

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Friday, Oct. 14

School Breakfast: Cereal.
School Lunch: Mac and cheese, peas.
Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, buttermilk biscuit, peas, mandarin oranges, cookie.
7 p.m.: Football at Mobridge

Saturday, Oct. 15

Volleyball at Milbank Tournament. Groton games in the elementary gym. Groton plays Great Plains Lutheran at 9 a.m.; Groton plays Sioux Valley at noon; Groton plays Hamlin at 1 p.m.; Finals start at 3 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Sunday, Oct. 16

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.
St. John's worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Zion Lutheran worship with communion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Confirmation retreat for freshmen, 1 p.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.
UMC: Conde Worship, 8:30 a.m.; coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday School after children's sermon during worship.

Monday, Oct. 17

Senior Menu: Beef tips with gravy over noodles,

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

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



lettuce salad with dressing, peaches, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Pot sickers, rice.

1 p.m.: Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center.

Volleyball hosting Langford Area. Parent's Night. Also wear Pink night. Old gym has 8th grade match at 5 p.m. and 7th grade match at 6 p.m. In the Arena: JV match at 6 p.m. followed by varsity match.

St. John's Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.



Part time cashier wanted at Ken's Food Fair of Groton. Must be available any hours including weekends. Stop at the store and see Lionel or Matt.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

Lady Tigers stop the slide with win over Deuel

Groton Area's volleyball team put the breaks on a four match losing streak by posting a 3-0 win over Deuel Thursday night in Clear Lake.

Groton Area never trailed in the first set en route to a 25-16 win. The second set was tied six times with Groton having the early lead and Deuel the lead later in the set. The Cardinals held a 21-19 lead, but the Tigers would score the final six unanswered points for the 25-21 win. The third set was tied eight times in the first half with four lead changes. The last time was at 10 before Groton Area got the upper hand and went on for the 25-18 win.

Sydney Leicht led the Tigers with 13 kills, five ace serves and nine digs. Anna Fjeldheim had six kills, two ace serves and a block. Lydia Meier had eight kills, nine digs and one assisted block. Aspen Johnson had three solo and one assisted block and two kills. Elizabeth Fliehs had 27 assists, two ace serves, one block and one kill. Carly Guthmiller had four ace serves, one kill and eight digs. Hollie Frost had two kills and a block. Laila Roberts had a kill and an ace serve. Jaedyn Penning had a kill and Jerica Locke had an ace serve.

For the Cardinals, Harley Hennings and Josie Anderson each had seven kills, Hope Bjerke had three kills, one block and one ace serve, McKenna Olson had an ace, a kill and a block, Emma Sattler had two kills, Kaden Russel had a kill and an ace serve and Annika Kriz and Emma Hamann each had a kill.

The match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bahr Spray Foam, John Sieh Agency, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Locke Electric, Dacotah Bank, SD Army National Guard with Brent Wienk, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc, Groton Area Chamber of Commerce.

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 25-10 and 25-14. Jaedyn Penning led Groton Area with eight ace serves and three kills. Others adding to the tally were Talli Wright with four kills, Carly Gilbert with four ace serves, Kella Tracy had a block and two kills, Chesney Weber had three kills and four ace serves, Jerica Locke had two kills, Rylee Dunker had two ace serves and a kill and Emma Kutter had two kills and a block.

The match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, with an anonymous sponsor.

Groton Area won the C match, 25-20 and 25-11. Tali Wright had five kills and an ace serve, Emerlee Jones had three kills, Kayla Lehr had two kills, Kella Tracy had three blocks and a kill, Chesney Weber had seven kills and four ace serves, Carly Gilbert had a kill and an ace serve, Hannah Sandness had an ace serve and Rylee Dunker had five kills.

The match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by the Craig Dunker family.

Justin Hanson did the play-by-play for all three matches.

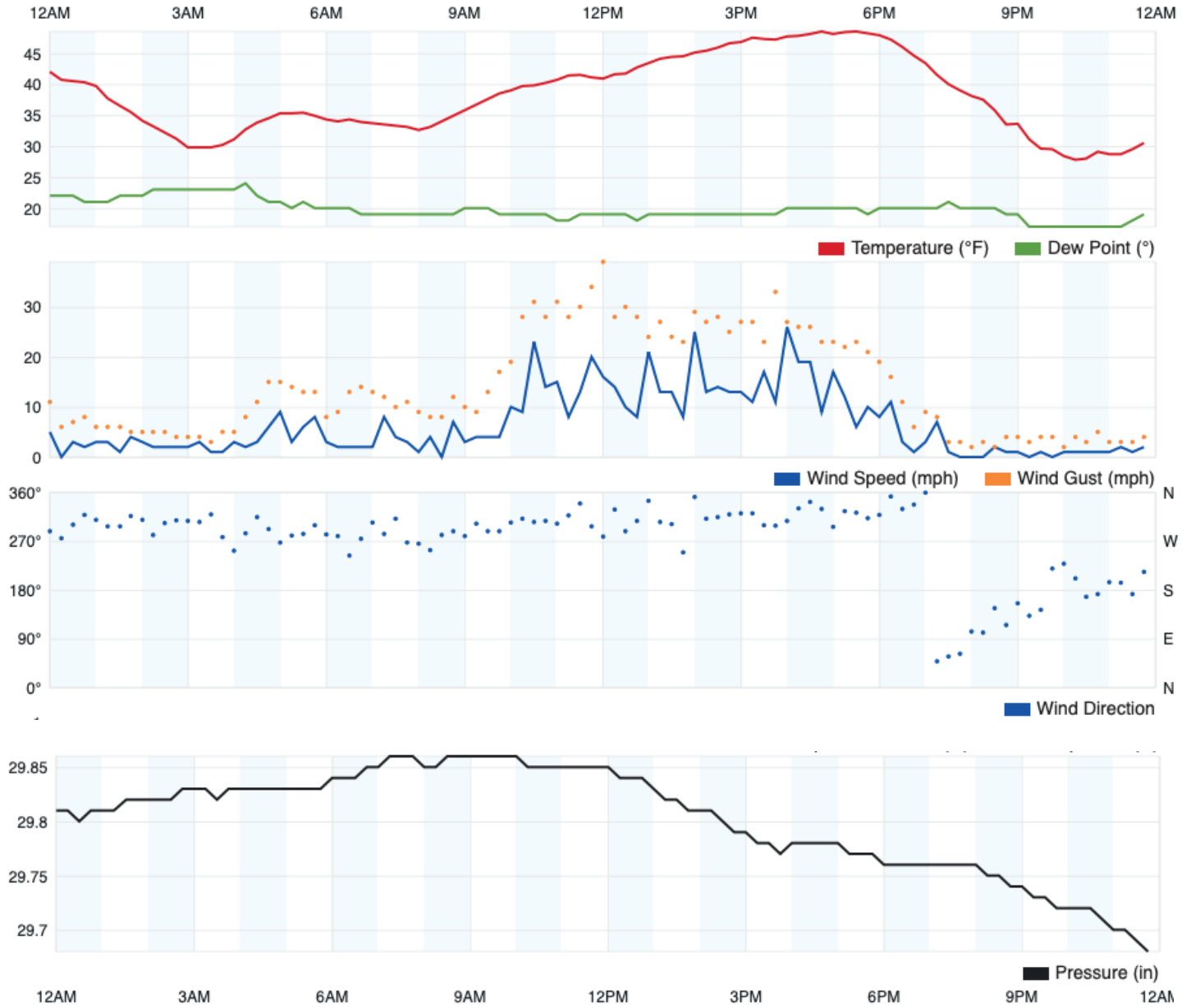
The Tigers had a clean sweep of the night as both junior high teams also won their matches.

Word also has it that one of the volleyball players, Faith Traphagen, has qualified for state in cross country as she ran in the region meet held at Webster on Thursday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Decreasing Clouds and Breezy	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy
High: 46 °F	Low: 26 °F	High: 60 °F	Low: 32 °F	High: 47 °F



NWS Aberdeen, SD

Breezy Temperature Roller Coaster

TODAY	SAT	SUN
COOL & BREEZY	WARMER & BREEZY	COOL & BREEZY
		
44 to 55°	55 to 62°	44 to 51°

● Light morning rain over central SD
* ● Light wintry mix over far northeastern SD & w central

warmest over central South Dakota

Today will be cool and breezy, with decreasing clouds over central South Dakota. Wind will be breezy out of the northwest with gusts of 30 to 40 mph. Light morning rain is anticipated over central South Dakota, with a wintry mix changing over to light rain over far northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota through mid afternoon.

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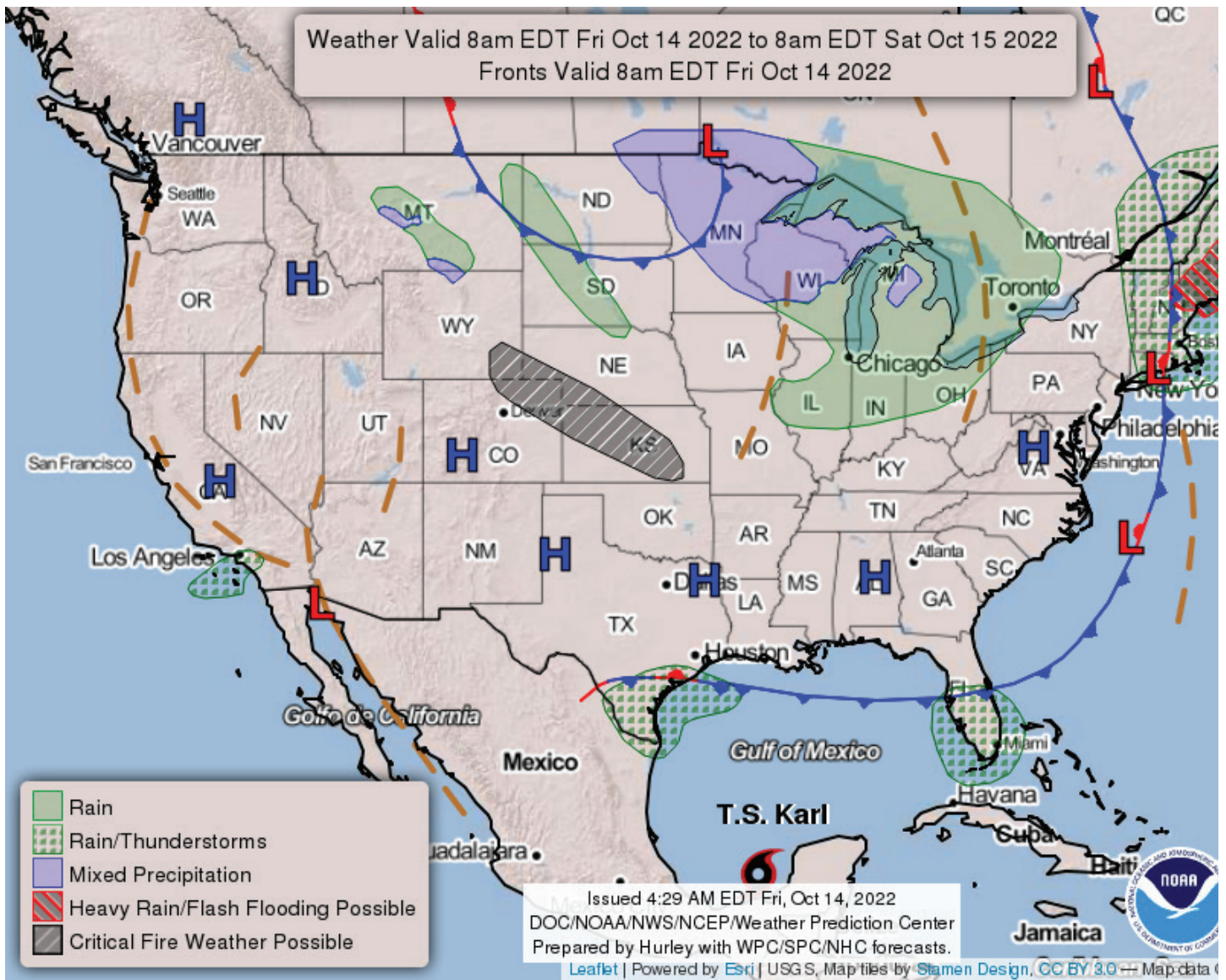
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 48.5 °F at 5:30 PM
Low Temp: 27.8 °F at 10:15 PM
Wind: 39 mph at Noon
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 4 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 87 in 1962
Record Low: 10 in 1937
Average High: 61°F
Average Low: 34°F
Average Precip in Oct.: 1.05
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.45
Average Precip to date: 19.38
Precip Year to Date: 16.50
Sunset Tonight: 6:50:27 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:47:31 AM



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Today in Weather History

October 14, 1969: Cold air during the overnight produced lows from six degrees in Custer, Gillette, and Devils Tower to fifteen degrees in Dupree, Hot Springs, and the Rapid City Airport.

1909: An F3 tornado struck Pittsburg Landing and Stantonville, TN killing 23 people and injuring 80 others.

1941: America's first television weather forecast was broadcast on New York's WNBT (later WNBC). There weren't many televisions at that time, so viewers were limited to perhaps a few hundred people. The weathercast consisted of a sponsor's message followed by a text screen containing the next day's forecast.

1957 - Floodwaters roared through a migrant labor camp near the town of Picacho AZ flooding fifty cabins and a dozen nearby homes. 250 migrant workers lost their shelters. The month was one of the wettest Octobers in Arizona weather history. (The Weather Channel)

1965 - Heavy rains hit the coastal areas of southeastern Florida. In a 24 hour period rains of twenty inches were reported from Deerfield Beach to Fort Lauderdale, with 25.28 inches on the Fort Lauderdale Bahia-Mar Yacht Basin. Flooding that resulted caused considerable damage to roads and streets. The rains inundated numerous newly planted vegetable fields, and some residences. Ten miles away just 4.51 inches of rain was reported. (14th- 15th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1981 - Four days of heavy rain across northern Texas and southern Oklahoma came to an end. The heaviest rains fell in a band from southwest of Abilene TX to McAlester OK, with up to 26 inches reported north of Gainesville, in north central Texas. The heavy rains were the result of decaying Hurricane Norma, which also spawned thirteen tornadoes across the region. Seven deaths were attributed to the flooding. (Storm Data)

1984 - Dense fog contributed to a 118 vehicle accident on I-94, just south of Milwaukee WI. It was the seventh day of an eight day stretch of dense fog. At the time of the accident the visibility was reportedly close to zero. (Storm Data)

1987 - Sixteen cities, mostly in the Appalachian Region, reported record low temperatures for the date. Record lows included 43 degrees at Lake Charles LA, 35 degrees at Augusta GA, and 27 degrees at Asheville NC. Gale force winds buffeted the Carolina coast. Light snow fell across parts of Wyoming, Colorado, and western South Dakota. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Forty cities in the eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Elkins WV was the cold spot in the nation with a record low of 18 degrees above zero. Thunderstorms in Arizona drenched Phoenix with nine inches of rain in nine hours, the fifth highest total for any given day in ninety-two years of records. Carefree AZ was soaked with two inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather over Michigan during the morning, and over New York State and Connecticut during the afternoon and evening hours. Thunderstorms spawned two tornadoes, and there were ninety reports of large hail or damaging winds, including seventy reports of damaging winds in New York State. A tornado at McDonough NY killed one person and injured three other people. Strong thunderstorm winds gusted to 105 mph at Somerset. Temperatures warmed into the 80s and lower 90s over much of the nation east of the Rockies, with eleven cities reporting record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 81 degrees at Beckley WV and Bluefield WV equalled October records. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

IT TAKES MORE THAN ONE

Somewhere on a shelf in my library is a small book with a big lesson. When I take its message to heart, I am more apt to succeed in whatever I have in mind. When I rush ahead and neglect its counsel, I am more apt to fail and must deal with problems that could have been avoided.

It Takes Two to See One is the name of the book that "can make a distinct difference" in how we make our decisions, solve our problems, or set our goals. The simple secret is that if we isolate ourselves from the wisdom and knowledge of others and insulate ourselves from the insight and experiences of others, we are likely to end up with a picture of ourselves that is out of focus, lacks detail and eventually leads us to disaster!

"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." Getting input and ideas, advice and information from others can lead us to success. Although not clearly expressed in the way this verse is translated, the advice we are to seek is to come from those whom we can trust and will keep our discussions confidential. As we talk about and look for clarification "from many," a pattern will develop, and what we might have overlooked will become clear and visible and obvious to us. Then, it's time to act!

There is also the important fact of humility in this verse. "Pride" does come before "destruction" and God does hate a person who is "arrogant." Those two words, pride and arrogance, have brought the downfall of many. Being inclusive of others in our lives shows great wisdom. No one knows everything, but others may know something that can help us.

Prayer: Lord, help us to realize the need we have for counsel - especially from You. May we recognize our limits, Your wisdom and the gifts You have given others. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. Proverbs 15:22



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
11/13/2022: Snow Queen Contest
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

Subscription Form

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- Colored \$42.60/6 months
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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 26, Clark/Willow Lake 0

Little Wound 36, Crow Creek 0

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Arlington def. Deubrook, 25-13, 18-25, 25-27, 25-19, 15-7

Baltic def. Sioux Valley, 25-16, 25-15, 25-17

Belle Fourche def. Red Cloud, 25-10, 25-3, 25-11

Burke def. Gregory, 25-19, 25-10, 25-9

Canton def. Vermillion, 25-17, 25-10, 25-17

Centerville def. Avon, 16-25, 20-25, 25-22, 25-14, 15-9

Chester def. Madison, 25-17, 25-17, 25-14

Clark/Willow Lake def. Sisseton, 25-20, 22-25, 25-23, 15-25, 15-8

Crow Creek def. Crazy Horse, 25-14, 25-16, 25-14

Dell Rapids St. Mary def. DeSmet, 25-18, 25-16, 25-22

Elk Point-Jefferson def. Irene-Wakonda, 25-11, 25-4, 25-13

Ethan def. Hanson, 18-25, 26-24, 21-25, 25-14, 16-14

Faith def. Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, 25-12, 25-19, 25-10

Florence/Henry def. Wilmot, 25-18, 25-8, 25-14

Garretson def. Tea Area, 25-11, 25-16, 25-23

Gayville-Volin def. Bridgewater-Emery, 25-15, 25-23, 19-25, 25-21

Groton Area def. Deuel, 25-16, 25-21, 25-18

Hamlin def. Britton-Hecla, 25-14, 25-17, 25-9

Harrisburg def. Aberdeen Central, 25-19, 25-13, 25-11

Herreid/Selby Area def. Highmore-Harrold, 25-21, 25-8, 25-17

Hill City def. Wall, 26-24, 25-15, 25-16

Hitchcock-Tulare def. Ipswich, 25-22, 25-21, 17-25, 19-25, 15-10

Hot Springs def. Douglas, 25-18, 19-25, 25-16, 27-25

James Valley Christian def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-13, 25-15, 25-14

Jones County def. Kadoka Area, 25-17, 25-16, 25-18

Kimball/White Lake def. Sanborn Central/Woonsocket, 25-13, 25-17, 25-16

Leola/Frederick def. Aberdeen Christian, 25-13, 25-16, 25-16

Milbank def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 3-2

Mobridge-Pollock def. Sully Buttes, 25-13, 25-13, 25-20

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. West Central, 25-18, 25-22, 25-23

North Central Co-Op def. Wakpala, 25-8, 25-18, 25-7

Northwestern def. Potter County, 25-17, 25-10, 25-14

Omaha Nation, Neb. def. Flandreau Indian, 25-0, 25-0, 25-0

Philip def. Lyman, 15-25, 25-17, 25-16, 25-20

Pierre def. Yankton, 25-11, 25-16, 25-22

Platte-Geddes def. Chamberlain, 25-12, 25-11, 25-13

Rapid City Christian def. Gordon/Rushville, Neb., 25-20, 25-23, 25-13

Redfield def. Webster, 25-20, 25-8, 25-18

Sioux Falls Jefferson def. Huron, 25-20, 25-19, 25-12

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Sioux Falls Lincoln def. Brookings, 25-19, 25-12, 24-26, 25-10
Sioux Falls Washington def. Watertown, 25-19, 25-16, 21-25, 25-13
St. Thomas More def. Custer, 25-21, 20-25, 25-19, 25-17
Stanley County def. Dupree, 16-25, 25-18, 25-16, 16-25, 15-11
Sturgis Brown def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-16, 25-14, 25-12
Tri-State, N.D. def. Waubay/Summit, 25-17, 25-14, 17-25, 25-21
Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Scotland, 25-17, 25-13, 25-18
Wagner def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-16, 25-15, 25-16
Warner def. Faulkton, 25-17, 25-11, 25-16
Winner def. Corsica/Stickney, 25-15, 16-25, 25-5, 25-23
Wolsey-Wessington def. Wessington Springs, 25-17, 25-20, 25-16

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

North Dakota term limit foes lack cash to mount opposition

By JAMES MacPHERSON Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A campaign over whether to impose term limits on North Dakota lawmakers and the governor is a mismatch so far — at least financially.

U.S. Term Limits, a Washington, D.C.-based group, has contributed more than \$810,000 in the past two years to get the ballot proposal before voters, while lawmakers and opponents complain they can't keep up with out-of-state interests.

"We have no money," said Bismarck Republican Rep. Mike Nathe, who is leading a loosely organized group of GOP lawmakers and others who oppose the measure. They call it an "attack" on voters' rights to choose the candidate they want, and argue that it diminishes institutional knowledge and shifts power to lobbyists, agencies and the governor.

Supporters say term limits bring in new blood and increase voter participation.

Many Democratic and Republican lawmakers have spoken out against the measure. Republican Gov. Doug Burgum supports it.

Nathe said his ad-hoc group is banking on social media, letters to the editor and word-of-mouth to persuade voters term limits are a bad idea. Voters would sour on the idea if they knew more about it, and that it's being led by an out-of-state group that term-limit foes believe want to dictate how state government should operate, he said.

"We're just trying to educate people about the measure and about how bad we think it is for the future of North Dakota," said Nathe, a funeral home owner who has been in the Legislature since 2009.

Nathe released a list of state organizations that have joined in opposing the term limit measures, including the state's largest business group, and organizations representing energy, education and agriculture.

But none have contributed money so far. Nathe said that's because there has been no time to organize and raise funds after the North Dakota Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the measure should be on the November ballot. The court ruled that Secretary of State Al Jaeger had erred in rejecting the measure over notary violations in some petitions.

Scott Tillman, the national field director for U.S. Term Limits, said his group has always been upfront about its involvement in the North Dakota measure since it started last year.

"We're not trying to hide that we're involved," Tillman said.

The group spent about \$330,000 on its signature-gathering effort, and another \$275,000 in its lawsuit with the state, Tillman said. It has spent about \$75,000 so far on television commercials in Bismarck and Minot markets, and will spend more money to push the ads statewide soon, he said.

The measure's sponsoring committee includes several lawmakers linked to the ultraconservative Bastiat Caucus, as well as several new GOP district chairmen. It has raised about \$45,000 in addition to contributions from the out-of-state group, campaign filings show.

Measure 1 would add a new article to the state constitution, effective Jan. 1, 2023, imposing term limits of eight cumulative years each in the House and Senate. The governor could not be elected more than twice. Term limits would not be retroactive, which means the service of current officeholders would not count against them.

The measure that voters will consider makes no mention of "term limits." Tillman said the ads will feature the term prominently.

North Dakota is the only state where term limits are on the ballot in November, and the only state at present where Tillman's group is actively pushing for them.

Fifteen states have term limits for lawmakers; 36 states have gubernatorial term limits.

U.S. Term Limits also helped fund a failed term-limit campaign in 1996 in North Dakota, contributing more than \$100,000 toward that effort.

Police: Shooter kills 5, including officer, in N. Carolina

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A shooter killed five people along a walking trail in North Carolina's capital city and eluded officers for hours before he was cornered in a home and arrested, police said.

An off-duty police officer was among those killed Thursday by the suspect, who police only described as a white, juvenile male. He was arrested around 9:37 p.m., authorities said. His identity and age weren't released. North Carolina law defines a juvenile as anyone under age 18.

The gunfire broke out around 5 p.m. along the Neuse River Greenway in a residential area northeast of downtown, Raleigh Mayor Mary-Ann Baldwin said. Officers from numerous law enforcement agencies swarmed the area, closing roads and warning residents to stay inside while they searched for the shooter.

Two people, including another police officer, were taken to hospitals. The officer was later released, but the other survivor remained in critical condition.

"Tonight, terror has reached our doorstep. The nightmare of every community has come to Raleigh. This is a senseless horrific and infuriating act of violence that has been committed," Gov. Roy Cooper told reporters.

Authorities didn't offer any details on a motive, but Baldwin joined Cooper in decrying the violence.

"We must stop this mindless violence in America, we must address gun violence," the mayor said. "We have much to do, and tonight we have much to mourn."

Early Friday, authorities searched a house a couple of streets over from where the shooting happened, WRAL-TV said.

The Raleigh shooting was the latest in a violent week across the country. Five people were killed Sunday in a shooting at a home in Inman, South Carolina. On Wednesday night two police officers were fatally shot in Connecticut after apparently being drawn into an ambush by an emergency call about possible domestic violence. Police officers have been shot this week in Greenville, Mississippi; Decatur, Illinois; Philadelphia, Las Vegas and central Florida. Two of those officers, one in Greenville and one Las Vegas, were killed.

Thursday's violence was the 25th mass killing in 2022 in which the victims were fatally shot, according to The Associated Press/USA TODAY/Northeastern University Mass Killings database. A mass killing is defined as when four or more people are killed excluding the perpetrator.

Brooke Medina, who lives in the neighborhood bordering the greenway, was driving home at around 5:15 p.m. when she saw about two dozen police cars, both marked and unmarked, race toward the residential area about 9 miles (14 kilometers) from Raleigh's downtown. She then saw ambulances speeding the other direction, toward the closest hospital.

She and her husband, who was working from home with their four children, started reaching out to neighbors and realized there was a shelter-in-place order.

The family closed all of their window blinds, locked the doors and congregated in an upstairs hallway together, said Medina, who works as a communications vice president at a think tank. The family listened to the police scanner and watched local news before going back downstairs once the danger seemed to

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have moved further away from their home.

"We're just going to hunker down for the rest of the night and be very vigilant. Keep all of our lights on, doors locked," she said.

She described the neighborhood known as Hedingham as a sprawling, dense, tree-lined community that's full of single-family homes, duplexes and townhomes that are more moderately priced compared to other parts of the Raleigh area.

Allison Greenawalt, 29, who also lives in the neighborhood, said she was sitting on the couch with her cat around 5 p.m. when she heard "three shots in a pretty rapid succession." She said police arrived quickly and that she's grateful that they were there during the chaotic hours while she sheltered inside. Her husband, meanwhile, tried to drive home from work after the shooting and was turned away by police who had closed nearby streets, and he didn't make it home until around 10:30 p.m., she said.

"I was sitting in our house with the lights turned off and the windows closed for the majority of the evening, just waiting to hear that" the shooter had been arrested, she said.

N. Korea fires missile, artillery shells, inflaming tensions

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea fired a ballistic missile and hundreds of artillery shells toward the sea Friday and flew warplanes near the tense border with South Korea, further raising animosities triggered by the North's recent barrage of weapons tests.

The North Korean moves suggest it is reviving an old playbook of stoking fears of war with provocative weapons tests before it seeks to win greater concessions from its rivals.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement the short-range missile lifted off from the North's capital region at 1:49 a.m. Friday (1649 GMT Thursday; 12:49 p.m. EDT Thursday) and flew toward its eastern waters.

It was North Korea's 15th missile launch since it resumed testing activities Sept. 25. North Korea said Monday its recent missile tests were simulations of nuclear strikes on South Korean and U.S. targets in response to their "dangerous" military exercises involving a U.S. aircraft carrier.

Soon after the latest missile test, North Korea fired 130 rounds of shells off its west coast and 40 rounds off its east coast. The shells fell inside maritime buffer zones the two Koreas established under a 2018 inter-Korean agreement on reducing tensions, South Korea's military said.

On Friday afternoon, South Korea's military said North Korea fired 80 additional shells off its east coast. It said it also detected signs of about 200 other North Korean artillery launches off its west coast, citing firing sounds and splashes. In both coasts, the North Korean shells were believed to have landed in the buffer zones again, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Observers said it was North Korea's third and most direct violation of the 2018 agreement, which created buffer zones and no-fly areas along their land and sea boundaries to prevent accidental clashes. South Korea's Defense Ministry said it earlier sent North Korea a message asking it not to violate the agreement again.

North Korea separately flew warplanes, presumably 10 aircraft, near the rivals' border late Thursday and early Friday, prompting South Korea to scramble fighter jets. There were no reports of clashes between the two countries. It was reportedly the first time that North Korean military aircraft have flown that close to the border since 2017.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said North Korea's provocations are becoming "indiscriminate" but that his country has massive retaliation capabilities that can deter actual North Korean assaults to some extent.

"The decision to attack can't be made without a willingness to risk a brutal outcome," Yoon told reporters. "The massive punishment and retaliation strategy, which is the final step of our three-axis strategy, would be a considerable psychological and social deterrence (for the North)."

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said Friday it imposed sanctions on 15 North Korean individuals and 16

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organizations suspected of involvement in illicit activities to finance North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs. They were Seoul's first unilateral sanctions on North Korea in five years, but observers say they are largely a symbolic step because the two Koreas have little financial dealings between them.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters he supports South Korea's decision to impose the sanctions.

Most of the North's recent weapons tests were ballistic missile launches that are banned by United Nations Security Council resolutions. But the North hasn't been slapped with fresh sanctions thanks to a divide at the U.N. over U.S. disputes with Russia regarding its invasion of Ukraine and with China over their strategic competition.

The missile launched Friday traveled 650-700 kilometers (403-434 miles) at a maximum altitude of 50 kilometers (30 miles) before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, according to South Korean and Japanese assessments.

"Whatever the intentions are, North Korea's repeated ballistic missile launches are absolutely impermissible and we cannot overlook its substantial advancement of missile technology," Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada said.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said in a statement that the U.S. commitment to the defense of South Korea and Japan remains "ironclad."

Other recent North Korean tests included a new intermediate-range missile that flew over Japan and demonstrated a potential range to reach the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam; long-range cruise missiles; and a ballistic missile fired from an inland reservoir, a first for the country.

After Wednesday's cruise missile launches, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his nuclear forces were fully prepared for "actual war to bring enemies under their control at a blow" and vowed to expand the operational realm of his nuclear armed forces, according to North Korea's state media.

Some observers had predicted North Korea would likely temporarily pause its testing activities this week in consideration of its ally China, which is set to begin a major political conference Sunday that is expected to give President Xi Jinping a third five-year term as party leader.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular briefing Friday that all related countries should work to prevent tensions from escalating and move toward restarting meaningful talks.

North Korea's ongoing testing spree is reminiscent of its 2017 torrid run of missile and nuclear tests that prompted Kim and then-U.S. President Donald Trump to exchange threats of total destruction. Kim later abruptly entered high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with Trump in 2018 but their negotiations fell apart a year later due to wrangling over how much sanctions relief Kim should be provided in return for a partial surrender of his nuclear capability.

Kim has repeatedly said he has no intentions of resuming nuclear diplomacy. But some experts say he would eventually want to win international recognition of his country as a nuclear state and hold arms control talks with the United State to wrest extensive sanctions relief and other concessions in return for partial denuclearization steps.

The urgency of North Korea's nuclear program has grown since it passed a law last month authorizing the preemptive use of nuclear weapons over a broad range of scenarios, including non-war situations when it may perceive its leadership as under threat.

Most of the recent North Korean tests were of short-range nuclear-capable missiles targeting South Korea. Some analysts say North Korea's possible upcoming nuclear test, its first bomb detonation in five years, would be related to efforts to manufacture battlefield tactical warheads to be placed on such short-range missiles.

These developments sparked security jitters in South Korea, with some politicians and scholars renewing their calls for the U.S. to redeploy its tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea as deterrence against intensifying North Korean nuclear threats.

North Korea's military early Friday said it took unspecified "strong military countermeasures" in response to South Korea's artillery fire for about 10 hours near the border on Thursday. South Korea's military later

confirmed it conducted artillery training at a frontline area but said its drills didn't violate the conditions of the 2018 agreement.

Maj. Gen. Kang Ho Pil of the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a televised statement that South Korea issued "a stern warning to (North Korea) to immediately halt" its weapons tests.

South Korea's military said it will begin an annual 12-day field training Monday to hone its operational capabilities under various scenarios of North Korean provocations. It said an unspecified number of U.S. troops plan to take part in this year's drills.

Russia to evacuate Kherson residents as Ukraine advances

By SABRA AYRES Associated Press

KYIV, UKRAINE (AP) — Russia has promised free accommodation to residents of Ukraine's partially occupied Kherson region who want to evacuate to Russia, a sign that Ukrainian military gains along the war's southern front are worrying the Kremlin.

The Moscow-installed leader of Kherson, one of four regions illegally annexed by Russian President Vladimir Putin last month, asked the Kremlin to organize an evacuation from four cities, citing incessant shelling by Ukrainian forces.

Vladimir Saldo, the head of the Moscow-appointed regional administration, said a decision was made to evacuate Kherson residents to the Russian regions of Rostov, Krasnodar and Stavropol, as well as to the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

"We, residents of the Kherson region, of course know that Russia doesn't abandon their own, and Russia always offers a hand," Saldo said Thursday.

Russia has characterized the movement of Ukrainians to Russia or Russian-controlled territory as voluntary, but in many cases those are the only evacuation routes residents of the occupied areas can or are allowed to take.

Reports have surfaced that some Ukrainians were forcibly deported to "filtration camps" with harsh conditions. In addition, an Associated Press investigation found that Russian officials deported thousands of Ukrainian children - some orphaned, others living with foster families or in institutions - to be raised as Russian.

As Ukrainian forces sustain counteroffensives in the country's east and south to recapture occupied areas, Russian troops have retreated from some areas they overran soon after invading the country in late February.

The Ukrainian gains and an Oct. 8 truck bomb explosion on a prized bridge linking Russia to Crimea have led to domestic criticism of the Kremlin's handling of the war and increased pressure on Putin to do more to turn the tide in Russia's favor.

The evacuation announcement came as Ukrainian forces pushed deeper into the Kherson region, albeit at a slower pace than a few weeks ago. Ukrainian forces reported retaking 75 settlements in the region in the last month, Ukraine's Ministry for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories said late Thursday night.

A similar campaign in eastern Ukraine resulted in 502 settlements in the Kharkiv region, 43 in the Donetsk region and seven in Luhansk region returning to Ukrainian control, the ministry said.

Putin illegally annexed Kherson, as well as the neighboring Zaporizhzhia region and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine last month following "referendums" in the four regions that Kyiv and the West denounced as a sham.

Gen. Valeriy Zaluzhny, the commander of Ukraine's armed forces, vowed Friday that his forces would succeed in "getting ours back."

"No one and nothing will stop us," Zaluzhny said in a video message. "We have buried the myth of the invincibility of the Russian army."

While reiterating calls for local residents to evacuate to Russia, Saldo's deputy, Kirill Stremousov, also insisted the evacuation preparations did not mean the Russian-installed officials anticipated Ukrainian

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forces taking all of the Kherson region.

"No one's retreating. ... No one is planning to leave the territory of the Kherson region," he said.

Early Friday, Russia continued missile strikes on critical infrastructure that started Monday in retaliation for the explosion on the Moscow-funded bridge that links Crimea to the Russian mainland.

In the last 24 hours, at least nine civilians were killed and 15 were wounded, the Ukrainian president's office reported Friday morning. The victims included seven people who died after a missile strike in the city of Mykolaiv, where a residential building was destroyed, the regional governor, Vitaliy Kim, said.

Multiple Russian missile strikes shook the city of Zaporizhzhia overnight. The capital of the annexed region remains in Ukrainian hands and has come under repeated bombardment as Ukraine pushes its southern counteroffensive.

Several explosions were reported overnight at infrastructure facilities, causing fires, regional Gov, Oleksandr Starukh said. There were no victims in preliminary reports, and further details about specific damage were unavailable.

Starukh told Ukrainian state television that Russian soldiers remained unable to enter the city but their "missiles remind us of the evil and grief that the army of the occupiers carries."

In addition to the missile strikes on the regional capital, there was also shelling in three cities closer to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. In Nikopol, Marhanets, Chervonohryhorivka, drone and artillery strikes destroyed residential buildings and damaged water supply and power lines.

The regional capital is about 100 miles by road from the plant, the largest nuclear power plant in Europe. Two days ago, it was forced to revert to diesel-fueled generator power to maintain its reactor cooling systems after an Russian missile attack on distant electrical substation.

Friday is Defender's Day in Ukraine, but celebrations were muted because of the war. In Kyiv, a concert at the central opera house was canceled because of planned, rotating power outages across the city as repairs to the city's energy infrastructure continue following Russia's wide-ranging missile attacks.

Missile, drone and rocket attacks on Ukraine have kept the country on edge with air raid sirens occurring more frequently and bringing a heightened sense of urgency after Monday's strike killed 19 people and wounded more than 100, including many in the capital.

Putin has vowed to retaliate harshly if Ukraine or its allies strike Russian territory, including the annexed regions of Ukraine. Russian officials reported Friday that Ukrainian shelling blew up an ammunition depot in Russia's Belgorod region on the border with Ukraine.

An unspecified number of people were killed and wounded in the incident, according to Russia's Investigative Committee. Unconfirmed media reports said three Russian National Guard officers were killed and more than 10 were wounded.

UK prime minister calls press conference amid U-turn calls

By DANICA KIRKA and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Embattled British Prime Minister Liz Truss scheduled a hastily arranged news conference on Friday, after her Treasury chief dashed back to London for urgent talks on an economic package that sparked market turmoil.

Truss' office did not disclose the subject of the press conference, but she and Treasury chief Kwasi Kwarteng are under intense pressure to scale back unfunded tax cuts in order to calm financial markets and quell a snowballing revolt by members of their own Conservative Party,

Kwarteng left the International Monetary Fund's annual meeting a day early amid the crisis triggered by investor concerns that 43 billion pounds (\$48 billion) of tax cuts will push public borrowing in Britain to unsustainable levels and fuel inflation.

Kwarteng on Thursday initially rejected suggestions that the government would reverse course, but in a later interview with The Daily Telegraph he said only "let's see" when asked if he might ditch his promise on corporation tax.

Senior members of the Conservative party are publicly advising the government to take action. The

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pound rose as much as 1.7% against the dollar on Thursday and bond markets stabilized amid expectations that Truss and Kwarteng, whose formal title is chancellor of the Exchequer, will revise their economic growth plan.

"So my advice to the chancellor would firmly be, do it, do it now," Mel Stride, chairman of the House of Commons Treasury Committee, told the BBC. "Make sure it's something significant, not just nibbling at the edges but something that's going to be firm, bold and convincing, and do it as soon as possible."

Truss, a free-market libertarian, came to power last month pledging to cut taxes to spur growth. But her ability to deliver on that commitment is now in doubt.

Analysts suggest the most likely change in her program would be to abandon a promise to halt her predecessor's plan to increase corporation tax from 19% to 25%. That would reduce the bill for her program by about 18 billion pounds a year.

James Athey, the investment director at abrdn, said that it now seemed certain that the government "is about to U-turn on its decision not to U-turn on its profligate tax-cutting policies." The rumors are calming markets, he said.

"The risk now is that investors have forgotten that there are significantly more problems than just an ill-advised and ill-timed fiscal easing to deal with," he said. "Inflation is at multi-decade highs, government borrowing is huge as is the current account deficit. The housing market is likely to suffer a hammer blow from the jump in mortgage rates and the war in Ukraine rumbles on. We may well be through the worst of the volatility but I fear that the U.K. is nowhere near out of the woods."

Kwarteng's return to London comes as Conservative lawmakers agonize over whether to try to oust their second leader this year. Truss was elected last month to replace Boris Johnson, who was forced out in July. Some reports suggest senior Conservatives are plotting to replace Truss with a joint ticket of Rishi Sunak and Penny Mordaunt, her two closest rivals in the summer contest for leadership of the party, though it's unclear how that could be achieved.

As the causes of US inflation grow, so do the dangers

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — What keeps driving inflation so high? The answer, it seems, is nearly everything.

Supply chain snarls and parts shortages inflated the cost of factory goods when the economy rocketed out of the pandemic recession two years ago. Then it was a surge in consumer spending fueled by federal stimulus checks. Then Russia's invasion of Ukraine disrupted gas and food supplies and sent those prices skyward.

Since March, the Federal Reserve has been aggressively raising interest rates to try to cool the price spikes. So far, there's little sign of progress. Thursday's report on consumer prices in September came in hotter than expected even as some previously big drivers of inflation — gas prices, used cars — fell for a third straight month.

Consumer prices, excluding volatile food and energy costs, skyrocketed 6.6% from a year ago — the fastest such pace in four decades. Overall inflation did decline a touch, mostly because of cheaper gas. But costlier food, medical care and housing pointed to a widening of price pressures across the economy.

High inflation has now spread well beyond physical goods to the nation's vast service sector, which includes everything from dental care and apartment rents to auto repairs and hotel rates. The broadening of inflation makes it harder to tame. Thursday's report underscored that the Fed may have to jack up its key short-term rate even higher than had been expected — and keep it there longer — to curb inflation.

Such action would mean even higher loan rates for consumers and businesses. It could also cause recessions in both the U.S. and global economies, international financial officials warn. Higher U.S. rates encourage investors to pull money from foreign markets and invest it in U.S. assets for a higher return, a shift that can cause upheaval in overseas economies.

Here's what's driving persistent inflation and what it means:

SPENDING STILL HOLDING UP — FOR SOME

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Consumers, on the whole, are still managing to spend more, even though average wage gains over the past year haven't kept up with inflation. Many businesses, particularly larger corporations, have taken advantage of rising wages and increased consumer savings from government stimulus checks to raise their prices.

PepsiCo, for example, said Wednesday that while purchases by volume fell 1% in the third quarter of the year, it was able to boost prices 17% without losing customers.

"We obviously exited the third quarter with the consumer still very healthy in terms of our particular categories," the company's chief financial officer, Hugh Johnston, told investors.

Still, for many Americans, declining wages (after adjusting for inflation) could eventually slow demand and help force companies to lower prices.

Already there are signs that some Americans, particularly lower-income families, are balking at inflated prices. Sales of used cars fell over the summer. One major car dealer, the CarMax chain, blamed "vehicle affordability challenges that stem from widespread inflationary pressures, as well as climbing interest rates" for the decline.

At the same time, Jonathan Smoke, chief economist at Cox Automotive, said that many higher-income consumers have stepped into the used car market, offsetting at least some of the loss from previous buyers.

"We see increases in higher-income households buying used vehicles," Smoke said. "The profile of who's buying used is a dramatically upper-scale type of customer."

SERVICES INFLATION TAKES OVER

Rising prices can often lead consumers to switch their spending to other things, rather than cutting back overall. Right now, for instance, Americans are switching more of their spending from physical goods to services. And that shift is evident in the categories where prices are rising.

"Most people in America spend pretty much their whole budget anyway," said Eric Swanson, an economics professor at the University of California, Irvine. "So the money's going to get spent, it's just a question of what it's going to get spent on."

In September, the price of one major service — restaurant meals — jumped 8.5% from a year earlier. It was the largest such increase in 41 years. Likewise, Delta and American Airlines are reporting strong revenue gains as more Americans show willingness to spend on travel.

Yet restaurants, airlines and hotels all still have far fewer workers than they did before the pandemic. With demand healthy, companies in those industries have been forced to provide hefty pay raises to attract or keep workers. Those raises are often then passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices — a cycle that feeds inflation.

Many other services are also reporting big price increases, including health care, car insurance, veterinarian services and dentists' visits. Eye care and eyeglasses jumped 3.2% from August to September, the sharpest increase for that category on record.

HOUSING PRICES DEFY FED

The Fed's rate hikes have led to vastly higher mortgage rates, which have contributed to a 20% plunge in home sales from a year ago. Once-hot home prices even fell in July on a monthly basis, according to the most recent data from the S&P Case-Shiller home price index.

Apartment rental costs are also starting to slow, according to real time data from ApartmentList and Zillow. Yet in Thursday's inflation report, one key measure of housing costs jumped 0.8% from August to September. It was the largest monthly increase in 32 years. The divergence occurred because the government's rent gauge operates with a significant lag: It tracks all rent payments — not just those for new leases — and most of them don't change from month to month. Economists say it could be a year or more before the declines in new leases feed through to government data.

WILL THE FED CAUSE A RECESSION?

That's the biggest fear overhanging the economy. Chair Jerome Powell and other Fed officials have said that they will base their policies only on changes in the government's inflation data, rather than in response to data from other sources.

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Yet that sets up a high-risk challenge for the central bank: Will it keep hiking rates, or leave them at high levels, if forward-looking data suggests that rental costs are declining?

For now, the Fed is willing to err on the side of continuing to raise borrowing rates. According to the minutes of its last meeting in September, policymakers "emphasized that the cost of taking too little action to bring down inflation likely outweighed the cost of taking too much action."

FED PREPARED TO WEAKEN ECONOMY FOR A 'FEW YEARS'

At their most recent meeting in late September, Fed officials warned that their rate hikes would likely slow the economy for an extended period, with growth coming in at "a below-trend pace in this and the coming few years" and unemployment likely rising.

Among central bank officials, Loretta Mester, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, this week sounded one of the hardest-line notes when she suggested that "it will take a couple of years before inflation returns to the Fed's 2% goal."

"We cannot say that inflation has even peaked yet," Mester said.

Jan. 6 panel subpoenas Trump, shows startling new video

By LISA MASCARO, FARNOUSH AMIRI, ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Jan. 6 committee voted unanimously to subpoena former President Donald Trump, demanding his personal testimony as it unveiled startling new video and described his multi-part plan to overturn his 2020 election loss, which led to his supporters' fierce assault on the U.S. Capitol.

With alarming messages from the U.S. Secret Service warning of violence and vivid new video of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other congressional leaders pleading for help, the panel on Thursday showed the raw desperation at the Capitol. Using language frequently seen in criminal indictments, the panel said Trump had acted in a "premeditated" way before Jan. 6, 2021, despite countless aides and officials telling him he had lost.

Trump is almost certain to fight the subpoena and decline to testify. On his social media outlet he blasted members for not asking him earlier — though he didn't say he would have complied — and called the panel "a total BUST."

"We must seek the testimony under oath of January 6's central player," said Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the committee's vice chair, ahead of the vote.

In the committee's 10th public session, just weeks before the congressional midterm elections, the panel summed up Trump's "staggering betrayal" of his oath of office, as Chairman Bennie Thompson put it, describing the then-president's unprecedented attempt to stop Congress from certifying Democrat Joe Biden's victory.

While the effort to subpoena Trump may languish, more a nod to history than an effective summons, the committee has made clear it is considering whether to send its findings in a criminal referral to the Justice Department.

In one of its most riveting exhibits, the panel showed previously unseen footage of congressional leaders phoning for help during the assault as Trump refused to call off the mob.

Pelosi can be seen on a call with the governor of neighboring Virginia, explaining as she shelters with Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer and others that the governor of Maryland has also been contacted. Later, the video shows Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell and other GOP leaders as the group asks the Defense Department for help.

"They're breaking the law in many different ways," Pelosi says at one point. "And quite frankly, much of it at the instigation of the president of the United States."

The footage also portrays Vice President Mike Pence — not Trump — stepping in to help calm the violence, telling Pelosi and the others he has spoken with Capitol Police, as Congress plans to resume its session that night to certify Biden's election.

The video was from Pelosi's daughter, Alexandra, a documentary filmmaker.

In never-before-seen Secret Service messages, the panel produced evidence that extremist groups pro-

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vided the muscle in the fight for Trump's presidency, planning weeks before the attack to send a violent force to Washington.

The Secret Service warned in a Dec. 26, 2020, email of a tip that members of the right-wing Proud Boys planned to outnumber the police in a march in Washington on Jan. 6.

"It felt like the calm before the storm," one Secret Service agent wrote in a group chat.

To describe the president's mindset, the committee presented new and previously seen material, including interviews with Trump's top aides and Cabinet officials — including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Attorney General William Barr and Labor Secretary Eugene Scalia — in which some described the president acknowledging he had lost.

Ex-White House official Alyssa Farah Griffin said Trump once looked up at a television and said, "Can you believe I lost to this (expletive) guy?"

Cabinet members also said in interviews shown at the hearing that they believed that once legal avenues had been exhausted, that should have been the end of Trump's efforts to remain in power.

"In my view, that was the end of the matter," Barr said of the Dec. 14 vote of the Electoral College.

But rather than the end of Trump's efforts, it was only the beginning — as the president summoned the crowd to Washington on Jan. 6.

The panel showed clips of Trump at his rally near the White House that day saying the opposite of what he had been told. He then tells supporters he will march with them to the Capitol. That never happened.

"There is no defense that Donald Trump was duped or irrational," said Cheney. "No president can defy the rule of law and act this way in our constitutional republic, period."

Thursday's hearing opened at a mostly empty Capitol complex, with most lawmakers at home campaigning. Several people who were among the thousands around the Capitol on Jan. 6 are now running for congressional office, some with Trump's backing. Police officers who fought the mob filled the hearing room's front row.

The House panel said the insurrection at the Capitol was not an isolated incident but a warning of the fragility of the nation's democracy in the post-Trump era.

"None of this is normal," Cheney said.

Along with interviews, the committee is drawing on the trove of 1.5 million pages of documents it received from the Secret Service, including an email from Dec. 11, 2020, the day the Supreme Court rejected one of the main lawsuits Trump's team had brought against the election results.

"Just fyi. POTUS is pissed," the Secret Service message said.

White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson, a top aide to then-chief of staff Mark Meadows, recalled Trump being "fired up" about the court's ruling.

Trump told Meadows "something to the effect of: 'I don't want people to know we lost, Mark. This is embarrassing. Figure it out,'" Hutchinson told the panel in a recorded interview.

Thursday's session served as a closing argument for the panel's two Republican lawmakers, Cheney of Wyoming and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, who have essentially been shunned by Trump and their party and will not be returning in the new Congress. Cheney lost her primary election, and Kinzinger decided not to run.

The committee, having conducted more than 1,000 interviews and obtained countless documents, has produced a sweeping probe of Trump's activities from his defeat in the November election to the Capitol attack.

Under committee rules, the Jan. 6 panel is to produce a report of its findings, likely in December. The committee will dissolve 30 days after publication of that report, and with the new Congress in January.

At least five people died in the Jan. 6 attack and its aftermath, including a Trump supporter shot and killed by Capitol Police.

More than 850 people have been charged by the Justice Department, some receiving lengthy prison sentences for their roles. Several leaders and associates of the extremist Oath Keepers and Proud Boys have been charged with sedition.

Trump faces various state and federal investigations over his actions in the election and its aftermath.

Fighting food poisoning: Sweeping poultry changes proposed

By DAVID PITT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The U.S. Department of Agriculture on Friday proposed sweeping changes in the way chicken and turkey meat is processed that are intended to reduce illnesses from food contamination but could require meat companies to make extensive changes to their operations.

Despite decades of efforts to try and reduce illnesses caused by salmonella in food, more than 1 million people are sickened every year and nearly a fourth of those cases come from turkey and chicken meat.

As it stands, consumers bear much of the responsibility for avoiding illness from raw poultry by handling it carefully in the kitchen — following the usual advice to not wash raw chicken or turkey (it spreads the bacteria), using separate utensils when preparing meat and cooking to 165 degrees. The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service wants to do something about it by starting with the farmers that raise the birds and following through the processing plant where the meat is made.

Their food poisoning target: Of the more than 2,500 salmonella serotypes, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified three that cause a third of all human illnesses from chicken and turkey products. The agency proposes limiting the presence of these on poultry products.

In 1994, the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service took a similar step by declaring some strains of E. coli a contaminant in ground beef and launched a testing program for the pathogen which has significantly reduced illnesses from the meat.

In an effort to curtail salmonella outbreaks in poultry, the agency is proposing a regulatory framework that would include testing incoming flocks of chickens and turkeys for the bacterial disease that commonly affects the intestinal tract and affects 1.3 million people annually with symptoms that may include diarrhea, nausea and vomiting which could last for several days. Officials hope testing chickens and turkeys before they enter the slaughterhouse will encourage farmers to adopt practices that reduce the bacterial infection on the bird before they reach the point of meat processing.

A second measure would require enhanced monitoring for salmonella during processing by adopting sampling for the bacteria at multiple stages inside the processing facility. The third major change would be to establish a maximum level of bacterial contamination allowed and possibly limiting the three specific types of salmonella that can make people sick. Meat that would exceed the limits or that would contain the types of salmonella prohibited could be withheld from the market.

The FSIS will begin a lengthy process of proposing new rules by holding a public hearing on Nov. 3 to get input from the poultry industry and others. The government's goal is to come up with new rules and regulations that could be rolled out beginning next year and completed within two years.

The agency said it is taking its time to roll out these ideas and get input before establishing firm regulations. The agency hopes to begin rulemaking in mid-2023 and complete it in two years, said USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety Sandra Eskin.

"We know this is quite a pivot from where the agency has been historically and for that reason we're trying to be as transparent and deliberative and collaborative as possible," Eskin said.

Consumer advocates have pushed for such action on poultry products for years. Eskin said the administration of President Joe Biden is pushing to make the changes.

Seattle-based lawyer Bill Marler, one of the nation's leading lawyers to represent consumers sickened by food sources applauded the agency's action which recognizes that controlling salmonella on animals before they reach processing plants is crucial to reducing meat contamination. He said FSIS should be bold and deem salmonella is a adulterant — a contaminant that can cause food-borne illness — in all meat as a starting point.

"What they've outlined is something that's really unique that they have not ever done before but it doesn't have a time line and doesn't have regulations attached that would show it's actually going to be accomplished. That's my criticism," he said.

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The industry has been unable to meet government targets for reducing food-borne salmonella infections for a couple of decades. Meeting the new target set for 2030 of 11.5 infections per 100,000 people a year would require a 25% reduction, Eskin said.

Eskin said the industry has managed to reduce the number of chicken samples contaminated with salmonella by 50% from 2017 to 2021, but the rate of salmonella illnesses over the last two decades has not significantly declined. More than 23% of foodborne salmonella illnesses are attributable to poultry consumption with nearly 17% coming from chicken meat and more than 6% from turkey meat.

The North American Meat Institute, the trade association representing U.S. packers and processors of beef, pork, lamb, veal and turkey said efforts to combat salmonella are a high priority.

"We are encouraged to see FSIS is going through the regular rulemaking process. We look forward to reviewing the proposal and providing comment from the industry," said Julie Anna Potts, the group's president and CEO.

A spokeswoman for the National Chicken Council, which represents the companies that raise and process chickens for meat said they support efforts to reduce salmonella on chicken products.

"We are concerned that the proposed framework currently lacks industry input, research and data to support it," said Ashley Peterson, senior vice president of scientific and regulatory affairs for the group.

DACA program's fate again before judge who ruled it illegal

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A federal judge is set to again consider the fate of a program that prevents the deportation of hundreds of thousands of immigrants brought to the United States as children.

U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen last year declared the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program illegal.

Last week, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said he should take another look at DACA following revisions adopted by the Biden administration in August that were created to improve its chances of surviving legal scrutiny.

Hanen has scheduled a hearing Friday to meet with attorneys and discuss the next steps in the decade-long legal fight.

Hanen will likely ask lawyers for more information on the new DACA regulation, according to Nina Perales, an attorney with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund who will be representing DACA recipients at Friday's hearing.

"It's a safe bet the judge is going to call for more filings and more legal arguments because he now has to take up the question of the legality of the Biden administration regulation," Perales said.

But a timetable for how quickly those arguments need to be made and when Hanen would issue a final ruling will remain unclear until Friday's hearing, Perales said. The new regulation is set to take effect Oct. 31.

Several advocacy groups planned to attend the hearing and gather outside the federal courthouse on Friday.

Hanen last year declared DACA illegal after Texas and eight other Republican-leaning states filed a lawsuit claiming they are harmed financially, incurring hundreds of millions of dollars in health care, education and other costs, when immigrants are allowed to remain in the country illegally. They also argued that the White House overstepped its authority by granting immigration benefits that are for Congress to decide.

"Only Congress has the ability to write our nation's immigration laws," Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said Thursday in a statement.

Hanen found DACA had not been subjected to public notice and comment periods required under the federal Administrative Procedures Act. But he left the Obama-era program intact for those already benefiting from it, pending the appeal. There were 611,270 people enrolled in DACA at the end of March.

A three-judge panel of the New Orleans-based appeals court upheld Hanen's initial finding but sent the case back to Hanen so he could review the impact of the federal government's new DACA regulation.

The new rule's 453 pages are largely technical and represent little substantive change from the 2012

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memo that created DACA, but it was subject to public comments as part of a formal rule-making process.

But even if Hanen were to issue a positive ruling on the new DACA regulation, the judge might still decide the program is illegal because it was not created by Congress, Perales said.

"Which is why so many right now are calling on Congress to act," she said.

After last week's appeals court ruling, President Joe Biden and advocacy groups renewed their calls for Congress to pass permanent protections for "Dreamers," which is what people protected by DACA are commonly called. Congress has failed multiple times to pass proposals called the DREAM Act to protect DACA recipients.

Whatever Hanen decides, DACA is expected to go to the Supreme Court for a third time. In 2016, the Supreme Court deadlocked 4-4 over an expanded DACA and a version of the program for parents of DACA recipients. In 2020, the high court ruled 5-4 that the Trump administration improperly ended DACA, allowing it to stay in place.

Poor nations to demand climate justice, finance at UN summit

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — The chair of an influential negotiating bloc in the upcoming United Nations climate summit in Egypt has called for compensation for poorer countries suffering from climate change to be high up on the agenda.

Madeleine Diouf Sarr, who chairs the Least Developed Countries group, told The Associated Press that the November conference — known as COP27 — should "capture the voice and needs of the most climate-vulnerable nations and deliver climate justice."

Sarr said the group would like to see "an agreement to establish a dedicated financial facility" that pays nations that are already facing the effects of climate change at the summit.

The LDC group, comprised of 46 nations that make up just a small fraction of global emissions, negotiates as a bloc at the U.N. summit to champion the interests of developing countries. Issues such as who pays for poorer nations to transition to cleaner energy, making sure no communities get left behind in an energy transition and boosting how well vulnerable people can adapt to climate change have long been on the bloc's agenda.

Developing nations still face serious challenges accessing clean energy finance, with Africa attracting just 2% of the total clean energy investment in the last 20 years, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency. The U.N. weather agency recently estimated that global clean energy supplies must double by 2030 for the world to limit global warming within the set targets.

Sarr added that the bloc will push for funds to help developing countries adapt to droughts, floods and other climate-related events as well as urging developed nations to speed up their plans to reduce emissions. The group is particularly vulnerable to climate change because of their lack of ability to adapt to extremes, the U.N. weather agency said.

"We have delayed climate action for too long," Sarr said, pointing to the promised \$100 billion a year in climate aid for poorer countries that was pledged over a decade ago.

"We can no longer afford to have a COP that is 'all talk.' The climate crisis has pushed our adaptation limits, resulted in inevitable loss and damage, and delayed our much-needed development," added Sarr.

The COP27 President also said this year's summit should be about implementing plans and pledges that countries have agreed to at previous conferences.

Sarr defended the U.N. conference as "one of the few spaces where our nations come together to hold countries accountable for historical responsibility" and pointed to the success of the 2015 conference in Paris in setting the goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees C (2.7 F).

Xi's power in China grows after unforeseen rise to dominance

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — When Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, it wasn't clear what kind of leader he would be.

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His low-key persona during a steady rise through the ranks of the long-ruling Communist Party gave no hint that he would evolve into one of modern China's most dominant leaders, or that he would put the economically and militarily ascendant country on a collision course with the U.S.-led international order.

Xi is all but certain to be given a third five-year term as party leader at the end of a major party congress that opens Sunday — a break with an unofficial two-term limit that other recent leaders had followed. What's not clear is how long he will remain in power, and what that means for China and the world.

"I see Xi having his way at the 20th congress, mostly. It is a question of how much more powerful he will be coming out of it," said Steve Tsang, director of the China Institute at the London University School of Oriental and African Studies. "He is not coming out looking weaker."

He has already amassed and centralized power over the past 10 years in ways that far surpass his immediate predecessors, Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, and even rival the Communist Party's two other dominating leaders — Mao Zedong, who led the country until his death in 1976, and Deng Xiaoping, who launched China in 1978 on its rise from poverty to become the world's second largest economy.

One of Xi's signature policies has been an anti-corruption campaign that has been popular with the public and conveniently enabled him to sideline potential rivals. A former justice minister and a former deputy public security minister received suspended death sentences last month.

The continuing anti-corruption campaign, Tsang said, shows that "anyone who stands in his way will be crushed."

Xi, 69, had the right pedigree to climb to the top. He enjoyed a privileged early youth in Beijing as the son of Xi Zhongxun, a former vice premier and guerrilla commander in the civil war that brought Mao's communists to power in 1949.

His family, though, fell afoul of the capriciousness of Mao's rule during the anarchy of the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution, which banished intellectuals to the countryside and subjected many to public humiliation and brutal beatings in the name of class struggle.

His father was jailed and Xi, at the age of 15, was sent to live in a poor rural village in Shaanxi province in 1969 as part of Mao's campaign to have educated urban young people learn from peasants. He lived as villagers did in a hut carved into the area's cliffs.

The experience is said to have toughened Xi and given him an understanding of the struggles of the rural population. He stayed in the village for six years, until receiving a coveted scholarship to prestigious Tsinghua University in Beijing.

"Knives are sharpened on the stone. People are refined through hardship," Xi told a Chinese magazine in 2001. "Whenever I later encountered trouble, I'd just think of how hard it had been to get things done back then and nothing would then seem difficult."

After university, Xi began his climb up the bureaucratic ranks with a three-year stint in the Defense Ministry. He then was made party chief of a county south of Beijing before spending 17 years in Fujian province, starting as vice mayor of the city of Xiamen in 1985 and rising through a series of posts to governor of the province in 2000.

A first marriage fell apart after three years, and in 1987 he married his current wife, Peng Liyuan, a well-known singer and an officer in the People's Liberation Army's song and dance troupe. They have one daughter, Xi Mingze, who studied at Harvard University and has no public role in Chinese politics.

Alfred Wu, who covered Xi for Chinese state media in Fujian, remembers him as quiet and low-profile, saying he wasn't as assertive as he has become as national leader.

"Nowadays, Xi Jinping is totally different from Xi Jinping as a governor," said Wu, now an associate professor of public policy at the National University of Singapore.

Xi was moved to neighboring Zhejiang province in 2002, where he was party leader for more than four years, the top position outranking the governor. He then briefly was made party secretary in nearby Shanghai in 2007, after his predecessor fell in a corruption scandal.

Over his time in Fujian, Zhejiang and Shanghai, Xi was seen mainly as a pragmatist who didn't originate bold proposals but generally backed the economic reforms that Deng had initiated and benefited in par-

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ticular coastal areas such as those three jurisdictions.

He also spoke out against corruption as governor in Fujian after a major smuggling scandal, a hint perhaps of the national crackdown that came after his rise to the top.

Xi was thrust into the national leadership in 2007. That's when he joined the all-powerful Standing Committee of the Communist Party's Politburo, a prelude to being named to the top position at the next congress in 2012.

Xi has taken control of economic and military matters and had his name enshrined in the party constitution alongside Mao by adding a reference to his ideology — Xi Jinping Thought.

The ideology is vague but emphasizes reviving the party's mission as China's political, economic, social and cultural leader and its central role in achieving the goal of "national rejuvenation," the restoration of the country to a position of prominence in the world.

His government has increased the role of state industry while launching anti-monopoly and data security crackdowns on high-flying private sector firms including e-commerce giant Alibaba Group and Tencent Holding, the owner of the popular WeChat messaging service.

Xi has also revived a 1950's propaganda slogan "common prosperity" in a nod to a burgeoning gap between the rich and the poor, though it's unclear if the government plans any major initiatives to address that.

With the economy sagging from pandemic-era restrictions and a government crackdown on spiraling real estate debt, concern is rising that Xi is engineering a shift away from Deng's strategy of "reform and opening up" that delivered four decades of growth.

Wu views Xi as a disciple of Mao rebelling against Deng, who allowed the private sector to flourish and sought positive relations with the West. "He's really anti-U.S. and anti-West," Wu said.

Xi's more confrontational approach stems from a belief that now is the time for a stronger China to play a larger role in international affairs and stand up to outside pressure.

Xi has antagonized Japan, India and other Asian neighbors by pressing claims to disputed islands in the South and East China Seas, and territory high up in the Himalayas. He has also ramped up military and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan, the island democracy that the Communist Party says belongs to China.

Relations with the U.S. have tumbled to their lowest level since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1979, with the Biden administration maintaining tariffs imposed by former President Donald Trump and blocking Chinese access to important American technologies.

If anyone in the party leadership thinks that Xi is leading the country in the wrong direction, though, it's hard to decipher, given China's opaque political system and control of the media.

"We have no idea whether people at the very top think Xi Jinping is performing poorly or not," said Joseph Torigan, a Chinese politics expert at American University in Washington.

Within China, the Communist Party under Xi has increased surveillance, tightened already strict control over speech and media and cracked down further on dissent, censoring even mildly critical views and jailing those it believes went too far.

Authorities have detained an estimated million or more members of predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in China's Xinjiang region in a harsh anti-extremism campaign that has been labeled genocide by the U.S. In Hong Kong, Xi's government responded to massive protests with a tough national security law that has eliminated political opposition and altered the once-freewheeling nature of the city.

Xi is facing a challenge to his government's harsh "zero-COVID" policies, which have taken an economic and human toll. Small groups of residents staged protests during a two-month lockdown in Shanghai earlier this year.

In a rare political protest, someone hung banners from an elevated highway in Beijing this week calling for freedom, not lockdowns, and worker and student strikes to force Xi out. They were quickly removed, police deployed and any mention of the incident speedily wiped from the internet.

The government has stuck with the policy, which earlier was seen as a success as COVID-19 ravaged other parts of the world. Although there is simmering dissatisfaction, particularly as life returns to normal

in other parts of the world, most people don't dare to speak out.

Orphan watched dad die, now awaits future in Ukraine shelter

By LORI HINNANT, JUSTIN SPIKE and VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

IZIUM, Ukraine (AP) — One building in the recaptured but devastated Ukrainian town of Iziium is filled with those at the end of their lives. It reeks of unwashed sheets and unbathed skin and needs more heat to fend off the approaching winter. Despair weighs on its occupants like a blanket and the sound of weeping echoes in its rooms.

Now an orphan wanders the cold hallways among the elderly and infirm, his eyes firmly upon the phone in his hand. Until a few days ago, 13-year-old Bohdan had a father. Now he has no one.

Bohdan's father wasted away for weeks in the corridor room of a shelter for the injured and homeless before stomach cancer finally claimed him on Oct 3. During every dwindling waking moment at the end of his life, Mykola Svyryd worried about his son.

"He runs to me and says, 'Papa, I love you.' I tell him, 'Who else could you love?'" said Svyryd, cheeks sunken and skin pale, in a bedside interview only a few days before his death at 70. "His mother is dead, his father is old. ... When his father is gone, I won't know if there is someone with him and where they will send him."

The small compound in the eastern town opened in January as a rehabilitation center for people recovering from surgeries or injury. When the war started a month later, Russian forces quickly engulfed the town. Within a matter of weeks, airstrikes, artillery and fires had left their mark on nearly every building.

Those who didn't have the means to flee the city quickly enough cowered in its basements, surviving — but only just — without electricity, gas or running water. In early September, a Ukrainian counteroffensive swept through the Kharkiv region, sending the Russians into a disorganized retreat from Iziium and other towns.

But their departure did little to lessen the deprivation in Iziium. The 39 people sleeping in the rehab center have nowhere else to go. They are infirm and impoverished, their homes are destroyed, and the rest of their families are dead or gone.

The realization of all that is what brings on the tears.

And this is how Mykola Svyryd and Bohdan ended up here. Svyryd was already dying when the war started, and cancer had taken Bohdan's mother two years earlier.

The boy himself was born with a brain injury that his father had hoped doctors could eventually treat with surgery. Between timid glances and shy smiles, Bohdan says little, only a few short words at a time.

"He was born disabled. He never went to school. I taught him to read a little, to write numbers and letters," Svyryd said of his son.

A retired former worker in a factory that made eyeglass lenses, Svyryd sheltered with his son from the Russian assault on the town, which had blown out all the windows in their apartment. Neighbors helped where they could as his health gradually failed.

"We had to sit in a basement for three months. When we came out, my health became worse and worse. And then my legs stopped working," Svyryd said. By the time he spoke to AP reporters, he was bedridden and emaciated, his voice barely rising above a whisper.

Bohdan embraced his father tenderly and often in the older man's last days. He whispers along with Ukrainian pop music and plays small-screen video games as avidly as any teen.

He seems to find nothing odd about being the only child in a building filled with the elderly, but nor does he particularly interact with them. Standing in a knit cap and blue hooded parka beneath the trees in the rehab center's small front courtyard, he shuffles about uncertainly.

Svyryd was buried in a simple grave in a cemetery on the outskirts of Iziium, a wooden cross and colorful bouquet of artificial flowers marking his final resting place.

Since his father's death, Bohdan has often sat in the room they shared at the shelter, staring out distantly. He sleeps elsewhere in the shelter now, and the staff hope that a new environment will dull his pain a little.

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The surgery that had been postponed because of war and his father's illness is finally scheduled for the coming days. Ultimately, Bohdan will go up for adoption, one more Ukrainian orphan among so many. But sometimes, he still asks where his father is.

Black leaders rebuke Tuberville stance on reparations, crime

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

As far as Jeremy Ellis is concerned, Republican Tommy Tuberville should know or learn more about the long history and struggles of the Black Alabama residents he represents in the U.S. Senate.

Tuberville told people Saturday at an election rally in Nevada that Democrats support reparations for the descendants of enslaved people because "they think the people that do the crime are owed that."

His remarks — seen by many as racist and stereotyping Black Americans as people committing crimes — cut deeply for some, especially in and around Africatown, a community in Mobile, Alabama, that was founded by descendants of Africans who were illegally smuggled into the United States in 1860 aboard a schooner called the Clotilda.

The 2019 discovery of the vessel in the muddy waters near Mobile offers the best argument for reparations of some type to the descendants of the enslaved people who survived the long and arduous Atlantic crossing.

"I think that Sen. Tuberville's comments were misinformed, ignorant in nature and an embarrassment for the state of Alabama," said Ellis, who now lives in Marietta, Georgia, and is president of the Clotilda Descendants Association.

Before running for the U.S. Senate, Tuberville spent four decades in coaching, including 11 years as the head coach at Auburn University, which is about a three-hour drive northeast of Mobile.

Ellis graduated in 2003 from Auburn's engineering school and said he attended all of the football team's home games while at Auburn. Ellis also said he served as a student assistant for the team under Tuberville.

"I think it would suit Sen. Tuberville to visit Africatown," Ellis said. "It's an area he is extremely familiar with since he recruited a number of his players there when he was head football coach."

Tuberville's remarks about the Democratic Party's response to perceived rising crime across the nation come just weeks before the Nov. 8 general election, as Republicans seek to regain control of Congress.

"They're not soft on crime," Tuberville said of Democrats. "They're pro-crime. They want crime. They want crime because they want to take over what you got. They want to control what you have. They want reparation because they think the people that do the crime are owed that."

The first-term senator has not publicly responded to backlash from his words, which have revived the national debate about reparations.

In April 2021, a House panel approved legislation that would create a commission to study the issue. President Joe Biden's White House said earlier that he backs studying reparations for Black Americans.

"When they illegally brought my ancestors to the Mobile, Alabama, area a crime was committed," Ellis told The Associated Press on Tuesday. "And now that we have the actual artifacts, evidence of the crime, I think this is a clear and perfect case study."

Tuberville's statements "are the words of a man who is trying to lead a desperation effort to discredit and discount the fact that reparations are owed," said Darron Patterson, past president of the Clotilda Descendants Association and Ellis' cousin.

Patterson, who lives in Mobile and says his great-great-grandfather was a slave aboard the Clotilda, criticized Tuberville's assertions.

"Are you saying the descendants of slaves are the only ones doing crime in this country?" Patterson said. "We've got people in Washington that really don't understand what their job is. We sent you there to do the job. The job is to have America's best interest at heart. How in the world is America's best interest at heart when you make a statement that Democrats are for crime and the ones doing the crimes are the ones hollering for reparations?"

Patterson said he plans to meet next week with Tuberville.

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Tuberville's message was directed at the base of MAGA Republicans seeking office and supporters of former President Donald Trump, an ally of Tuberville, according to Ron Daniels, convener of the National African American Reparations Commission.

The remarks present "an Emancipation Proclamation moment" for Biden, a Democrat, to embrace the federal study on reparations and say, "I stand on the side of racial justice and racial healing," Daniels said.

But Frederick Gooding Jr., an African American studies and honors college professor at Texas Christian University, believes Tuberville was simply "testing the waters."

"I think this is quite strategic," Gooding said. "Let's see where it goes. He's in a small town in Nevada. We're a couple years away from the next major national election. He's leveraging time, pulling some of the rhetoric out piecemeal and in small dosages. Being a successful football coach for so long, strategy literally is his game."

But what Tuberville said about reparations and crime "doesn't make any sense," Gooding added.

"The idea that 'they want to take over what you got, then control what you have' stokes fearmongering," Gooding said. "Then he throws in reparations. Reparations has to do with repairing the human crimes that were committed."

Data compiled by the FBI shows that crime has slowed in the last year and most crimes are committed by white people, who make up more than 75% of the U.S. population, according to the Census Bureau.

The data was released Oct. 5. It showed violent and property crime generally remained consistent between 2020 and 2021, with a slight decrease in the overall violent crime rate and a 4.3% rise in the murder rate. That's an improvement over 2020, when the murder rate in the U.S. jumped 29%.

Figures from some of the nation's largest police departments weren't included in the FBI report.

An analysis of crime data by The Brennan Center for Justice also shows that the murder rate grew nearly 30% in 2020, rising in cities and rural areas alike.

Republicans hope for a 'new' Kris Kobach in Kansas AG race

By JOHN HANNA AP Political Writer

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Kris Kobach, the Kansan with a national reputation as a hardline provocateur on immigration and voter ID laws, is trying to rebrand himself as a calmer, steadier voice in his comeback bid for elective office.

Republicans hope the candidate for Kansas attorney general is a "new" Kobach. Many of them say he's staying more on message with a better organized campaign after losing the 2018 race for Kansas governor and a 2020 U.S. Senate primary. Both of those losses were chalked up to disorganized campaigns and Kobach being too abrasive even for very Republican Kansas voters.

The former Kansas secretary of state built a national profile — and created lasting political foes — as the go-to adviser for state and local officials wanting to crack down on illegal immigration. But his platform this year doesn't mention immigration. The signature prop of his campaign for governor four years ago was a jeep painted with a U.S. flag design and equipped with a replica machine gun, and it's nowhere to be seen this year.

"There's been some learning, trial and error, over time, and I think Kobach as a candidate has grown and become more disciplined," said Moriah Day, a Republican and gun-rights activist who once worked for Kobach in the secretary of state's office. "There are certainly advisers and others who have pushed hard for that discipline, and some of them have been together for a few cycles now."

Kobach's Democratic opponent in the Nov. 8 election is Chris Mann, who is making his first run for elective office. While Republicans have won 80% of statewide down-ballot races over the past 50 years, both parties see the Kobach-Mann contest as a toss-up because of Kobach's political baggage.

Some of the baggage comes from Kobach advocating strict immigration laws years before Donald Trump ran for president in 2016 and upsetting not only immigrant rights advocates but GOP-leaning business and agricultural groups.

Kobach also pushed the idea that droves of people could be voting illegally and championed a tough

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prove-your-citizenship rule for new Kansas voters, only to see the federal courts strike it down and order the state to pay voting rights attorneys \$1.4 million.

Kobach served as co-chairman of Trump's short-lived presidential advisory commission on "election integrity" and promoted Trump's lies about widespread voter fraud. At the time, The Associated Press reported that Kobach oversaw an election system in Kansas that threw out at least three times as many ballots in the 2016 election as any similarly sized state did, fueling concerns about massive voter suppression should its practices become the national standard.

Then there was his brand in his 2018 and 2020 races, the fighter who was even willing to take on GOP leaders. While Republicans across the U.S. have embraced a combative persona in Trump and other candidates, and Trump carried Kansas twice by wide margins, the state's voters more often have favored candidates with an aw-shucks demeanor.

The jeep with the machine gun became a symbol of how Kobach seemed not to care that he annoyed or angered some voters. He mocked what he called the "snowflake meltdown" the first time he rode it in a parade in 2018.

Some are skeptical that Kobach has changed in any substantive way, and say he is not always on message. For example, his comments during campaign appearances sometimes veer into his plan to slowly and quietly maneuver to ban abortion.

Kansas voters in August decisively rejected a proposed amendment to the state constitution that would have cleared the way for the Republican Legislature to tighten abortion restrictions or ban the procedure. Kobach backed the measure, which was GOP lawmakers' response to a 2019 Kansas Supreme Court decision declaring access to abortion a "fundamental" right under the state's Bill of Rights.

Kobach advocates amending the state constitution to elect Supreme Court justices rather than have governors appoint them. Eventually new, more conservative justices would overturn the 2019 ruling, he argues.

Backers argue that Kobach's views on abortion are well-known enough that he can't backpedal now.

But he's pitching a proposal that faces big political hurdles, and some Republicans fear that talking about abortion will keep moderate Republicans and independents riled and boost Democratic turnout. Kobach has said he'll defend existing abortion restrictions as attorney general, but his critics worry that he'll hunt for new ways to curb access if he's elected.

"I thought we had a representative form of government, but it looks like Kris Kobach will certainly be willing to subvert the wishes of the voters when he has a chance," said former Kansas House Majority Leader Don Hineman, a moderate Republican and western Kansas farmer.

Democrat Mann, 46, was a police officer in his early 20s in the northeastern Kansas city of Lawrence, where he now lives. An on-duty accident involving a drunken driver ended his career in uniform and he then served as a prosecutor in nearby Kansas City, Kansas, as a state securities regulator and on the board of Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

"I'm not in this to chase the spotlight or to grab attention like my opponent, and that's all he's going to do," Mann said during an interview.

Kobach, 56, said he's learned from past campaigns and is delegating more tasks. For this year's race, he hired Axiom Strategies, a prominent Kansas City-area GOP firm, and his chief consultant is a conservative state senator, J.R. Claeys, in good standing with top Kansas Republicans.

And that jeep with the replica machine gun from four years ago?

"That was a different time," Kobach said, chuckling, noting that four years ago was "right in the middle" of Trump's high-drama administration.

Kobach's lower-key campaign appeals to William Hendrix, a 21-year-old Topeka resident who is treasurer for a local Young Republicans group. He predicted that as attorney general, Kobach would "cool down on the campaign-trail rhetoric."

"He'll see the limitations of the office and also at the same time, what he can do with what he has," Hendrix said.

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But Kobach also might appear more measured than in the past because if he loses this year, "it really could be, possibly, the end," said Bob Beatty, a political science professor at Washburn University in Topeka.

Patrick Miller, an associate University of Kansas professor of political science, wondered whether Kobach seems less provocative because the attorney general's race can't command the same kind of attention his 2018 and 2020 races did.

"All of that attention given to him in 2018 was an invitation for him to be very flamboyant as a politician," Miller said. "Maybe losing had an effect on that and maybe he's more cautious. Maybe, he's more calculating."

Kobach has promised to spend each breakfast thinking about potential lawsuits against the Democratic president's administration and during one Topeka event urged the crowd to chant, "Sue Biden."

The candidate himself goes back and forth on whether there's a new Kobach. He says there is a little truth in the GOP buzz but some exaggeration, too.

"I'm still my old self in the sense that I stick to my guns," Kobach said. "I don't back down."

Homes inundated by swollen rivers in Australian floods

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Homes were flooded in Melbourne and other cities in Australia's southeast on Friday with rivers forecast to remain dangerously high for days.

About 70 residents were told to leave the suburb of Maribyrnong in Melbourne's northwest, along with hundreds in the Victoria state cities of Benalla and Wedderburn, authorities said. Melbourne is Australia's second-most populous city with 5 million people.

About 500 homes in Victoria were flooded and another 500 had been isolated by floodwater, Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews said. Those numbers would increase, he said.

Most of the state was experiencing a "very, very, significant rainfall event and it comes, of course, with the ground completely sodden," Andrews said.

"The real challenge now is we've got another rain event next week and the Bureau (of Meteorology) forecasting more rain throughout the next six-to-eight week period and it won't take a lot of additional water for there to be further flood events," Andrews added. "So this has only just started and it's going to be with us for a while."

Andrews said 4,700 homes were without power, more than the 3,500 that Victoria State Emergency Service had reported earlier on Friday.

The Bureau of Meteorology said major-to-record flooding was occurring or was forecast to occur on many rivers in Victoria and the island state of Tasmania to the south.

North of Victoria, moderate-to-major flooding was occurring along several rivers in inland New South Wales state, the bureau said.

A 63-year-old man was reported missing in floodwater in New South Wales on Tuesday and a person was reported missing in central Victoria on Friday, officials said. No details of the person missing from the Victorian town of Newbridge have been released.

Police on Tuesday found the body of a 46-year-old man in his submerged car in floodwater near the New South Wales city of Bathurst, west of Sydney, a day after he died.

The State Emergency Service said it had carried out 108 flood rescues in Victoria in the past 48 hours.

State Emergency Service commander Josh Gamble said complacency was the main reason for people getting into trouble.

"That is quite significant and we haven't had that many flood rescues for quite some time, for some years in fact," Gamble said.

"Many of these people are putting their own lives at risk, their own children in some circumstances, but more importantly, other community members and responders and that's in all parts of the state not just metropolitan areas," Gamble added.

Evacuation orders were also in place for the town of Rochester on the Campaspe River, north of Mel-

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bourne, and the central Victorian towns of Carisbrook and Seymour on the Goulburn River.

In New South Wales, 550 people have been isolated or evacuated from the town of Forbes as the Lachlan River flooded, authorities said.

South of Forbes, parts of the city of Wagga Wagga were evacuated due to the Murrumbidgee River breaking its banks.

"Fortunately, the Murrumbidgee River peaked on Thursday and we're starting to see the floodwaters decline in those areas," New South Wales State Emergency Service official Andrew Edmunds said.

In Tasmania, north coast residents were moving to higher ground with river levels forecast to rise and the major port of Devonport was closed on Friday due to flooding of the Mersey River.

The bureau said flood peaks on the Meander and Macquarie rivers in Tasmania were likely to be the highest on record.

The North Esk and Mersey rivers may peak around the same levels as they did during major floods in 2016, when three people drowned, the bureau said.

The bureau last month declared that a La Niña weather pattern, which is associated with above-average rainfall in eastern Australia, was underway in the Pacific.

The bureau forecast that the La Niña event may peak during the current Southern Hemisphere spring and return to neutral conditions early next year.

La Niña is the cooler flip side of the better-known drying El Niño pattern. La Niña occurs when equatorial trade winds become stronger, changing ocean surface currents and drawing up cooler deep water.

It is the third La Niña since 2019 became Australia's hottest and driest year on record.

That year came to a catastrophic conclusion with wildfires fueled by drought that directly or indirectly killed more than 400 people, destroyed more than 3,000 homes and razed 19 million hectares (47 million acres) of woods, farmland and city fringes.

Sydney, New South Wales' capital and Australia's largest city, last week beat its 1950 record to make 2022 its wettest-ever year.

Ohio Dems press party to invest in high stakes Senate seat

By STEVE PEOPLES and JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Democrats across Ohio are pleading for help in the state's Senate contest, afraid they may lose a winnable election unless national party leaders make major investments in the coming days.

So far, the most powerful groups in Democratic politics have prioritized Senate pickup opportunities in North Carolina, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania over Ohio, once a perennial swing state that veered right in the Trump era. But on the eve of the 2022 midterms, some public polls suggest Ohio is as competitive as the other swing states, leaving many Democrats here wondering why their party isn't backing Senate contender Tim Ryan more forcefully.

"Ohio's just not a priority anymore. It's a daunting task that we have to navigate," said state Rep. Don-tavius Jarrells, a Ryan ally. "The reality is that without federal investments, he may not win."

Ryan, a 10-term congressman, said in an interview that party leaders who believe he can't win "have no idea what's going on out here."

"I've come to terms with the fact that we're probably not going to get any help. I'm playing with the team we got on the field," Ryan said. "I can't think of anything more Ohio than us taking on the entire political establishment at this point."

The tension is a reflection of the difficult decisions Democratic leaders are facing about how to invest limited financial resources in the final weeks before the Nov. 8 election. With a razor-thin Senate majority, any move could carry longterm consequences. If Republicans gain even one seat, they would take control of the Senate — and with it, gain power to control judicial nominations and President Joe Biden's legislative agenda.

And if Ryan comes up short by just a few points, there will likely be an intense round of post-election

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questions about whether the party could have done more to win.

The financial disparities in the race are stark. Republican JD Vance, a venture capitalist and author of "Hillbilly Elegy," is the beneficiary of more than \$30 million from outside Republican groups. They include organizations aligned with former President Donald Trump and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell. By contrast, Ryan has benefited from less than \$4 million in outside spending so far.

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, who has built a reputation as a progressive Democrat who can still win over working class voters in places like Ohio, said the party should do more.

"If we want to win in Ohio, we need to invest in Ohio," he said. "Tim Ryan is running a great campaign because he's showing voters that he is the candidate who's on their side. That's how you win elections."

David Bergstein, the spokesman for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, which is the official campaign arm for Senate Democrats, said the organization was "proud" to support Ryan's campaign with a coordinated investment of roughly \$1 million in television spending that allowed the campaign to take advantage of lower advertising rates for candidates.

There is still a chance Democrats will find some additional money to help Ryan.

The Senate Majority PAC, by far the most influential super PAC in Senate Democratic politics, is not ruling out significant Ohio investments over the election's final days, although the group has spent little there so far compared with other key states. On Thursday, the group announced an additional \$4 million investment in North Carolina television advertising, bringing its total spending in the state to \$15 million and counting.

"Tim Ryan is running a remarkably strong campaign that is resonating with Ohio voters of every political persuasion and putting Republicans on defense, while Vance's weak candidacy has become a serious liability for the GOP," said JB Poersch, Senate Majority PAC president. "We're going to continue making strategic, effective decisions that put us in the best position possible to accomplish our mission: defending our Democratic Senate majority."

Another pro-Democrat group, the Save America Fund, has already spent \$2.5 million on television ads designed to help Ryan since August. The group has been discussing more significant buys with other PACs.

"We are having lots of conversations about how Tim Ryan can win this race," said Eric Hyers, a former colleague of Ryan's campaign manager who is running the Save America Fund. "We are all in on this."

But there are no easy options for Democratic groups deciding where to dedicate their final round of resources.

Democrats are defending vulnerable incumbent senators across Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and New Hampshire. They have also been investing heavily in flipping Republican-held seats across Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Wisconsin.

Democratic officials privately note that Trump has twice won Ohio by 8 points, reflecting the Republican leanings of the state. By comparison, Trump won North Carolina by less than 1 percentage point and lost Wisconsin by just over 1 percentage point.

National Democratic strategists also note that Ohio's large working-class population has shifted sharply away from Democrats in recent years, despite Ryan's best efforts to appeal to such voters.

That sentiment has led to a sense among Democrats in Ohio that their national party is abandoning them.

"There's a lot of frustration," said Ohio-based Democratic strategist Cliff Schefter, conceding that national Democratic leaders have a difficult job. "Tim Ryan doesn't need a lot -- just something. Do what you gotta do. Find a little bit of extra money. This race is incredibly winnable."

Some Republicans privately see Vance as an underwhelming candidate, although most expect him to win because of the state's recent Republican shift. He has badly trailed Ryan in fundraising, typically an important gauge of a candidate's strength. Ryan has raised more than \$21.5 million on his own, compared with Vance's \$3.6 million.

As the race moves into its final weeks, Vance is leaning on Trump's continued popularity in the state to maintain momentum, particularly among undecided working-class white voters. Donald Trump Jr., one of Vance's strongest supporters, campaigned alongside the Ohio Republican last week.

But Vance's relationship with Trump is complicated.

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Vance was initially a so-called "Never Trumper" before Trump won the president. The former president then botched Vance's name at a rally during the spring primary. And at Trump's most recent Ohio rally for Vance, the former president quipped that Vance "is kissing my a—" for political support.

Ryan echoed that comment during a debate this week, calling Vance an "a— kisser." In the interview, Ryan said he's considering renaming his campaign bus "The A— Kicker Express."

He also made clear that while he'd welcome national Democratic dollars, he doesn't want Biden to campaign on his behalf.

"It's nothing personal. It's just like, I'm running in Ohio. I know Ohio. I know the message," Ryan said. "There's nobody that can express that better than me. And every time you bring people in, you take on their enemies, they may not say the things way you want it to be said, and we've run a very disciplined campaign for the last year and a half. I just want to make sure that I'm the face, I'm the voice."

Ryan added, "And I want Ohioans to know I stand on my own."

Yet many Ryan allies continue to clamor for help from the national party.

Former Ohio Democratic Party Chairman David Pepper said the DSCC needs to step up and support Ryan now, who's "fighting as effectively as anybody could" without national money.

"It's so similar to what happened in '16, it's kind of hard to watch," Pepper said, referencing former Democratic Gov. Ted Strickland's loss to Republican Sen. Rob Portman in that year's Senate race. "It's when polls are tied, our candidate has more money and is a stronger candidate and, when Republicans throw a punch, we walk away. It's a terrible signal to send."

In 2016, Strickland ultimately lost to Portman by 21 points. Next door in Pennsylvania, Republican Sen. Pat Toomey won by less than 2.

Police: 5 killed, including officer, in N. Carolina shooting

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Five people were killed by a shooter who opened fire along a walking trail in North Carolina's capital city on Thursday and eluded officers for hours before he was cornered in a home and arrested, police said.

An off-duty police officer was among those killed by the suspect, who police only described as a white, juvenile male. He was arrested around 9:37 p.m., authorities said. His identity and age weren't released.

The gunfire broke out around 5 p.m. along the Neuse River Greenway in a residential area northeast of downtown, Raleigh Mayor Mary-Ann Baldwin said. Officers from numerous law enforcement agencies swarmed the area, closing roads and warning residents to stay inside while they searched for the shooter.

Two people, including another police officer, were taken to hospitals. The officer was later released, but the other survivor remained in critical condition.

"Tonight, terror has reached our doorstep. The nightmare of every community has come to Raleigh. This is a senseless horrific and infuriating act of violence that has been committed," Gov. Roy Cooper told reporters.

Authorities didn't offer any details on a motive, but Baldwin joined Cooper in decrying the violence.

"We must stop this mindless violence in America, we must address gun violence," the mayor said. "We have much to do, and tonight we have much to mourn."

The Raleigh shooting was the latest in a violent week across the country. Five people were killed Sunday in a shooting at a home in Inman, South Carolina. On Wednesday night two police officers were fatally shot in Connecticut after apparently being drawn into an ambush by an emergency call about possible domestic violence. Police officers have been shot this week in Greenville, Mississippi; Decatur, Illinois; Philadelphia, Las Vegas and central Florida. Two of those officers, one in Greenville and one Las Vegas, were killed.

Thursday's violence was the 25th mass killing in 2022 in which the victims were fatally shot, according to The Associated Press/USA TODAY/Northeastern University Mass Killings database. A mass killing is defined as when four or more people are killed excluding the perpetrator.

Brooke Medina, who lives in the neighborhood bordering the greenway, was driving home at around 5:15 p.m. when she saw about two dozen police cars, both marked and unmarked, race toward the residential

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area about 9 miles (14 kilometers) from Raleigh's downtown. She then saw ambulances speeding the other direction, toward the closest hospital.

She and her husband, who was working from home with their four children, started reaching out to neighbors and realized there was a shelter-in-place order.

The family closed all of their window blinds, locked the doors and congregated in an upstairs hallway together, said Medina, who works as a communications vice president at a think tank. The family listened to the police scanner and watched local news before going back downstairs once the danger seemed to have moved further away from their home.

"We're just going to hunker down for the rest of the night and be very vigilant. Keep all of our lights on, doors locked," she said.

She described the neighborhood known as Hedingham as a sprawling, dense, tree-lined community that's full of single-family homes, duplexes and townhomes that are more moderately priced compared to other parts of the Raleigh area.

Allison Greenawalt, 29, who also lives in the neighborhood, said she was sitting on the couch with her cat around 5 p.m. when she heard "three shots in a pretty rapid succession." She said police arrived quickly and that she's grateful that they were there during the chaotic hours while she sheltered inside. Her husband, meanwhile, tried to drive home from work after the shooting and was turned away by police who had closed nearby streets, and he didn't make it home until around 10:30 p.m., she said.

"I was sitting in our house with the lights turned off and the windows closed for the majority of the evening, just waiting to hear that" the shooter had been arrested, she said.

US migrant policy 'bucket of cold water' to some Venezuelans

By MARKO ALVAREZ and ASTRID SUÁREZ Associated Press

NECOCLI, Colombia (AP) — Venezuelan Gilbert Fernández still plans to cross the dangerous Darién jungle into Panama and head toward the United States over land, despite a U.S. announcement that it will grant conditional humanitarian permits only to 24,000 Venezuelan migrants arriving by air.

"The news hit us like a bucket of cold water," Fernández said Thursday, a day after the announcement, which also stated that Venezuelans arriving by land at the Mexico-U.S. border would be returned to Mexico.

Fernández spoke to The Associated Press on a beach in Necoclí, a coastal town in Colombia where about 9,000 people, mostly Venezuelans, waited to board a boat to take them to the entrance of the Darién Gap connecting the South American country to Panama. From there, migrants head by land up Central America through Mexico toward the U.S.

Some on the Colombian beach said they would seek other routes into the United States or give up the voyage after hearing the news. Critics noted that the number of humanitarian visas was just a fraction of the number of Venezuelans seeking to enter the United States.

But for Fernández it was too late to turn back. He said he sold his car and his land in Venezuela to finance the trip with his 18-year-old son and his friends, and he no longer has money for a plane ticket to the U.S.

"Those of us who have already started, how are we going to do that?" he wondered. "We are already involved in this."

The U.S. and Mexico said Wednesday that the Biden administration agreed to accept up to 24,000 Venezuelan migrants at U.S. airports while Mexico agreed to take back Venezuelans who come to the U.S. over land.

Venezuelans who walk or swim across the border will be immediately returned to Mexico under a pandemic rule known as Title 42 authority, which suspends rights to seek asylum under U.S. and international law on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19.

The U.S. offer to the Venezuelans is modeled on a similar program for Ukrainians who fled Russia's invasion.

The moves are a response to a dramatic increase in migration from Venezuela, which surpassed Guatemala and Honduras in August to become the second largest nationality arriving at the U.S. border after Mexico.

So far in 2022, more than 151,000 people have crossed into Panama through the jungle, the majority

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— 107,600 — Venezuelans. That already exceeds the 133,000 Venezuelan who crossed in the previous year, according to official Panamanian figures. The trip through the inhospitable jungle is fraught with dangers, including thieves, human traffickers and the possibility of sexual assault. Armed groups operate in the region.

Arrests of Venezuelans at the U.S. border also have increased. Authorities detained Venezuelans 25,349 times in August, making them the second most detained nationality at the border, after Mexicans.

For some, the offer of 24,000 humanitarian visas is not enough given the dimensions of Venezuela's migration situation and the conditions on those visas are too difficult.

María Clara Robayo, an investigator for the Venezuelan Observatory at Colombia's Del Rosario University, said the flow of migrants through the Darién Gap might be reduced a bit but won't stop.

"People will continue exposing themselves to precarious situations" crossing the jungle, she said.

Jeremy Villegas arrived in Necoclí in a group of 30 people, most of whom are turning back or looking for other routes. He said he is still undecided and is waiting to hear from people who are farther along the route to know if it is worth the risk.

Cristian Casamayor said he has decided to stop his journey through the Darién after hearing of the new U.S. policy.

"I stopped out of awareness and being smart ... they mark your passport and you can no longer enter the United States," he said, adding that he has not decided where he will go now. All he knows is that he will not return to Venezuela.

Mario Ricardo Camejo, a member of the non-profit Colombian-Venezuelan foundation Fundacolven, said that while they appreciate any help and humanitarian visas from countries, like the U.S., they worry the help comes with conditions that make it difficult on the poorest migrants. For example, having to arrive by plane and have a financial sponsor.

"Automatically, a filter is created that ensures the help does not reach the people who need it most," Camejo said.

Of the more than 7.1 million Venezuelans who have left their country due to the social and economic crisis, at least 4.3 million have difficulties accessing food, housing and formal employment, according to a report released Wednesday by the International Organization for Migration and the UNHCR.

Venezuelans back in that country's capital agreed the new rules will hurt.

"The people who leave by land have no money, no visa, no family there" in the United States, José Santana said in Caracas' central plaza. "It is useless for them to say that they are going to let many enter by plane."

Racist remarks could spell trouble for LA political maps

By BRIAN MELLEY and DON THOMPSON Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The effort by three Latino politicians to maximize their influence in Los Angeles backfired after a leaked recording of their meeting exposed crude and, at times, racist banter that has already led to one city councilmember's resignation and could have broader legal and political consequences.

If the other two councilmembers heed calls to step down, their constituents will have lost some of their most powerful leaders and a state investigation into their private meeting could lead to criminal charges and undo efforts to draw districts in their favor.

Pressure mounted Thursday on Gil Cedillo and Kevin de Leon to resign a day after former council President Nury Martinez stepped down for comparing another colleague's Black son to a monkey, belittling Mexicans from the state of Oaxaca and making crass remarks about Armenians and Jews.

Acting City Council President Mitch O'Farrell canceled Friday's scheduled meeting, saying members couldn't conduct business until the two step down.

The recording from a year ago of the three speaking with a labor leader revealed a rare glimpse of behind-the-scenes maneuvering during the politically charged process of redrawing political boundaries every decade.

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Aside from the shocking and salty dialog, the unusual element was that the conversation was recorded and aired publicly, said Sara Sadhwani, a politics professor at Pomona College and member of the California Citizens Redistricting Commission that draws district boundaries for congressional, legislative and other state-level races.

"What we hear in those tapes is classic backroom negotiations of redistricting," Sadhwani said. "We hear politicians who are not looking out for the interests of their constituents but are looking out for the interests of themselves towards reelection ... drawing districts in such a way that their friends can win seats as well. It's the worst kind of abuse of power."

Whether it crossed the line into criminal activity or results in civil action, possibly leading to the redrawing of district boundaries, will depend on what Attorney General Rob Bonta's investigation finds.

Bonta did not mention what type of crime may have been committed. But Gregory Totten, chief executive officer of the California District Attorneys Association, said it could focus on whether the politicians had a conflict of interest that influenced their actions.

Totten and Jessica Levinson, a Loyola Law School professor who was a member of the Los Angeles City Ethics Commission, said criminal charges would be less likely than an order to draw new maps for districts.

Investigators could look into whether the rights of a particular racial or ethnic group were diluted in violation of the federal Voting Rights Act.

In the recording, the issue of race frequently surfaced.

Latinos, who make up nearly half the city's population, only had four — or just over a quarter — of the 15 seats on the council at the time. Black people, who make up less than 10 percent of the population have three — a fifth — of the seats.

De Leon says Bonin, who is white, is like the "fourth Black" on the council and implied he wouldn't stand by Latinos.

"He'll never say a (expletive) word about us," de Leon said.

The group discussed how to fill the seat held by Mark Ridley-Thomas, a Black member facing federal corruption charges, who was eventually suspended by the council.

Martinez said "the African Americans look at this as a hostile takeover" if they appointed an ally.

"The one who will support us is Heather Hutt," said Cedillo, referring to the Black woman who eventually was picked to fill Ridley-Thomas' seat.

Hutt has joined other members calling for Cedillo and de Leon to resign. She said in a statement that she was unaware of the conversation the three had and said she was legitimately chosen for the council.

"The audio tapes released this week lay out a dangerous plot to weaken Black political representation across Los Angeles County," Hutt said. "Let me be clear — I am a Black woman, not a pawn."

Levinson said the recording gives the impression they are explicitly drawing lines on the basis of race. She said she would not be surprised to see a lawsuit designed to throw out the maps.

"It's all boiling down to: Did they draw the lines to hurt Black voting power?" Levinson said. "What Bonta is ultimately going to have to determine is ... (are they) essentially saying, 'We want to make it difficult for African American voters to elect the candidate of their choosing.'"

Challenges to district maps drawn through a partisan process are not uncommon in other states, and the U.S. Supreme Court just last week heard arguments on a challenge out of Alabama.

But the Attorney General's office and experts could not point to other cases in California since voters in 2008 adopted the independent citizens redistricting commission that has drawn the maps after the last two censuses.

Local jurisdictions operate under different rules.

The city of Los Angeles has a commission appointed by councilmembers to draw up maps that can then be approved or rejected by the council. The recording was of a discussion over frustration with the proposed maps.

Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer has called on City Council to call a special election in the spring with an amendment to redraw the lines for the 2024 elections, independent of influence by city officials.

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"This ultimately is about political power in this city," Feuer said. "The credibility of those (redistricting map) lines, and the power those lines reflect, will be tainted now given this conversation for sure, until there is some substitute provided."

The council, meanwhile, has been thrown into chaos by the scandal. Raucous protesters shut down a meeting Wednesday.

O'Farrell said he has spoken with Cedillo, who was unseated in the primary and due to leave office at the end the year, and thinks he will resign.

O'Farrell and others haven't been able to reach de Leon, who is not facing reelection until 2024.

De Leon has apologized for his remarks and for what he said was appearing to condone Martinez's comments. Cedillo said he should have intervened.

Both men appeared at Tuesday's meeting and left after being booed and yelled at.

'She Said,' drama of Weinstein reporting, premieres in NYC

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Five years after a pair of exposés revealed Harvey Weinstein's long trail of sexual abuse of women, "She Said," a film that dramatizes the dogged fight to uncover years of allegations against the movie mogul, premiered Thursday at the New York Film Festival.

The film stars Carey Mulligan and Zoe Kazan as New York Times reporters Megan Twohey and Jodi Kantor, who helped uncover the many allegations against Weinstein. When news of their impending report was first leaked by Variety, Weinstein at the time commented: "The story sounds so good, I want to buy the movie rights."

Instead, the movie that would become "She Said" was adapted from Twohey and Kantor's 2019 book about the investigation. It unspooled Thursday at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, with numerous women who came forward to tell their story in attendance, including Ashley Judd. Weinstein, meanwhile, is currently being tried in Los Angeles for 11 counts of rape and sexual assault. He has pled not guilty.

The 70-year-old Weinstein is currently serving a 23-year prison sentence after being convicted in 2020 for committing a criminal sexual act and third-degree rape.

One of the loudest of the film's numerous standing ovations was for Judd, whose on-the-record account led The Times' first report and whose bravery emboldened many others to speak out. Other women who came forward were also in the audience. Judd plays herself in the film.

"I just want to remember when I was speaking to my mother about all this, she said, 'Oh, you go get 'em, honey,'" Judd said in an on-stage conversation following the film, recalling that her father was with her after her 1996 meeting with Weinstein at the Peninsula Beverly Hills hotel. "When I came down from the hotel room, he knew something devastating had just happened to me by the look on my face."

"It was very validating that someone finally wanted to listen and do something about it," Judd added. "The film was the next step in that."

That "She Said" was premiering in New York at a festival Weinstein once frequented made the evening particularly poignant. Eugene Hernandez, executive director of the festival, noted that "it's a room Harvey Weinstein has been in."

The movie, too, has been a subject in Weinstein's current trial. During pre-trial hearings, Weinstein's attorneys requested that the trial be delayed because of the release of "She Said," arguing that it could influence jurors. Universal Pictures will open "She Said" in theaters Nov. 18. Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Lisa Lench rejected the motion.

But the array of women on stage — including the stars, the Times reporters, director Maria Schrader and screenwriter Rebecca Lenkiewicz — made a powerful statement. "She Said" follows the ups and downs of Kantor and Twohey's persistent investigation, battling against a decades-old wall-of-silence, a litany of NDAs and Weinstein's own belligerent responses.

"The number of people who shared information with us was relatively small, and yet their impact was so large," Kantor said. "We hope this film helps people remember that these personal stories really can

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make an enormous difference.”

The Times’ reporting on Weinstein, along with that of The New Yorker, was the catalyst not just for Weinstein’s dramatic downfall but the rapid expansion of the #MeToo movement begun by activist Tarana Burke that would spread throughout Hollywood and many other industries.

“She Said” follows in the tradition of investigative journalism films like “All the President’s Men” and “Spotlight,” with the notable difference that its protagonists are women balancing their 24/7 work lives with their young families. The film takes care to show the reporters as hard-working professionals not so unlike the young, ambitious women Weinstein preyed on.

Kazan took a moment to reflect on what’s changed in Hollywood in the five years since. There are now intimacy coordinators on set for sex scenes and a more open conversation about gender imbalance. But, she said, “there’s so much change left to be effected.”

“Anybody reading the newspaper headlines since let’s just say the beginning of May would know that we’re still living in an oppressive patriarchy,” said Kazan. “That’s not special to our industry.”

Judd added that, thanks to SAG-Aftra agreements, auditions no longer happen in hotel rooms. But she also made the point that something deeper has changed within women.

“I have reframed the experiences that I have had to understand that they were, in fact, harassment and assault, when I had previously minimized them,” Judd said. “I think that the individual transformation a lot of us have had as a result of what Tarana started and as a result of this reporting, has allowed women’s consciousness to transform and to set boundaries and reclaim autonomy and say, ‘This is the up with which I will not put. This is the hill on which I’m willing to die.’”

\$1B judgment against Alex Jones not the final word

By DAVE COLLINS, MICHAEL HILL and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

WATERBURY, Conn. (AP) — The nearly \$1 billion judgment against Alex Jones for spreading false conspiracy theories about the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre brought long-sought relief to family members and hopes the eye-popping figure would deter others from broadcasting falsehoods.

But Jones has given no signs of tempering his bluster — a headline on his website Thursday blared that the “show trial verdict signals the death of free speech.” And lawyers say it’s not certain that relatives who lost loved ones in the mass shooting will see the full dollar amount after promised appeals and a bankruptcy proceeding play out.

“Every plaintiff’s lawyer knows from often bitter experiences that it is usually easier to get a judgment than to enforce it,” said Columbia University law professor John Coffee.

So while the judgment may be a milestone, it’s not an end point.

Experts say the Sandy Hook families likely face a long fight ahead as they try to collect the \$965 million awarded to them by a jury in Connecticut Wednesday and a separate \$49 million judgment from a Texas jury in August.

Here’s a look at some of the issues raised by the judgment.

WHAT IS THE CASE ABOUT?

After 26 people were killed by a gunman at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012, Jones made a false conspiracy theory a centerpiece of his programming on his flagship Infowars show.

He promoted a theory that the shooting was a hoax, staged by actors, and that no children died — all in an effort to increase gun control. His shows drew legions of followers, some of whom then spent years harassing the parents and siblings of the victims, as well as an FBI agent who had responded to the school.

Jones was found liable by default in multiple defamation lawsuits after judges ruled that he and his lawyers were improperly withholding information and records from the plaintiffs.

Trials were held in Texas and Connecticut to determine how much he owed the families for lying about them. Jones faces a third trial in Texas, in a lawsuit filed by the parents of another child killed in the shooting.

DOES ALEX JONES HAVE \$1 BILLION?

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Jones has maintained he doesn't have the kind of money being sought by the family members suing him. Jones has repeatedly said he doesn't even have \$2 million to his name.

"When the reality sets in that they're not going to silence me and there's no money, it's all an exercise in futility," Jones said outside the Connecticut courthouse during the trial. "So whatever they do in here is a Pyrrhic victory."

A different picture was presented at the Texas trial.

During his testimony, Jones was confronted with a memo from one of his business managers outlining a single day's gross revenue of \$800,000 from selling vitamin supplements and other products through his website. Jones called it a record sales day. Also, a forensic economist testified that Jones and his media company, Free Speech Systems, have a combined net worth that could be as high as \$270 million.

"You can't invent money. If \$270 million is the maximum, you're not going to get more than that, at least without finding some new sources that haven't yet been uncovered," Coffee said.

Russ Horton, a Texas attorney, said dramatically large civil judgments often get cut down on appeal. But he said even if the Connecticut verdict is reduced, it will likely be ruinous for Jones.

"This is a judgment that is very likely to exceed his net worth, however it comes down," said Horton, noting the uncertainty about Jones' assets.

IS BANKRUPTCY A BARRIER?

Complicating matters is the fact that Jones is seeking bankruptcy protection for his company.

Free Speech Systems, Infowars' parent company, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in July. Jones told a court his company had estimated assets of \$50,000 or less and estimated liabilities of \$1 million to \$10 million. He said at the time that he was "totally maxed out" financially.

The Sandy Hook families have alleged in bankruptcy court filings that after they brought their defamation cases Jones began "diverting assets" out of Free Speech Systems, totaling in 2021 and 2022 to more than \$60 million. They say Jones also drew a \$1.4 million annual salary from the company at a time that he claimed it was operating at a net loss.

Horton said that Jones' company's bankruptcy is likely to complicate and draw out the Sandy Hook families efforts to collect on their judgments. The judgments against Jones personally can still be collected, he said, but their scale might force him to file for individual bankruptcy.

But bankruptcy doesn't get Jones off the hook.

"Bankruptcy is not the place you want to be if you're hiding assets or behaving badly," said Horton.

Last month, Houston-based bankruptcy Judge Christopher Lopez dismissed Jones' attorney and chief restructuring officer – citing a lack of transparency by his company – and empowered a Department of Justice-appointed trustee to hire lawyers to investigate Free Speech Systems.

On Wednesday, Lopez approved a new restructuring officer to handle Jones' company and appointed another judge as a mediator to hash out disputes in the federal case.

SILENCING JONES

William Sherlach, whose wife Mary Sherlach was killed at Sandy Hook, told reporters after the judgment that "people like Alex Jones will have to rethink what they say."

On his show Thursday, Jones continued to assail his critics and said "we have two years of appeals." While Jones in recent years has acknowledged the shooting happened, he claims the families are being used to push a gun control and anti-free speech agenda.

"They try to shut me off. It ain't happening," he said Thursday.

The judgment has been compared to pro wrestler Hulk Hogan's invasion-of-privacy lawsuit against the gossip blog Gawker, which ultimately bankrupted the business.

But it's not clear if the judgment would have a chilling effect on others who broadcast false and defamatory statements, said Thomas Hentoff, a Washington-based First Amendment attorney who has represented major media companies.

It can take years or even decades to collect judgments, Hentoff said, and Jones' cases were outliers because he had default judgments against him, meaning he never staged a merits defense.

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"There are a lot of people who make money by expressing extreme views, and I would hesitate to think that a large jury's monetary judgment in itself would cause them to change course," Hentoff said.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The judge in Connecticut will soon decide the amounts of punitive damages, which will be added to the \$965 million. After that, Jones can formally appeal.

Christopher Mattei, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said on MSNBC after the verdict that they were prepared for the long haul.

"Whatever assets he has," Mattei said, "these families are going to chase him to ground and enforce every cent of this verdict against him."

Proposed UN resolution would sanction top Haitian gang chief

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. Security Council is negotiating a resolution that would impose an arms embargo, asset freeze and travel ban on influential Haitian gang leader Jimmy Cherizier, nicknamed "Barbeque."

It also would target other Haitian individuals and groups who engage in actions that threaten the peace, security or stability of the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, according to the text obtained Thursday by The Associated Press.

The U.S.-drafted resolution singles out by name Cherizier, a former police officer who leads an alliance of Haitian gangs known as the "G9 Family and Allies." But it would establish a Security Council committee to designate other Haitians and groups to be put on a blacklist and subjected to sanctions as well.

The draft resolution expresses "grave concern about the extremely high levels of gang violence and other criminal activities, including kidnappings, trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants, and homicides, and sexual and gender-based violence including rape and sexual slavery, as well as ongoing impunity for perpetrators, corruption and recruitment of children by gangs and the implications of Haiti's situation for the region."

The Security Council moved up a meeting on Haiti to Monday because of the increasingly dire situation in the country.

Daily life in Haiti began to spin out of control last month just hours after Prime Minister Ariel Henry said fuel subsidies would be eliminated, causing prices to double. Gangs blocked the entrance to the Varreux fuel terminal, leading to a severe shortage of fuel at a time that clean water is also scarce and the country is trying to deal with a deadly cholera outbreak.

The draft resolution says "Cherizier and his G9 gang confederation are actively blocking the free movement of fuel from the Varreux fuel terminal — the largest in Haiti."

"His actions have directly contributed to the economic paralysis and humanitarian crisis in Haiti," it says.

In a video posted on Facebook last week, Cherizier called on the government to grant him and G9 members amnesty and to void all arrest warrants against them. He said in Creole that Haiti's economic and social situation is worsening by the day, so "there is no better time than today to dismantle the system."

He outlined a transitional plan for restoring order in Haiti. It would include creation of a Council of Sages with one representative from each of Haiti's 10 departments to govern the country with an interim president until a presidential election could be held in February 2024. It also calls for restructuring Haiti's National Police and strengthening the army.

"The country is (facing) one crisis after another," Cherizier said. "During all these crises, the first victim is the population, the people in the ghettos, the peasants."

Haiti has been in the grips of an inflationary vise that is squeezing its people and exacerbating protests that have brought society to the breaking point. Violence is raging, making parents afraid to send their kids to school. Hospitals, banks and grocery stores are struggling to stay open.

The president of neighboring Dominican Republic, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, recently described the situation as a "low-intensity civil war." His government is cracking down on Haitians

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migrating to the Dominican Republic.

Political instability has simmered ever since last year's still-unsolved assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse, who had faced opposition protests calling for his resignation over corruption charges and claims that his five-year term had ended. Moïse dissolved Parliament in January 2020 after legislators failed to hold elections in 2019 amid political gridlock.

Last week, Haiti's prime minister and 18 high-ranking officials requested "the immediate deployment of a specialized armed force, in sufficient quantity" by international partners to stop the "criminal actions" of armed gangs across the country.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres sent a letter to the Security Council on Sunday calling for the deployment of a rapid action force by one or several U.N. member states to help Haiti's National Police.

That force would "remove the threat posed by armed gangs and provide immediate protection to critical infrastructure and services," as well as secure the "free movement of water, fuel, food and medical supplies from main ports and airports to communities and health care facilities," he said.

The draft resolution takes note of Guterres' letter, welcomes the appeal from Haiti, and encourages "the immediate deployment of a multinational rapid action force" to support the Haitian National Police, as the secretary-general recommends.

U.S. officials said Wednesday the Biden administration will provide security and humanitarian assistance to Haiti and pull visas to current and former government officials involved with gangs.

Q&A: Lil Baby talks new album, Young Thug, rap lyrics

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — While Lil Baby's new album blares loudly in the living room, the Atlanta-born rapper stands in the kitchen of his \$20 million Bel Air home singing to his son, who dances along on FaceTime.

For Lil Baby, living in one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in the U.S. would have been unfathomable several years ago. He was released in 2016 after being incarcerated on a drug charge and had no intention of starting a rap career until Quality Control founders Kevin "Coach K" Lee and Pierre "P" Thomas saw tremendous potential.

"I knew Baby had a hustler's spirit," Thomas says. "All he had to do was transfer his energy from whatever he was doing to the music. He's got that hustler's mentality of the first one getting up and last one going to sleep. He grinds nonstop. I just knew if he transferred all that energy, he was going to grind all the way to the top."

Lil Baby, 27, initially wasn't hard pressed to rap. But once he made it a priority, he rose to remarkable success. He won over listeners through his infectious singles like "Drip Too Hard," "We Paid" and "Yes Indeed" with Drake. He's worked with some of music's best including Future, Nicki Minaj and Lil Wayne. Earlier this year, he won a Grammy in the best melodic rap performance category for Kanye West's "Hurricane," which also featured The Weeknd.

In a recent interview with The Associated Press, Lil Baby opened up about decriminalizing rap lyrics, his friends Young Thug and Gunna who are currently locked up in a RICO criminal case and his third studio album "It's Only Me," which releases Friday.

Remarks have been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: You've overcome being a high school dropout and bounced back from serving time in prison. How does it feel now to be successful?

LIL BABY: When I look at everything I had to endure and the process, I think about when I was just sitting in a prison cell to now I'm living in a pad in California. I feel like anything can happen. Anything is possible. If you believe, you can achieve.

AP: When did you realize you was good with formulating words together?

LIL BABY: Language arts was one of my favorite classes. I could imagine and really write a story about whatever. It could be real or not real. From second to third grade, I always been into writing a good story.

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Once I got on Instagram, I started realizing that the caption was more important than the picture. Like if you got the right caption, it'll go viral. The caption has to be hard as my picture.

AP: Your protest song "The Bigger Picture" was a big hit at the Grammys last year. Will you do more racial disparity-type topics in your new music?

LIL BABY: I feel like that's something I do in my songs anyway. That was a time where so much was going on. I think it got reciprocated like that. But that's a song that could've been on my album right now — without this going on. That's how I rap already.

AP: Your new album has 23 tracks. With that good amount of songs, did you think about breaking it up into a double album?

LIL BABY: I could've put 15 songs out and just added seven more songs then put out another album. I could put out two albums in no time. But I haven't put nothing out in two years. It's almost really going on three (years). ... I'm not going to drop a deluxe.

AP: Your friends Young Thug and Gunna have been jailed since May in a criminal racketeering case. How have you been dealing with that?

LIL BABY: It honestly kind of (expletive) me up, like on a day-to-day. I try my best not to think of it. I haven't been talking to Gunna as much, but I talk to Thug often. It's one of those things I try to keep off my mind. If I think about it too much, I get deep into it. It's the fact that I know the situation of where we are and what we've overcome. I know them personally. I know what they're doing and what they are not to a certain extent. To know the picture that they are painting isn't really them. It's really scary. I'm in that same position. They could be painting the same picture to me. I know for a fact that's not what it is. But I'm also seeing people in jail when I know it's not what it is. It kind of (expletive) with your insanity a little bit.

AP: Since you communicate with Thug the most, what advice have you given him?

LIL BABY: I tell him to read. This is a time when we got to do what we to get through this situation. Just read. Stack up on your knowledge. It's nothing else to do. Get you some real good books. Let that be the reason.

AP: Are you more conscious of your lyrics now?

LIL BABY: Yep, by default. It automatically makes you conscious. I can say something crazy that I never did. I know that. But with everything going on, I ain't going to say that. I'm scared for someone who would try to make something that's not. I try my best. We're rappers. We're used to saying a lot of stuff that's not true, that didn't happen. It's art. It's your imagination. You can go as far as you want to take it. But now, I have to be very mindful, because I know as much as people who are listening to what I'm saying is a critic.

AP: In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom recently signed the decriminalizing artistic expression act. How do you feel about it?

LIL BABY: It's a major impact. But I think it's a catch with this lyric thing. It's dead (expletive) wrong to try to use your lyrics and convict you of something you're just saying. It's also (expletives) wrong for putting stuff in your music that you're actually doing. It's a strong battle in that right now.

As a rapper and a person, I'm leaning more towards decriminalizing lyrics, so it's doesn't get brought up in court. But I ain't advertising or applauding the people who are actually going out here on nonsense and putting it in their songs. You got to get it how you live, but it's a finesse. You can finesse it into the music. That's the art of it. That makes it a craft. You can go out there and do something — good, bad, wrong. And then be able to come back and make it into a song. Make art out of it. You don't have to be direct and say exactly what happened. You fabricate it. It's art. You give it how you imagine.

AP: Anything you want to do outside of rap?

LIL BABY: I've been telling my team to put something together for a cartoon. My baby mother and her friends, they got like a TV show on BET, "The Impact: Atlanta." I co-produce that. I'm into stuff. My momma is trying to come up with a show about the pressure that rap moms have to go through — to be a parent of someone in hip-hop. I got my team trying to come up with a show around that. I got a couple

of ideas. I'll be around.

AP: You were singing to your son over FaceTime. How do you juggle being a rap star and father of two boys?

LIL BABY: Everything is great, except me being in this position, I just don't have enough time as I want. I want to be there, but I want to build this legacy. It (expletive) with my time with them. That's the only problem I have in life: Finding time with my kids. I can say that I don't want to go to work and have all the time in the world for them. But that won't lead to the life I want to build for them or the life I want for myself.

AP: What kind of life do you want for them?

LIL BABY: I inspire my kids to be business owners and legacy holders. I'm a first generation millionaire. I'm trying to keep it going for as long as possible. So my children are in a big situation. They hold the fire, really. I created it as the first generation. I'm going to make sure I pass it on. They have to make sure they pass it onto the next generation and so forth.

8.7% hike to Social Security checks won't cut it, some fear

By AMANDA SEITZ, TRISHA AHMED, CLAIRE SAVAGE and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — In a year when inflation has made Americans' eyes pop when they fill up their gas or walk down aisles at the grocery store, many Social Security recipients worry whether the biggest cost-of-living increase in four decades will be enough to cover their needs.

The Social Security Administration announced Thursday that Social Security benefits will rise 8.7% in 2023. That amounts to about \$140 a month on average.

Some recipients are still worried about how they'll make rent or utility payments. Others fear persistent inflation will just eat into any of the new cash flow. And some are just thankful a few extra dollars might be just enough to cover a new dress or a steak dinner.

Around the country, some of the 70 million people who receive Social Security payments are running the numbers to calculate what they can — and can't — afford once the new paychecks hit their bank accounts.

ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

Barbara Steingaszner, 83, is in a serious mood as she sits down at the card table for her weekly game of competitive bridge at the Hollin Hall Senior Center in this Washington suburb.

But she smiles big when asked about Thursday's news.

"I got really excited," Steingaszner said. "I was delighted. Whatever they're going to give me, I'll be thrilled."

Steingaszner lost her husband last year, and she's had to balance her checkbook carefully with the loss of his income.

She's been most sticker shocked by the rising costs at grocery stores, especially for meat. She says she mostly sticks to fish these days, but maybe she'll buy a bit of meat for dinner once those new Social Security payments roll in.

"You do what you have to do," Steingaszner said. "I'll do my best, I grew up during the war."

MINNEAPOLIS

A blue insulin pen in his pocket, a green debit card loaded with \$1,199 on the third of each month in his wallet, and a rental application for a low-income apartment in his hands, Lavell Leonard sighed outside the Social Security office in Minneapolis.

"This increase — it helps. But it don't help a lot," Leonard said. He plans to put the COLA increase toward his utility and phone bills.

The 39-year-old said he has received Social Security payments for his disability, severe type 1 diabetes, since he was 7 years old.

Prone to seizures and collapsing from low blood sugar, Leonard said his disability makes it difficult to

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work but he's taken on temporary jobs — washing cars, working at warehouses, and selling cans and metals — to earn \$400 to \$600 monthly.

The side jobs and the Social Security payments aren't enough to cover inflation or manage the crisis he experienced when his rent jumped from \$750 to \$950 this year. Leonard said he started working double to come up with the extra \$200 each month, but he ended up in the hospital for four days when his blood sugar dropped.

The father of three said he has been homeless "quite a few times" — including last year when he got sick, couldn't work, couldn't pay rent and got evicted — and relies on Social Security to survive.

"The government might feel like giving us \$100 is a big help, but no, it's not," Leonard said. "Increase payments four or five hundred dollars, and I bet you, we'll see a lot of happy faces — even if it's just three or four hundred dollars extra, that's a lot for some people."

WAUKEGAN, Illinois

From the third floor of a subsidized apartment about 45 miles north of Chicago, 68-year-old Earnestine Smith dreams of being able to shop for a new outfit.

"I'm so far back in clothes — I think I'm wearing my Grandma's dresses," said Smith, a retiree.

Smith plans to put the extra money she'll get each month into an emergency fund for unforeseen costs. And maybe she'll be able to do something other than window shopping at the storefronts of clothing stores, too.

"You know how you walk out and you would love to just ... to buy something new? To be able to, besides just looking at it? Yeah, it would mean a whole lot to me," she said. "A lot."

GARNER, NORTH CAROLINA

Margaret Toman's house is still filled with the flower pots, paintings and bird statutes that her mother sprinkled throughout their shared dwelling before she passed away.

While her memory looms large in this two-bedroom home, eight miles outside of Raleigh, North Carolina, money has gotten so tight that Toman now rents the empty bedroom where her mother lived out her final years with Alzheimer's disease.

The 78-year-old has been living off the retirement checks since she stepped in to be her mother's caretaker full time nearly 13 years ago.

Her most recent retirement checks are about \$1,400 a month, which she said does not begin to cover her health care costs and rising food and gas prices, expenses that "eat you alive on a low income." Occasionally she picks up groceries from the With Love From Jesus food bank in Raleigh, where she's seen fights break out over the limited supply of produce.

She described Thursday's announcement of an 8.7% cost-of-living adjustment as "quite stingy" and said she worried that a few extra dollars might disqualify some low-income seniors from other essential government programs, like food stamps.

"We're not profligate spenders, we're just not making enough to get by, period," she said.

Parkland school shooter spared from execution for killing 17

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A divided jury spared Florida school shooter Nikolas Cruz the death penalty Thursday for killing 17 people at a Parkland high school in 2018, sending him to prison for the rest of his life in a decision that left many families of the victims angered, baffled and in tears.

"This is insane. Everyone knows right?" Chen Wang, 14-year-old shooting victim Peter Wang's cousin, yelled during a news conference after the decision was read. "We need justice."

Cruz, 24, pleaded guilty a year ago to murdering 14 students and three staff members, and wounding 17 others, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Feb. 14, 2018.

The three-month trial included graphic videos and photos from the massacre and its aftermath, heart-

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wrenching testimony from victims' family members and a tour of the still blood-spattered building. The jury rejected the death penalty after deliberating for about seven hours over two days.

Cruz's lead public defender, Melisa McNeill, told the jury during her closing argument Tuesday that life in prison would still be a horrible punishment and suggested that other prisoners might target him.

But that wasn't enough for many family members, who went before television cameras, one by one, to express their shock and anger at the jury's decision. Some called Cruz a "monster," while others cried.

"We are beyond disappointed with the outcome," said Lori Alhadeff, whose 14-year-old daughter, Alyssa, was killed. "This should have been the death penalty, 100%. ... I sent my daughter to school and she was shot eight times. ... I cannot understand. I just don't understand."

Under Florida law, a death sentence requires a unanimous vote on at least one count. The seven-man, five-woman jury unanimously agreed there were aggravating factors to warrant a possible death sentence, such as agreeing that the murders were "especially heinous, atrocious, or cruel."

But one or more jurors also found mitigating factors, such as untreated childhood issues. In the end, the jury could not agree that the aggravating factors outweighed the mitigating ones, so Cruz will get life without parole.

Circuit Judge Elizabeth Scherer will formally issue the life sentences Nov. 1. Relatives, along with the students and teachers Cruz wounded, will be given the opportunity to speak.

Cruz, his hair unkempt, largely sat hunched over and stared at the table as the jury's decisions were read. Rumbblings grew from the family section — packed with about three dozen parents, spouses and other relatives of the victims — as it became apparent the jury was not going to recommend the death penalty. Many shook their heads or covered their eyes as the judge spent 50 minutes reading the jury's decision for each victim. Some parents sobbed as they left court.

Jury foreman Benjamin Thomas, in an interview broadcast on local TV station WPLG, indicated more than one juror voted for life in prison.

"We went through all the evidence and some of the jurors just felt that was the appropriate sentence," Thomas said. "I didn't vote that way, so I'm not happy with how it worked out, but everyone has the right to decide for themselves."

He said he feels bad for the families of victims and that "it hurt" to watch the decisions being read in court.

"This has been really hard on my heart ... I'd rather not see anything like this ever again," he said.

The jurors pledged during the selection process that they could vote for a death sentence, but some victims' parents — some of whom attended the trial almost daily — wondered if all of them were being honest.

Denise Cunha, one of the jurors, sent a short handwritten note to the judge defending her vote for a life sentence, and denying that she intended to vote that way before the trial began.

"The deliberations were very tense and some jurors became extremely unhappy once I mentioned that I would vote for life," wrote Cunha. She did not explain her vote.

Multiple family members talked about the years they waited for justice. They thanked prosecutors for their work, but in the end, they said they got another blow.

Tony Montalto, father of 14-year-old Gina Montalto, expressed disbelief. He said the jury recognized that Cruz committed terrible acts, "shooting, some victims more than once on a pass, pressing the barrel of his weapon to my daughter's chest. That doesn't outweigh that poor little what's-his-name had a tough upbringing?"

"Our justice system should have been used to punish this shooter to the fullest extent of the law," he said.

Michael Schulman, the stepfather of teacher Scott Beigel, said the decision gives anyone a license to kill, then claim mental illness as a defense. "This animal deserves to die. He hunted all of these people," Schulman said. "He planned it for months."

As he spoke to the media, Schulman held up a laptop with an image of Cruz in the school hallway with a gun. "The last thing my son saw was the gunman aiming at him," he said.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said that in a case like this, "where you're massacring those students with premeditation in utter disregard for basic humanity ... I just don't think anything else is appropriate except

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a capital sentence.”

Just days after the shooting, Cruz’s defense had offered that he plead guilty in exchange for a life sentence. But then-Broward State Attorney Mike Satz rejected that. Satz appointed himself to be Cruz’s lead prosecutor.

Broward State Attorney Harold Pryor released a statement Thursday saying: “We have not shied away from telling all of the horror, all of the loss, all of the devastation, all of the pain, all of the facts, all of the truth. We hope that, while there is no such thing as closure, this will bring some measure of finality and justice to this terrible chapter.”

Gordon Weekes, Broward County’s public defender, said his team’s success in getting Cruz a life sentence is not something they will celebrate.

“Doing this work as a public defender, you know there will be difficult days and you may be subjected to trauma in order to prepare your case. But you set those things aside because of your oath, your commitment and the importance of this Constitution we all cherish,” Weekes said.

Cruz, a former student at the school, said he chose Valentine’s Day to make it impossible for Stoneman Douglas students to celebrate the holiday again.

Satz kept his case simple, focusing on Cruz’s eight months of planning, the seven minutes he stalked the halls of the three-story building, firing 140 shots with an AR-15-style semi-automatic rifle, and his escape.

He played security videos of the shooting and showed gruesome crime scene and autopsy photos. Teachers and students testified about watching others die. He took the jury to the fenced-off building, which remains blood-stained and bullet-pocked.

The defense team never questioned the horror inflicted, but focused on their belief that Cruz’s birth mother’s heavy drinking during pregnancy left him brain damaged and condemned him to a life of erratic and sometimes violent behavior that culminated in the shooting. His adoptive father died in front of him when Cruz was 5, leaving his adoptive mother alone and overwhelmed by his behavior, they argued. They also said he was raped by a 12-year-old neighbor when he was 9.

The prosecution contended that Cruz did not suffer from fetal alcohol damage but has antisocial personality disorder. Their witnesses said Cruz faked brain damage during testing and that he was capable of controlling his actions, but chose not to.

The massacre is the deadliest mass shooting to go to trial in the U.S. Nine other people in the U.S. who fatally shot at least 17 people died during or immediately after their attacks by suicide or police gunfire. The suspect in the 2019 massacre of 23 at an El Paso, Texas, Walmart is awaiting trial.

Trump dossier source shocked speculation portrayed as fact

By MATTHEW BARAKAT Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — A Russian-born analyst who provided the bulk of the information for a flawed dossier about former President Donald Trump told an FBI agent he was shocked and dismayed that the speculative information he provided was portrayed as fact, an agent testified Thursday.

FBI agent Kevin Helson is the second bureau employee to testify at the trial of Igor Danchenko, who’s accused of lying to the FBI about his own sources for the information he passed on to British spy Christopher Steele.

The “Steele dossier” contained numerous allegations about connections between Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign and the Kremlin, and also included allegations of salacious sexual activity that Trump supposedly engaged in at a Moscow hotel.

Prosecutors say Danchenko should have been more forthcoming about his own sources and that if he had done so, the FBI would not have treated the dossier as credulously as it did. As it turned out, the FBI used the allegations in the dossier to obtain a surveillance warrant against a Trump campaign staffer, Carter Page.

Helson, though, offered largely positive assessments of his interviews with Danchenko when he was cross-examined by Danchenko’s attorneys. In that respect, Helson’s testimony mirrored that of the first FBI witness, analyst Brian Auten, who contradicted the prosecution theory that Danchenko fabricated

interactions with one of his supposed sub-sources, Sergei Millian.

Helson served as Danchenko's handler from 2017 through 2020, a time period in which Danchenko was a paid "confidential human source" for the FBI.

Helson said Danchenko was upfront from the start that the information he gave to Steele was mere rumor and speculation, and that he had no ability to corroborate it.

He also said Steele seemed to be telling the FBI in the months after the dossier was leaked and prompted a media frenzy that Danchenko's sourcing was more solid than Danchenko ever claimed it to be.

"Steele was really trying to prove it (the dossier), even during that time period, because he wanted it to be true. And that was putting pressure on Danchenko," Helson said.

Danchenko is being prosecuted by Special Counsel John Durham, who was appointed by then-Attorney General William Barr to investigate any misconduct in the FBI's investigation of the Trump campaign and its alleged ties to Russia. Danchenko is the third person to be prosecuted by Durham. It is the first of Durham's cases that delves deeply into the origins of the dossier, which Trump derided as fake news and a political witch hunt.

Durham's other two cases resulted in an acquittal and a guilty plea with a sentence of probation.

In the Danchenko trial, prosecutors say he lied when he told the FBI he obtained some of his information during an anonymous phone call from a man he believed to be Millian, a former head of the Russian-American Chamber of Commerce.

Prosecutors say Danchenko never spoke with Millian and that phone records show he never received an anonymous phone call at the time Danchenko claimed it occurred.

They also say Danchenko lied when he told the FBI he never "talked" with a man named Charles Dolan about the allegations contained in the dossier.

Defense lawyers say that Danchenko did receive a call, perhaps over an internet app, from someone he genuinely believed to be Millian, and that he was truthful when he said he never "talked" with Dolan about the information in the dossier because their relevant exchanges were over email.

Quality of life concerns weigh heavily on rail contract vote

By JOSH FUNK AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The lack of some benefits most American workers can readily count on, like paid sick leave and regularly scheduled weekends, is driving some railroad workers to veto contracts that include hefty raises and \$5,000 bonuses.

This week's vote by the third-largest railroad union against their contract raised the possibility that a crippling nationwide strike could still happen even though the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division union pledged to negotiate more before considering walking off the job.

All 12 railroad unions must approve the contract to avoid a strike. Six smaller railroad unions have now approved their agreements with the major freight railroads after the National Conference of Firemen & Oilers ratified their deal Thursday.

But the workers with the most concerns about demanding schedules that have them on call 24-7 — engineers and conductors, nearly one-third of rail workers — won't vote until next month.

Ultimately Congress may step in to block a strike and impose a contract if the two sides can't reach agreements.

The five-year deals include 24% raises, which are the biggest in more than four decades, and closely follow the recommendations of a special board of arbitrators appointed by President Joe Biden this summer. However, those recommendations generally don't resolve workers' scheduling and workload concerns, especially as the major railroads have eliminated nearly one-third of their workers over the past six years. Railroads have been reluctant to offer much more than that board recommended, although they did agree to give engineers and conductors three unpaid days off a year to tend to medical appointments as long as they give 30 days notice.

Conductors and engineers clearly have the worst schedules that can lack weekends because railroads

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cannot predict exactly when trains will be ready to leave, and because trains run around the clock. The electricians, mechanics, and other employees based in a set location have more regular schedules, but they say their work has also become more demanding.

Currently, rail employees can take days off for any reason, but those days are generally unpaid and workers might be docked under the railroad's attendance rules. And it's hard to get paid leave or vacation days approved unless workers plan far ahead and have the seniority to secure them, so that makes those kind of leave days nearly impossible to use for a sick day. That's why some workers question the value of the one additional paid leave day these contracts offer even though it would be the first improvement to that leave time since 1981.

"When I go to take them (personal leave days), every time without fail: 'Oh, the crew supply doesn't meet demand. We're denying it.' You've got to try to plan them in advance — ahead. So you can't use those for your sick days," said Paul Lindsey, a longtime Union Pacific engineer based in Pocatello, Idaho, who is active with the Railroad Workers United group that's campaigning against the proposed contracts.

Electrician Shelly Nunemaker wants to see BNSF ease the tight attendance rules engineers and conductors work under before those could get imposed on her job, and she says the railroad should provide paid sick leave.

"They're going to have to get a handle on this kind of thing before it gets worse and before it trickles down to us because eventually there won't be anybody to fix those choo-choos that people need to drive around," said Nunemaker, who wanted to vote "no" on the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers contract but said she never received a ballot. That has her questioning the validity of that vote because several coworkers also allegedly didn't get ballots.

The strict attendance policies that some railroads use that dock certain employees points for missing work for almost any reason have been a key concern for the unions this year because workers can be disciplined after losing all their points. The railroads maintain those systems are needed to ensure they have enough crews available, and they say the systems give workers flexibility to take some days off as long as they manage their points.

The Association of American Railroads trade group notes that rail workers do have some sickness benefits that kick in after a waiting period of four or seven days, and unions actually traded away some paid sick days in the 1970s to get better short-term disability benefits. But the unions say the pandemic — when railroads temporarily offered paid leave for COVID absences — highlighted the need for paid sick time.

Track maintenance worker Matt Mortensen said that when his three boys were younger, he had to use nearly all his vacation time to take care of sick kids. Then if he did take vacation, it had to be unpaid time off.

"To me it's weird working for a company that is so profitable and not have sick days," said Mortensen, who has worked for BNSF for 17 years in the Kansas City area and voted no on the BMWED contract.

All the major railroads have been reporting sizeable profits and BNSF said it made just over \$3 billion in the first half of this year.

Issues with scheduling and time off have increasingly become top negotiating concerns coming out of the pandemic, but rarely are the issues as glaring as they are on the railroads. Virginia Commonwealth University professor Victor Chen said the railroads' intense focus on a lean operating model that relies on fewer, longer trains with fewer locomotives and employees has "made formerly good jobs atrociously bad."

"Over the years, they've laid off workers in droves while expecting those who remain to do much more," said Chen, a sociologist who studies labor issues. "They've imposed schedules that are wildly unpredictable because it means they can squeeze more out of each worker. They've put in place insane attendance policies that would never fly in white-collar workplaces."

The working conditions on railroads have even attracted the attention of top policymakers. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi condemned all the job cuts when she spoke at the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen convention this week in Las Vegas.

"Railroad corporations are making obscene profits on the backs of its workers," Pelosi said. "You shouldn't

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get fired for staying home when you get sick.”

Lindsey, the Union Pacific engineer, said he doesn't think the unions are asking for too much.

“We just want our pay to keep up with inflation and have the ability to take days off when we need them,” he said. “I think that's totally reasonable.”

How Moscow grabs Ukrainian kids and makes them Russians

By SARAH EL DEEB, ANASTASIYA SHVETS and ELIZAVETA TILNA Associated Press

Olga Lopatkina paced around her basement in circles like a trapped animal. For more than a week, the Ukrainian mother had heard nothing from her six adopted children stranded in Mariupol, and she was going out of her mind with worry.

The kids had spent their vacation at a resort in the port city, as usual. But this time war with Russia had broken out, and her little ones — always terrified of the dark — were abandoned in a besieged city with no light and no hope. All they had now was her oldest son, Timofey, who was still himself just 17.

The questions looped endlessly in her head: Should she try to rescue the children herself — and risk being killed, making them orphans yet again? Or should she campaign to get them out from afar — and risk them being killed or falling into the hands of the Russians?

She had no idea her dilemma would lead her straight into a battle against Russia, with the highest stakes of her life.

Russia's open effort to adopt Ukrainian children and bring them up as Russian is already well underway, in one of the most explosive issues of the war, an Associated Press investigation shows.

Thousands of children have been found in the basements of war-torn cities like Mariupol and at orphanages in the Russian-backed separatist territories of Donbas. They include those whose parents were killed by Russian shelling as well as others in institutions or with foster families, known as “children of the state.”

Russia claims that these children don't have parents or guardians to look after them, or that they can't be reached. But the AP found that officials have deported Ukrainian children to Russia or Russian-held territories without consent, lied to them that they weren't wanted by their parents, used them for propaganda, and given them Russian families and citizenship.

The investigation is the most extensive to date on the grab of Ukrainian children, and the first to follow the process all the way to those already growing up in Russia. The AP drew from dozens of interviews with parents, children and officials in both Ukraine and Russia; emails and letters; Russian documents and Russian state media.

Whether or not they have parents, raising the children of war in another country or culture can be a marker of genocide, an attempt to erase the very identity of an enemy nation. Prosecutors say it also can be tied directly to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has explicitly supported the adoptions.

“It's not something that happens spur of the moment on the battlefield,” said Stephen Rapp, a former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues who is advising Ukraine on prosecutions. “And so your ability to attribute responsibility to the highest level is much greater here.”

Even where parents are dead, Rapp said, their children must be sheltered, fostered or adopted in Ukraine rather than deported to Russia.

Russian law prohibits the adoption of foreign children. But in May, Putin signed a decree making it easier for Russia to adopt and give citizenship to Ukrainian children without parental care — and harder for Ukraine and surviving relatives to win them back.

Russia also has prepared a register of suitable Russian families for Ukrainian children, and pays them for each child who gets citizenship — up to \$1,000 for those with disabilities. It holds summer camps for Ukrainian orphans, offers “patriotic education” classes and even runs a hotline to pair Russian families with children from Donbas.

“It is absolutely a terrible story,” said Petro Andryushchenko, an adviser to the Mariupol mayor, who claims hundreds of children were taken from that city alone. “We don't know if our children have an of-

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ficial parent or (stepparents) or something else because they are forcibly disappeared by Russian troops.”

The picture is complicated by the fact that many children in Ukraine’s so-called orphanages are not orphans at all. Ukraine’s government acknowledged to the U.N. before the war that most children of the state “are not orphans, have no serious illness or disease and are in an institution because their families are in difficult circumstances.”

Nevertheless, Russia portrays its adoption of Ukrainian children as an act of generosity that gives new homes and medical resources to helpless minors. Russian state media shows local officials hugging and kissing them and handing them Russian passports.

It’s very hard to pin down the exact number of Ukrainian children deported to Russia — Ukrainian officials claim nearly 8,000. Russia hasn’t given an overall number, but officials regularly announce the arrival of Ukrainian orphans in Russian military planes.

In March, Russian children’s rights ombudswoman Maria Lvova-Belova said more than 1,000 children from Ukraine were in Russia. Over the summer, she said 120 Russian families had applied for guardianship, and more than 130 Ukrainian children had received Russian citizenship. Many more have come since, including a batch of 234 in early October.

Lvova-Belova has said these children need Russia’s help to overcome trauma that has left them sleeping badly, crying at night and drawing basements and bomb shelters. She acknowledged that at first, a group of 30 children brought to Russia from the basements of Mariupol defiantly sang the Ukrainian national anthem and shouted, “Glory to Ukraine!” But now, she said, their criticism has been “transformed into a love for Russia,” and she herself has taken one in, a teenager.

“Today he received a passport of a citizen of the Russian Federation and does not let go of it!” she posted on Telegram on Sept. 21, along with a photo. “(He) was waiting for this day in our family more than anyone else.”

Lvova-Belova has been sanctioned by the United States, Europe, the U.K., Canada and Australia. Her office referred the AP to her reply in a state-owned news agency that Russia was “helping children to preserve their right to live under a peaceful sky and be happy.”

In August, a post from a senior official at the Moscow Department of Labor and Social Protection thanking the Russian foster families declared: “Our Children...Now they are ours.”

As Lopatkina agonized over what to do, her teenage son’s childhood came to an abrupt end in Mariupol. Suddenly, Timofey had become the father to all his siblings. Three had chronic illnesses or disabilities, and the youngest was just 7.

As intense shelling broke the glass around them, they cowered in a basement. When the younger ones were scared, Timofey carried them in his arms. After one airstrike, they moved their beds closer together next to the thickest wall.

But no wall could keep out the war. Every day, Timofey awoke at 6 a.m. in the bitter cold and chopped wood for a bonfire to cook food. All he wanted to do was to finish his work and sleep — only to have to wake up and do it again.

Calluses built up on his hands. His skin grew thicker in other ways. When airplanes rumbled overhead, he no longer ran for shelter.

“When you walk and see brains of people on the road, right on the pavement, nothing matters,” he recalled.

He promised his mother he would look after the younger children. But then the power went out, and he lost touch with her completely.

A friend who had joined the fighting offered to take him out of Mariupol. He refused. He knew he would never forgive himself if he left his siblings behind.

Finally, a local doctor from Mariupol arranged an evacuation to elsewhere in Ukraine. But pro-Russia forces at a checkpoint refused to recognize the children’s documents, photocopies of official papers identifying them and their parents. Timofey’s pleas went nowhere.

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Instead, the children ended up in a hospital in the Donetsk People's Republic, or DPR, a separatist Russian-controlled area in Ukraine. Timofey was only months away from turning 18 — the age when he would be drafted into the DPR army against his homeland.

"For the DPR, I would never go to fight in my life," he said. "I understood that I had to get out of there one way or another."

At least, Timofey thought, he could tell his mother he had kept the children safe. He was close to his mother, and they were alike, he and she — both tough survivors who would stick it out to the end no matter what.

Or so he thought, until he reached her.

"It's great that they are alive," she replied. "But we are already abroad."

Timofey was utterly devastated. His parents had fled Ukraine without him. He felt they had thrown him away like garbage, along with five children he hadn't asked for and couldn't know how to protect.

"Thanks for leaving me," he wrote back, furious.

The children of Mariupol aren't the first Russia has been accused of stealing from Ukraine.

In 2014, after Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, more than 80 children from Luhansk were stopped at checkpoints and abducted. Ukraine sued, and the European Court of Human Rights found the children were taken into Russia "without medical support or the necessary paperwork." The children were returned to Ukraine before a final decision.

Kateryna Rashevskaya, a human rights defender, said she knows of about 30 Ukrainian children from Crimea adopted by Russians under a program known as Train of Hope. Now, she said, some of those children might well be Russian soldiers. Since 2015, the Young Army Cadets national movement has trained youth in Crimea and Russia for potential recruitment into the military.

This time around, at least 96 children have been returned to Ukraine since March after negotiations. But Ukrainian officials have tracked down the identities of thousands more in Russia, and the names of many others simply aren't published.

"We cannot ask the Russian Federation to return the children because we don't know who they should return," said Rashevskaya, with the Ukrainian organization Regional Central for Human Rights.

Kira, a 12-year-old girl who saw her father shot and killed, was evacuated from Mariupol to Donetsk with shrapnel wounds on her ear, leg, neck and arm. Kira was reunited with her grandparents only after the office of the Ukraine deputy prime minister got involved.

Her grandmother, Svitlana Obedynska, said Kira had become withdrawn and lost interest in everything, and negotiations were "very difficult."

"It was not decided at our level," she said. "She wants to be with her family. After all, she has no one else."

In response to the AP investigation, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price called the story of stolen children "absolutely horrifying, but unfortunately not surprising."

Russia justifies the deportation of children by saying it has annexed four territories in Ukraine, but the U.N. and the rest of the world called the move in late September a sham. The governor of one of those territories, Serhiy Haidai of Luhansk, has accused Russian officials of drawing up documents that deprive Ukrainian parents of their rights. He too fears that Ukrainian children will be enlisted in the Russian military.

Other officials in occupied territories loyal to Moscow have a more benign view of what Russia is doing. Olga Volkova, who heads an institution for children in Donetsk, had 225 kids evacuated to an area near the Russian seaside city of Taganrog, and 10 were taken in by Russian families in April. After DPR and Russian officials make a list of suitable candidates, her boarding school secures citizenship for them and sends them to new families in Russia.

If there are Ukrainian relatives, they can stay in touch, call and perhaps eventually meet, Volkova said. In the meantime, while the war is ongoing, she noted, the children now still have families of a sort.

"Everyone wants to have a mother, you see?" Volkova said.

Olga Lopatkina was a teacher of music and the arts who had lived a hard life. Now a middle-aged woman

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with red and pink streaks in her hair fading to white, she lost her own mother as a teenager. In 2014, when fighting with Russian-backed forces broke out in Donetsk, she also lost a home.

But this nightmare with her children, she thought, was the hardest thing yet. Although Mariupol was less than 100 kilometers (60 miles) away from her home in Vuhledar, it was impossible to reach safely because of bombardment. In the meantime, her 18-year-old biological daughter, Rada, was at a boxing competition near Kharkiv, another front-line city.

She told herself every day that the war would end fast. It was the 21st century, after all. Instead, it edged closer.

Lopatkina took in two refugee families from a city near Mariupol, who confirmed her worst fears. One woman said her husband was killed in front of her, and she had to step over his corpse.

Lopatkina hounded Ukrainian officials, the local governor, social services, anybody who could evacuate her children. In calls, Timofey told his mother he was looking after his younger siblings. She was proud and slightly reassured.

Then, on March 1, their connection was lost. She thought her kids were going to be evacuated to Zaporizhzhia, so she and her husband went there, with books of fairy tales and other treats. But two days after they arrived, the state ordered Zaporizhzhia itself to be evacuated instead.

Lopatkina had to make yet another painful decision. Should she wait for an evacuation from Mariupol that might never happen? Or should she go to collect her oldest daughter before losing contact with her too?

"Let's go," she told her husband, Denys.

Lopatkina escaped with Rada to France. In one final plea, she wrote to the governor of Donetsk: "Don't forget my orphans."

When she received the message from Timofey accusing her of deserting them, she was stung but not surprised.

"I can't even imagine," she said, her voice breaking as she started to cry. "If I were him, I would have reacted the same way, and maybe even worse."

Lopatkina continued to push Russian and Ukrainian officials incessantly. She sent them photocopies of Ukrainian documents proving her guardianship. She told them some of the children were sick, and worried that nobody had even asked about their medication.

The children were paraded on Russian television and told she didn't love them. It broke her heart.

"Every day they turned the children against us," she said. "Your parents abandoned you ... We will transfer you to the best families. Here you will have a better life."

She got a job in a garment factory in France and bought furniture, clothes and toys for children who might or might not return. She chose their bedrooms in her small duplex in the northwest, in Loue. She planned celebrations for missed birthdays.

Then, much to her dismay, she found out that other Ukrainian orphans who were with her children had been issued new identity documents for the DPR. The Donetsk authorities dropped a bombshell. She could have her children back — if she came through Russia to Donetsk to get them in person.

Lopatkina feared a trap. If she went to Russia, she might never be allowed to leave.

"I will sue you," she threatened Donetsk officials in an email on May 18th. "You took my kids. That is a crime."

For some Russian families, taking in Ukrainian orphans isn't a crime. It's a gift.

One professional foster mother was called in by the Moscow social services to "come and look" at the eastern Ukrainian kids who had recently arrived. She already had six Russian foster kids under her roof, some with disabilities. She took in three more from Mariupol.

"We still have love untapped," she said. "There are children who need to be given affection, love, care, family, mom and dad. If we can give it, why not?"

She said she had reached out to the children's Ukrainian foster mother, who didn't mind the arrangement.

The AP couldn't reach the Ukrainian mother. But the children didn't hide their resentment of her, described life with her as constrained and made no effort to call her.

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They said she had dropped them off at a bunker in Mariupol. The Russian military got them out, and they had to choose between adoption by a Russian family and life in a Russian orphanage.

After a guardianship trial in now-occupied Mariupol, the Russian mother has custody of the children. They have become Russian citizens and call her mom, she said.

"We don't talk about the war," she said. "Politics remains politics. This is not our business."

At her house with a courtyard and inflatable swimming pool, the children said they felt welcome and accepted. The 15-year-old girl is eager to start a new life in Russia — but in part because returning to her old one is impossible. Her school was bombed, one of her classmates died and almost everyone has left.

"Trying to start on a new page is never bad," she said. "Why not?"

Her 17-year-old foster brother interrupted. Two of his friends had died also, he said.

He thinks starting his life anew will give him experience, and he looks forward to seeing Russia. But he is also worried about not being accepted as a Ukrainian. He will give it a go for a decade to try and make a fortune, and then return to Ukraine.

"My friends are there, they can support me," he said. "I was born there ... I know everything there, I'm just used to it."

Hundreds more orphans from Ukraine were housed in a leafy seaside camp near Taganrog, an upscale facility with a large dining room and playgrounds.

Yaroslava Rogachyova, 11, had been evacuated from a children's institution in Donetsk, and was waiting to be sent to a foster family in Moscow with her two sisters. She said she will miss the sea, Donetsk and her biological parents back there, but she didn't explain why she didn't or couldn't go back to them. She is now thinking ahead to her new life.

"I'm going to Moscow, I've already seen the family and everyone," she said. "I liked the mom from the very beginning."

In the DPR, Timofey didn't want a new life —he wanted his old one back. Angry and miserable, he argued with officials and ate almost nothing.

His only escape was reading a book he never finished, and sneaking out to see a girl. One day he returned with a tattoo of three daggers on his legs, which could symbolize protection, bravery or power.

The new reality in a new place terrified Timofey, eclipsing his anger at his mother. On a call, she explained what had happened. He was deeply relieved.

"I missed my parents," he said. "It was very difficult for me without my mother and father's support ... I constantly cried like a girl, 'Mom, it's hard for me, I'm tired.'"

The little children repeatedly asked when they could go home to their mother. They were badly fed, slapped and cursed, Timofey said.

Then they heard hospital officials wouldn't let them go home at all. Timofey's 13-year-old foster brother, Sasha, was so furious that he slammed his hand on a slide and broke a finger.

"I really missed my parents," Sasha said. "I didn't need anything but my parents."

Two officials pulled Timofey aside and told him a court in the DPR would strip Lopatkina and her husband of their guardianship. His younger siblings would go first to an orphanage, then to new families in Russia. Timofey would go to school in Donetsk.

He was enraged. "That can't be done," he said. "It is illegal."

The officials replied that parents who didn't come to collect their children didn't want them. Timofey stormed out.

"I was so disappointed, I didn't believe in anything," he said. "I was terrified."

He was determined to keep together the only family he had known, and he worried that his siblings would end up with Russian families who wanted them only for the state aid. He told his mother he could marry his new girlfriend and adopt his siblings when he turned 18.

Then Lopatkina's efforts finally paid off.

She was working with Darya Kasyanova, the director of the nonprofit SOS Children's Villages, who already had helped to negotiate the release of 25 Ukrainian children from Russia. Sending the children in the first

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place to Russian territories instead of Ukraine was "a violation of the rights of the child," Kasyanova said.

After two months of negotiation and an initial objection from a senior Russian official, DPR authorities finally agreed to allow a volunteer with power of attorney from Lopatkina to collect the children. They asked Timofey if he and his siblings wanted to go back to his foster family or stay in Donetsk.

"Now that I have a chance, I will, of course, go home to my parents," he told them.

A document was drafted and signed. At last, they were going to France.

After a delay because of shelling, they finally left on a three-day bus trip through Russia and Latvia to Berlin.

They were grilled at the Russian border and panicked. Timofey texted his mother. But the volunteer got them through.

Timofey met his father at a bus stop in Berlin. He couldn't quite believe it. They drove to France, where Timofey went to pick his mother up from the garment factory as a surprise.

Lopatkina was sewing frantically, replaying the moment her kids were stopped at the border a dozen times in her head. She had already begun thinking of what new plan she could hatch to get them back.

When Timofey arrived, she was in shock. For him, the euphoria was wild, a high like nothing he had ever experienced before.

Back at the house, the other children were waiting. They ran toward their mother, losing their shoes, and jumped into her arms. She ruffled their hair and held their faces. It was all happening faster than her brain could process.

"Let me see you!" she screamed. "Aaaaah!" The two dogs joined the party, barking.

It took Timofey a couple of days before he could believe he was really back with his parents. No resentment was left, he said. He erased the angry message he had sent his mother from his phone and from his mind.

"I kept my promise," he said. "The burden of responsibility was gone. I said: 'Mother, take the reins, that's all ... I'm a child now.'"

High court rejects Trump plea to step into Mar-a-Lago case

By MARK SHERMAN and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Thursday rejected former President Donald Trump's plea to step into the legal fight over the FBI search of his Florida estate.

The justices did not otherwise comment in turning away Trump's emergency appeal.

Trump had pressed the court on an issue relating to classified documents seized in the search authorized by a federal judge of Mar-a-Lago.

The Trump team was asking the justices to overturn a lower court ruling and permit an independent arbiter, or special master, to review the roughly 100 documents with classified markings that were taken in the Aug. 8 search of Mar-a-Lago.

The move Thursday appears to greatly reduce the potential impact of the special master process to the ongoing Justice Department criminal investigation into the classified documents.

A federal appeals court had already restored the department's access to the classified documents, which had been investigators' primary goal. And the Supreme Court's decision to stay out of the fray ensures that the special master will not have access to those same records as the FBI and Justice Department evaluate if criminal charges are merited.

A three-judge panel from the Atlanta-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit last month limited the special master's review to the much larger tranche of non-classified documents. The judges, including two Trump appointees, sided with the Justice Department, which had argued there was no legal basis for the special master to conduct his own review of the classified records.

But Trump's lawyers said in their application to the Supreme Court that it was essential for the special master to have access to the classified records to "determine whether documents bearing classification markings are in fact classified, and regardless of classification, whether those records are personal records

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or Presidential records.”

The Justice Department said in a Supreme Court filing that Trump’s request had no merit.

The FBI says it seized roughly 11,000 documents, including about 100 with classification markings, during its search. The Trump team asked a judge in Florida, Aileen Cannon, to appoint a special master to do an independent review of the records.

Cannon subsequently assigned a veteran Brooklyn judge, Raymond Dearie, to review the records and segregate those that may be protected by claims of attorney-client privilege and executive privilege. The Justice Department objected to Dearie’s ability to review the classified records, prompting the 11th Circuit to side with the department.

The department also is appealing Cannon’s entire ruling to the 11th Circuit.

Trial: Trump tweet about ‘wild’ protest energized extremists

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Members of the far-right Oath Keepers were ecstatic when then-President Donald Trump invited supporters to a “wild” protest in Washington on Jan. 6, 2021, when Congress would be certifying the results of the 2020 election, according to messages shown Thursday during the seditious conspiracy trial for the militia group’s founder and four associates.

During an FBI agent’s testimony, jurors saw a string of online posts that Oath Keepers members in Florida exchanged after Trump’s tweet on Dec. 19, 2020, about a “big protest” at the upcoming joint session of Congress on Jan. 6. “Be there, will be wild!” Trump said.

“He wants us to make it WILD,” Kelly Meggs, an Oath Keepers leader from Dunnellon, Florida, wrote in a message to other group members. “He called us all to the Capitol and wants us to make it wild!!! Sir Yes Sir!!!”

Trump’s words appeared to energize Oath Keepers members. They used an encrypted messaging app to discuss their plans to be in the nation’s capital on Jan. 6, when, after a Trump rally near the White House, a mob stormed the Capitol and disrupted Congress from certifying Democrat Joe Biden’s victory over the Republican incumbent.

“These will be flying Jan. 6 in front of the Capitol,” Meggs wrote in a post that included the image of an Oath Keepers flag.

Graydon Young, an Oath Keepers member from Florida who has pleaded guilty to a conspiracy charge, said he was going to Washington even though it “feels like a fool’s errand.” Oath Keepers founder and national leader Stewart Rhodes responded on Dec. 25, 2020, that he disagreed with that assessment.

“Trump needs to know we support him in using the Insurrection Act,” Rhodes wrote. “And he needs to know that if he fails to act, then we will.”

Rhodes added that he believed the Secret Service would be “happy to have us out there” if Trump “calls us up as militia.”

A key argument for Rhodes’ lawyers is that the Oath Keepers founder believed Trump was going to invoke the Insurrection Act, which gives the president broad authority to call up the military and decide what shape that force will take. Trump did float that kind of action at other points in his presidency.

Meggs and Rhodes, who’s from Granbury, Texas, are on trial with Thomas Caldwell of Berryville, Virginia; Kenneth Harrelson of Titusville, Florida; and Jessica Watkins of Woodstock, Ohio.

They are the first Capitol riot defendants to be tried on seditious conspiracy charges for what prosecutors said was a plot to stop the lawful transfer of presidential power. The Civil War-era charge carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

As testimony continued Thursday, the House Jan. 6 committee played a recording at its public hearing of Watkins saying, “It has spread like wildfire that (Vice President Mike) Pence has betrayed us” and “100 percent” of the crowd would be going to the Capitol right after a Trump tweet that had criticized Pence, as the Senate’s presiding officer, for not delaying or rejecting the certification of the Electoral College vote by Congress.

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Defense lawyers have accused prosecutors of cherry-picking messages and have said there is no evidence the Oath Keepers had a plan to attack the Capitol.

The trial started last Monday and is expected to last more than a month.

Trump's Dec. 19 tweet also was a focus of a July hearing by the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection.

One committee member, Rep. Stephanie Murphy, D-Fla., said the tweet "served as a call to action and in some cases as a call to arms." A second, Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., said it "electrified and galvanized" Trump supporters, including the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys and other far-right extremists.

Several members of the Proud Boys, including former national chairman Henry "Enrique" Tarrío, also are charged with seditious conspiracy for their alleged roles in the Jan. 6 attack and await a trial in December.

Thursday's testimony for the Oath Keepers trial focused on members of the group's Florida contingent and their communications in the days leading up to the riot.

In a chat for Oath Keepers members in Florida on the Signal messaging app, Rhodes said they should adopt the QAnon slogan "WWG1WGA," which stands for "Where we go one, we go all." QAnon is a conspiracy theory that has centered on the baseless belief that Trump was secretly fighting a cabal of Satan-worshipping "deep state" enemies, Hollywood elites and prominent Democrats.

"They come for one of us, they come for all of us," Rhodes posted on Dec. 21, 2020. "When they come for us, we go for them."

Kelly Meggs responded: "It's easy to chat. The real question is who's willing to DIE."

Three days before the Capitol attack, Meggs sent a message to an associate that said, "1776 we are going to make history."

"What happened in 1776?" Justice Department prosecutor Louis Manzo asked FBI Special Agent Kelsey Harris.

"The American revolution," the agent replied.

Ukraine gets more air defense pledges as Russia hits cities

By SABRA AYRES Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's allies vowed Thursday to supply the besieged nation with advanced air defense systems as Russian forces attacked the Kyiv region with kamikaze drones and fired missiles elsewhere at civilian targets, payback for the bombing of a strategic bridge linking Russia with annexed Crimea.

Missile strikes killed at least five people and destroyed an apartment building in the southern city of Mykolaiv, while heavy artillery damaged more than 30 houses, a hospital, a kindergarten and other buildings in the town of Nikopol, across the river from the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

Russia has intensified its bombardment of civilian areas in recent weeks as its military lost ground in multiple occupied regions of Ukraine that Russian President Vladimir Putin has illegally annexed. Kremlin war hawks have urged Putin to escalate the bombing campaign even more to punish Ukraine for Saturday's truck bomb attack on the landmark Kerch Bridge. Ukraine has not claimed responsibility for the attack.

"We need to protect our sky from the terror of Russia," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told the Council of Europe, a human rights organization. "If this is done, it will be a fundamental step to end the entire war in the near future."

Responding to Zelenskyy's repeated pleas for more effective air defenses, the British government announced it would provide missiles for advanced NASAM anti-aircraft systems that the Pentagon plans to send to Ukraine. The U.K. also is sending hundreds of aerial drones for information-gathering and logistics support, plus 18 howitzer artillery guns.

"These weapons will help Ukraine defend its skies from attacks and strengthen their overall missile defense alongside the U.S. NASAMS," U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said.

Other NATO defense ministers meeting this week promised to supply systems offering medium- to long-range defense against missile attacks.

Germany has delivered the first of four promised IRIS-T air defense systems, while France pledged more artillery, anti-aircraft systems and missiles. The Netherlands said it would send missiles, and Canada is

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planning about \$50 million more in military aid, including winter equipment, drone cameras and satellite communications.

Speaking in Berlin, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Putin "and his enablers have made one thing very clear: this war is not only about Ukraine," but rather "a crusade against our way of life and a crusade against what Putin calls the collective West. He means all of us."

NATO plans to hold a nuclear exercise next week against the backdrop of Putin's insistence he would use any means necessary to defend Russian territory, including the illegally annexed regions of Ukraine. The exercise takes place each year.

On the battlefield Thursday in Ukraine, Russian forces hit a five-story apartment building in Mykolaiv with an S-300 missile, regional Gov. Vitaliy Kim said, a weapon ordinarily used for targeting military aircraft. An 11-year-old boy was pulled alive from the building's rubble after six hours but later died.

"No words. Creature terrorists," Kim wrote on Telegram.

Video showed rescuers working by flashlight to pull the boy out of the concrete and metal debris. As they carried him on a stretcher through the building's front door to an ambulance, a man who appeared to be his father leaned over to kiss the boy's head, then place a blanket on him.

Four other people were reported killed in Mykolaiv.

Residents of Ukraine's capital region, whose lives had regained some normalcy when war's front lines moved east and south months ago, were jolted by air raid sirens multiple times Thursday after explosives-packed Iran-made drones found their targets.

Ukrainian officials said Iranians in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine were training Russians how to use the Shahed-136 systems, which can conduct air-to-surface attacks, electronic warfare and targeting.

The low-flying drones keep Ukraine's cities on edge, but the British Defense Ministry said they're unlikely to strike deep into Ukrainian territory because many are destroyed before hitting their targets. Ukraine's air force command said Thursday its air defense units shot down six drones over the Odesa and Mykolaiv regions during the night. Ukrainian authorities also reported knocking down four Russian cruise missiles.

Describing the scope of Russia's retaliatory attacks, the speaker of Russia's lower house of parliament said Russian forces struck more than 70 energy facilities in Ukraine this week.

State Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin threatened an "even tougher" response to future Ukrainian attacks. The 12-mile Kerch Bridge is a prominent symbol of Moscow's power.

Kyiv's troops have recaptured villages and towns in a fall offensive but that has been revealing the trauma of residents who lived for months under Russian occupation.

In one liberated town, Velyka Oleksandrivka in the annexed Kherson region, seven months of Russian occupation left bridges blasted into pieces, blackened vehicles on pockmarked roads and shelling scars on buildings.

"It's a disaster," resident Tetyana Patsuk said of her house. "I've been crying for a month. I am still shocked. I can't recover from that feeling that I have lost everything now that I am 72 years old, and that's it."

As Ukraine's military claimed more success Thursday in forcing its enemy to retreat from Kherson-area positions, Moscow authorities promised free accommodation to Kherson residents who choose to evacuate to Russia. The Russia-backed leader of Kherson, Vladimir Saldo, cited possible missile attacks on civilians in suggesting the move.

Saldo's deputy, Kirill Stremousov tried to play down the move, saying, "No one's retreating ... no one is planning to leave the territory of the Kherson region." But the British military suggested the move reflected Russian fears that fighting was coming right into the city of Kherson.

Russia has repeatedly characterized the movement of Ukrainians to Russia as voluntary but reports have surfaced that many have been forcibly deported from occupied territory to Russian "filtration camps," under harsh conditions. In most cases, the only way out of the camps is to Russia or Russian-controlled areas.

Among those forced out have been children. An Associated Press investigation found that officials have deported Ukrainian children without consent, lied to them that their parents didn't want them, used them for propaganda, changed their citizenship to Russian and gave some to Russian families.

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On the Russian side of the border, the Ukrainian military blew up an ammunition depot and damaged a multi-story building in Russia's Belgorod region, Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Telegram. The village where the depot is located was evacuated.

The director general of the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog said Thursday that fighting around the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest, remained "concerning." A Russian missile strike on a distant electrical substation Wednesday caused the plant temporarily to lose its last external power source, which is needed to prevent reactors from overheating.

International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi said in Kyiv after returning from Russia that his organization is pushing for a demilitarization zone around the plant, but that said he did not receive any indications that Putin was ready to discuss the definitive "parameters" of such an agreement.

Social Security benefits to jump by 8.7% next year

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Millions of Social Security recipients will get an 8.7% boost in their benefits in 2023, a historic increase but a gain that will be eaten up in part by the rising cost of everyday living.

The cost-of-living adjustment — the largest in more than 40 years — means the average recipient will receive more than \$140 extra a month beginning in January, the Social Security Administration said Thursday.

While Social Security recipients welcomed the benefit increase, many said it wasn't enough to cover the impact of inflation.

It's "not much help," said 85-year-old Shirley Parker, who lives in Chatham on Chicago's South Side, Home maintenance costs and high grocery prices are cutting steeply into her budget. "Food is ridiculous. I come out with a bag full of groceries — \$50 — don't have about 10 items," she said.

A separate government report Thursday showed inflation newly accelerating. The Consumer Price Index rose 0.4% for September after just 0.1% in August and is up 8.2% for the past 12 months. Jobless claims for unemployment benefits rose for the week.

The Social Security Administration said the estimated average monthly Social Security benefit for all retired workers will be \$1,827 starting in January, according to an agency fact sheet.

The boost in Social Security benefits will be coupled with a 3% drop in Medicare Part B premiums, meaning retirees will get the full impact of the Social Security increase.

"This year's substantial Social Security cost-of-living adjustment is the first time in over a decade that Medicare premiums are not rising and shows that we can provide more support to older Americans who count on the benefits they have earned," said the Social Security Administration's acting commissioner, Kilolo Kijakazi.

President Joe Biden on Thursday afternoon echoed the sentiment that the Medicare premium reduction would have some impact on retirees' wallets. "Seniors are gonna get ahead of inflation next year," Biden said. "For the first time in 10 years, their Social Security checks will go up while their Medicare premiums go down."

Jo Ann Jenkins, CEO of the AARP, said the benefits increase "will provide much needed relief to millions of Americans."

Several government indexes show that inflation hits older Americans harder than the rest of the population. Medical costs are a big part of the burden.

The Social Security announcement comes just weeks before the midterm elections, and at a time when Democrats and Republicans are sparring about high prices now and how best to shore up the program financially in the future.

William Arnone, chief executive of the National Academy of Social Insurance, an advocacy organization for Social Security, said the benefit increase is "no cause for celebration," since it will not help all recipients overcome inflation, especially if prices continue to rise.

"There's already indications that health care inflation is going to be through the roof next year," Arnone said.

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Margaret Toman, a 78-year-old in Garner, North Carolina, who had stopped working to take care of her mother, who has since died, described the 8.7% increase as "quite stingy."

"I think most of us who are older receiving Social Security are grateful for that Social Security," she said. "But that gratitude sometimes covers up or replaces a certain feeling of anger at having paid into a system for so long and still struggling to survive."

About 70 million people — including retirees, disabled people and children — receive Social Security benefits. This will be the biggest increase in benefits that baby boomers, those born between the years 1946 and 1964, have ever seen. The last time a COLA was higher was in 1981, at 11.2%.

Willie Clark, 65, of Waukegan, Illinois, says his budget is "real tight" and the increase in his Social Security disability benefits could give him some breathing room to cover household expenses he's been holding off on.

Still, he doubts how much of the extra money will end up in his pocket. His rent in an apartment building subsidized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is based on his income, so he expects that will rise, too.

Social Security is financed by payroll taxes collected from workers and their employers. The maximum amount of earnings subject to Social Security payroll taxes for 2023 is \$160,200, up from \$147,000 in 2022.

The financing setup dates to the 1930s, the brainchild of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who believed a payroll tax would foster among average Americans a sense of ownership that would protect the program from political interference.

Next year's higher payout, without an accompanying increase in Social Security contributions, could put additional pressure on a system that's facing a severe shortfall in coming years.

The annual Social Security and Medicare trustees report released in June says the program's trust fund will be unable to pay full benefits beginning in 2035.

If the trust fund is depleted, the government will be able to pay only 80% of scheduled benefits, the report said. Medicare will be able to pay 90% of total scheduled benefits if the fund is depleted.

In January, a Pew Research Center poll showed 57% of U.S. adults saying that "taking steps to make the Social Security system financially sound" was a top priority for the president and Congress to address this year. Securing Social Security got bipartisan support, with 56% of Democrats and 58% of Republicans calling it a top priority.

Some solutions for reforming Social Security have been proposed, but none has moved forward in a sharply partisan Congress.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Thursday the COLA announcement is a reminder that "extreme MAGA Republicans are openly plotting new schemes to slash seniors' benefits and raise their costs — including by threatening to cause an economic catastrophe by holding the debt limit hostage for their toxic agenda."

Earlier this year, Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., issued a detailed plan that would require Congress to come up with a proposal to adequately fund Social Security and Medicare or potentially phase them out.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., publicly rebuked the plan and Biden has used Scott's proposal as a political bludgeon against Republicans before the midterm elections.

"If Republicans in Congress have their way, seniors will pay more for prescription drugs and their Social Security benefits will never be secure," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

Netflix sets \$7 monthly price for its ad-supported service

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN RAMON, Calif. (AP) — Netflix next month will unveil the first version of its video streaming service with ads, giving cost-conscious viewers a chance to watch most of its shows at a steep discount in exchange for putting up with commercial interruptions.

The ad-supported service is scheduled to debut Nov. 3 as Netflix tries to reverse a drop in subscribers. It will cost \$7 per month in the U.S., a 55% markdown from Netflix's most popular \$15.50-per-month plan, which is ad-free.

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Netflix's ad-supported option will also be rolling out in Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Spain and the U.K., according to a Thursday post by the company's chief operating officer, Greg Peters.

Besides putting up with roughly four to five minutes of ads during each hour of viewing, Netflix subscribers who sign up for the cheaper service also won't be able to download TV shows and movies to watch when their devices are offline. Peters also said a "limited" amount of programming available on the commercial-free service won't be on the ad-supported version because of licensing issues.

Netflix's 15-year-old streaming service has until now been commercial free, but the Los Gatos, California, company decided to head in a new direction six months ago after reporting its first loss in subscribers in more than a decade.

The customer erosion worsened a wrenching decline in its stock price that has wiped up more than \$200 billion in shareholder wealth during the past 11 months. The shares rallied after Thursday's announcement, but still have lost about two-thirds of their value since reaching their peak last November when the streaming service was still growing.

Through the first half of this year, Netflix lost 1.2 million subscribers, leaving it with nearly 221 million. Management in July predicted it would regain about 1 million of those subscribers during the summer months. The numbers for the July-September period are scheduled to be disclosed Tuesday.

Netflix is betting the low-priced option with ads will be particularly popular at a time that persistently high inflation is pressuring millions of households to curb their spending, particularly on discretionary items such as video streaming. The streaming market also has become crowded with tougher competition from the likes of Amazon, Apple and Walt Disney Co., which also is preparing to offer an ad-supported version of its service soon.

Putin tempts Turkey, suggests making it Europe's new gas hub

By SUZAN FRASER and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday doubled down on his proposal to turn Turkey into a gas hub for Europe after deliveries to Germany through the Baltic Sea's Nord Stream pipeline were halted.

Putin floated the idea of exporting more gas through the Turk Stream gas pipeline running beneath the Black Sea to Turkey as he met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the sidelines of a regional summit in Kazakhstan.

It's the second unlikely energy proposal that Putin has pitched in as many days, with European leaders calling Russia's cuts in natural gas a political bid to divide them over their support for Ukraine. It's created an energy crisis heading into winter that has fueled inflation, forced some industries to cut production and sent utility bills soaring.

"This is just another attempt by Russia to use gas as a geo-strategic tool to weaken EU and NATO countries," said Simone Tagliapietra, an energy policy expert at the Bruegel think tank in Brussels.

Russia was "tempting Turkey to becoming an energy hub — a long lasting strategic aim of the country — while trying to create new divisions among European countries," the analyst said, adding that Putin's strategy was not likely to succeed.

A day earlier, Germany rejected Putin's proposal to step up gas flows to Europe via a link of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline under the Baltic Sea — a pipeline that has never been operational. Moscow has cut off the parallel Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline over what it claimed were technical problems.

The Russian leader first voiced the proposal on Wednesday, saying that Russia could increase the volume of its gas exports to Turkey through the Black Sea pipeline.

"We could ... make the main routes for the supply of our fuel, our natural gas to Europe through Turkey, creating in Turkey the largest gas hub for Europe -- if, of course, our partners are interested in it," Putin told a Moscow energy forum.

On Thursday, he said the hub could help regulate "exorbitant" prices. "We could easily regulate (prices)

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at a normal market level, without any political overtones," Putin said.

"Putin is in a desperate situation. Nord Stream 1 and 2 are not operational and are unlikely to be operational for a long while," said Mehmet Ogutcu, chairman of the London Energy Club. "Europe has made clear that it will not enter an engagement (with Russia) as long as the war in Ukraine continues."

"Turkey remains Putin's only option," he said.

Ogutcu said Turkey was likely to tread carefully, wary of further increasing its dependence on Russia.

"There is a delicate balancing act (by Turkey). If the balance tilts too much toward Russia this will damage (Ankara's) relations with the West," Ogutcu said.

Erdogan did not comment publicly on the proposal but Putin's spokesman, Dimitry Peskov said Turkey has reacted positively to the idea. Officials from Erdogan's office could not immediately be reached for comment.

Turkey's state-run news agency however, quoted Turkish Energy Minister Fatih Donmez as saying on Wednesday that it was "too early to assess" the proposal.

"Technically it is possible," Anadolu Agency quoted Donmez as telling reporters at the same Moscow energy forum. "For such international projects, technical, commercial and legal evaluation and feasibility studies need to be conducted."

NATO-member Turkey, which is depending on Russian for its energy needs and tourism, has criticized Moscow's actions in Ukraine but has not joined U.S. and European sanctions against Russia. It has maintained its close ties with both Moscow and Kyiv and positioning itself as a mediator between the two. Ankara recently helped broker key deals that allowed Ukrainian to resume grain exports and led to a prisoner swap between Ukraine and Russia.

Although Russia is still conveying gas to Europe via Ukraine, the amount has plummeted drastically with the two Baltic pipelines out of commission.

The Nord Stream 2 pipeline never came on stream because Germany blocked its operation just before Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Ozone hole grows this year, but still shrinking in general

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

The Antarctic ozone hole last week peaked at a moderately large size for the third straight year — bigger than the size of North America — but experts say it's still generally shrinking despite recent blips because of high altitude cold weather.

The ozone hole hit its peak size of more than 10 million square miles (26.4 million square kilometers) on October 5, the largest it has been since 2015, according to NASA. Scientists say because of cooler than normal temperatures over the southern polar regions at 7 to 12 miles high (12 to 20 kilometers) where the ozone hole is, conditions are ripe for ozone-munching chlorine chemicals.

"The overall trend is improvement. It's a little worse this year because it was a little colder this year," said NASA Goddard Space Flight Center Chief Earth Scientist Paul Newman, who tracks ozone depletion. "All the data says that ozone is on the mend."

Just looking at the maximum ozone hole size, especially in October, can be misleading, said top ozone scientist Susan Solomon of MIT.

"Ozone depletion starts LATER and takes LONGER to get to the maximum hole and the holes are typically shallower" in September, which is the key month to look at ozone recovery, not October, Solomon said Thursday in an email.

Chlorine and bromine chemicals high in the atmosphere eat at Earth's protective ozone layer. Cold weather creates clouds that releases the chemicals, Newman said. The more cold, the more clouds, the bigger the ozone hole.

Climate change science says that heat-trapping carbon from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas makes Earth's surface warmer, but the upper stratosphere, above the heat-trapping, gets cooler, Newman said. However, the ozone hole is slightly lower than the region thought to be cooled by climate change,

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he said. Other scientists and research do connect cooling in the area to climate change.

"The fact that the stratosphere is showing signs of cooling due to climate change is a concern," said University of Leeds atmospheric scientist Martyn Chipperfield. The worry is that climate change and efforts to reduce the ozone hole get intertwined.

Decades ago atmospheric chemists noticed that chlorine and bromine was increasing in the atmosphere, warning of massive crop damages, food shortages and huge increases in skin cancer if something wasn't done. In 1987, the world agreed to a landmark treaty, the Montreal Protocol, that banned ozone-munching chemicals, often hailed as an environmental success story.

It's a slow process because one of the chief ozone-munching chemicals, CFC11, can stay in the atmosphere for decades, Newman said. Studies also show that CFC11 levels going into the air were rising a few years ago with scientists suspecting factories in China.

Chlorine levels are down almost 30% compared to their peak 20 years ago, Newman said. If these cool temperatures had occurred with chlorine levels of the year 2000 "it would have been a very very large hole, much, much bigger than it is now."

It's the third straight year of an ozone hole peaking at more than 9.5 million square miles (24.8 million square kilometers), which Solomon called very unusual and worthy of extra study.

University of Colorado's Brian Toon points to large fires in Australia and injection of massive amounts of water from January's undersea volcano eruption as new phenomena that could be having impacts.

EXPLAINER: What's the state of Russia's missile arsenal?

By MATT LEE and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Russia bombarded Ukraine this week, military observers were left wondering about how many and what types of missiles Russia still has in its arsenal. In other words, how long can the Kremlin keep up the barrage?

Some analysts believe Russia could be running down its stockpiles of long-range precision weapons as the nearly 8-month-old war drags on and sanctions hit its economy, forcing it to resort to less-accurate missiles.

It remains unclear if Russia has enough weapons to continue the strikes against Ukraine with the same intensity that began following the Oct. 8 explosion on the Kerch Bridge to the Moscow-annexed Crimean Peninsula.

A look at what is known — and not known — about Russia's arsenal:

WHAT DOES RUSSIA SAY?

Russian officials say the military has sufficient stockpiles of long-range missiles and that factories are churning out more, rejecting Western claims its supplies are shrinking.

The Russian military hasn't said how many missiles it has fired and how many are left, and there is no data to independently assess the state of the Russian arsenal.

President Vladimir Putin recently chaired a meeting to discuss plans for boosting weapons production, but he steered clear of specifics in the introductory remarks that were televised.

WHAT HAS RUSSIA RELIED ON RECENTLY?

When the Russian military unleashed missile attacks across Ukraine starting Monday, it used the entire range of its long-range precision weapons: the Kh-55 and Kh-101 cruise missiles fired by strategic bombers, the sea-launched Kalibr cruise missiles and the ground-launched Iskander missiles.

Russian forces have also repeatedly used the S-300 surface-to-air defense missile systems for striking ground targets, which was seen by some observers as a sign of a Russian weapons shortages.

Russia's repurposing of air defense systems and anti-ship missiles suggests it is running low on more advanced missiles that are intended to hit ground targets, said Ian Williams, a fellow at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Strikes from a Russian S-300 air defense system "don't have the 'oomph' to really hit hardened military targets and they don't have the accuracy in a land attack role to even strike the building you want to hit,"

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Williams said. "This really is just firing them into the ether and seeing where they land."

Their use, however, could be explained by an abundant stock of older subtypes of such missiles, which were superseded by more advanced air defense weapons, as well as the military's desire to keep more expensive, advanced long-range missiles for priority targets.

While numbers are hard to obtain, how Russia is using its weapons is telling. In a recent strike in Mykolaiv, a surface-to-air missile was used to hit a target on the ground.

Douglas Barrie, senior fellow for military aerospace at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, called that "a sure sign that missile stocks are running low."

WHAT IS WASHINGTON SAYING?

While the Biden administration believes there is evidence that Russia has depleted stocks of its most efficient weapons, U.S. officials say there is no sign Moscow is ready or willing to relent in its recent barrages against civilian areas in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities.

It was not immediately clear what the U.S. thinks Russia might have left. But two officials said U.S. government analysts had noted with interest that Russia had used cruise missiles, and not less expensive, shorter-range artillery or rockets, in the aftermath of the Kerch Bridge blast.

That choice, the officials said, could indicate that Russia is running low on cheaper, reliable mid-range weapons and is having trouble replenishing its stockpiles due to sanctions and supply chain disruptions.

The relative calm that Kyiv enjoyed prior to the Kerch Bridge incident may have been a sign that Russia was trying to conserve its limited resources, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal assessments of Russia's military strength.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE CHOICE OF TARGETS?

Firing large numbers of inaccurate missiles could be intended to clutter air defenses while Russia uses its best missiles for high-value targets and key infrastructure.

But Williams suggested that Moscow could also be acting strategically, knowing its barrage will hit civilian targets in hopes of driving up panic in Ukraine and pushing Kyiv to accept a cease-fire favorable to Russia.

"It's becoming more and more clear that, as they say, the cruelty is the point," he said.

Racist remarks: Hurt, betrayal among LA's Indigenous people

By AMY TAXIN and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Bricia Lopez has welcomed people of all walks to dine at her family's popular restaurant on the Indigenous-influenced food of her native Mexican state of Oaxaca — among them Nury Martinez, the first Latina elected president of the Los Angeles City Council.

The restaurant, Guelaguetza, has become an institution known for introducing Oaxaca's unique cuisine and culture to Angelenos, attracting everyone from immigrant families to Mexican stars to powerful city officials such as Martinez.

But now after a scandal exploded over a recording of Martinez making racist remarks about Oaxacans such as Lopez, the 37-year-old restaurateur and cookbook author said she feels a tremendous sense of betrayal.

Martinez resigned from her council seat Wednesday and offered her apologies. But the disparaging remarks still deeply hurt the city's immigrants from Oaxaca, which has one of Mexico's large indigenous populations. Sadly, many said, they are not surprised. Both growing up in their homeland and after reaching the U.S., they say they've become accustomed to hearing such stinging comments — not only from non-Latinos but from lighter skinned Mexican immigrants and their descendants.

"Every time these people looked at me in my face, they were all lying to me," Lopez said. "We should not let these people continue to lie to us and tell us we are less than, or we are ugly, or allow them to laugh at us."

Following Martinez' departure, two other Latino City Council members also are facing widespread calls to resign since the year-old recording surfaced of them mocking colleagues while scheming to protect Latino political strength in council districts. Martinez used a disparaging term for the Black son of a white

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council member and called immigrants from Oaxaca ugly.

"I see a lot of little short dark people," Martinez said on the recording, referring to an area of the largely Hispanic Koreatown neighborhood. "I was like, I don't know where these people are from, I don't know what village they came (from), how they got here."

Lopez said she heard such racist comments growing up in California but had hoped they would be a thing of the past and that young Oaxacan immigrants would not have to hear them.

"I want people to look at themselves in the mirror every day and see the beauty," she said.

Oaxaca has more than a dozen ethnicities, including Mixtecos and Zapotecs. The southern Mexican state is known for famously hand-dyed woven rugs, pristine Pacific tourist beaches, a smoky alcohol called Mezcal and sophisticated cuisine including moles — thick sauces crafted from more than two dozen ingredients.

Los Angeles is home to the country's largest Mexican population and nearly half the city of 4 million people is Latino, census figures show. Informal studies indicate that several hundred thousand Oaxacan immigrants live in California, with the largest concentration in Los Angeles, said Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, director of the University of California, Los Angeles Center for Mexican Studies.

Demearing language is often used against Mexico's Indigenous people. It is "the legacy of the colonial period," Rivera-Salgado said of Spanish rule long ago.

Racism, and colorism — discrimination against darker-skinned people within the same ethnic group — run centuries deep in Mexico and other neighboring Latin American countries. A few years ago, Yalitza Aparicio, the Oscar-nominated actress in "Roma" who is from Oaxaca, faced racist comments in her country and derogatory tirades online over her Indigenous features after she appeared on the cover of Vogue México.

Odilia Romero said the scandal doesn't surprise her. The Oaxacan community leader is among many who had been pressing for the resignation of Martinez, the daughter of Mexican immigrants, and the two other councilmembers on the recorded conversation.

Romero said she's also fielded calls since the scandal broke, including from someone urging her not to let the hurtful remarks distract from critical working aiding the immigrant community.

"That is a very paternalist comment," said Romero, executive director of the group Comunidades Indígenas en Liderazgo or CIELO and a Zapotec interpreter. "How dare you tell us Indigenous people that we are not understanding. Of course we understand — we see this every day."

Lynn Stephen, an anthropology professor at University of Oregon who researches Mexican migration and Indigenous peoples, said the concept of mestizaje — or being a mixed-race and non-racial unified nation — intended to erase Indigenous communities, not uplift them, and the discrimination persists to this day. It is carried to the United States with those who migrate, she said, while similar divisions also exist in other Latin American countries.

"These kinds of comments directed toward Indigenous people from non-Indigenous people from Mexico, Guatemala, etc., it's a different kind of layer of racism," Stephen said. "Folks from Oaxaca they have to contend with anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican backlash and racism often from non-Latino Americans, white Americans, sometimes other folks, and then within that, often where they're living or in school."

Ofelia Platon, a tenant organizer, went to the Los Angeles city council chambers recently to demand the officials step down. She said she hasn't experienced discrimination from within the Latino community as much as from outside it, but there's no place for such — especially coming from elected leaders the poor count on to help improve their lives.

"They think they have the power to step on people," she said. "They're two-faced."

It's not just the hurtful remarks that sting Xóchitl M. Flores-Marcial, a Zapotec scholar and professor of Chicana/o Studies at California State University, Northridge. She called it very telling about the officials who make decisions affecting her community. She said she grew up in the United States hearing hurtful words and still faces similar rejection whenever she travels to Oaxaca and people there are surprised she's the research team leader.

"It's so painful because those are consequential people," she said. "This is hurting us — not just our emotions, but our actual life in terms of our jobs and our opportunities."

Still she said she has hope for future generations in "Oaxacalifornia" — the tight-knit community that has maintained traditions while embracing life in Los Angeles.

DeSantis eases voting rules in counties devastated by Ian

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis on Thursday issued an executive order expanding voting access for the midterm elections in three counties where Hurricane Ian destroyed polling places and displaced thousands of people.

The move, which followed requests from Lee, Charlotte and Sarasota counties and voting rights groups, comes as Florida begins to undertake a massive recovery from the Category 4 hurricane that hit on Sept. 28 and leveled parts of the state's southwest.

The order extends the number of early voting days in the three counties and authorizes election supervisors to designate additional early voting locations, steps that allow voters to cast ballots at any polling place in their registered county from Oct. 24 through Election Day, Nov. 8. Election supervisors can also relocate or consolidate polling places if necessary.

It also waives training requirements for poll workers and suspends a signature requirement for voters requesting to have a mail ballot sent to an address that is different from the one election officials have on file.

The decision was praised by Tommy Doyle, the elections supervisor in Lee County, which was the epicenter of Ian's wrath along the Gulf Coast.

"The Executive Order is crucial because it allows us to move forward with our plans to make voting as accessible as possible to the voters of Lee County," Doyle said Thursday.

Secretary of State Cord Byrd, a Republican appointee of the governor, said state officials are working to ensure that the election is "administered as efficiently and securely as possible across the state and in the counties that received the heaviest damage."

The changes are similar to policies allowed by former Florida Gov. Rick Scott, a Republican, after Hurricane Michael in 2018.

DeSantis has faced questions over what steps he would take to ensure voting access in the heavily damaged southwest part of the state, which has leaned conservative in recent elections. The Republican governor, who is up for reelection, has made tightening election laws a top priority over the last two years, as he and others in the GOP reacted to former President Donald Trump's baseless claims of widespread fraud in the 2020 presidential election.

This week, a coalition of advocacy organizations sent a letter to state election officials that asked for extension of the state's voter registration deadline, which ended Tuesday, along with a greater number of early voting days and expanded early voting hours in affected counties, among other requests.

"It's literally about removing barriers when people are in a state of incredible hardship and in displacement," said Amy Keith of Common Cause Florida. "Just making it so they can do their civic duty, they can go out and exercise their right to vote."

Separately, Doyle asked for similar changes, telling state election officials that the storm has devastated the county and its neighbors.

"In Lee county, there remain few viable election day polling locations post-storm. Several established polling locations no longer exist. Securing a sufficient number of poll workers to staff ninety-seven voting sites will be problematic. Hurricane Ian has displaced countless Lee County voters and poll workers from their homes," he wrote in a letter to the state on Oct. 2.

Hurricane Ian came ashore in Lee County with 155 mph (250 kph) winds that decimated coastal communities and inundated areas with flooding and debris. Ian was the third deadliest storm to hit the U.S. mainland this century and Lee County has reported about half of the state's more than 100 fatalities.

A Lee County spokesperson said election officials there have mailed out approximately 170,000 vote-by-mail ballots and will continue to send ballots out daily until the Oct. 29 request deadline. She added that

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the county will use its most experienced polls workers at its polling places.

During a news conference last week, DeSantis said he wants to keep the election "as normal as humanly possible" and added that there may be a need to make accommodations for a county as badly damaged as Lee, as well as possibly Charlotte County to the north.

Southwest Florida leans Republican, with the counties of Lee, Charlotte and Sarasota delivering wins for DeSantis and Trump in their last general elections. Lee County voted for Trump in 2020 by nearly 20 percentage points over President Joe Biden. DeSantis is favored to win reelection this year over Democrat Charlie Crist.

DeSantis and the Republican-controlled legislature have in the last two years tightened various voting rules in Florida. A law signed by the governor in 2021, prohibits people who would help others drop off mail ballots from possessing more than two mail ballots other than their own, unless they belong to immediate family members. This year Florida increased the penalty for the so-called "ballot harvesting" to a felony.

In Milwaukee, Latinos fed up with crime weigh GOP appeal

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — In two decades of street outreach on Milwaukee's south side, evangelical pastor Marty Calderon has offered Bible study, gang prevention, a safe place to stay for those battling addiction, and help getting jobs for those newly released from prison.

But as he's watched rising crime threaten those efforts to "clean up" his impoverished neighborhood, Calderon started bringing Republican politicians to his ministry, God Touch.

He hopes the largely Hispanic, working-class community will hear what they can do for it — and the conservative candidates will learn these voters' reality, especially their immigration journeys.

"We've never had the Republicans come as strong as they are. ... I'm very cautious doing this because I just don't want people thinking they're going to come get a vote," Calderon said in his sanctuary, adding that he doesn't push specific candidates on his community. "I'm just saying go out and vote, and pray about it."

Republican candidates across the country are seeking to expand recent gains the party has made with Hispanic voters from Florida to the Rio Grande Valley to Los Angeles. What seems to be driving them are bread-and-butter issues that Calderon's neighbors constantly mentioned to Associated Press reporters last week — rampant lawlessness, struggling schools, and food and gas prices creeping beyond their paychecks' reach.

Those consistently matter more to Latino voters than immigration, allowing Republicans to make inroads that constitute a "big re-alignment" — if they end up splitting their vote close to 40% Republican and 60% Democratic instead of historically a third of Latinos voting with the right, said Geraldo Cadava, a Northwestern University history and Latino studies professor.

Swinging even a few thousand votes in a state like Wisconsin — which delivered minuscule margins for Trump in 2016 and for Biden in 2020 — could impact national politics because GOP Sen. Ron Johnson is in a close re-election race with Democratic challenger Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes.

A month before the midterms, Johnson was talking about the importance of "renewed faith" as he met with Calderon and other community leaders in the Republican National Committee's one-year-old Hispanic outreach center, two blocks from God Touch.

"We're showing up," Johnson said of the party's outreach in communities like this. "We have a universal message."

Minutes earlier, Republican U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil, whose southeastern Wisconsin district is just a few miles south, had also made a stop at the storefront center, decorated with yard signs, an elephant-shaped piñata and U.S. and state flags.

These efforts encourage Hilario Deleon, 21, who grew up on the south side and, after losing his dish-washing job during the COVID-19 lockdown, got involved in Republican campaigning.

"We've failed in the past to be in the community," he said of the GOP. He added that he likes to see

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political and faith leaders walking the walk, like Calderon's weekly food distribution. "I like to see God through people's actions."

Wisconsin's elections commission doesn't collect race or ethnicity data, but the immigrant rights advocacy group Voces de la Frontera estimates there are about 180,000 voters among the state's Hispanics, nearly 40% of whom live in Milwaukee. Most are of Mexican origin, followed by Puerto Ricans.

And 46% of Latino registered voters consider themselves independent, according to pollster Charles Franklin of Marquette University Law School. His aggregate polling data over the last two years shows that Wisconsin Latino voters fall about halfway between whites and Blacks on political issues – and 71% identify as Christian.

"Political parties can't take this population for granted," said Felipe Hinojosa, a professor at Texas A&M University who studies the connection between religion and politics among Latinos.

He finds the centrality of faith to many Hispanics' daily life doesn't automatically make them Republican, but being an ethnic minority doesn't reflexively make them Democratic, either.

Little wonder that bilingual canvassers were door-knocking last week across Milwaukee's south side. They came from both Voces de la Frontera Action, which endorses Democrats, and Operación Vamos ("operation let's go," in Spanish), the Republican Party's new Hispanic outreach organization.

Walking past taquerias and historic churches, founded by Central European immigrants and now attended largely by Mexican faithful, the canvassers stopped at modest, single-family homes, many with Halloween decorations but no campaign signs.

Carrying Voces' flyers promoting "pro-immigrant, pro-working class" candidates – the Wisconsin Democrats running for statewide office – Deisy Espana, a 20-year-old college student, said the "unfair" treatment her undocumented parents suffered motivates her activism.

But "Latinos are switching over because of the lack of fulfilled promises," she added, especially on immigration. Voces founding director, Christine Neumann-Ortiz, said she feared disenchanted Latinos might not vote at all.

Vamos canvassers faced a different kind of challenge with uncommitted Hispanic voters.

"Folks on the ground hear, 'No one ever reached out to us before' or 'I didn't expect Republicans to reach out to us,'" said Ana Carbonell, a consultant for Hispanic outreach with the National Republican Senatorial Committee, which launched Vamos efforts this midterm season in nine key states, including Wisconsin.

In a late September poll by the Pew Research Center, more Latinos said they felt that the Democratic Party "works hard to earn Latinos' vote" and "cares about Latinos" than the Republican Party.

The historic lack of outreach to the Latino community leaves Hispanic voters to "bundle" their own issues, often based on faith, instead of buying into an "ideological package" from either party, said Ali Valenzuela, an American University professor of Latino politics. That can benefit Republicans when the focus is on the economy, as in these midterms.

Since April, Vamos in Wisconsin has contacted more Hispanic voters there than over the last three election cycles combined – voters like the woman who chucklingly told two Vamos canvassers last week, "You're in the wrong neighborhood."

"I can always learn more," she nevertheless added, taking their flyers.

Nearby, Artemio Martinez, a construction worker from Mexico married to a U.S. citizen, said he was grateful Vamos knocked on his door.

As his 2-year-old daughter played with the bilingual flyer listing Republican statewide candidates under "iEquipo Ganador!" – the "winning team," described first as "pro-faith" and "pro-family" – Martinez said he hadn't planned on voting.

"But if the senator (Johnson) will do something about this," he added, referring to the crime and drug use he sees all around the neighborhood, "We will bring our support and vote so that things can change in the community."

Working on new siding for his white home, Noah Ledezma also said he wasn't sure if he would vote. He supported Republicans in the past, because he feels the party is more aligned with his Christian faith and family values.

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But now he believes that no matter who's in office, life keeps getting harder for working class people like him – born of Mexican immigrants, the father of five works in construction while his wife is a schoolteacher.

"All they're doing is bickering," he said of politicians. "You have to see the change. You have to see them working together."

The Vamos canvassers and their literature didn't sway him. But what might is if Johnson showed up in person to take "open questions" on a crucial topic like education.

"It's different when you see them out here," Ledezma said. "Let's say I ask ... 'Senator, what are you going to do that's going to be different?' ... And you're hearing it from the horse's mouth ... I can say, 'I'm going to hold accountable. Okay, you have my vote.'"

EXPLAINER: Rituals play role in creating Italian government

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — With its dozens of "revolving door" governments, Italy might give the impression that carving out new ruling coalitions is quick work. But the process can take weeks, even months.

On Thursday, when newly elected lawmakers took their seats, the work of giving the country a new government formally began.

Giorgia Meloni, who scored a solid victory in the Sept. 25 election, is well-positioned to become the first far-right leader of an Italian government since the end of World War II and the first female premier. A number of rituals must happen first though.

GETTING SEATED IN PARLIAMENT

Italy's governments require the backing of Parliament. Before a new ruling coalition can be formed, newly elected lawmakers must take their seats in the legislature within 20 days of an election. On Thursday, both the Senate, Parliament's upper chamber, and the lower Chamber of Deputies, will hold their first session since the election.

This time, there will be fewer lawmakers. Under a reform to streamline the legislature and reduce spending, the new Senate now has 200 members, down from 315, and the Chamber of Deputies has 400 instead of 630. Their main order of business is electing each chamber's president.

On Thursday, Ignazio La Russa of Meloni's far-right Brothers of Italy party was elected Senate president; the chamber president is expected to be elected by Friday.

MAKING THE ROUNDS

After parliamentary elections, Italy's president, as head of state, has to task someone with trying to cobble together a government — formally called "conferring a mandate."

The clear winner of last month's election was the far-right Brothers of Italy leader Meloni.

With her main coalition partners — Matteo Salvini's League and former Premier Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia — Meloni should be able to command a comfortable majority in Parliament.

But before President Sergio Mattarella asks Meloni to see if she can assemble a viable coalition, he is expected — but not obliged — to hold a round of consultations with party leaders, including from the potential opposition. Those huddles could take two or three days.

"WITH RESERVATION"

Barring surprises, the presidential Quirinal Palace will announce that Meloni has accepted "with reservation" the task of trying to create a new government. But that doesn't mean she has any doubts she'll succeed — it's a customary phrase.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Once tapped, Meloni and her allied leaders will confer — separately or together — on how to divvy up Cabinet posts. That's where it can get sticky, as each party jockeys for the most high-profile ministries.

Since Meloni's party won a bigger share of the votes than Salvini's and Berlusconi's forces put together, her campaign allies will have somewhat limited bargaining power.

Tensions were already apparent on Thursday during the election for Senate president: Most Forza Italia senators didn't cast votes, depriving Meloni's candidate, La Russa, of a wide margin of victory. The op-

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position revealed in their rivals' apparent lack of cohesion.

REPORT TIME

Once Meloni is confident that she has nailed down a solid Cabinet that will pass Mattarella's muster, she'll meet with him to present her list of ministers.

Any disagreement over names is usually dealt with outside of the public eye. But after the 2018 election, Mattarella vetoed the pick of a euroskeptic economist for finance minister. That veto angered the coalition's populist leaders, but ultimately forced selection of another minister acceptable to the president.

UNVEILING

Should Meloni succeed in forming a Cabinet, as journalists wait in the hilltop Quirinal Palace and a pair of helmeted Corazzieri Carabinieri stand guard, the palace secretary general will emerge and announce that the political leader has "dissolved the reservation" — a formulaic way of saying she has formed a government. Generally, the premier-to-be then makes a brief statement and reads out the names of the Cabinet ministers.

IT'S OFFICIAL

Then it's back to the Quirinal Palace — usually the next day — for the new government's swearing-in ceremony. The new premier and each minister pledge to be faithful to the republic, to loyally observe its constitution and laws and to exercise their powers "in the exclusive interest of the nation."

PASS THAT BELL

After the oath-taking, the new premier heads a few blocks away to Chigi Palace, the premier's office, for an official photo. The outgoing premier hands the incoming one the bell used to open Cabinet meetings.

Usually they smile for the photo. But in 2014, as he handed over the bell, outgoing Premier Enrico Letta refused to smile or even look at newly-minted Premier Matteo Renzi, who had ousted him from office through backroom party maneuvers.

FULL POWERS

Italy's constitution requires all new governments to face a confidence vote in each chamber of Parliament within 10 days of the Cabinet's formation. Only then is the government considered to be fully in power.

Today in History: October 14, Martin Luther King wins Nobel

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Oct. 14, the 287th day of 2022. There are 78 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 14, 1964, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. was named winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

On this date:

In 1066, Normans under William the Conqueror defeated the English at the Battle of Hastings.

In 1586, Mary, Queen of Scots, went on trial in England, accused of committing treason against Queen Elizabeth I. (Mary was beheaded in February 1587.)

In 1933, Nazi Germany announced it was withdrawing from the League of Nations.

In 1939, a German U-boat torpedoed and sank the HMS Royal Oak, a British battleship anchored at Scapa Flow in Scotland's Orkney Islands; 833 of the more than 1,200 men aboard were killed.

In 1944, German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel took his own life rather than face trial and certain execution for allegedly conspiring against Adolf Hitler.

In 1947, U.S. Air Force Capt. Charles E. ("Chuck") Yeager (YAY'-gur) became the first test pilot to break the sound barrier as he flew the experimental Bell XS-1 (later X-1) rocket plane over Muroc Dry Lake in California.

In 1964, Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev was toppled from power; he was succeeded by Leonid Brezhnev as First Secretary and by Alexei Kosygin as Premier.

In 1981, the new president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak (HOHS'-nee moo-BAH'-rahk), was sworn in to succeed the assassinated Anwar Sadat. Mubarak pledged loyalty to Sadat's policies.

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In 1986, Holocaust survivor and human rights advocate Elie Wiesel (EL'-ee vee-ZEHL') was named winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1990, composer-conductor Leonard Bernstein (BURN'-styn) died in New York at age 72.

In 2008, a grand jury in Orlando, Fla. returned charges of first-degree murder, aggravated child abuse and aggravated manslaughter against Casey Anthony in the death of her 2-year-old daughter, Caylee. (She was acquitted in July 2011.)

In 2016, a judge in Connecticut dismissed a wrongful-death lawsuit by Newtown families against the maker of the rifle used in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting massacre, citing a federal law that shielded gun manufacturers from most lawsuits over criminal use of their products.

Ten years ago: Extreme athlete Felix Baumgartner landed gracefully in the eastern New Mexico desert after a 24-mile jump from a balloon in the stratosphere in a daring, dramatic feat that officials said made him the first skydiver to fall faster than the speed of sound. Retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Chuck Yeager, at the age of 89, marked the 65th anniversary of his supersonic flight by smashing through the sound barrier again, this time in the backseat of an F-15 which took off from Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada. Former Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, 82, died in Philadelphia.

Five years ago: A truck bombing in Somalia's capital killed more than 500 people in one of the world's deadliest attacks in years; officials blamed the attack on the extremist group al-Shabab and said it was meant to target Mogadishu's international airport, but the bomb detonated in a crowded street after soldiers opened fire. The board of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences revoked the membership of movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, after published reports about sexual harassment and rape allegations against Weinstein.

One year ago: New York real estate heir Robert Durst was sentenced in Los Angeles to life in prison without a chance of parole for the murder of a friend, Susan Berman, more than two decades earlier. (Durst died in prison in January 2022 at 78.) South Carolina state police said prominent attorney Alex Murdaugh had been arrested and charged with stealing insurance settlements that were meant for the sons of his late housekeeper. A work by British street artist Banksy that sensationally self-shredded just after it sold at auction three years earlier fetched more than \$25 million — a record for the artist, and close to 20 times its pre-shredded price.

Today's Birthdays: Classical pianist Gary Graffman is 94. Movie director Carroll Ballard is 85. Country singer Melba Montgomery is 85. Former White House counsel John W. Dean III is 84. Fashion designer Ralph Lauren is 83. Singer Sir Cliff Richard is 82. Singer-musician Justin Hayward (The Moody Blues) is 76. Actor Greg Evigan is 69. TV personality Arleen Sorkin is 67. World Golf Hall of Famer Beth Daniel is 66. Singer-musician Thomas Dolby is 64. Actor Lori Petty is 59. Former MLB player and manager Joe Girardi is 58. Actor Steve Coogan is 57. Singer Karyn White is 57. Actor Edward Kerr is 56. Actor Jon Seda is 52. Country singer Natalie Maines (The Chicks) is 48. Actor-singer Shaznay Lewis (All Saints) is 47. Actor Stephen Hill is 46. Singer Usher is 44. TV personality Stacy Keibler is 43. Actor Ben Whishaw is 42. Actor Jordan Brower is 41. Director Benh Zeitlin is 40. Actor Skyler Shaye is 36. Actor-comedian Jay Pharoah is 35. Actor Max Thieriot is 34.