a lot can be salvaged.

"We'll tear the home apart so we can live in it," said Bickford, who wore a T-shirt that said "Relax," "Refresh" and "Renew."

"It's not our stuff we're worried about. It's our community. Pine Island is extremely close-knit," said Bickford, who arrived Thursday for the first time.

Jay Pick said the island still feels cut off from the outside, and a bit chaotic.

"People are trying to do the right thing and help people, and yet other people are stepping up and taking their gas cans and stealing generators," he said.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, at a news conference Thursday in the Sarasota County town of Nokomis, praised the widespread restoration of running water through the storm-hit zone and the work toward restoring power. Some 185,000 customers remain without electricity, down from highs above 2.6 million across the state.

He said rescue workers have conducted around 2,500 missions, particularly on barrier islands on the Gulf coast as well as in inland areas that have seen intense flooding. More than 90,000 structures have been inspected and checked for survivors, he said.

He said residents areas devastated by the hurricane had been showing great resilience over the past week.

President Joe Biden toured some of Florida's hurricane-hit areas on Wednesday, surveying damage by

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helicopter and then walking on foot alongside DeSantis. The Democratic president and Republican governor pledged to put political rivalries aside to help rebuild homes, businesses and lives. Biden emphasized at a briefing with local officials that the effort could take years.

A bump and a miss: Saudi oil cut slaps down Biden's outreach

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER, CHRIS MEGERIAN and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Thursday effectively acknowledged the failure of one of his biggest and most humiliating foreign policy gambles: a fist-bump with the de facto leader of Saudi Arabia, the crown prince associated with human rights abuses.

Biden's awkward encounter with Mohammed bin Salman in July was a humbling attempt to mend relations with the world's most influential oil power at a time when the U.S. was seeking its help in opposing Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the resulting surge in oil prices.

That fist bump three months ago was followed by a face slap this week from Prince Mohammed: a big oil production cut by OPEC producers and Russia that threatens to sustain oil-producer Russia in its war in Ukraine, drive inflation higher, and push gas prices back toward voter-angering levels just before U.S. midterms, undercutting the election prospects of Biden and Democrats.

Asked about Saudi Arabia's action, Biden told reporters Thursday it was "a disappointment, and it says that there are problems" in the U.S.-Saudi relationship.

A number of Democrats in Congress called on the U.S. Thursday to respond by pulling back on its decades-old provision of arms and U.S. military protection for Saudi Arabia, charging that Prince Mohammed had stopped upholding Saudi Arabia's side of a more than 70-year strategic partnership. The relationship is based on the U.S. providing the kingdom with protection against its outside enemies, and on Saudi Arabia providing global markets with enough oil to keep them stable.

Calling the oil production cuts "a hostile act," New Jersey Democratic Rep. Tom Malinowski led two other lawmakers in introducing legislation that would pull U.S. troops and Patriot missile batteries out of the kingdom.

"What Saudi Arabia did to help Putin continue to wage his despicable, vicious war against Ukraine will long be remembered by Americans," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said, adding, "We are looking at all the legislative tools to best deal with this appalling and deeply cynical action."

The U.S. has no plans at the moment to withdraw military personnel or equipment from Saudi Arabia, State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel said Thursday.

Congress and the administration were reacting to the announcement of a bigger than expected cut of 2 million barrels a day by the OPEC-plus group, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia. The production cut is likely to drive up prices, bolstering the oil revenue Russia is using to keep waging its war in Ukraine despite U.S.-led international sanctions and further shaking a global economy already struggling with short energy supply.

Saudi oil minister Abdulaziz bin Salman, a half-brother of the crown prince, insisted at the OPEC-plus session there was no "belligerence" in the action.

The administration says it's looking for ways to blunt the impact of OPEC's decision, and notes that the cost at the pump has still dropped in recent months.

Foreign arms sales ultimately are Congress's to approve or disapprove, a U.S. official argued Thursday, so it was up to lawmakers to choose whether to try to make good on cutting U.S. weapons to Saudi Arabia. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the government's take on the matter.

The official called Biden's trip to Saudi Arabia, and meetings with Middle East leaders there, steps toward building relations across the region, and said Biden's meeting with the crown prince was in line with other face-to-face sessions with allies, rivals and adversaries, including Putin.

As a candidate, Biden had made a passionate promise to make the Saudi royal family a "pariah" over human rights abuses, especially Saudi officials' killing of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018.

The U.S. intelligence community formally concluded that Prince Mohammed, who wields much of the power

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in Saudi Arabia in the stead of his aging father, King Salman, had ordered or approved of Khashoggi's killing. Biden as president disappointed rights activists when he opted not to penalize Prince Mohammed directly, citing his senior position in the kingdom and the U.S. strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia.

Then Russia's February invasion of Ukraine worsened an already tight global oil market, driving up gasoline prices and inflation overall. Ally Israel and some in the administration argued that smooth relations between Riyadh and Washington had to be the U.S. priority.

As U.S. prices at the pump rose and Biden's poll ratings fell further, senior administration officials began shuttling to the Gulf, seeking to soothe Prince Mohammed's anger at Biden's campaign remarks and the U.S. findings in Khashoggi's killing. That led to Biden paying his first visit as president to Saudi Arabia in July, putting presidential prestige behind the attempt to get U.S.-Saudi relations, and the global oil supply, back on steadier ground.

In Jeddah, Biden stopped short of offering a much-anticipated handshake. Instead, Biden, looking frailer and more stooped in comparison with Prince Mohammed, who is in his late 30s, leaned in to offer an out-of-character fist bump. Prince Mohammed reciprocated. Any smiles on the two men's faces as their knuckles touched were fleeting.

Critics deplored Biden's outreach to a prince accused of ordering the imprisonment, abduction, torture and killing of those, even fellow royals and family members, who oppose him or express differing views.

Even if "you're not willing to use the sticks with MBS, then don't give up the carrots for free," Khalid al Jabri, the son of a former Saudi minister of state, Saad al Jabri, said Thursday, using the prince's initials.

The senior al Jabri accuses Prince Mohammed of sending a hit squad after him in 2018, and of detaining two of his children to try to force his return. Prince Mohammed denies any direct wrongdoing, although he says as a Saudi leader he accepts responsibility for events on his watch.

Khalid al Jabri, who like his father now lives in exile, offered an argument echoed by rights advocates, Democratic lawmakers and others:

"That is one major flaw of the Biden policy so far, that in this kind of U.S.-Saudi rapprochement, it has been lopsided, it's been one-way concessions. And that doesn't work for MBS."

Saudi Arabia has made a couple of moves that benefited the U.S. since Biden's visit. Saudi Arabia was among the intermediaries who recently won the release of two Americans and other foreigners captured by Russia as they fought for Ukraine. And OPEC-plus made a modest increase in oil output shortly after the visit. The U.S. official cited Saudi Arabia's agreement to allow Israeli civilian overflights of Saudi territory as one gain from Biden's trip.

The subsequent oil production cuts have far offset the earlier gains, however. Prince Mohammed and other Saudi officials also have kept up outwardly warm dealings with Russian officials. And rights advocates point to a series of multidecade prison terms handed down to Saudi men and women over the mildest of free speech, especially tweets, since Biden's visit.

By November, the Biden administration will have to decide whether to make another major concession to the prince. A U.S. court set that deadline for the U.S. to determine whether it will weigh in to agree or disagree with Prince Mohammed's lawyer that the prince has legal immunity from a lawsuit in U.S. federal court over the killing of Khashoggi.

Lawmakers are scheduled to be out of Washington until after the Nov. 8 midterm elections and when they return will be focused on funding federal agencies for the full fiscal year through September 2023. Prospects for a lame-duck Congress taking up the bill introduced by Malinowski and the two other lawmakers are slight.

Rising gas prices would be bad news for Democrats heading into the final stretch of the midterm elections, while Republicans remain eager to capitalize on the decades-high inflation and rising cost of living, with high gas prices a constant reminder as voters fill up their tanks.

Sen. Dick Durbin, the second-highest ranking Democrat in the Senate, had one of the more scathing reactions to OPEC's announcement.

"From unanswered questions about 9/11 & the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, to conspiring w/ Putin to

punish the US w/ higher oil prices, the royal Saudi family has never been a trustworthy ally of our nation. It's time for our foreign policy to imagine a world without their alliance," he tweeted Thursday.

Biden pardons thousands for 'simple possession' of marijuana

By ZEKE MILLER and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is pardoning thousands of Americans convicted of "simple possession" of marijuana under federal law, as his administration takes a dramatic step toward decriminalizing the drug and addressing charging practices that disproportionately impact people of color.

Biden's move also covers thousands convicted of the crime in the District of Columbia. He is also calling on governors to issue similar pardons for those convicted of state marijuana offenses, which reflect the vast majority of marijuana possession cases.

Biden, in a statement, said the move reflects his position that "no one should be in jail just for using or possessing marijuana."

"Too many lives have been upended because of our failed approach to marijuana," he added. "It's time that we right these wrongs."

According to the White House, no one is currently in federal prison solely for "simple possession" of the drug, but the pardon could help thousands overcome obstacles to renting a home or finding a job.

"There are thousands of people who have prior Federal convictions for marijuana possession, who may be denied employment, housing, or educational opportunities as a result," he said. "My action will help relieve the collateral consequences arising from these convictions."

The pardon does not cover convictions for possession of other drugs, or for charges relating to producing or possessing marijuana with an intent to distribute. Biden is also not pardoning non-citizens who were in the U.S. without legal status at the time of their arrest.

The announcement marks Biden's reckoning with the impact of 1994 crime legislation, which he supported, that increased arrest and incarceration rates for drug crimes, particularly for Black and Latino people.

The Department of Justice is working to devise a process for those covered by Biden's pardon to receive a certificate of pardon, which they can show to potential employers and others as needed.

"The Justice Department will expeditiously administer the President's proclamation, which pardons individuals who engaged in simple possession of marijuana, restoring political, civil, and other rights to those convicted of that offense," the department said in a statement. "In coming days, the Office of the Pardon Attorney will begin implementing a process to provide impacted individuals with certificates of pardon."

Biden is also directing the secretary of Health and Human Services and the U.S. attorney general to review how marijuana is scheduled under federal law. Rescheduling the drug would reduce or potentially eliminate criminal penalties for possession. Marijuana is currently classified as a Schedule I drug, alongside heroin and LSD, but ahead of fentanyl and methamphetamine. The White House did not set a timeline for the review.

But Biden said he believes that as the federal government and many states ease marijuana laws, they should maintain limitations on trafficking, marketing and underage sales.

The move by Biden puts the federal government on course with other big cities like New York that have been moving toward decriminalizing low-level marijuana arrests for years. But there's a big divide in the nation as some police departments still believe the drug leads to more serious crime and ignoring low-level offenses emboldens criminals.

Advocacy groups praised Biden's announcement, with Cassandra Frederique, the executive director of the Drug Policy Alliance, saying the organization was "thrilled."

"This is incredibly long overdue," said Frederique. "There is no reason that people should be saddled with a criminal record — preventing them from obtaining employment, housing, and countless other opportunities — for something that is already legal in 19 states and D.C. and decriminalized in 31 states."

It remains to be seen whether governors follow Biden's lead. Erik Altieri, executive director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, said extending the action to states could help millions of

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Americans.

"Since 1965, nearly 29 million Americans have been arrested for marijuana-related violations — for activities that the majority of voters no longer believe ought to be a crime," he said.

Chris Goldstein, 46, was arrested after smoking half a joint during a marijuana legalization protest at Independence Hall in Philadelphia in 2013. He paid a \$3,000 fine and spent two years on probation.

"As someone who voted for President Biden, I've been expecting this from the first day he came into office," Goldstein said. "This was a campaign promise."

As a writer and activist who has been public about his conviction, he's not sure that his criminal record was an obstacle to him getting a job, but he knows that it shows up in his background checks. And he's shied away from visiting other countries because convictions can complicate international travel.

"I'm thrilled, and everyone like me is going to be just as thrilled," he said.

Rev. Al Sharpton, the president of the National Action Network, said Biden's "righteous action today will give countless Americans their lives back." But he added, "The United States will never justly legalize marijuana until it reckons with the outdated policies that equated thousands of young Black men with hardened drug pushers."

The move also fulfills one of the top priorities of the Democratic nominee in one of their party's most critical Senate races, as Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. John Fetterman has repeatedly pressed Biden to take the step, including last month when they met in Pittsburgh.

Fetterman, in a statement, took credit for elevating the issue on Biden's agenda and praised the decision, calling it "a massive step towards justice."

"This action from President Biden is exactly what this work should be about: improving people's lives. I commend the president for taking this significant, necessary, and just step to right a wrong and better the lives of millions of Americans," he said.

Fired police sergeant attacks Thai day care center, kills 36

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and DAVID RISING Associated Press

UTHAI SAWAN, Thailand (AP) — A former police officer facing a drug charge burst into a day care center Thursday in Thailand, killing dozens of preschoolers and teachers and then shooting more people as he fled. At least 36 people were slain in the deadliest rampage in the nation's history.

The assailant, who was fired earlier this year, took his own life after killing his wife and child at home.

Photos taken by first responders showed the school's floor littered with the tiny bodies of children still on their blankets, where they had been taking an afternoon nap. The images showed slashes to their faces and gunshots to their heads and pools of blood.

A teacher told public broadcaster Thai PBS that the assailant got out of a car and immediately shot a man eating lunch outside, then fired more shots. When the attacker paused to reload, the teacher had an opportunity to run inside.

"I ran to the back, the children were asleep," said the young woman, who did not give her name, choking back her words. "The children were two or three years old."

Another witness said staff at the day care center had locked the door, but the gunman shot his way in.

"The teacher who died, she had a child in her arms," the witness, whose name wasn't given, told Thailand's Kom Chad Luek television. "I didn't think he would kill children, but he shot at the door and shot right through it."

At least 10 people were wounded, including six critically, police spokesman Archayon Kraithong said.

The attack took place in the rural town of Uthai Sawan in Thailand's northeastern province of Nongbua Lamphu, one of the country's poorest regions.

A video taken by a first responder arriving at the scene showed rescuers rushing into the single-story building past a shattered glass front door, with drops of blood visible on the ground in the entryway.

In footage posted online after the attack, frantic family members could be heard weeping outside the building. One image showed the floor smeared with blood where sleeping mats were scattered around

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the room. Pictures of the alphabet and other colorful decorations adorned the walls.

Police identified the attacker as 34-year-old former police officer Panya Kamrap. Police Maj. Gen. Paisal Luesomboon told PPTV in an interview that he was fired from the force earlier this year because of the drug charge.

In a Facebook posting, Thai police chief Gen. Dumrongsak Kittiprapas said the man, who had been a sergeant, was due in court Friday for a hearing in the case involving methamphetamine, and speculated that he may have chosen the day care center because it was close to his home.

Earlier, Dumrongsak told reporters that the main weapon used was a 9mm pistol that the man had purchased himself. Paisal said he also had a shotgun and a knife.

Thailand Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, who planned to travel to the scene on Friday, told reporters that initial reports were that the former officer was having personal problems.

"This shouldn't happen," he said. "I feel deep sadness toward the victims and their relatives."

Police have not given a full breakdown of the death toll, but they have said at least 22 children and two adults were killed at the day care. At least two more children were killed elsewhere.

Some family members of those killed in the attack were still at the scene of the rampage late into the evening. Mental health workers sat with them, trying to bring comfort, according to Thai TBS television.

Firearm-related deaths in Thailand are much lower than in countries such as the United States and Brazil, but higher than in Japan and Singapore, which have strict gun-control laws. The rate of firearms related deaths in 2019 was about 4 per 100,000, compared with about 11 per 100,000 in the U.S. and nearly 23 per 100,000 in Brazil.

Mass shootings are rare but not unheard of in Thailand, which has one of the highest civilian gun ownership rates in Asia, with 15.1 weapons per 100 population compared to only 0.3 in Singapore and 0.25 in Japan. That's still far lower than the U.S. rate of 120.5 per 100 people, according to a 2017 survey by Australia's GunPolicy.org nonprofit organization.

The country's previous worst mass shooting involved a disgruntled soldier who opened fire in and around a mall in the northeastern city of Nakhon Ratchasima in 2020, killing 29 people and holding off security forces for some 16 hours before eventually being killed by them.

Nearly 60 others were wounded in that attack. Its death toll surpassed that of the previously worst attack on civilians, a 2015 bombing at a shrine in Bangkok that killed 20 people. It was allegedly carried out by human traffickers in retaliation for a crackdown on their network.

Last month, a clerk shot co-workers at Thailand's Army War College in Bangkok, killing two and wounding another before he was arrested.

Immigration will vex Biden no matter who controls Congress

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — At a recent White House ceremony honoring Hispanic heritage in the U.S., President Joe Biden spoke of how immigration has defined the nation and should be celebrated.

"We say it all the time, but that's who we are," Biden said. "That's the nation. We are a nation of immigrants."

Biden pledged himself to "fixing our immigration system for good." He's tackling near-term issues like reuniting migrant families separated during the previous administration and addressing clogs in the asylum system. And his border officials have worked to reduce the chaos along the U.S.-Mexico line.

But an increasingly divided nation can't agree on what a longer-term fix to the system should look like -- basic questions like should there be more immigrants coming in, or fewer? And the future of key policies lies not with the White House or in the outcome of the midterm elections, but with the courts.

Just Wednesday, a federal appeals court ruling left in limbo the fate of more than 600,000 immigrants known as "dreamers" who came to the U.S. as children. Biden said he would do everything to help them but cautioned it wasn't all up to him.

"While we will use the tools we have to allow dreamers to live and work in the only country they know as

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home, it is long past time for Congress to pass permanent protections for dreamers, including a pathway to citizenship," Biden said in a statement.

The political backdrop to all these challenges is stark.

One in 3 U.S. adults believe an effort is underway to replace native-born Americans with immigrants for electoral gains, according to an AP-NORC study. Republicans running for Congress are using midterm campaign ads to warn of a coming "invasion." Some GOP leaders have taken to busing or flying border crossers to Democratic-led areas as a political play to raise awareness of what they claim is ongoing mayhem at the border.

Democrats, for their part, say they want to create a pathway to citizenship for hundreds of thousands of immigrants who came here as children, and they want policies that reflect the U.S. role as a haven for those fleeing persecution. But they can't agree on what that should look like.

And all the while, economists say the country needs more workers, not less, to meet its labor needs.

Biden, who inherited a hardened system oriented by Donald Trump toward keeping immigrants out, has undone many of Trump's most contentious policies. He's worked to speed up the handling of asylum cases and boost the number of refugees allowed into the U.S.

And despite record numbers of arrivals in recent months and all of those overheated campaign ads, border stations right now are largely free of the chaotic scenes that in past years sparked outrage -- migrants huddling under a bridge or small children packed behind fences.

Congress has repeatedly tried -- and failed -- to improve the nation's tattered immigration system, chasing various proposals through the House and Senate only to see them collapse, often spectacularly.

Despite the latest court ruling on dreamers, it's doubtful Congress will be able to pass any substantive legislation to protect a new generation of immigrants the way the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program provided a route to legal status a decade ago in the Obama administration.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi pointed to the most recent bills that have been approved by the Democratic-run House, but languished in the Senate, where Republicans are able to filibuster to block bills in the evenly split chamber.

"House Democrats have twice passed the Dream and Promise Act: to finally offer Dreamers a permanent pathway to citizenship," Pelosi said in a statement. "Senate Republicans must join us to immediately pass this urgent, necessary, House-passed legislation and send it straight to President Biden's desk."

With action in Congress unlikely, the president is going to have to find ways to innovate if he wants to improve on the status quo, advocates say.

Thomas Saenz, president and general counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, acknowledged the "very real and undeniable challenges" Biden is facing, particularly as migrants arrive in record numbers. But he says the administration is falling short in meeting the moment.

"I have found this administration, particularly the White House, to be not creative nor open to creative approaches to provide relief," he said, talking about migration issues that extend beyond the border.

Debate about the DACA program has dragged on so long that many of those children are now in their mid-30s with children of their own who are U.S. citizens. And the limbo continues after Wednesday's court ruling.

If the program is ultimately ended by the courts, Biden is weighing possible executive action to provide some safeguards to the dreamers, according to administration officials familiar with the plan who spoke to AP on condition of anonymity to discuss preparations.

The Trump administration claimed DACA was denying jobs to Americans by allowing migrants to supplant them. That idea has been disproven by economists and isn't shared by a majority of Americans. Two-thirds feel the country's diverse population makes the U.S. stronger, and far more favor than oppose a path to legal status for the DACA recipients, according to AP-NORC.

But the deep anxieties expressed by some Americans help to explain how the issue energizes those opposed to immigration. And the idea of disarray at the U.S.-Mexico border also animates those on both sides of the debate.

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Even as officials encounter more migrants than ever at the border, there's a lull right now in the type of shocking turmoil that has defined the past few years.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials say changes to their processing system deserve at least part of the credit for increased efficiency and improved communication with Mexican officials on when and where migrants are coming.

"There is a lot of really thoughtful, detailed and careful work that's being done to manage this flow," said Commissioner Chris Magnus. He said migrants are vetted and screened rigorously, and careful steps are taken to make sure they are going into proper immigration pathways.

Critics, including some Democrats, say the administration is letting too many people into the country and should be either deporting or detaining more.

"If you don't deport people, they will see the border as a speed bump," Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Texas, told Fox News. "We have to deport people. We have to deport people who aren't supposed to be here."

Overall, migrants have been expelled 1.8 million times since the beginning of the pandemic under an emergency health authority known as Title 42, which allowed the government to immediately deport asylum seekers as long as their countries were considered safe.

Although Biden in late March agreed to end the program, it has continued for now under a court order.

Sergio Gonzales, executive director of the Immigration Hub, a nonprofit that advocates for immigration reform, said whether the rule ultimately stands or falls, migrants will continue coming to the border because they're living in impoverished, dangerous countries and making a calculus that staying is worse than the journey, "even though there is a danger in that too."

The U.S. is still trying to atone for the Trump-era family separations in which as many as 5,500 children were taken from their parents. So far, only about 600 families have been brought back together, in part because of considerable roadblocks thrown up under Trump.

Lee Gelernt, the American Civil Liberties Union lawyer who sued over the separations and is managing the reunifications, said that while the Biden administration has been "constructively working" to reunite families, he worries that the separations — international news when they happened — have been largely forgotten. "The truth is, there are still hundreds of little children who are not back with their parents."

Riot plea: Proud Boys member admits to seditious conspiracy

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A North Carolina man pleaded guilty Thursday to plotting with other members of the far-right Proud Boys to violently stop the transfer of presidential power after the 2020 election, making him the first member of the extremist group to plead guilty to a seditious conspiracy charge.

Jeremy Joseph Bertino, 43, has agreed to cooperate with the Justice Department's investigation of the role that Proud Boys leaders played in the mob's attack on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, a federal prosecutor said.

Bertino's cooperation could ratchet up the pressure on other Proud Boys charged in the siege, including former national chairman Henry "Enrique" Tarrío.

The guilty plea comes as the founder of the another extremist group, the Oath Keepers, and four associates charged separately in the Jan. 6 attack stand trial on seditious conspiracy — a rarely used Civil War era offense that calls for up to 20 years behind bars.

Bertino traveled to Washington with other Proud Boys in December 2020 and was stabbed during a fight, according to court documents. He was not in Washington for the Jan. 6 riot because he was still recovering from his injuries, court papers say.

Bertino participated in planning sessions in the days leading up to Jan. 6 and received encrypted messages as early as Jan. 4 indicating that Proud Boys were discussing possibly storming the Capitol, according to authorities.

A statement of offense filed in court says that Bertino understood the Proud Boys' goal in traveling to Washington was to stop the certification of Joe Biden's victory and that the group was prepared to use

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force and violence if necessary to do so.

On Jan. 6, Bertino applauded the insurrection from afar and sent messages encouraging other Proud Boys to keep pushing toward the Capitol.

"DO NOT GO HOME. WE ARE ON THE CUSP OF SAVING THE CONSTITUTION," he wrote on a social media account. That night, he messaged Tarrío, "You know we made this happen."

Bertino also pleaded guilty to a charge of unlawfully possessing firearms in March 2022 in Belmont, North Carolina. U.S. District Judge Timothy Kelly agreed to release Bertino pending a sentencing hearing, which wasn't immediately scheduled.

Justice Department prosecutor Erik Kenerson said sentencing guidelines for Bertino's case recommend a prison sentence ranging from four years and three months to five years and three months.

A trial is scheduled to start in December for Tarrío and four other members charged with seditious conspiracy: Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl and Dominic Pezzola. The charging document for Bertino's case names those five defendants and a sixth Proud Boys member as his co-conspirators.

Tarrío's case is among the most serious charged in the attack, which sent lawmakers running and left dozens of officers bloodied and bruised.

Nayib Hassan, one of Tarrío's attorneys, said Bertino's cooperation doesn't change the landscape for his client's case. He described Bertino as "just another individual who is going to be testifying." Tarrío is "still looking forward to his day at trial," Hassan added.

The indictment in Tarrío's case alleges that the Proud Boys held meetings and communicated over encrypted messages to plan for the attack in the days leading up to Jan. 6. On the day of the riot, authorities say Proud Boys dismantled metal barricades set up to protect the Capitol and mobilized, directed and led members of the crowd into the building.

Video testimony by Bertino was featured in June at the first hearing by the House committee investigating Jan. 6. The committee showed a clip of Bertino saying that the group's membership "tripled, probably" after Trump's comment at a presidential debate that the Proud Boys should "stand back and stand by."

Tarrío wasn't in Washington on Jan. 6, but authorities say he helped put into motion the violence that day. Police arrested Tarrío in Washington two days before the riot and charged him with vandalizing a Black Lives Matter banner at a historic Black church during a protest in December 2020. Tarrío was released from jail on Jan. 14 of this year after serving his five-month sentence for that case.

More than three dozen people charged in the Capitol riot have been identified by federal authorities as leaders, members or associates of the Proud Boys. Two — Matthew Greene and Charles Donohoe — pleaded guilty to conspiring to obstruct an official proceeding, the Jan. 6 joint session of Congress for certifying the Electoral College vote.

Proud Boys members describe the group as a politically incorrect men's club for "Western chauvinists." They have brawled with antifascist activists at rallies and protests. Vice Media co-founder Gavin McInnes, who founded the Proud Boys in 2016, sued the Southern Poverty Law Center for labeling it as a hate group.

Nordean, of Auburn, Washington, was a Proud Boys chapter president and a member of the group's national "Elders Council." Biggs, of Ormond Beach, Florida, is a self-described Proud Boys organizer. Rehl was president of the Proud Boys chapter in Philadelphia. Pezzola is a Proud Boys member from Rochester, New York.

MLB's postseason is here: A guide to the 12-team playoffs

By DAVID BRANDT AP Sports Writer

Major League Baseball's postseason has a little more heft this season.

The playoffs are here, with the first games played on Friday. The postseason begins with a field of 12 teams — up from last year's 10 — and includes a best-of-three format for the opening wild-card round.

The expanded postseason has produced some spicy early postseason matchups. San Diego's newly acquired slugger Juan Soto against the 101-win New York Mets? Ageless star Albert Pujols and the Cardinals against Bryce Harper, Kyle Schwarber and the Phillies?

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Buckle up, they're happening this weekend.

MLB's new wild-card format is similar to the one currently used in college baseball for the NCAA Super Regional round: The three games will be scheduled on three consecutive days from Friday to Sunday at the higher seed's field. The first team that gets two wins advances.

After that, the playoffs will be business as usual. The division series will be best-of-five, while the league championship series and World Series will be best-of-seven.

Here's a little more information about baseball's bulked-up postseason:

WHAT'S NEW IN BASEBALL'S WILD-CARD ROUND?

The best-of-three wild card format is a change from the sudden death one-game format that's been in place since 2012.

Six teams each from the American League and National League qualified for the postseason, including the three division winners in each league. The three wild-card teams in each league are the teams with the best record that didn't win their division.

The top two teams with the best records in each league get a bye and don't have to play in the wild-card round. Those four teams get a few days of rest. That's the Astros and Yankees in the American League and the Dodgers and Braves in the National League.

The wild-card round will feature four series over the upcoming weekend: Rays-Guardians, Blue Jays-Mariners, Padres-Mets and Cardinals-Phillies.

WHY ARE THE PLAYOFFS STARTING LATE?

October's postseason festivities will bleed into November before a champion is crowned.

That's mostly because of the sport's labor strife that resulted in a work stoppage over the winter. It delayed the beginning of spring training and pushed the regular season back about a week. Baseball players and owners salvaged the usual 162-game season, but to do that, they had to move opening day from March 31 to April 7.

Some of the games originally scheduled for the first week of the season were moved to the end, meaning a season that was originally scheduled to end on Oct. 2 instead ended on Oct. 5.

Hence, a late start to the playoffs.

WHO ARE THE FAVORITES?

Great question.

The Dodgers have been dominant all season with a lineup that includes Mookie Betts, Trea Turner, Will Smith and Freddie Freeman. They won 111 games for one of the best seasons in franchise history.

Over in the American League, the Houston Astros topped 100 wins as well. They've got a loaded lineup that includes Jose Altuve, Alex Bregman and Yordan Alvarez, along with potential AL Cy Young winner Justin Verlander.

New York's teams should figure into the mix as well. The Yankees were cruising for much of the season — led by star Aaron Judge's 62-homer campaign — but haven't played as well since the All-Star break. The Mets have one of the league's deepest pitching staffs, with two aces on top in Jacob deGrom and Max Scherzer.

Then there's the defending World Series champion Braves, who rallied to win the NL East and still have a loaded lineup that includes Austin Riley, Dansby Swanson, Michael Harris, Matt Olson and Ronald Acuña Jr.

Peloton to cut 500 jobs as turnaround efforts continue

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

Peloton is cutting hundreds of jobs in a corporate reorganization of its stalled business as the pandemic-related surge ebbs.

The maker of high-end exercise equipment cut approximately 500 jobs, or about 12% of its workforce, Peloton said Thursday.

Peloton Interactive Inc. said it's completed the vast majority of a restructuring plan begun in February. That plan included a new chief executive and a smaller store base.

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"The changes we have made, combined with the performance of the business, are moving us closer to our fiscal year-end goal of break-even cash flow, with a renewed focus on growth," said CEO and President Barry McCarthy.

Peloton experienced incredible sales growth during the height of the coronavirus pandemic. The New York-based company's share price multiplied by more than five times in 2020 amid lockdowns that made its bikes and treadmills popular among customers who pay a monthly fee to participate in its interactive workouts.

But sales began to slow last year as the distribution of vaccines drew many people out of their homes and back into gyms. Thursday's statement followed Peloton's August announcement that it would cut 784 jobs, close its North America distribution network and shift delivery work to third-party providers. A push is also being made to sell its equipment to consumers through retailers including Amazon and Dick's Sporting Goods.

The company is working to return to profitability. In its fourth quarter, Peloton lost \$1.24 billion, stung by restructuring and other charges. Revenue dropped from \$936.9 million to \$678.7 million. Its annual loss for the fiscal year totaled \$2.8 billion.

Peloton shares added 34 cents to \$8.83 Thursday. The stock is down about 75% since the start of the year.

Russia strikes Ukraine housing; detains refugees at border

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian missiles hit apartment buildings in the southern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia on Thursday, killing at least seven people, with at least five others missing, in a region that Moscow has illegally annexed, a local official said.

Two strikes damaged more than 40 buildings hours after Ukraine's president announced that his military had retaken three more villages in another of the four regions annexed by Russia, Moscow's latest battlefield reversal.

The Zaporizhzhia regional governor, Oleksandr Starukh, who provided the casualty figure, said more than 20 people were rescued from the multistory apartment buildings. Rescuers who earlier took a 3-year-old girl to a hospital continued to search the rubble early Friday. Starukh wrote on Telegram that Russian forces used S-300 missiles in the attacks.

Russia has been reported to have converted the S-300 from its original use as a long-range anti-aircraft weapon into a missile for ground attacks because of a shortage of other, more suitable weapons.

"Absolute meanness. Absolute evil," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said of the attacks, in a video speech to the inaugural summit of the European Political Community in Prague. "There have already been thousands of manifestations of such evil. Unfortunately, there may be thousands more."

Zaporizhzhia is one of the four regions of Ukraine that Russian President Vladimir Putin has claimed as Russian territory in violation of international laws. The region is home to a sprawling nuclear power plant under Russian occupation; the city of the same name remains under Ukrainian control.

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi, announced Thursday after meeting with Zelenskyy in Kyiv that the U.N.'s atomic energy watchdog will increase the number of inspectors at the Zaporizhzhia plant from two to four.

Grossi talked with Ukrainian officials — and later will confer in Moscow with Russian officials — efforts to set up a protection zone around the nuclear power station. Grossi said mines appear to have been planted around the perimeter of the plant, which has been damaged during the war and caused worries of a possible radiation disaster. Zelenskyy said Russia has stationed as many as 500 fighters at the plant.

Putin signed a decree Wednesday declaring that Russia was taking over the six-reactor facility, a move Ukraine's Foreign Ministry called a criminal act that was "null and void."

Ukraine's state nuclear operator, Energoatom, said it would continue to operate the plant, whose last operating reactor was shut down Sept. 11 because of frequent outages of external power needed to run

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critical safety systems. Transmission lines to the plant have been repeatedly shelled, and Grossi on Thursday reported shelling in an industrial area close to the plant's access road.

Outside the battlefield, Russian authorities detained several hundred Ukrainians trying to flee Russian-occupied areas Wednesday near the Russian-Estonian border, according to Ukrainian Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets. Citing the Estonian Ministry of Internal Affairs, he wrote on Facebook that Russian forces took the Ukrainians on trucks to an unknown destination.

Most of the detained Ukrainians had fled through Russia and Crimea and were seeking to enter the European Union — Estonia is a member state — or find a way to return home, Lubinets wrote.

Russian has forced thousands of Ukrainians into "filtration camps" to determine their loyalties. Zelenskyy said Thursday more than 1.6 million Ukrainians have been deported to Russia.

The precise borders of the areas in Ukraine that Moscow is claiming remain unclear. Putin has vowed to defend Russia's territory — including the annexed Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine — with any means at his military's disposal, including nuclear weapons.

Ukrainian forces are seizing back villages in Kherson in humiliating battlefield defeats for Russian forces that have badly dented the image of a powerful Russian military. Ukrainian officials said Thursday they have retaken 400 square kilometers (154 square miles) of territory, including 29 settlements, in the Kherson region since Oct. 1.

Ukraine also was pressing a counteroffensive in the Donetsk region, which Moscow-backed separatists have partially controlled since 2014 but which remains contested despite Putin's proclaimed annexation.

In battered Chasiv Yar, a city in the Donetsk region 7 miles (12 kilometers) from heavy fighting, the human impact became clear as retirees waited to collect their pension checks at a post office.

"We are hoping for victory of the Ukrainian army," Vera Ivanovna, 81, a retired English and German teacher, said as artillery booms echoed. "We lived in independent Ukraine as you are living in America. We also want to live how you are living."

At least two Russian strikes have hit Chasiv Yar in recent days, with one person reportedly buried under the rubble of a dormitory. More than 40 people were killed in July when Russian rockets struck a residential building.

Russia said it had seized the Donetsk region village of Zaitsevo. The governor of the neighboring Luhansk region said Ukrainian forces had recaptured the village of Hrekivka. Neither battlefield report could be independently confirmed.

The U.S. government, meanwhile, sent its international development chief to Kyiv on Thursday, the highest-ranking American official to visit Ukraine since Russia illegally annexed the four regions. The head of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Samantha Power, met with government officials and residents and said the U.S. would provide an additional \$55 million to repair heating pipes and other equipment.

USAID said the United States had delivered \$9.89 billion in aid to Ukraine since February. A spending bill that U.S. President Joe Biden signed last week promises another \$12.3 billion for Ukraine's military and public services needs.

"This war will be won on the battlefield, but it is also being won in Ukraine's ongoing efforts to strengthen its democracy and its economy," Power told reporters at Kyiv's train station.

She said Ukraine's success as a democratic country with a modern economy tackling corruption incensed Putin.

The European Union on Thursday froze the assets of an additional 37 people and entities tied to Russia's war in Ukraine, bringing the total of EU blacklist targets to 1,351. The newly sanctioned included officials involved in last week's illegal Russian annexations and sham referendums. The latest sanctions also widen trade bans against Russia and prepare for a price cap on Russian oil.

At the United Nations in New York, Russia called for a secret ballot next week on a Western-backed resolution that would condemn Russia's annexation of the four Ukrainian regions and demand that Moscow reverse its actions. Russia apparently hopes to get more support from the 193 nations in the General Assembly if their votes aren't made public.

Russia vetoed a legally binding Security Council resolution on Sept. 30 to condemn annexation referendums in the four Ukrainian regions as illegal. The General Assembly's resolutions aren't legally binding.

In a first, Netflix's 'Glass Onion' to play in major chains

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For the first time, the major U.S. theater chains will play a Netflix release after exhibitors and the streaming service reached a deal for a nationwide sneak-peak run of Rian Johnson's "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery."

Netflix announced Thursday that AMC, Regal Cinemas and Cinemark will all carry the "Knives Out" sequel for an exclusive one-week run beginning Nov. 23, one month before it begins streaming on Dec. 23.

Up until now, those chains have largely refused to program Netflix releases. But as theatrical windows have shortened from three months to frequently closer to 45 days, and streaming-only releases have sometimes lacked the buzz generated by moviegoing, Netflix and the chains finally found common ground.

The deal stops short of a full theatrical release window for "Glass Onion," which premiered last month at the Toronto International Film Festival and stars Daniel Craig as detective Benoit Blanc. A wide release typically plays in more than 3,000 theaters in North America, but Johnson's film will play in about 600 domestic theaters in addition to an international rollout.

"Given the excitement surrounding the premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival, we hope fans will enjoy this special theatrical event in celebration of the film's global debut on Netflix in December," said Scott Stuber, head of global film at Netflix.

For months, negotiations between exhibitors and Netflix had centered around "Glass Onion" because of its box-office pedigree: "Knives Out" was one of the biggest original hits of 2019, grossing more than \$311 million worldwide in ticket sales for Lionsgate. After a bidding war, Netflix acquired two sequels for \$450 million. Johnson, too, had voiced interest in it playing widely theatrically.

"This movie, above everything else, is designed to be a good time with a big crowd of folks in a theater," the director said in an earlier interview with The Associated Press.

On Thursday, Johnson celebrated, saying in a statement that he was "over the moon that Netflix has worked with AMC, Regal and Cinemark to get Glass Onion in theaters for this one of a kind sneak preview."

Adam Aron, chairman and chief executive of AMC, said the first-ever agreement "sufficiently respects the sanctity of our current theatrical window policy." Aron said he hoped it will lead to more cooperation between Netflix and AMC, the largest theater chain.

"As we have often said, we believe that both theatrical exhibitors and streamers can continue to co-exist successfully," said Aron in a statement. "Beyond that, though, it has been our desire that we find a way to crack the code and synergistically work together. By doing so, theaters will make more money by having more titles to show, and thanks to the larger cultural resonance those movies can gain from a theatrical release, they will wind up playing to a wider audience when they also are viewed on streaming platforms."

"Glass Onion" revolves around tech billionaire Miles Bron (Edward Norton), who invites a small group of friends to his private island for a murder mystery party. The cast includes Janelle Monáe, Dave Bautista, Madelyn Cline, Kathryn Hahn, Kate Hudson, Jessica Henwick and Leslie Odom Jr.

Jury begins deliberations in Alex Jones' Sandy Hook trial

By DAVE COLLINS and PAT EATON-ROBB Associated Press

WATERBURY, Conn. (AP) — A jury began deliberations Thursday to decide how much conspiracy theorist Alex Jones should pay for pushing the lie that the 2012 Sandy Hook School massacre was a hoax.

A lawyer for the families of eight people killed and an FBI agent who responded to the mass shooting told jurors in closing arguments that Jones started lying about the shooting the day it happened and provided the machinery that allowed that lie to spread.

Jones' attorney countered by telling the jury his client didn't "invent the Internet" and argued jurors should not award excessive damages just because they are angry about the harassment the families went through at the hands of others who also believed the lie that the shooting was a hoax.

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The attorneys presented closing arguments in the trial to determine how much Jones and his company, Free Speech Systems, should pay for representing to the audience of his Infowars show that the shooting at the school in Newtown, Connecticut, was a hoax staged to impose more gun control laws.

The six-person jury, comprised of three men and three women, began deliberations late in the day, charged with completing a form that will detail a dollar amount each of the 15 plaintiffs should receive.

Before deliberations, the judge didn't give jurors explicit instructions on how to arrive at dollar figures for the damages. She told them to use their life experiences and common sense in determining damages that are "fair, just and reasonable."

In closings, plaintiff attorney Christopher Mattei told the jury that it was because of Jones and his massive Infowars platform that the families have been subjected to a decade of torment at the hands of conspiracy theorists.

"As soon as he did it, everyone else came coming in over him," Mattei said. "The threats, the harassment, the fear, the allegations of actors, when every single one of these families were drowning in grief. And Alex Jones put his foot right on top."

Defense attorney Norm Pattis opened his arguments with a 19-minute video from a 2018 episode of Jones' Infowars show in which the Jones accuses the media of misrepresenting his position for "questioning" Sandy Hook and bringing it up long after he acknowledged the shooting happened.

"It's edited and then it's brought back up as if I'm bringing it back up," Jones says in the video.

Mattei suggested the jury should award the plaintiffs at least \$550 million, telling them Jones will spread lies about other shootings and other families if they don't make him understand the harm his comments caused. Mattei tied that dollar amount to the estimated 550 million views of the Sandy Hook content on Jones and Infowars' social media accounts from 2012 to 2018 — an estimate provided by a plaintiffs' expert witness who said he reviewed the content.

"It is your job to make sure he understands the extent of the wreckage that he caused," Mattei said. "Because you know damn well he doesn't get it."

Another plaintiff attorney, Joshua Koskoff, told the jury that lies like the ones Jones tells, get people killed.

"We don't know when, but it is going to happen at some point," he said.

Since the trial began Sept. 13, testimony has mostly centered on the relatives and the FBI agent who say they've been harassed for a decade by people who believed Jones' claims that the shooting never happened, and that the parents of the 20 slain children were "crisis actors."

The plaintiffs said they have received death and rape threats, mail from conspiracy theorists that included photos of dead children, and had in-person confrontations with hoax believers. They sued Jones for defamation, intentional infliction of emotional distress and violating Connecticut's unfair trade practices law by profiting off the hoax lies.

Pattis noted the plaintiffs' lawyers did not show monetary harm to the families, "no doctor's bills reports, very few mentions of treatment." He told the jurors that punitive damages are by law limited to attorneys fees and they should not confuse those with compensatory damages, which should be for losses caused by Jones.

"This is not an action to compensate the folks at Sandy Hook for the loss of their children," he said. "Alex Jones is not (shooter) Adam Lanza."

Jones, whose show and Infowars brand are based in Austin, Texas, was found liable for defaming the plaintiffs last year. In an unusual ruling, Judge Barbara Bellis said Jones had forfeited his right to a trial as a consequence of repeated violations of court orders and failures to turn over documents to the plaintiffs' lawyers.

Jones did take the stand for a contentious day of testimony earlier in the trial, saying he was "done saying I'm sorry" for calling the school shooting a hoax. However, he declined to put on a defense Wednesday, and his lawyers rested with putting on evidence or witnesses.

Outside the courthouse and on his show, Jones has repeatedly bashed the trial as a "kangaroo court" and an effort to put him out of business. He has cited free speech rights, but he and his lawyer were not

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allowed to make that argument during the trial because he already had been found liable. His show is also broadcast on many radio stations.

Koskoff pointed out the Jones was not in court to hear any of the families' testimony, and called him a "coward."

Pattis has suggested the relatives were exaggerating their claims of being harmed and falsely placed the blame for that harm on Jones.

"Alex invented fear, Alex invented anger, Alex invented what's wrong with this world," Pattis said. "Kill Alex and we'll all live happily ever after. Do you believe that for one moment?"

In a similar trial in Texas in August, a jury ordered Jones to pay nearly \$50 million in damages to the parents of one of the children killed in the shooting, because of the hoax lies. A third such trial, also in Texas, involving two other parents is expected to begin near the end of the year.

Jones has said he expects the cases to be tied up in appeals for the next two years and has asked his audience to help him raise \$500,000 to pay for his legal expenses. Free Speech Systems, meanwhile, is seeking bankruptcy protection.

Uvalde schools fire ex-Texas trooper who was at shooting

By PAUL J. WEBER and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — New outrage ripped through Uvalde on Thursday over revelations that a school police officer hired after the Robb Elementary massacre was not only on campus during the May attack as a Texas state trooper but under investigation over her actions while a gunman killed 19 students and two teachers.

The hiring of Officer Crimson Elizondo was first reported by CNN on Wednesday night. Less than 24 hours later, the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District fired Elizondo on Thursday in the face of swift and mounting backlash from families of the fourth-grade victims and Texas lawmakers.

But the abrupt firing did little to diffuse anger in Uvalde. Families demanded answers over why the school district's small police force in the first place hired one of the nearly 400 law enforcement officers who rushed to the scene of the May 24 attack but waited more than an hour to confront a gunman with a AR-15-style rifle.

Adding to some parents' disbelief was the fact that Elizondo, according to records released by the Texas Department of Public Safety, is among at least seven troopers who were at the scene and put under internal investigation over their actions during one of the deadliest classroom shootings in U.S. history.

"They knowingly hired her," tweeted Brett Cross, whose 10-year-old son Uziyah Garcia was killed in the attack.

Elizondo did not immediately respond to voicemail and Facebook messages seeking comment Thursday.

The documents show that after the Uvalde school district contacted DPS in July while conducting a background screening of Elizondo, the agency sent back a letter noting that she was under internal investigation over allegations that her actions were "inconsistent with training and Department requirements."

In a statement Thursday announcing the firing, Uvalde school officials did not address their decision to originally hire Elizondo.

"We sincerely apologize to the victim's families and the greater Uvalde community for the pain that this revelation has caused," the statement said.

Elizondo gave notice of her resignation as a Texas state trooper Aug. 17 and her last day with the department of public safety was Aug. 29, said Travis Considine, a DPS spokesperson.

In police body camera footage, CNN reported, Elizondo is heard telling other officers at the scene of Robb Elementary: "If my son had been in there, I would not have been outside. I promise you that."

Elizondo's profile was on the Uvalde school district's website Thursday morning but had been removed by the afternoon.

Hours before the firing, families had gathered outside the school district's administrative office to protest the hiring.

"We are disgusted and angry at Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District's (UCISD) decision to hire Officer Crimson Elizondo. Her hiring puts into question the credibility and thoroughness of UCISD's HR and vetting practices," a statement from some of the victims' families said. "And it confirms what we have been saying all along: UCISD has not and is not in the business of ensuring the safety of our children at school."

In July, a damning report cited "egregiously poor decision making" by law enforcement officers who waited more than an hour before confronting the 18-year-old gunman. The campus police chief, Pete Arredondo, was fired in August.

State Sen. Roland Gutierrez, whose district includes Uvalde, said Elizondo's hiring "slapped this community in the face."

"A DPS trooper was on scene within two minutes of the shooter and failed to follow training, protocol, and the duty they were sworn to," he said. "People's children died because DPS officials failed to do their job."

A district spokesperson did not immediately return messages Thursday.

City to pay \$12M to kin of Prude, Black man killed by police

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (AP) — City officials agreed to pay \$12 million to the children of Daniel Prude, a Black man who died after police held him down until he stopped breathing on a snowy street in Rochester, New York.

A federal judge approved the settlement in a court document filed Thursday. Rochester Mayor Malik D. Evans said in a statement that the agreement was "the best decision" for the city.

"It would have cost taxpayers even more to litigate, and would have placed a painful toll on our community," said Evans, who wasn't in office when Prude died in March 2020.

The settlement money, minus lawyers' fees and costs, will go to Prude's five children, who are heirs to the estate, attorneys said.

"I think that it's an amount of money that is sufficient to show that the City of Rochester recognizes that something very bad happened and that it's very important for the city to put it in the rearview mirror and move forward," said lawyer Matthew Piers, who represents the administrator of the estate.

The agreement is the latest in a number of settlements involving police killings of Black people in the U.S. in the last decade. Among them: a \$27 million agreement with the family of George Floyd and a \$12 million settlement with relatives of Breonna Taylor. Their 2020 deaths — his in Minneapolis, hers in Louisville, Kentucky — ignited protests around the country and fueled a reckoning on racial justice and policing.

A killing that became an earlier catalyst for the Black Lives Matter movement — the 2014 police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri — led to a \$1.5 million settlement. In a lawsuit stemming from the chokehold death of Eric Garner that same year, New York City settled with his family for about \$6 million.

Just this August, three towns on Maryland's Eastern Shore reached a \$5 million settlement with relatives of Anton Black, who was chased, handcuffed and shackled by police before he stopped breathing in rural Greensboro in 2018. The family is continuing to pursue a case against the state medical examiner's office.

Police confronted 41-year-old Prude in March 2020 after his brother called to say the man needed mental health help. Prude had been taken to a hospital for a psychiatric evaluation earlier that night but was released after a few hours, and later bolted from his brother's home.

After officers found him running naked through the streets, police video showed that Prude complied with police demands to get on the ground and put his hands behind his back. He became agitated as he sat, handcuffed, on the pavement.

Police then put a hood over his head to stop him from spitting, and held him down for about two minutes until his breathing stopped. He died several days later after being taken off life support.

The county medical examiner said his death was a homicide caused by "complications of asphyxia in the setting of physical restraint" and cited the drug PCP as a contributing factor.

The officers said they followed their training. A grand jury last year declined to bring criminal charges against them.

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The relatives' lawyers said Prude's constitutional rights were violated by the police actions and what the family called an attempted cover-up by the department and city government.

Released emails showed that in June 2020, Rochester police commanders urged city officials to hold off on publicly releasing the video because they feared violent blowback if it came out during nationwide protests that were then unfolding over Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police.

Prude's family eventually obtained the video and released it in September 2020.

Whistleblower: 665 left FBI over misconduct in two decades

By ERIC TUCKER and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S. senator is pressing the FBI for more information after a whistleblower alleged that an internal review found 665 FBI personnel have resigned or retired to avoid accountability in misconduct probes over the past two decades.

The whistleblower told the office of Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, that the Justice Department launched the review of the FBI's disciplinary database in 2020 following an Associated Press investigation into sexual misconduct allegations involving at least six senior FBI officials.

The follow-up review found 665 FBI employees, including 45 senior-level officials, resigned or retired between 2004 and 2020 following a misconduct probe but before a final disciplinary letter could be issued, according to a letter this week from Grassley to FBI Director Christopher Wray and Attorney General Merrick Garland.

It was not clear how many of those cases involved sexual misconduct. Grassley's office, which declined to make the whistleblower or underlying documents available to protect the person's identity, said in its letter it was still seeking that information but also characterized that number as possibly being in the "hundreds."

"It's been alleged to my office that the data involved an element of sexual misconduct, which comports with the purpose of the ... review that was done because of the Associated Press article," Grassley wrote in his letter that was first shared with the AP. "The committee welcomes any clarity the Justice Department is able to provide."

Asked for its response, the FBI told AP it intended to respond to the oversight committee first. It declined to comment specifically on the whistleblower's allegation or to provide its own tally of disciplinary cases and how many of them involved sexual misconduct.

It instead issued a statement saying it has a zero-tolerance policy toward sexual harassment. "The FBI looks critically at ourselves and will continue to make improvements. The bottom line is, employees who commit gross misconduct and sexual harassment have no place in the FBI," it said.

The AP investigation in December 2020 identified at least six sexual misconduct allegations involving senior FBI officials over the prior five years ranging from unwanted touching and advances to coercion.

It found that several senior FBI officials have avoided discipline — quietly transferring or retiring with full benefits — even after claims of sexual misconduct against them were substantiated. In one case, an FBI assistant director retired after the inspector general's office concluded that he had harassed a female subordinate and sought an improper relationship with her.

In its statement, the FBI said that since establishing a working group just days after the AP story was published, the bureau has implemented a series of changes, including a 24/7 tip line with a licensed clinician where employees can report abuse, and a working group of senior executives to review policies and procedures on harassment and victim support.

Grassley asked in his letter for updates on other changes recommended by the Justice Department, including that it fast-track investigations to reduce the chance an accused employee could become eligible for retirement and leave the FBI before a probe can be completed.

The FBI noted that it cannot legally prevent someone from resigning or retiring. "It is infuriating that we are left with little disciplinary recourse when people leave before their case is adjudicated," the statement said.

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David J. Shaffer, a Washington attorney who represents several victims of sexual misconduct in the FBI, called on lawmakers to examine how often the bureau opens internal investigations against women who come forward.

"The most serious abuse of the FBI disciplinary system is to retaliate against the very women who complain by starting investigations against them after they report sexual misconduct," he said, "thereby discouraging reporting in the FBI due to fear of retaliation."

Tracy Walder, a former FBI agent who left the bureau in 2006 after she filed a sexual harassment complaint, said she believes such misconduct is pervasive and is glad it is finally being taken seriously.

"I do not believe that the entirety of the FBI behaves this way. In fact, there are many excellent agents. However, because of the way I was treated, I feel a sense of shame and 'What if?' And this behavior has been allowed to continue for decades."

US hits Iran with more sanctions over Mahsa Amini death

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. on Thursday imposed more sanctions on Iranian government officials in response to the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, as protests have embroiled dozens of Iranian cities for weeks and evolved into the most widespread challenge to Iran's leadership in years.

U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control designated seven high-ranking leaders for financial penalties due to the shutdown of Iran's internet, repression of speech and violence inflicted on protesters and civilians. Iran's interior and communications ministers and several law enforcement leaders were targeted for sanctions.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the sanctions demonstrate the "United States stands with the brave citizens and the brave women of Iran who right now are demonstrating to secure their basic rights."

And Brian Nelson, Treasury's undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said in announcing the sanctions that "the rights to freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly are vital to guaranteeing individual liberty and dignity."

U.S. support of freedom in Iran, however, further undermines efforts to salvage the languishing 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, would provide Tehran with billions in sanctions relief in exchange for the agreeing to roll back its nuclear program.

How the administration can credibly side with a protest movement while hoping to strike a nuclear deal with a regime it accuses of engaging in human rights abuses is a question that has resonated through the halls of Congress.

"President Biden simply cannot offer the prospect of sanctions relief and de facto legitimize a regime that is ruthlessly gunning down its own citizens in the street," said Marjan Keypour Greenblatt, director of a network of activists that promotes human rights in Iran and a nonresident scholar with the Middle East Institute's Iran Program.

Amini was detained in September by the morality police, who said she didn't properly cover her hair with the mandatory Islamic headscarf, known as the hijab. She collapsed at a police station and died three days later.

Her death set off protests in dozens of cities across the country of 80 million people, with young women marching in the streets and publicly cutting off their hair in the most widespread challenge to Iran's leadership since the 2009 Green Movement protests drew millions to the streets.

The government has responded with a fierce crackdown. An Associated Press tally of reports in state-run and state-linked media shows there have been at least 1,900 arrests connected to the protests.

And while state television last suggested at least 41 people had been killed in the demonstrations as of Sept. 24, an Oslo-based group called Iran Human Rights estimates at least 154 people have been killed. Amini's death has drawn a host of U.S. actions against the government and its leaders.

The morality police and the leaders of other Iranian law enforcement agencies were hit with one round of sanctions, and on Sept. 23, the Treasury Department announced that it would allow American tech firms

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to expand their business in Iran, where most internet access has been cut off in response to the protests. Agency officials said an updated general license authorizes tech firms to offer more social media and collaboration platforms, video conferencing and cloud-based services.

"We're going to continue to impose further costs on the perpetrators of this violence," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Tuesday afternoon.

Before Amini's death, U.S. sanctions on Iran have accelerated in recent months.

Firms from Iran, China, India, the United Arab Emirates and elsewhere that the Biden administration says have been involved in shipping sanctioned Iranian oil around the world have also seen penalties.

Survivors tell grim tale of southern Greek migrant shipwreck

By THANASSIS STAVRAKIS and SRDJAN NEDELJKOVIC Associated Press

KYTHIRA, Greece (AP) — Many had embarked on the stomach-churning sea journey before; many will follow.

Survivors of one of the latest fatal shipwrecks involving Europe-bound migrants say the omens were bad even as the sailboat they traveled on slipped off from Turkey on Monday under cover of night, ultimately bound for Italy.

Strong winds swept the Aegean Sea, and the pleasure yacht turned human freighter was criminally overloaded - with about 95 migrants so tightly crammed below deck that there was only space to stand.

"From the first minute ... we thought that maybe we will face some problems," Ahmad Shoab Noorzaei, a survivor of the wreck off Greece's Kythira island, said. "Because the weather was not normal for such a ship - a 16-meter (52-foot) ship. ... It was a small ship ... just for 20 or 30 (people)."

Instead, the native of Afghanistan said, there were about 95 on board, including 10 or 11 families.

By late Wednesday, the third night at sea, the captain had lost his bearings, according to survivors, and the wind was gusting at up to 100 kilometers per hour (60 mph). Instead of safely rounding Kythira, with a clear passage to Italy ahead after the Aegean island obstacle course, the vessel was swept into a rocky inlet surrounded by forbidding cliffs.

It struck and disintegrated — just a few hundred meters from the gentle beach of Diakofti, on the island's eastern coast.

"The waves was too much high, about 6 meters (20 feet)," Abdul Ghafar Amur, another survivor from Afghanistan, said. "We tried to save our lives, but most of our friends, they have died."

The survivors managed to cling to the rocks. Nearby villagers who poured out to help eventually pulled them to safety with ropes.

At first light, at least four bodies were seen bobbing under the cliffs among the flotsam from the shipwreck. By late Thursday, there were 80 survivors, from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, including 17 boys and a girl.

Speaking to The Associated Press Thursday from a schoolhouse where the survivors — many bearing bruises and scratches from getting battered on the rocks — were temporarily housed, clothed and fed, Amur said the Greek coast guard arrived "three or two hours too late."

"During these three or two hours, most of women died. Young guys and old men, we couldn't do anything for them. We saw just how they died," he said.

Amur said he paid smugglers \$9,000 to be shipped from Turkey to Italy, a sum which matched accounts by other survivors. The fate of the yacht's captain was unknown, though some of the survivors said he was lost in the wreck.

Gangs smuggling asylum-seekers to Europe from Turkey favor the long haul south of Kythira, because it avoids the strongly patrolled eastern Aegean Sea islands that used to be the main sea route for people fleeing conflict and poverty to reach Greece.

Nevertheless, that route is still in use. Also late Wednesday, hundreds of miles away from Kythera, 18 migrants drowned when their small boat sunk off the eastern Aegean island of Lesbos.

EXPLAINER: How will OPEC+ cuts affect oil prices, inflation?

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By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Major oil-producing countries led by Saudi Arabia and Russia have decided to slash the amount of oil they deliver to the global economy.

And the law of supply and demand suggests that can only mean one thing: higher prices are on the way for crude, and for the diesel fuel, gasoline and heating oil that are produced from oil.

The decision by the OPEC+ alliance to cut 2 million barrels a day starting next month comes as the Western allies are trying to cap the oil money flowing into Moscow's war chest after it invaded Ukraine.

Here is what to know about the OPEC+ decision and what it could mean for the economy and the oil price cap:

WHY IS OPEC+ CUTTING PRODUCTION?

Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman says that the alliance is being proactive in adjusting supply ahead of a possible downturn in demand because a slowing global economy needs less fuel for travel and industry.

"We are going through a period of diverse uncertainties which could come our way, it's a brewing cloud," he said, and OPEC+ sought to remain "ahead of the curve." He described the group's role as "a moderating force, to bring about stability."

Oil prices have fallen after a summer of highs. International benchmark Brent crude is down 24% from mid-June, when it traded at over \$123 per barrel. Now it's at \$93.50.

One big reason for the slide is fears that large parts of the global economy are slipping into recession as high energy prices — for oil, natural gas and electricity — drive inflation and rob consumers of spending power.

Another reason: The summer highs came about because of fears that much of Russia's oil production would be lost to the market over the war in Ukraine.

As Western traders shunned Russian oil even without sanctions, customers in India and China bought those barrels at a steep discount, so the hit to supply wasn't as bad as expected.

Oil producers are wary of a sudden collapse in prices if the global economy goes downhill faster than expected. That's what happened during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and during the global financial crisis in 2008-2009.

HOW IS THE WEST TARGETING RUSSIAN OIL?

The U.S. and Britain imposed bans that were mostly symbolic because neither country imported much Russia oil. The White House held off pressing the European Union for an import ban because EU countries got a quarter of their oil from Russia.

In the end, the 27-nation bloc decided to cut off Russian oil that comes by ship on Dec. 5, while keeping a small amount of pipeline supplies that some Eastern European countries rely on.

Beyond that, the U.S. and other Group of Seven major democracies are working out the details on a price cap on Russian oil. It would target insurers and other service providers that facilitate oil shipments from Russia to other countries. The EU approved a measure along those lines this week.

Many of those providers are based in Europe and would be barred from dealing with Russian oil if the price is above the cap.

HOW WILL OIL CUTS, PRICE CAPS AND EMBARGOES CLASH?

The idea behind the price cap is to keep Russian oil flowing to the global market, just at lower prices. Russia, however, has threatened to simply stop deliveries to a country or companies that observe the cap. That could take more Russian oil off the market and push prices higher.

That could push costs at the pump higher, too.

U.S. gasoline prices that soared to record highs of \$5.02 a gallon in mid-June had been falling recently, but they have been on the rise again, posing political problems for President Joe Biden a month before midterm elections.

Biden, facing inflation at near 40-year highs, had touted the falling pump prices. Over the past week, the national average price for a gallon rose 9 cents, to \$3.87. That's 65 cents more than Americans were paying a year ago.

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"It's a disappointment, and we're looking at what alternatives we may have," he told reporters about the OPEC+ decision.

WILL THE OPEC PRODUCTION CUT MAKE INFLATION WORSE?

Likely yes. Brent crude should reach \$100 per barrel by December, says Jorge Leon, senior vice president at Rystad Energy. That is up from an earlier prediction of \$89.

Part of the 2 million-barrel-per-day cut is only on paper as some OPEC+ countries aren't able to produce their quota. So the group can deliver only about 1.2 million barrels a day in actual cuts.

That's still going to have a "significant" effect on prices, Leon said.

"Higher oil prices will inevitably add to the inflation headache that global central banks are fighting, and higher oil prices will factor into the calculus of further increasing interest rates to cool down the economy," he wrote in a note.

That would exacerbate an energy crisis in Europe largely tied to Russian cutbacks of natural gas supplies used for heating, electricity and in factories and would send gasoline prices up worldwide. As that fuels inflation, people have less money to spend on other things like food and rent.

Other factors also could affect oil prices, including the depth of any possible recession in the U.S. or Europe and the duration of China's COVID-19 restrictions, which have sapped demand for fuel.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR RUSSIA?

Analysts say that Russia, the biggest producer among the non-OPEC members in the alliance, would benefit from higher oil prices ahead of a price cap. If Russia has to sell oil at a discount, at least the reduction starts at a higher price level.

High oil prices earlier this year offset much of Russia's sales lost from Western buyers avoiding its supply. The country also has managed to reroute some two-thirds of its typical Western sales to customers in places like India.

But then Moscow saw its take from oil slip from \$21 billion in June to \$19 billion in July to \$17.7 billion in August as prices and sales volumes fell, according to the International Energy Agency. A third of Russia's state budget comes from oil and gas revenue, so the price caps would further erode a key source of revenue.

Meanwhile, the rest of Russia's economy is shrinking due to sanctions and the withdrawal of foreign businesses and investors.

Jan. 6 committee schedules next public hearing for Oct. 13

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol has scheduled its next hearing for Oct. 13, pushing the investigation back into the limelight less than three weeks before the midterm election that will determine control of Congress.

It will be the panel's first public session since the summer, when lawmakers worked through a series of tightly scripted hearings that attracted millions of viewers and touched on nearly every aspect of the Capitol insurrection.

The committee had planned to hold the hearing in late September, but postponed as Hurricane Ian made landfall in Florida.

The panel — comprised of seven Democrats and two Republicans — has not yet provided an agenda, but Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., said recently that the hearing would "tell the story about a key element of Donald Trump's plot to overturn the election."

Democratic Rep. Bennie Thompson, the committee's chairman, told reporters last week that the hearing would touch on recent revelations about Save America PAC, Trump's chief fundraising vehicle. It is facing legal scrutiny after the Justice Department issued a round of grand jury subpoenas that sought information about the political action committee's fundraising practices.

The hearing is also expected to include never-before-seen interview footage of witnesses the committee has deposed since late July. That could include Virginia "Ginni" Thomas, the wife of Supreme Court

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Justice Clarence Thomas, who was interviewed last week behind closed doors. The committee probed Thomas about her role in trying to help Trump overturn his election defeat, including her correspondence with White House chief of staff Mark Meadows and lawmakers in Arizona and Wisconsin in the weeks after the 2020 presidential election.

Throughout its initial eight hearings, the committee has sought to show the American public in expansive detail how Trump ignored many of his closest advisers to pursue false claims of election fraud after he lost the election to Democrat Joe Biden, then failed to act when his rhetoric spurred a mob assault on the Capitol.

Some of the more than 1,000 witnesses interviewed by the panel — a number of them Trump's closest allies — recounted in videotaped testimony how the former president sat idly when hundreds of his supporters violently attacked the Capitol as Congress certified Biden's victory on Jan. 6, 2021.

The committee is aiming to wrap up its work by the end of the year and issue a final report and legislative recommendations, but their investigative work is not yet complete as lawmakers explore several unanswered questions.

Panel members still want to get to the bottom of missing Secret Service texts from Jan. 5-6, 2021, which could shed further light on Trump's actions during the insurrection, particularly after earlier testimony about his confrontation with security as he tried to join supporters at the Capitol. Thompson said earlier this month that the committee has recently obtained "thousands" of documents from the Secret Service.

Congressional investigators have also been interviewing several of Trump's former Cabinet members, some of whom had discussed invoking the Constitution's 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office in the aftermath of the insurrection.

Another decision for the committee is how aggressively to pursue testimony from Trump and former Vice President Mike Pence. Some members have downplayed the value of taking that step and time is running short to request their testimony.

The panel will have to wrap up the loose ends by the end of the year when the select committee status expires.

If Republicans take the majority in November's elections, they are expected to dissolve the committee in January. The panel plans to issue a final report by the end of December that will include legislative reforms it says would help prevent future attempts to subvert democracy.

IMF warns of higher recession risk and darker global outlook

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two principal economists painted very different pictures Thursday of what the global economy will look like in the coming years.

Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, told an audience at Georgetown University on Thursday that the IMF is once again lowering its projections for global economic growth in 2023, projecting world economic growth lower by \$4 trillion through 2026.

"Things are more likely to get worse before it gets better," she said, adding that the Russian invasion of Ukraine that began in February has dramatically changed the IMF's outlook on the economy. "The risks of recession are rising," she said, calling the current economic environment a "period of historic fragility."

Meanwhile, U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, on the other side of town at the Center for Global Development, focused on how the U.S. and its allies could contribute to making longer-term investments to the global economy.

She called for ambitious policy solutions and didn't use the word "recession" once. But despite Yellen's more measured view, she said "the global economy faces significant uncertainty."

The war in Ukraine has driven up food and energy prices globally — in some places exponentially — with Russia, a key global energy and fertilizer supplier, sharply escalating the conflict and exposing the vulnerabilities to the global food and energy supply.

Additionally, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation and worsening climate conditions are also impacting world economies and exacerbating other crises, like high debt levels held by lower-income

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countries.

Georgieva said the IMF estimates that countries making up one-third of the world economy will see at least two consecutive quarters of economic contraction this or next year and added that the institution downgraded its global growth projections already three times. It now expects 3.2% for 2022 and now 2.9% for 2023.

The bleak IMF projections come as central banks around the world raise interest rates in hopes of taming rising inflation. The U.S. Federal Reserve has been the most aggressive in using interest rate hikes as an inflation-cooling tool, and central banks from Asia to England have begun to raise rates this week.

Georgieva said "tightening monetary policy too much and too fast — and doing so in a synchronized manner across countries — could push many economies into prolonged recession." Maurice Obstfeld, an economist at the University of California, Berkeley, recently wrote that too much tightening by the Federal Reserve could "drive the world economy into an unnecessarily harsh contraction."

Yellen agreed Thursday that "macroeconomic tightening in advanced countries can have international spillovers."

The two economists' speeches come ahead of annual meetings next week of the 190-nation IMF and its sister-lending agency, the World Bank, which intend to address the multitude of risks to the global economy.

Georgieva said the updated World Economic Outlook of the fund set to be released next week downgrades growth figures for next year.

Many countries are already seeing major impacts of the invasion of Ukraine on their economies, and the IMF's grim projections are in line with other forecasts for declines in growth.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development last week said the global economy is set to lose \$2.8 trillion in output in 2023 because of the war.

The projections come after the OPEC+ alliance of oil-exporting countries decided Wednesday to sharply cut production to support sagging oil prices in a move that could deal the struggling global economy another blow and raise politically sensitive pump prices for U.S. drivers just ahead of key national elections in November.

Yellen said since many developing countries are facing all challenges simultaneously, from debt to hunger to exploding costs, "this is no time for us to retreat."

"We need ambition in updating our vision for development financing and delivery. And we need ambition in meeting our global challenges," she said.

College football at 49? North Dakota lineman has right stuff

By DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

WHAPEYON, N.D. (AP) — When North Dakota State College of Science suffered a heartbreaking loss in early September — foiled at the goal line as time expired in a jolt to their national championship ambitions — it was a backup defensive lineman who stepped forward with a pep talk to lift the locker room.

Forget it, 49-year-old Ray Ruschel said, according to his junior college teammates. Focus on the rest of the season and things will work out.

"There were just kind of emotions everywhere. Everybody did not handle it," wide receiver Marselio Mendez said after the loss to rival Minnesota State Community Technical College. "Ray came up and said, you know, it's not really failing, right? He said we just have to put the emotion to the side and we still got the rest of the season and playoffs to show who we are."

When it comes to inspiration, the Wildcats could do worse than look to Ruschel's own story, and the path that brought him to a small, vocational-minded school in the wide shadow cast by nearby NCAA power North Dakota State.

After nearly two decades in the Army and National Guard, Ruschel was working as a night-shift mechanic at a North Dakota sugar beet factory when he decided to enroll at the College of Science. The school offers two-year programs in manufacturing, skilled trades, health care, and the liberal arts.

That sounded good to Ruschel, who hoped to move up at the factory and decided to study business

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management. Then he learned the school had a football team among its six sports — and that, despite his age, he was eligible.

“Something just clicked in my head, like why not play?” recalled Ruschel, whose last game action came when he was a high school senior in Pennsylvania, more than 30 years ago.

When Ruschel asked head coach Eric Issendorf — one year younger — for a tryout, Issendorf said sure, even though he worried that Ruschel might get hurt.

Instead, Ruschel has held his own and earned the respect of the other players. He now plays about a dozen snaps a game.

“Guys that he’s playing against are bigger, faster, stronger than him,” Issendorf said. “But he’s been able to manage it. His personality he’s just a really likable guy with an ambition not to leave any stone unturned. As long as he’s here on this earth.”

Wahpeton, a mostly industrial town of about 7,800, is home to the Minn-Dak Farmers Cooperative, one of the largest sugar beet producers in North Dakota and Minnesota. That’s where Ruschel works an overnight shift, then fits in a couple of hours at the gym after he gets off at 8 a.m. each day.

After a few hours of schoolwork online at his apartment near campus, Ruschel grabs some rest before afternoon practice, which runs until about 7 p.m. Then it’s back to his apartment, where Ruschel showers and eats before lying down for whatever rest he can get before it all begins again with his overnight shift.

How does he pull off such a grueling schedule?

“That’s a good question.” said Ruschel, a single father of two grown children. “It’s because I choose to prioritize certain things and other things have to be sacrificed. They just have to be sacrificed right now.”

The college campus is home to about 3,000 students, anchored by its historic Old Main that dates to its founding in 1903. A recruiting brochure boasts of a 97% employment rate for graduates.

When it comes to football, it’s no North Dakota State — a perennial national champion in the NCAA’s second tier, with a \$25 million budget, a dome that seats 19,000 and numerous alumni in the NFL.

But it’s not bad, with facilities among the best in junior college football, including a 4,100-seat stadium, four practice fields and a locker room with 90 modern stalls.

The Wildcats went 9-1 last season, second-best in school history, and finished at No. 4 in the Division III junior college rankings. After a 37-6 win over Vermillion Community College — a six-hour bus ride to far northeastern Minnesota — and a homecoming win last weekend they are 4-1 in a season they hope can end with a national championship.

Players say Ruschel fits in with his teammates despite the obvious musical and cultural differences that come with such a big age gap. On that bus ride to Minnesota, for example, Ruschel spent the hours scrolling through Facebook, listening to music on his head phones and “staring out the window mostly.” No Instagram or TikTok for him.

“The players will come up to me and ask me what I’m listening to,” Ruschel said, chuckling. “I tell them country music and that will be the end of that.”

Ruschel, who made sergeant while in the Army and said he aims to stay active in the National Guard until he’s 60, has served in Afghanistan and Jordan, though he declined to talk about the tours.

Linebacker Manny Garcia said Ruschel’s Army experience and his willingness to take on players less than half his age give him credibility with his teammates.

“You know, we hear Ray’s stories about the military and listen to those and make sure we try to translate those to the football field, for sure,” Garcia said.

Five games into the season, the 6-foot, 225-pound Ruschel, a workout buff, said he feels no pain on the field.

“All in all I’m no more sore than the rest of these kids,” he said. “I’ve just got to keep stretching.”

Word of a 49-year-old college football player has attracted national media attention and Ruschel has at times apologized for taking the spotlight away from others, Issendorf said. Before Ruschel arrived, the program’s claim to fame was Errol Mann, who kicked for the NFL’s Oakland Raiders and was part of their Super Bowl-winning 1976 team.

“I told Ray, you know, we’re embracing it,” Issendorf said. “Our institution loves it. Our administration

loves the attention. It's great marketing. But it's also a really good story."

2021 Nobel Peace Prize winners have faced a year of battles

By LYNN BERRY and JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Winning the Nobel Peace Prize often provides a boost for a grassroots activist or international group working for peace and human rights, opening doors and elevating the causes for which they fight. But it doesn't always work out that way.

For the two journalists who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021, the past year has not been easy.

Dmitry Muratov of Russia and Maria Ressa of the Philippines have been fighting for the survival of their news organizations, defying government efforts to silence them. The two were honored last year for "their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace."

Muratov, the longtime editor of newspaper Novaya Gazeta, saw the situation for independent media in Russia turn from bad to worse following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24. The paper removed much of the war reporting from its website a week later in response to a new Russian law, which threatened jail terms of up to 15 years for publishing information disparaging the Russian military or deemed to be "fake."

That could include mention of Russian forces harming civilians or suffering losses on the battlefield. All other major independent Russian media either closed down or had their websites blocked. Many Russian journalists left the country. But Novaya Gazeta held out, printing three issues a week and reaching what Muratov said were 27 million readers in March.

Finally, on March 28, after two warnings from Russia's media regulator, the paper announced it was suspending publication for the duration of the war. A team of its journalists, however, started a new project from abroad, calling it Novaya Gazeta Europe.

Muratov has kept the newspaper going through many trying times since it was founded in 1993. The paper has won acclaim but also made many enemies in Russia through its critical reporting and investigations into rights abuses and corruption. Six of its journalists have been killed.

In April, while Muratov was on a train waiting to leave Moscow for Samara, a man poured red paint over him, causing his eyes to burn. He said the man shouted: "Muratov, here's one for our boys!"

His newspaper, too, wasn't to be left in peace. In September, a court agreed to the media regulator's request to revoke its license.

In appealing the ruling, Muratov argued that the regulator should have been satisfied that the newspaper was no longer publishing, but instead wanted a "control shot to the head" to make sure it was dead.

One bright spot came in June, when his Nobel Peace Prize sold at auction for \$103.5 million, shattering the old record for a Nobel. The money went to help Ukrainian child refugees. Muratov also donated his \$500,000 Nobel cash award to charity.

In the Philippines, the legal travails of Ressa and her news website Rappler under former President Rodrigo Duterte have not eased with his exit from office on June 30 at the end of a turbulent six-year term that activists regarded as a human rights calamity in an Asian bastion of democracy.

Her online news outfit was among the most critical of Duterte's brutal crackdown against illegal drugs, which left thousands of mostly petty drug suspects dead and sparked an International Criminal Court investigation into possible crimes against humanity.

Throughout much of Duterte's rule, Ressa and Rappler, which she co-founded in 2012, fought a slew of lawsuits that threatened to shut down the increasingly popular news website and lock her up in jail. Just two days before Duterte stepped down, the government's corporate regulator upheld a decision revoking Rappler's operating license on a conclusion that the news upstart allowed a foreign investor to wield control in violation of a constitutional prohibition on foreign control of local media, a finding that Rappler had disputed.

Rappler moved to fight the closure order and told its staff: "It is business as usual for us. We will adapt, adjust, survive and thrive."

It got backing from prominent democracy voices. "Rappler and Maria Ressa tell the truth," Hillary Clinton

tweeted. "Shutting the site down would be a grave disservice to the country and its people."

About a week later in July, in the first days in power of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Manila's Court of Appeals upheld an online libel conviction of Ressa and a former Rappler journalist in a separate lawsuit and imposed a longer prison sentence of up to six years, eight months and 20 days for both. Their lawyers appealed to keep them out of prison and the news website running.

The ruling prompted the Norwegian Nobel Committee to react, with committee chair Berit Reiss-Andersen saying it "underlines the importance of a free, independent and fact-based journalism, which serves to protect against abuse of power, lies and war propaganda."

The astonishing rise to power of Marcos Jr., the son of a dictator accused of widespread rights atrocities and plunder who was ousted in a 1986 pro-democracy uprising, was a new reality check on the extent of disinformation and fake news on social media that Rappler and other independent news organizations have grappled with in the Philippines.

Critics attributed his landslide electoral victory to well-funded online propaganda, which they said whitewashed the Marcos family's history and underscored the powerful sway of social media in a country regarded as one of the world's largest internet users.

When asked about Ressa and Rappler in an appearance at the Asia Society headquarters in New York last month, Marcos Jr. said his administration would not interfere in court cases. He made no mention of allegations of media repression by his predecessor.

A private individual filed the two online libel cases against her, he said, and added that the closure order came off a legal breach.

"What have happened with Maria Ressa and Rappler is that it was determined that it is a foreign enterprise," Marcos Jr. said. "And that's not allowed in our rules, in our law."

The 2022 Nobel Peace Prize will be announced on Friday in Oslo.

Family of victim in 'Serial' case asks court to halt case

By BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — The family of the victim in the murder case chronicled in the first season of the "Serial" podcast has asked Maryland's intermediate appellate court to halt Adnan Syed's court case pending the family's appeal of a judge's overturning of Syed's murder conviction.

Young Lee, the brother of victim Hae Min Lee, asked the Maryland Court of Special Appeals in a six-page motion filed late last month to suspend further proceedings, including an Oct. 18 deadline by which prosecutors must decide whether to drop the charges against Syed or retry him for the killing. He contends that the family was not given enough notice about a court hearing last month over whether Syed's conviction should be overturned.

"The Lee family is not seeking, through this motion or through the appeal, to impact Mr. Syed's release from custody," said the family's attorney, Steve Kelly. "If the wrong person has been behind bars for 23 years, the Lee family and the rest of the world want to understand what new evidence has led to that conclusion."

Baltimore Circuit Judge Melissa Phinn overturned Syed's conviction on Sept. 19. The Baltimore State's Attorney's Office said it found evidence that should have been disclosed to Syed's attorneys.

Prosecutors moved to vacate Syed's conviction on Sept. 14. That followed a yearlong investigation and was two days after they notified the Lee family, the family's motion says. Then on Sept. 16, Syed's attorneys and prosecutors discussed the motion at a meeting in Phinn's chambers.

Phinn ordered a new trial, but prosecutors were given 30 days — until Oct. 18 — in which to dismiss the charges or proceed with a new trial.

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

Syed was serving a life sentence after he was convicted of strangling 18-year-old Lee, whose body was

found buried in a Baltimore park.

Prosecutors said a reinvestigation of the case revealed evidence regarding the possible involvement of two other possible suspects. The two suspects may be involved individually or may be involved together, the state's attorney's office said.

Amid end to COVID help, homelessness surging in many cities

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE, MICHAEL CASEY and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — In California's capital, massive tent encampments have risen along the American River and highway overpasses have become havens for homeless people, whose numbers have jumped a staggering nearly 70% over two years.

Among the 9,300 without a home is Eric Santos, who lost his job at a brewery and was evicted from his apartment in July. Now he carries a list of places where free meals are available and a bucket to mix soap and water to wash his hands, and to sit on.

"The bucket is part of my life now," the 42-year-old said, calling it his version of Wilson, the volleyball that becomes Tom Hanks' companion in the film "Castaway."

Cities big and small around the country are facing a similar experience to Sacramento.

Fueled by a long-running housing shortage, rising rent prices and the economic hangover from the pandemic, the overall number of homeless in a federal government report to be released in coming months is expected to be higher than the 580,000 unhoused before the coronavirus outbreak, the National Alliance to End Homelessness said.

The Associated Press tallied results from city-by-city surveys conducted earlier this year and found the number of people without homes is up overall compared with 2020 in areas reporting results so far.

Some of the biggest increases are in West Coast cities such as Sacramento and Portland, Oregon, where growing homelessness has become a humanitarian crisis and political football over the past decade. Numbers are also up about 30% in South Dakota and Prince George's County, Maryland, and 15% in Asheville, North Carolina.

The data comes from the Point in Time counts the federal government requires communities to conduct to reflect how many people are without homes on a given winter night. The counts usually rely on volunteer census-takers and are always imprecise. This year's tallies were conducted amid the pandemic and advocates caution changed counting methods could have thrown off results.

Research has shown places seeing spikes in homelessness often lack affordable housing. Making matters worse, pandemic government relief programs — including anti-eviction measures, emergency rental assistance and a child tax credit that kept people housed who may have been on the streets otherwise — are ending.

Donald Whitehead Jr., executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, said the counts are generally rising more where housing costs are jumping the fastest — but the government's response makes a difference, too.

Some communities where numbers are down, he said, "are really looking at housing people versus criminalizing people and putting them in encampments."

In Sacramento, where rents are soaring and officials disagree on how best to deal with the problem, homelessness has jumped 68% from 2020 to 2022 — the most among larger cities reporting results so far.

The surge has been driven in part by the city's legacy of being more affordable than other California cities, which has attracted new residents, overwhelming the housing market. People moving out of the San Francisco Bay Area, 90 miles (145 kilometers) to the southwest, have flooded Sacramento with more potential homeowners and renters, driving up prices.

A Zillow analysis found the average rent in July was \$2,300 — a 28% increase since July 2019, before the pandemic began. Sacramento County's median income was about \$70,000 in 2020, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The crisis has deepened even as things have improved in other California cities that have contended

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for years with homelessness. Sacramento's efforts to address the problem have been marred by years of squabbles between the city and county governments.

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg has made reducing homelessness a priority since taking office in 2017. The city now has more than 900 beds in shelters and motels, compared to about 100 five years ago and has moved to ban single-family zoning, a move that could make it easier to build more housing.

But so far, it hasn't been enough.

"People are becoming homeless much faster than we are getting them off the street," Steinberg told the AP.

Santos is among them. He's been able to sign up for food assistance but is still on a waiting list to access other benefits, he said. Each night he hunts for a park bench that feels safe to sleep on. When he lost a suitcase to broken wheels, he got rid of some of his warmer clothing, a decision he regrets as the fall evenings get colder.

"Luckily I've been able to keep afloat with what I have," he said.

Steinberg has advocated for adopting a legal right to shelter and a legal obligation for people to accept it when offered. The approach has drawn some criticism from advocates who say it's just a means of taking the problem out of the public eye without providing meaningful help for those who need it.

County officials voted in August to ban camping along Sacramento's American River Parkway, with a misdemeanor charge for people who don't comply. City voters will decide in November on a ballot measure requiring the city to open hundreds more shelter beds. But it would only take effect if the county agrees to pony up money for mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Still, the rise in homelessness is not uniform across the country.

In Boston, the number of people sleeping on the streets and in shelters has dropped 25% over two years as advocates focused on finding permanent housing for those on the streets the longest.

In some cities, "housing first" policies intended to move the homeless into permanent homes have paid off. And while the pandemic brought economic chaos, an eviction moratorium, boosted unemployment payments and family tax credits prevented some people from becoming homeless at all.

Along with Boston, numbers have fallen by about 20% or more in Houston, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Even in California, homeless counts are down in San Francisco, and growth has slowed significantly in Los Angeles.

The numbers have also dropped in California's Orange County, where there have been extensive efforts to remove encampments — though some advocates there question the accuracy of the count.

In Boston, Steven Hamilton moved into a new apartment in September after decades staying on a friend or relative's couch or in a homeless shelter.

With the help of a program run by the Boston Medical Center, he was able to get a subsidized apartment in a public housing development. His portion of monthly rent is \$281 — or about 30% of his Social Security payments.

"I'm grateful," he said. "I am not looking to move nowhere else. I am going to stay here until eternity. I lost a lot of stuff. I'm not going through that again."

After what he called a "horrible nightmare" in a shelter with residents injecting drugs in the bathroom, the studio apartment has changed his outlook. He's planning to get furniture, save money for a car and hopes to invite his family for Thanksgiving.

"I have a place I can call my own," he said.

Hamilton's studio apartment is the result of a Boston strategy whereby the city and area nonprofits use extensive outreach to get people who've been on the streets for over a year into apartments and then provide services such as drug treatment and life-skills training like budgeting with the help of case managers.

Since 2019, annual funding in Boston for homeless programs has jumped from \$31 million to over \$51 million.

Those efforts were bolstered last year by a city program that pulled together a list of homeless individuals to target for housing and other services. The city also moved to shut down one of its biggest homeless

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encampments, going tent-to-tent to assess the needs of those living there and referring more than 150 to shelters and other housing.

The efforts have not been seamless. There have been reports of a cleared-out tent city re-emerging. And family homelessness numbers, though down from 2020, have ticked up in the past year.

Still, the city has been able to reduce the numbers of homeless people to about 6,000, down 25% since 2020.

Boston's shelters have become less crowded even as Zillow found the city's average rent rose to \$2,800 this summer — up 13% from three years earlier.

Housing advocates say prioritizing chronically homeless people ensures funds have the greatest impact, since the long-term homeless spend so much time in shelters. It also costs less to provide permanent housing than temporary shelter.

Lewis Lopez is among the success stories.

After cycling in and out of Boston shelters for several years, Lopez finally secured keys to his own apartment. No longer fearing his possessions would be stolen or he would get into fights over food, the 61-year-old felt he had finally gotten his life back.

"I felt so free, like a ton of bricks were lifted off my shoulders," Lopez said of the studio apartment he has lived in for five years, paid for partly with federal funds.

"I felt like part of society again," he said.

EXPLAINER: Russia's military woes mount amid Ukraine attacks

By The Associated Press undefined

Even as the Kremlin moved to absorb parts of Ukraine in a sharp escalation of the conflict, the Russian military suffered new defeats that highlighted its deep problems on the battlefield and opened rifts at the top of the Russian government.

The setbacks have badly dented the image of a powerful Russian military and added to the tensions surrounding an ill-planned mobilization. They have also fueled fighting among Kremlin insiders and left Russian President Vladimir Putin increasingly cornered.

Here is a look at the latest Russian losses, some of the reasons behind them and the potential consequences.

STRING OF DEFEATS IN THE NORTHEAST, SOUTH

Relying on Western-supplied weapons, Ukraine has followed up on last month's gains in the northeastern Kharkiv region by pressing deeper into occupied areas and forcing Russian troops to withdraw from the city of Lyman, a key logistical hub.

The Ukrainian army has also unleashed a broad counteroffensive in the south, capturing a string of villages on the western bank of the Dnieper River and advancing toward the city of Kherson.

The Ukrainian gains in the Kherson region followed relentless strikes on the two main crossings over the Dnieper that made them unusable and forced Russian troops on the western bank of the Dnieper to rely exclusively on pontoon crossings, which also have been repeatedly hit by the Ukrainians.

Phillips P. O'Brien, professor of strategic studies at the University of St Andrews, predicted more Russian failures in Kherson, noting that it's "hard to stabilize a line when your logistics are stretched, your troops are exhausted and your opponent is much, much smarter."

Pressed against the wide river and suffering severe supply shortages, Russian troops face a looming defeat that could set the stage for a potential Ukrainian push to reclaim control of the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow annexed in 2014.

MILITARY SHORTAGES AND COMMAND WOES

Military reporters and bloggers embedded with Russian troops in Ukraine have painted a bleak picture of an ill-equipped and poorly organized force under incompetent command.

With the war in its eighth month, the Russian military suffers from an acute shortage of personnel, lack of coordination between units and unstable supply lines.

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Many Russian units also have low morale, a depressed mood that contrasts sharply with Ukraine's well-motivated forces.

Unlike the Ukrainian military, which has relied on intelligence data provided by the U.S. and its NATO allies to select and strike targets, the Russian army has been plagued by poor intelligence.

When Russian intelligence spots a Ukrainian target, the military engages in a long process of securing clearance to strike it, which often drags on until the target disappears.

Russian war correspondents particularly bemoaned the shortage of drones and noted that Iranian-supplied drones have not been used for maximum effectiveness due to the poor selection of targets.

KREMLIN CALLS UP MORE TROOPS, ANNEXES TERRITORY

Russian President Vladimir Putin responded to the Ukrainian counteroffensive by ordering a partial military mobilization, which aims to round up at least 300,000 reservists to beef up forces along the 1,000-kilometer front line in Ukraine.

At the start of the invasion, Ukraine declared a sweeping mobilization, with a goal of forming a 1 million-member military. Russia until that moment had tried to win the war with a shrinking contingent of volunteer soldiers. The U.S. put the initial invading force at up to 200,000, and some Western estimates put Russian casualties as high as 80,000 dead, wounded and captured.

While the hawkish circles in Moscow welcomed the mobilization as long overdue, hundreds of thousands of Russian men fled abroad to avoid being recruited, and protests flared up across the country, raising new challenges to the Kremlin.

Fresh recruits posted images showing them being forced to sleep on the floor or even in the open air. Some reported being handed rusty weapons and told to buy medical kits and other basic supplies themselves. In a tacit recognition of supply problems, Putin dismissed a deputy defense minister in charge of military logistics.

The mobilization offers no quick fix for Russia's military woes. It will take months for the new recruits to train and form battle-ready units.

Putin then upped the ante by abruptly annexing the occupied regions of Ukraine and voicing readiness to use "all means available" to protect them, a blunt reference to Russia's nuclear arsenal.

RIFTS OPEN UP AT THE TOP

In an unprecedented sign of infighting in the higher echelons of the government, the Kremlin-backed regional leader of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, has scathingly criticized the top military brass, accusing them of incompetence and nepotism.

Kadyrov blamed Col. Gen. Alexander Lapin for failing to secure supplies and reinforcements for his troops that led to their retreat from Lyman. He declared that the general deserves to be stripped of his rank and sent to the front line as a private to "wash off his shame with his blood."

Kadyrov also directly accused Russia's top military officer, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, of covering up Lapin's blunders — a pointed attack that fueled speculation that the Chechen leader might have forged an alliance with other hawkish members of the Russian elite against the top military leadership.

In a blunt statement, Kadyrov also urged the Kremlin to consider using low-yield nuclear weapons against Ukraine to reverse the course of the war, a call that appeared to reflect the growing popularity of the idea among the Kremlin hawks.

In a show of continuing support for Kadyrov, Putin promoted him to colonel general to mark his birthday, a move certain to anger the top brass. And while Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described Kadyrov's statement as overly emotional, he strongly praised the Chechen leader's role in the fighting and his troops' valor.

In another sign of intensifying dissent at the top, Yevgeny Prigozhin, a millionaire businessman dubbed "Putin's chef," lashed out at the governor of St. Petersburg, charging that his failure to provide assistance for Prigozhin's Wagner private security company amounts to supporting Ukraine.

Some other members of the Russian elite offered quick support for Kadyrov and Prigozhin, who have increasingly served as frontmen for the hawkish circles in Moscow.

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Retired Lt. Gen. Andrei Gurulev, a senior member of the lower house of Russian parliament, strongly backed the Chechen leader, saying that the Russian defeat in Lyman was rooted in the top brass' desire to report only good news to Putin.

"It's a problem of total lies and positive reports from top to bottom," he said.

Brittney Griner at 'weakest moment' in Russia, her wife says

WASHINGTON (AP) — WNBA star Brittney Griner is at her "absolute weakest moment in life right now" as she faces a hearing in Russia later this month for her appeal of a nine-year prison sentence for drug possession, Griner's wife said in an interview aired Thursday.

Cherelle Griner told "CBS Mornings" that her wife, a two-time Olympic gold medalist who was playing in Russia during the WNBA offseason, is afraid of being forgotten by the United States.

"She's very afraid about being left and forgotten in Russia, or just completely used to the point of her detriment," Cherelle Griner said.

She said Brittney Griner told her in a phone call that she felt "like my life just doesn't matter."

"Like, y'all don't see the need to get me back home? Am I just nothing?" Cherelle Griner quoted her wife as saying. It wasn't clear when the call took place.

Brittney Griner was convicted Aug. 4 after Russian police said they found vape canisters with cannabis oil in her luggage at Sheremetyevo Airport in Moscow. Her defense lawyers said she had been prescribed cannabis for pain. The WNBA star said she had inadvertently packed them and had no criminal intent.

She is appealing her prison sentence; the hearing is scheduled for Oct. 25. But Cherelle Griner said after that hearing, her wife could potentially be moved to a labor camp elsewhere in Russia.

"My brain can't even fathom it," she said in the CBS interview.

President Joe Biden met with Cherelle Griner at the White House last month. He also sat down with Elizabeth Whelan, the sister of Paul Whelan, another American currently imprisoned in Russia. The Biden administration said in July that it had made a "substantial proposal" to get them home. The administration has not provided specifics about its proposal, but a person familiar with the matter previously confirmed it had offered to release Viktor Bout, a convicted Russian arms dealer imprisoned in the U.S.

Cherelle Griner said the president is "doing what he can, but there's another party in this situation." She said it's going to take Russian President Vladimir Putin changing his mindset.

Though Brittney Griner was arrested in February — amid escalated tensions because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine — the couple did not speak on the phone until August. Cherelle Griner said the first conversation was "just so delightful" and felt optimistic that her wife would survive the ordeal. But the second conversation, she said, "was the most disturbing phone call I've ever experienced."

"You could hear that she was not OK," Cherelle Griner said.

N.Korea flies warplanes near S.Korea after missile launches

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea flew 12 warplanes near its border with South Korea on Thursday, prompting the South to scramble 30 military aircraft in response, Seoul officials said. The highly unusual incident came hours after North Korea fired two ballistic missiles into the sea in its sixth round of missile tests in less than two weeks.

Eight North Korean fighter jets and four bombers flew in formation and were believed to have conducted air-to-surface firing drills, South Korea's military said.

The military said South Korea responded by scrambling 30 fighter jets and other warplanes, though they didn't engage in any clash with the North Korean aircraft.

The North Korean planes were probably dozens of kilometers away from the border, South Korean media said.

North Korea has previously sent military aircraft near the border, but Yonhap news agency said this is

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likely the first time it has mobilized so many warplanes for such a provocative flight and firing exercises. Tensions have risen sharply on the Korean Peninsula as North Korea's recent barrage of missile tests prompted South Korea, the United States and Japan to conduct joint drills in response.

Earlier Thursday, North Korea launched two short-range ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters. The launches came after the United States redeployed an aircraft carrier near the Korean Peninsula in response to North Korea's launch of a nuclear-capable missile over Japan earlier this week.

North Korea has conducted a record number of missile tests this year. South Korean officials said the North may further raise tensions by testing an intercontinental ballistic missile or conducting its first nuclear test explosion since 2017, following an old pattern of heightening animosities before trying to wrest outside concessions.

Some experts say North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is determined to expand his nuclear arsenal in defiance of international sanctions. They say North Korea's goal is to eventually win recognition as a legitimate nuclear state from the United States and the lifting of sanctions, though Washington and its allies have shown no sign of doing so.

The latest missiles were launched 22 minutes apart from North Korea's capital region and landed between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. The first missile flew 350 kilometers (217 miles) and reached a maximum altitude of 80 kilometers (50 miles) and the second flew 800 kilometers (497 miles) with an apogee of 60 kilometers (37 miles).

Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada said the second missile was possibly launched on an "irregular" trajectory. It is a term that has been used to describe the flight characteristics of a North Korean weapon modeled after Russia's Iskander missile, which travels at low altitudes and is designed to be maneuverable in flight to improve its chances of evading missile defenses.

U.S., South Korean and Japanese destroyers launched joint drills later Thursday off the Korean Peninsula's east coast to horn their abilities to search, track and intercept North Korean ballistic missiles, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

The U.S. destroyer is part of the strike group led by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, which returned to the waters in what South Korea's military called an attempt to demonstrate the allies' "firm will" to counter North's continued provocations and threats.

The strike group was in the area last week as part of previous drills between South Korea and the United States, and the allies' other training involving Japan. North Korea considers such U.S.-led drills near the peninsula as an invasion rehearsal and views training involving a U.S. carrier more provocative.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida spoke by phone Thursday and agreed that North Korea's recent missile tests are "a serious, grave provocation" that threatens international peace, according to Yoon's office. Kishida said the two reaffirmed the importance of the deterrence capability of the Japan-U.S. and South Korean-U.S. alliances, as well as security cooperation among the three countries.

Moon Hong Sik, a South Korean Defense Ministry spokesperson, said North Korea's accelerating tests also reflect an urgency to meet Kim Jong Un's arms development goals.

Kim last year described an extensive wish list of advanced nuclear weapons systems, including more powerful ICBMs, multiwarhead missiles, underwater-launched nuclear missiles and tactical nuclear arms.

On Tuesday, North Korea staged its most provocative weapons demonstration since 2017, firing an intermediate-range missile over Japan, forcing the Japanese government to issue evacuation alerts and halt trains.

Experts said the weapon was likely a Hwasong-12 missile capable of reaching the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam and beyond.

Other weapons tested in recent days included Iskander-like missiles and other ballistic weapons designed to strike key targets in South Korea, including U.S. military bases there.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry said in a statement Thursday that the redeployment of the Reagan strike group poses "a serious threat to the stability of the situation on the Korean peninsula and in its vicinity."

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The ministry said it strongly condemns U.S.-led efforts at the U.N. Security Council to tighten sanctions on the North over its recent missile testing, which it described as a "just counteraction" to joint U.S.-South Korean drills.

After the North's intermediate-range missile launch, the United States and South Korea also carried out their own live-fire drills that have so far involved land-to-land ballistic missiles and precision-guided bombs dropped from fighter jets.

The United States, Britain, France, Albania, Norway and Ireland called for an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council. But the session Wednesday ended with no consensus, underscoring a divide among the council's permanent members that has deepened over Russia's war on Ukraine.

Russia and China insisted during the meeting that U.S.-led military exercises in the region had provoked North Korea into acting.

The United States and its allies expressed concern that the council's inability to reach a consensus on North Korea's record number of missile launches this year was emboldening North Korea and undermining the authority of the United Nations' most powerful body.

North Korea has fired more than 40 ballistic and cruise missiles over more than 20 launch events this year, using the stalled diplomacy with the United States and Russia's war on Ukraine as a window to speed up arms development.

Sweden seizes evidence at Baltic Sea pipeline leak site

By JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Sweden's domestic security agency said Thursday that its preliminary investigation of leaks from two Russian gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea "has strengthened the suspicions of serious sabotage" as the cause and a prosecutor said evidence at the site has been seized.

The Swedish Security Service said the probe confirmed that "detonations" caused extensive damage to the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines last week. Authorities had said when the leaks off Sweden and Denmark first surfaced that explosions were recorded in the area.

The agency, which said what happened in the Baltic Sea was "very serious," didn't give details about its investigation.

But in a separate statement, Swedish prosecutor Mats Ljungqvist said "seizures have been made at the crime scene and these will now be investigated."

Ljungqvist, who led the preliminary investigation, did not identify the seized evidence. Ljungqvist said he had given "directives to temporarily block (the area) and carry out a crime scene investigation."

Now that the initial probe is completed, a blockade around the pipelines off Sweden will be lifted, he said.

The governments of Denmark and Sweden previously said they suspected that several hundred pounds of explosives were involved in carrying out a deliberate act of sabotage. The leaks from Nord Stream 1 and 2 discharged huge amounts of methane into the air.

Last week, undersea explosions ruptured Nord Stream 2 and its sister pipeline, Nord Stream 1, at two locations off Sweden and two off Denmark. The pipelines were built to carry Russian natural gas to Germany.

Danish authorities said the two methane leaks they were monitoring in international waters stopped over the weekend. One of the leaks off Sweden also appeared to have ended.

Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the West of attacking the pipelines, which the United States and its allies have vehemently denied, noting that Russia has the most to gain in wrecking havoc on Europe's energy markets.

Separately the Swedish coast guard said "the remaining emissions is more or less unchanged," and that it was returning to its ordinary environmental rescue operations.

Falsehoods, harassment stress local election offices in US

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

CARROLLTON, Ohio (AP) — With early voting less than three weeks away, Nicole Mickley was staring

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down a daunting to-do list: voting machines to test, poll workers to recruit, an onslaught of public records requests to examine.

And then, over a weekend, came word that the long-time county sheriff had died. To Mickley, director of elections in a small Ohio county, that added one more complication to an election season filled with them. It meant a new contest was needed to fill the position, so she and her small staff would have to remake the ballots for the fall election for the second time in a week.

"I feel like ever since we took office in '19, it's just been a constant rollercoaster," said Mickley, whose 36 months on the job qualify her as the senior member of her four-person staff in the Carroll County elections office.

The office Mickley oversees is tucked in a corner of the 137-year-old county courthouse in Carrollton, a close-knit town of 3,200 that sits amid the farm fields and fracking wells of eastern Ohio. She and Deputy Director Cheri Whipkey's son graduated from high school together.

The director and her deputy seem an unlikely pair to be contending with the wrath of a nation.

Yet ever since former President Donald Trump began falsely claiming that the 2020 presidential election was stolen, Mickley, Whipkey and local election workers like them across the country have been inundated with conspiracy theories and election falsehoods, and hounded with harassment.

They've been targeted by threats, stressed by rising workloads and stretched budgets. The stress and vitriol have driven many workers away, creating shortages of election office staff and poll workers.

During Ohio's second primary in August — an added burden for election officials stemming from partisan feuding over redistricting — Mickley's two clerks darted around the county all day filling in for absent poll workers. Two staff members' husbands were enlisted to help.

And then there's the stream of misinformation falsely alleging that voting systems across the country are riddled with fraud. Unfounded conspiracy theories about voting machines, manipulation of elections by artificial intelligence or ballot fixing have found a wide audience among Republicans. The claims sometimes lead voters — usually friends and neighbors of the Carroll County election staff — to question them about voting equipment and election procedures, no longer clear what to believe about a system they've trusted all their lives.

The false claims about the 2020 presidential election also have led believers to inundate election offices around the country with public records requests related to voting processes or equipment, demands to retain the 2020 ballots instead of destroying them, and attempts to remove certain voters from the rolls.

Carroll County hasn't been immune, even though it's heavily Republican and voted for Trump by nearly 53 percentage points over President Joe Biden in 2020. The county of nearly 27,000 people was flooded over the summer with form-letter emails from self-proclaimed "aggrieved citizens." They were protesting electronic voting machines, vowing to sue or demanding the county retain thousands of records from past elections.

Follow-up letters warned that election officials will "be met with the harshest possible criminal and civil repercussions available under the law" if they destroy any election records.

In response, a floor-to-ceiling locked cabinet in Mickley's office is now jammed with boxes of ballots and other records from 2020, papers that normally would have been destroyed by now to make way for the records of the 2022 election.

"We're already busting at the seams," she said. "It's a small office in the bottom basement of the courthouse that was built in the 1800s. Space is not our friend."

Whipkey notes that none of the complaint letters are from local residents, so many of whom she knows personally after 16 years managing the local McDonald's. She and Mickley both feel lucky they are only receiving letters — not the death threats experienced by some election officials around the country.

Still, the accusations sting. Whipkey said she hates being called a liar.

"If they wanted the answer, they would have come and asked us. We could give it to them," she said. "But they don't want the answer; they just want to harass."

Mickley said attending national conferences has persuaded her that election workers across the U.S. are just as honest, hard-working and passionate as her staff is: "I'm starting to get defensive and angry

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for them, too.”

Behind a Plexiglas window in the front of the office, the other two election staffers answer calls and process voter registration forms and change-of-address and absentee ballot requests. They’re also preparing the precinct kits that will go to poll workers — positions the office is still trying to fill for the Nov. 8 election, when they expect heavy turnout partly because Ohio has one of the most closely watched U.S. Senate races in the country.

Clerks Sarah Dyck, a Democrat, and Deloris Kean, a Republican, keep their personal feelings about the movement spawned by Trump’s election lies out of the office. They don’t want to bring politics into their work helping run the county’s elections.

When she’s out in the community, Dyck said neighbors are mostly sympathetic about how stressful elections work has become in recent years.

“People all the time say, ‘I don’t know about this, but I know you guys are doing a good job,’” she said. “It’s like with congressmen, right? ‘Well, I don’t like Congress, but my congressman’s okay.’ The closer you are to it, you know the people, and so it’s about those relationships.”

That’s not always been the experience of members of the Carroll County Board of Elections.

The four members of the bipartisan panel — a retired railroad worker, a farmer, a facilities operator and the owner of a local yoga studio — hold their meetings at a table wedged between Mickley’s and Whipkey’s desks in the cramped office. A collection of whiskey bottles shaped like elephants and donkeys sits atop a metal filing cabinet nearby.

Some members said they must work constantly to dispel false information that is rampant in the Republican-dominated county.

Roger Thomas, one of the board’s two Republicans and the operator of a popular pumpkin stand, said he’s frustrated that many of his friends “are unwilling to get past what they think they know with the facts.”

“It doesn’t matter what you say to them, you can’t convince them,” he said. “I don’t know how we combat that. They don’t care if they gum up the works of these elections, and that’s the problem. If these elections go haywire, go south — as the elections go, so goes the country.”

Mickley said she is a perfectionist who would never tolerate the slightest interference with carrying out secure and accurate elections.

She chokes up when talking about how seriously she takes her job and how she and her staff long to ease the worries of skeptical voters. The widespread belief in election conspiracy theories and hostility toward front-line election workers leaves Mickley questioning the country’s future.

“I think about my kids,” she said, “and I think about what I want to leave for them and what I want to build now to make sure that they still have it in 20, 30 years. And I’m not alone in that.”

Loretta Lynn’s songs resonate anew amid abortion debate

By KRISTIN M. HALL AP Entertainment Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Loretta Lynn, the Grammy-winning country music icon who died Tuesday at 90, lived through — and sang about — decades of advancements for women’s social movements, achievements now endangered.

A mother multiple times over by the end of her teens, she gave voice to those who had historically had little control over childbirth and their own sexuality. Some of her songs reflected the lives of many rural women and mothers, lamenting their invisible labor and the repressive and gendered roles that kept them tied to a singular identity.

For some of those working in reproductive health care today in her home state of Kentucky, Lynn’s music proves all too relevant. Lynn, who sang about birth control after Roe v. Wade became a landmark legal decision protecting abortion rights, died only months after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the 1973 case, creating a massive shift in reproductive rights across the country. In November, Kentucky voters will decide whether to eliminate the right to abortion in the state’s constitution.

Kate Collins, 34, was not of the generation who heard “The Pill” or “One’s on the Way” when they first

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played on the radio, but Lynn's voice provided a soundtrack to her childhood. In addition to growing up in a home where classic country music was part of the lexicon, Collins grew up in a family that talked about abortion and birth control, which led her to start volunteering as an escort at a clinic in Kentucky. But it wasn't until high school that she began to put together the context of what Lynn was singing about.

"She talks about being able to wear the clothes she wants," Collins, who now volunteers as a case manager on the Kentucky Health Justice Network's abortion resources hotline, said of 1975's "The Pill." "Because of my access to birth control, I could go out to bars with my friends and wear miniskirts. And that was not something I ever had to think twice about until the lyric finally hit me."

"The Pill," written by Lorene Allen, Don McHan and T.D. Bayless, was recorded prior to the Roe v. Wade decision, but Lynn held onto the song for years before she felt fans were ready to listen.

"When we released it, the people loved it. I mean the women loved it," she wrote in her 1976 autobiography, "A Coal Miner's Daughter." "But the men who run the radio stations were scared to death. It's like a challenge to the men's way of thinking."

Men in country music were singing about abortion, premarital sex and divorce in the '60s and '70s with little or no blowback, but it was rare that a woman could sing about wanting to enjoy sex with her husband without the consequences of an unplanned pregnancy, as Lynn did.

"It is, in fact, not about anything other than control of women and their pleasure, or anyone who can get pregnant and their pleasure," Collins said.

Lynn was frank about her experiences giving birth so young, being mentally unprepared and not physically ready. She wrote that she couldn't afford to stay overnight after the birth of her second child, so she went back home to wash diapers and draw water from the well 24 hours after delivery. She experienced miscarriages, nearly dying because she had no money to go to the doctor. And still she kept on getting pregnant, giving birth to six children.

She wrote that she couldn't even sign her own consent form to have a caesarean section because she was still a minor and her husband, Oliver Lynn — known as "Dolittle" or "Mooney" — was out on a logging job and unreachable.

"I love my kids but I wish they had the pill when I first married," she wrote. "I didn't get to enjoy the first four kids; I had 'em so fast. I was too busy trying to feed 'em and put clothes on 'em."

She said birth control was as a way for women to protect themselves: "The feelin' good comes easy now/Since I've got the pill/It's gettin' dark it's roostin' time/Tonight's too good to be real/Oh, but daddy don't you worry none/'Cause mama's got the pill," she sang.

And she did not mince words about her feelings about abortion.

"That's also why I won't ever say anything against the abortion laws they made easier a few years ago," she wrote in the 1976 memoir.

"Personally, I think you should prevent unwanted pregnancy rather than get an abortion. I don't think I could have an abortion. It would be wrong for me," she added. "But I'm thinking of all the poor girls who get pregnant when they don't want to be, and how they should have a choice instead of leaving it up to some politician or doctor who don't have to raise the baby. I believe they should be able to have an abortion."

As Collins sees it, Lynn was explaining — in her own way — the idea of bodily autonomy. Collins also sees a connection between the rollback of abortion rights to the attacks on gender-affirming care for transgender people.

More than 45 years after Lynn sang about the pill, in Kentucky and in many other states, clinics are barred from providing abortions. While self-managed abortions using prescription medication are safe and very effective, Collins worries about desperation sinking in for those seeking help and the collateral damage of people with dangerous pregnancies or miscarriages.

"It is really easy to feel like you're flipping the discography back and now we're going to go from 'The Pill' to 'One's on the Way,'" she said.

Today in History: October 7, Fox News Channel's debut

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By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Oct. 7, the 280th day of 2022. There are 85 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 7, 1991, University of Oklahoma law professor Anita Hill publicly accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of making sexually inappropriate comments when she worked for him; Thomas denied Hill's allegations and would go on to win Senate confirmation.

On this date:

In 1765, the Stamp Act Congress convened in New York to draw up colonial grievances against England.

In 1916, in the most lopsided victory in college football history, Georgia Tech defeated Cumberland University 222-0 in Atlanta.

In 1949, the Republic of East Germany was formed.

In 1982, the Andrew Lloyd Webber-Tim Rice musical "Cats" opened on Broadway. (The show closed Sept. 10, 2000, after a record 7,485 performances.)

In 1985, Palestinian gunmen hijacked the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro (ah-KEE'-leh LOW'-roh) in the Mediterranean. (The hijackers shot and killed Leon Klinghoffer, a Jewish-American tourist in a wheelchair, and pushed him overboard, before surrendering on Oct. 9.)

In 1989, Hungary's Communist Party renounced Marxism in favor of democratic socialism during a party congress in Budapest.

In 1992, trade representatives of the United States, Canada and Mexico initialed the North American Free Trade Agreement during a ceremony in San Antonio, Texas, in the presence of President George H.W. Bush, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (muhl-ROO'-nee) and Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

In 1996, Fox News Channel made its debut.

In 1998, Matthew Shepard, a gay college student, was beaten and left tied to a wooden fencepost outside of Laramie, Wyoming; he died five days later. (Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney are serving life sentences for Shepard's murder.)

In 2001, the war in Afghanistan started as the United States and Britain launched air attacks against military targets and Osama bin Laden's training camps in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

In 2003, California voters recalled Gov. Gray Davis and elected Arnold Schwarzenegger their new governor.

In 2020, President Donald Trump returned to the Oval Office for the first time since he was diagnosed with COVID-19; he credited an experimental drug treatment with helping his recovery. Debating from behind plexiglass shields, Vice President Mike Pence and Democrat Kamala Harris zeroed in on Trump's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, with Harris labeling it "the greatest failure of any presidential administration" while Pence defended the overall response.

Ten years ago: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez won re-election for the third time. (Chavez died in March 2013 at age 58 after a two-year battle with cancer; he was succeeded by Vice President Nicolas Maduro.)

Five years ago: Country music star Jason Aldean, who had been on stage at an outdoor concert in Las Vegas less than a week earlier when a gunman opened fire on the crowd, paid tribute to the victims and to the late Tom Petty by opening "Saturday Night Live" with Petty's song, "I Won't Back Down." Protesters rallied across Russia in a challenge to President Vladimir Putin on his 65th birthday; heeding calls from opposition leader Alexei Navalny to pressure authorities into letting him enter the presidential race.

One year ago: Abortions quickly resumed in at least six Texas clinics after a federal judge halted the most restrictive abortion law in the nation. (A federal appeals court would allow the law to go back into effect the following day.) The Senate dodged a U.S. debt disaster, voting to extend the government's borrowing authority into December and temporarily avert an unprecedented federal default. (The House would approve the extension days later.) Google said it would crack down on digital ads promoting false claims about climate change, in hopes of limiting revenue for climate change deniers and stopping the spread of misinformation.

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Today's Birthdays: Author Thomas Keneally is 87. Comedian and talk-show host Joy Behar is 80. Former National Security Council aide Lt. Col. Oliver North (ret.) is 79. Rock musician Kevin Godley (10cc) is 77. Actor Jill Larson is 75. Country singer Kieran Kane is 73. Singer John Mellencamp is 71. Rock musician Ricky Phillips is 71. Russian President Vladimir Putin is 70. Actor Mary Badham (Film: "To Kill a Mockingbird") is 70. Rock musician Tico Torres (Bon Jovi) is 69. Actor Christopher Norris is 67. Cellist Yo-Yo Ma is 67. Gospel singer Michael W. Smith is 65. Olympic gold medal ice dancer Jayne Torvill is 65. Actor Dylan Baker is 64. Actor Judy Landers is 64. Recording executive and TV personality Simon Cowell is 63. Actor Paula Newsome is 61. Country singer Dale Watson is 60. Pop singer Ann Curless (Expose) is 59. R&B singer Toni Braxton is 55. Rock singer-musician Thom Yorke (Radiohead) is 54. Rock musician-dancer Leeroy Thornhill is 53. Actor Nicole Ari Parker is 52. Actor Allison Munn is 48. Rock singer-musician Damian Kulash (KOO'-lahsh) is 47. Singer Taylor Hicks is 46. Actor Omar Miller is 44. Neo-soul singer Nathaniel Rateliff (Nathaniel Rateliff & the Night Sweats) is 44. Actor Shawn Ashmore is 43. Actor Jake McLaughlin is 40. Electronic musician Flying Lotus (AKA Steve Ellison) is 39. MLB player Evan Longoria is 37. Actor Holland Roden is 36. Actor Amber Stevens is 36. MLB outfielder Mookie Betts is 30. Actor Lulu Wilson is 17.