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Groton Community Calendar

Monday, Oct. 17

Senior Menu: Beef tips with gravy over noodles, 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.

Tuesday, Oct. 18

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, au gratin potatoes, carrots, apple sauce, cookie, whole wheat bread.

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

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

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School Breakfast: French toast.
School Lunch: Corndogs, spudsters.
Volleyball at Northwestern (C and 7th grade match at 5 p.m., JV and 8th grade match at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.
St. John's Quilting, 9 a.m.
UMC: Conde Ad Council; Bible Study, 10 a.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 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.

SPECIAL REPORT: How Kristi Noem rode shifting political winds to Pierre — and possibly back to D.C.

Sty Whitney

South Dakota News Watch

On the night of Sept. 21 in Washington D.C., Kristi Noem's face appeared on a video screen at an event hosted by the Media Research Center, a far-right watchdog group that aims to "expose and neutralize the propaganda arm of the left: the national news media." The organization was celebrating its 35th anniversary with a black-tie gala at the National Building Museum and promised to "honor those who have stood up to the left-wing mob."

South Dakota's governor was a featured speaker.

Noem, who had planned to attend in person, said her travel was curtailed by back surgery at the Mayo Clinic earlier in September for an acute condition of her lumbar spine. She submitted a videotaped message that echoed the media-bashing mantra popularized by her political ally, former president Donald Trump.

"What we did during the [COVID-19] pandemic worked, even though the liberal media tried to prove otherwise," Noem told the audience. "So now they have their sights on me in all kinds of ways. They're attacking my family, they're attacking every decision that I make, and they're trying to tear South Dakota down. But that isn't going to happen. Not on my watch."

It's hard to imagine recent South Dakota governors Dennis Daugaard, Mike Rounds, or even the irascible Bill Janklow uttering those words on a national stage – or having the opportunity to do so. But Noem has found the national spotlight, building a brand of right-wing populism unrecognizable in many respects from her career before Trump became president and the pandemic made polarization and personal attacks common in American discourse.

Noem's supporters laud her laissez-faire approach to pandemic response and cite her national profile as positive for selling South Dakota as a land of opportunity rather than a flyover state. Business applications increased by 6.4% in August, the highest rate in the nation, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, and the unemployment rate stands at 2.3%. South Dakota ranked second in the amount of state-to-state migration that was inbound (69%) rather than outbound in 2021, according to Atlas Van Lines.

Critics accuse Noem, who is up for re-election Nov. 8, of being hypocritical, among other concerns. She talks of less government while South Dakota reaps the benefits of millions in federal COVID and infrastructure funds, re-branded as state-level stewardship. She touts her "no lockdown" pandemic record despite closing schools in the spring of 2020 and proposing laws seeking more authority for state and county health officials to shutter businesses that violated CDC guidelines. And she lavishes praise on Trump despite saying in 2015 that some of his stances were "un-American" and that he was "not my candidate."

So what does Noem really stand for? It might depend on whom, and when, you ask.

"She's like a political chameleon," said Lance Russell, a former state legislator from Hot Springs who also



Kristi Noem, a U.S. Representative at the time, debates with Corinna Robinson during Dakotafest in Mitchell in August of 2014. Photo:

Courtesy of Sioux Falls Argus Leader

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served as executive director of the South Dakota Republican Party. "I don't think she's ever really shed her establishment mentality, but she'll shift her views or positions if she sees that someone or an idea is popular. She can very easily transition."

Noem didn't agree to an interview request for this story, deferring questions to spokesperson Ian Fury. South Dakota News Watch reached out to political scientists, lawmakers and campaign experts to assess the steps and strategy of the governor's journey from farm-raised Hamlin County candidate – a former Snow Queen with agricultural business acumen and a compelling personal story – to one of the most polarizing figures in South Dakota political history.

One thing is clear: Noem's pursuit of Republican Party relevance and extreme positions on hot-button issues such as abortion and gun rights make it nearly impossible for state residents not to have strong opinions of her, whether cheering her for a flag-waving horseback ride or chuckling at her in a Saturday Night Live lampoon in the opening sketch of its Oct. 1 season premiere.

"There's this thing called confirmation bias that says we look for information that fits our previously held beliefs, and we often reject others' information, or don't even see it, in the current media environment," said Michael Card, an emeritus professor of political science at the University of South Dakota. "That beats the heck out of dealing with the vicissitudes of, how do we make sense of all this? It's a lot easier just to say she's all good, or she needs to go."

Though the 50-year-old Noem remains non-committal about aspirations to run for president in 2024 or to make the national ticket as a vice presidential nominee, her national travel and fundraising activities – she had \$7.8 million in her state campaign committee as of the last reporting date – point to someone putting themselves in position to make that leap. In addition to visiting early Republican primary states such as Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina, Noem has held a fundraiser at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, spoken in Dallas at the National Rifle Association convention (days after a deadly mass shooting at a Texas elementary school in May of 2022) and recently appeared in Arizona with GOP gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake, who supports Trump's baseless contention that he won the 2020 election.

Noem published a book, "Not My First Rodeo," earlier this year, capitalizing on her political bounce from the summer of 2020, when her hands-off approach to COVID restrictions and criticism of social justice demonstrations endeared her to Trump – who visited Mount Rushmore for Fourth of July fireworks – and led to a speaking slot at the Republican National Convention. Two days after Trump lost the November 2020 election to Joe Biden and started making unfounded claims about voter fraud, Noem complained about "rigged election systems" from her Twitter account.

If Trump runs again in 2024, there may not be a lane for Noem, who has polled around 1% in most national GOP primary polls so far. But her anti-lockdown pandemic stance, which led to regular appearances on Fox News and other conservative outlets, offered a glimpse of a political future beyond South Dakota's borders.

"Trump is one variable, but I do think COVID matters," said Jon Schaff, a professor of government at Northern State University in Aberdeen. "When the pandemic hit, her response to it raised her profile. I suspect at that point the idea struck her that maybe she could be a national contender. She was getting a lot of publicity, she's an ambitious person, she's a very good politician and fundraiser, so maybe that



Throughout the pandemic, Gov. Kristi Noem routinely ignored the advice of the South Dakota Department of Health that people should wear masks and stay six feet apart from others in order to reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus, including in a fall 2020 visit with young residents of Groton, South Dakota. Photo: Gov. Noem on Twitter

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which seemed implausible or not even on her radar took on some degree of plausibility. So at that point, how does one advance in the Republican Party? You've got to be on Team Trump. It's not the only way, but it's the easiest way."

Paving the way was Corey Lewandowski, a former Trump campaign manager who helped orchestrate Noem's travel schedule, fundraising and messaging on what the governor's team calls a volunteer basis, but who does not come without baggage.

Lewandowski was charged with misdemeanor battery last year after being accused by a female Trump donor of unwanted sexual advances at a Las Vegas fundraiser also attended by Noem, charges that will be dropped if he follows through on a deal with prosecutors that includes eight hours of "impulse control" counseling. Noem publicly cut ties with Lewandowski soon after the incident but has since welcomed him back to the fold, and he attended a Rapid City event on Sept. 28 at which the governor promised to repeal the state's grocery tax if re-elected, despite opposing such action during previous legislative sessions.

Noem has defended South Dakota's abortion laws being among the most restrictive in the nation, with no exceptions for rape or incest, despite a recent News Watch poll showing that 76% of respondents support such exceptions. That stance, combined with much-publicized efforts to ban Critical Race Theory-style curricula and transgender sports participation in South Dakota schools, has opened her to criticism of prioritizing nationally resonant GOP issues over more pressing homegrown concerns.

"Governor Noem's position as a national figure can be a positive for South Dakota," said Republican Attorney General nominee Marty Jackley, who lost to Noem in a 2018 primary for governor. "But it's important for anyone in a statewide role not to let national policy set your South Dakota agenda. You need to let South Dakota's agenda set your national policy."

State concerns are plentiful: South Dakota ranks 48th in average salary across all occupations (\$44,960), according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Management, which contributes to just 53% of state university graduates taking jobs with in-state employers. A lack of state funding for early education on the heels of the pandemic has triggered what experts call a childcare crisis at a time when nearly half of students in Sioux Falls meet the criteria for free and reduced lunch. South Dakota, one of just 12 states that hasn't expanded Medicaid to broaden insurance coverage for low-income individuals, con-

DISPARATE VIEWS ON GOV. KRISTI NOEM

From Tony Venhuizen of Sioux Falls, former Noem chief of staff and presumptive Republican lawmaker

"She has stepped up to the challenge and gone where she felt God was leading her, which meant stepping up into positions that I don't think she would have ever guessed she would find herself in."

From Steve Hildebrand of Sioux Falls, former Democratic campaign manager:

"When Kristi Noem wakes up every morning, she thinks about herself and her political future. She does not wake up every morning and think about what's best for South Dakota."

From Jon Schaff of Aberdeen, professor at Northern State University

"The thing that inoculates her from some of the criticism is that it's really hard to out-South Dakota Kristi Noem .. and I don't think that she's lost that touch."

From Reynold Nesiba of Sioux Falls, college professor and Democratic state senator

"South Dakotans inherently look after one another ... {but} during COVID, it seemed like we were more interested in scoring political points. It could have been an opportunity for the governor to use her leadership to bring us together as a state; instead she used it to fan the divisiveness and push us further apart."

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tains some of the most poverty-stricken counties in the United States, a reminder of the challenges faced by Native Americans and reservation communities.

"When Kristi Noem wakes up every morning, she thinks about herself and her political future," said Steve Hildebrand, who served as Barack Obama's deputy campaign manager in 2008 and now runs Promising Futures Fund, a Sioux Falls nonprofit that fights child poverty. "She does not wake up every morning and think about what's best for South Dakota."

Noem had an approval rating of 58% in the most recent Morning Consult poll, but the ultimate test comes at the ballot box as she tries to fend off Democratic challenger Jamie Smith, minority leader in the South Dakota House. The race is rated "Solid R" by the nonpartisan Cook Political Report, but a

recent South Dakota State University poll had Noem's lead (45% to 42%) within the margin of error, drawing comparisons to her surprisingly tight victory over Billie Sutton in 2018.

Noem and her supporters have tried to portray Smith, a state legislator, realtor and former educator from Sioux Falls, as a "radical leftist" who is closely aligned with Biden's agenda. Smith has countered by calling her views on abortion extreme, questioning her ethics, and pointing to Noem's focus on national political themes rather than kitchen-table concerns.

South Dakota hasn't had a politician run for president since George McGovern in 1972, though senators Tom Daschle and John Thune reportedly considered campaigns before turning back. It takes an element of self-regard, considered a prideful flaw in some corners of the state's psyche, to reach for higher office, yet Noem has shown impeccable timing in her career and an ability to close out elections, with a record of 7-0. In that respect, say her supporters, she has been consistent in her approach.

"Kristi got into politics 16 years ago, and we've seen this country change a lot in that time," said Tony Venhuizen, who worked in the Daugaard and Noem administrations and is headed to the state legislature as a Sioux Falls Republican. "I'm not sure that she's really changed all that much. She has stepped up to the challenge and gone where she felt God was leading her, which meant stepping up into positions that I don't think she would have ever guessed she would find herself in."

Entering the political realm

Noem has said her political views were molded by the aftermath of losing her father, Ron Arnold, to a grain bin accident at the family's Castlewood farm in 1994, when Kristi was 22 years old and expecting her first child with husband Bryon. Fresh challenges faced by the family as Kristi assumed greater responsibility in business affairs shaped her thinking on the extent to which the government should impact individual lives.

Noem's small-business experience brought her in contact with Daschle, Democratic Senate Minority Leader at the time, who nominated her for a seat on the South Dakota Farm Service Agency state committee, to which she was appointed by then-President Bill Clinton.

"People wondered for years if maybe I switched to the Democrat Party to serve," Noem wrote in her book. "Of course, I never did, and to his credit Senator Daschle never asked."

Daschle did invite Noem in 2000 to his Black Hills Leader Retreat at Sylvan Lake Lodge for prospective legislative or local candidates, the overwhelming majority of whom were Democrats. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin, whom Noem would defeat in a momentous 2010 U.S. House race, attended Daschle's retreat the year before Noem and credited the experience with inspiring her to run for statewide office rather than continuing a law career.



Gov. Kristi Noem, at podium, held a press briefing during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 along with along with Department of Health Secretary Kim Malsam-Rysdon and state Epidemiologist Josh Clayton. Photo: Courtesy

Sioux Falls Argus Leader

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Steve Erpenbach, Daschle's state director at the time, called Noem to gauge her interest in the retreat, which included visits to Mount Rushmore and Crazy Horse memorials and featured speeches by notable Democrats such as Harry Reid and Gabby Giffords during the event's five-year run.

"She was interested but wanted to learn more," said Erpenbach, who met with Noem at the Crossroads Hotel in Huron and received her commitment to attend, with the future governor vowing to use the experience strategically if nothing else.

Noem's transition from intriguing prospect to active candidate came in 2006, when she ran for state House of Representatives as a Republican and finished first out of three candidates with 39% of the vote to win one of two District 6 seats.

By then she was the mother of three, helping to run the family's farm operation, hunting lodge and Watertown restaurant, amassing perspectives that would define her as a lawmaker. She explored her niche within the Republican caucus, focusing on wind energy and agricultural property tax issues. Two years later, after easily winning re-election and being named Assistant House Majority Leader, the legislature was more of a proving ground, with ideological factions coming into focus.

Soon after Obama entered the White House in 2009, the fiscally conservative Tea Party movement emerged on the far right of the Republican Party, trumpeting tax reform and less government spending. Noem, who resisted joining political blocs, was derided as "establishment" after siding with Gov.

Mike Rounds on the question of whether South Dakota should accept \$1.3 billion in federal stimulus funds as part of the Recovery Act pushed through Congress without Republican support in the wake of the Great Recession.

"(Noem) voted in favor of taking all that money over the course of two years," said Russell, who now serves as Fall River County State's Attorney. "There were some of us who voted not to take the money, because of the strings attached to it at the time and the fact that South Dakota was faring better than a lot of other states. Voting to accept the money was a very establishment position to take."

Any notion that Noem was a political wallflower was dispelled during a 2009 House committee hearing on a proposed constitutional amendment to allow expanded gambling in South Dakota. The amendment was viewed as a means of challenging a planned resort casino in Larchwood, Iowa, a project that opened as Grand Falls Casino two years later.

Sparks flew at the hearing when Noem suggested that Senate Democratic leader Scott Heidepriem had a conflict of interest because his law firm represented the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe in a federal lawsuit against the state over how many slot machines could be operated at the tribe's Royal River Casino in Flandreau.

Heidepriem, who ran for governor in 2010 and lost to Daugaard, held a press conference to defend himself days later. He pointed out that another lawyer at the firm signed on to the tribal lawsuit after he brought



Gov. Kristi Noem after a successful hunt. Whether riding at a rodeo or shooting pheasants on the wing, Noem has long highlighted her South Dakota roots. Photo: Gov. Noem on Twitter

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the bill and that he wouldn't have considered it a conflict even if he had known about it.

Reached by News Watch for this story, Heidepriem said he was "blindsided" by Noem's allegations at the time and added that "I'm very proud of what I said and did."

Democrats derided Noem's challenge as reckless and politically motivated, while some Republican lawmakers and operatives, according to Venhuizen, took note that Noem was not afraid to enter the ring and throw a punch.

High-stakes battle with Herseth Sandlin

In the years since attending the Daschle retreat, Herseth Sandlin had lost the 2002 U.S. House race to former governor Bill Janklow and then captured the seat two years later after Janklow resigned in

the wake of his manslaughter conviction for killing a motorcyclist in a car crash.

Herseth Sandlin, the granddaughter of former governor Ralph Herseth and daughter of longtime state legislator Lars Herseth, was a Georgetown Law School graduate and moderate "Blue Dog Democrat" with a bright future. But much of politics is about timing, and in 2010 she was viewed as vulnerable. The Democrats had taken over all three branches of the federal government in 2008, with a super-majority in the Senate, and Obama's landmark healthcare reform package in the face of a still-struggling economy energized Republicans for the midterms.

Suzanne Veenis of Sioux Falls, a grassroots organizer whose "Women for Thune" efforts helped Thune outduel Daschle in the pivotal Senate election of 2004, saw an opportunity to tie Herseth Sandlin to Obama's unpopularity in South Dakota, where his favorability hovered in the mid-30s percentile. The feeling was that the right candidate could be carried by political currents, rising above the reality that Herseth Sandlin, who declined an interview request for this story, had voted against Obamacare and was endorsed by the National Rifle Association.

"We felt it was time to find a Republican who could flip that seat and put the direction of the country in more of the way that South Dakota constituents wanted it to be," said Veenis.

Since Thune didn't have an opponent for re-election in 2010, his camp focused funding and energy on state legislative elections and defeating Herseth Sandlin, who could present a threat to Thune in the future. Veenis was tasked with persuading the 38-year-old Noem to run in a primary that already included Secretary of State Chris Nelson and state legislator Blake Curd, thinking she had a higher upside for a bare-knuckle general election.

Noem said she prayed on it with Bryon and their children, then ranging from 8 to 16 years old, and decided to take the leap, adding in her January 2010 announcement that South Dakotans "are best served when their representative has the same goals, experiences, and work ethic as they do."

She won the primary with 42% of the vote and handled the heat in the general election, overcoming reports that she was ticketed 20 times for speeding over the previous two decades, with bench warrants issued twice for her arrest due to unpaid fines. When she attacked Herseth Sandlin for supporting Obama's \$800 billion stimulus package, the incumbent countered that Noem voted to accept her state's share of the money as a legislator in Pierre.

Noem weathered the storm with retail campaigning heavy on rural advocacy, family values and Obama bashing, contrasting herself with an opponent she portrayed as banded to the bustle of Beltway politics.



Kristi Noem makes her acceptance speech in November 2018 after being elected as the first female governor of South Dakota. Photo:

Courtesy Sioux Falls Argus Leader

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It was a tough sell, as Herseth grew up on a northeast South Dakota farm and had a young son with her husband, Max. But it revealed a blossoming of Noem's political skill that went beyond physical presence or windows of opportunity to forge a homegrown connection. She needed every bit of it.

"Kristi resonated with voters," said Veenis, who served as Noem's statewide volunteer coordinator. "When we did our bus tour toward the November election, the crowds were huge, everyone was very excited, people were upbeat. She does very well with those campaign stops, whether it be restaurants or the Holiday Inn in Rapid City. She also had a strong message about less government, less regulation and advancing legislation to build people up rather than tear them down. It was the message that people in South Dakota wanted to hear."

On election night, Noem and her family watched the results at the Ramada Inn in Sioux Falls, declaring victory shortly after midnight with 48% of the vote, with Herseth Sandlin at 46% and Independent Thomas Marking at 6%. Earlier in the night, Daugaard, who had served as lieutenant governor under Rounds for eight years, thanked supporters for his gubernatorial rout of Heidepriem by a margin of 62% to 38%.

It was part of a Republican wave across the country, with the GOP winning control of the U.S. House by gaining 63 seats and cutting into the Democratic edge in the Senate. They also flipped control of 20 state legislatures. There were plenty of success stories to go around, but Noem's win signaled a turning point in South Dakota. Since her triumph in 2010, no Democratic candidate has managed to win statewide office.

"If you go back to when Kristi was in the state legislature, she was the one willing to call out Scott Heidepriem on some things when no one else was willing to," said Venhuizen. "She was willing to take on Stephanie Herseth when a lot of others weren't willing to, and I think that's a string that carries through to the present, that she doesn't give into pressure and she's never afraid of a fight."

Steering clear of Tea Party Caucus

Noem's approach to her first term in Congress struck some on the far right of her party as more ambitious than combative. She was one of two House freshmen (out of a mammoth GOP class of 87 new members) elected liaison to House Speaker John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor in 2011, a route she took rather than team with Minnesota Rep. Michelle Bachman and the burgeoning Tea Party Caucus.

Noem also raised eyebrows by not landing a spot on the House Committee on Agriculture, breaking recent tradition for South Dakota representatives focused on protecting the state's rural interests. She finally claimed a spot when a vacancy emerged in the summer of 2011.

"There was some stubbing of toes early on, but she proved herself to be a good soldier within the Republican Party in Congress – more establishment than rabble rouser," said Schaff. "She was not one of these people, like Marjorie Taylor Greene or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who clearly are in Congress to advance a personal agenda and are not really interested in pleasing leadership in any way shape or form. That was not Kristi Noem. She was in essence a good team player."

While taking online classes at South Dakota State University to obtain her political science degree, which she completed in 2012, Noem railed against Obama's health care policies and military intervention in Libya. She worked to roll back EPA regulations and include livestock disaster programs in the five-year Farm Bill, which passed in 2014.



Gov. Kristi Noem attends a fall 2020 event at a 3M plant in Aberdeen attended by the three members of the South Dakota congressional delegation. Photo: Sen. John Thune on Twitter

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To the extent that she walked a tightrope between GOP establishment concerns and the rumblings of the far right, Noem managed to keep her balance, easily winning re-election against Matt Varilek in 2012 and Corinna Robinson in 2014.

She dodged a primary challenge in 2012 from Rapid City resident Stephanie Strong, who drew headlines by highlighting Noem's vote for a debt-ceiling increase and her decision to get "cozy" with Boehner rather than championing fiscal conservatism.

Strong's candidacy was derailed by a lack of verified signatures, allowing Noem to stay in the middle and safely retain her seat, at least until a Manhattan real estate mogul and former reality TV star emerged on the political scene to turn everything on its ear.



While running for governor, Kristi Noem was joined by then-President Donald Trump for a Sioux Falls fundraising event in 2018. Photo:

Courtesy Sioux Falls Argus Leader

Noem on Trump: 'Not my candidate'

When Trump announced he was running for president and then began climbing GOP primary polls in 2015, Noem's reaction was not that he was "the last line of defense against the far left," as she claimed several years later. It was more about him being a threat to the mainstream Republican Party because some of his views on immigration and isolationism were "un-American."

In declaring his candidacy in June 2015, Trump promised to build "a great, great wall" on the southern border and blamed Mexico for the flow of drugs, criminals and "rapists" into the country. In December 2015, after a mass shooting in San Bernardino, Calif., committed by extremists inspired by Islamic terrorist groups, Trump called for "a total and complete shutdown" of Muslims entering the United States "until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on."

Noem condemned the remarks and joined fellow Republican House member Mike Pompeo, who later became Trump's Secretary of State, in endorsing Marco Rubio for the 2016 presidential nomination. In an interview with WNAX radio in late 2015, Noem said of Trump, "Well, he's not my candidate," and laughed before adding, "People came to this country for religious freedom, so I believe his comments were un-American, and I don't agree with them."

In a separate interview looking ahead to the Iowa Caucuses, Noem said of Trump's sizable lead in the polls: "I look at the candidates who are running and think, 'Who do I want in the room when we're negotiating with Iran?' It's not going to be Donald Trump. His principles and values don't align with mine, and his offensive nature wouldn't serve us very well in the presidency."

Her tone softened after Trump locked up the nomination, though she still referred to him as a "very flawed candidate" when announcing that she would vote for him over Hillary Clinton. Noem, who endorsed Trump when Ted Cruz suspended his campaign, didn't pull that support after "Access Hollywood" tapes from 2005 leaked a month before the election and revealed Trump making vulgar comments about groping women. Thune and Dugaard were among Republicans who called for Trump to step down and let vice presidential nominee Mike Pence head the ticket.

"I appreciate apologies," said Noem, who was running for re-election against Democrat Paula Hawkins, a race she would win with 64% of the vote. "I love the Lord and I believe in redemption and that people can change over the years."

When Trump defeated Clinton, he went from being a temporary headache for the Republican establishment to an unavoidable consequence of the party's shifting tides amid economic anxiety and concern for the future. Noem certainly wasn't the only politician who calibrated her treatment of Trump based on how

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it affected her prospects, but her turnabout, from calling him un-American to adopting his rhetoric and cultural grievances as part of her public persona, was among the most complete.

"Almost everyone was surprised that Trump won, maybe no one more than Trump himself," said Schaff. "That probably tempered Noem's (pre-election) support a bit. How much up front do you want to be supporting someone who is highly controversial and doesn't look like he's going to win? And then, bam, he wins. And because of that, there's a strong Trump stamp on the Republican Party, and not being fully on the Trump train can bring large amounts of skepticism against you."

Libertarian credentials in question

One of the transition points occurred when Noem visited the White House to visit President Trump and engaged in playful banter about her state's most prominent landmark, Mount Rushmore.

"He said, 'Kristi, come on over here. Shake my hand,'" Noem recalled in her book. "I shook his hand, and I said, 'Mr. President, you should come to South Dakota sometime. We have Mount Rushmore.' And he goes, 'Do you know it's my dream to have my face on Mount Rushmore?'"

Noem reacted as if the president was playing a joke. "I started laughing," she said. "He wasn't laughing, so he was totally serious."

She posted photos of herself in 2017 with Ivanka Trump, the president's daughter and one of his senior advisors, engaging in informal policy discussions. "When you're talking to her, I think there's a chance that it will end up in a conversation that she'll have with the president and people in the White House as well," Noem told the Argus Leader at the time.

Serving on a House conference committee, Noem helped negotiate passage of a \$1.5 trillion tax cut that served as the Trump administration's first legislative victory. She used the story of her father's tragic death – and the financial fallout faced by her family – to illustrate the need for estate tax reform because of the undue burden on those left behind.

In an earlier speech on the House floor, Noem related that soon after her father's death "we got a bill in the mail from the IRS that said we owed them money because we had a tragedy that happened to our family." Amid the 2017 debate over what she termed "the death tax," questions swirled around that claim, including the fact that her mother should have been able to assume the family assets through a marital deduction without being subject to estate tax. Noem countered that her father never signed his will, complicating the inheritance.

Tax experts clarified that estate taxes can be deferred for up to five years, with flexible installment plans offered, and typically aren't assessed until a tax return is filed, casting doubt on Noem's cautionary tale. Documents also showed that Noem's mother, Corrine, received \$1.1 million from her husband's life insurance policies, a figure significantly larger than the estate taxes owed.

"For a decade after a tragic farming accident took my dad's life, the Death Tax impacted nearly every decision our family made," Noem said in a statement at the time. "To allege anything else is fake news."

It wasn't the first time that the finances of her family's Racota Valley Ranch drew public scrutiny. The 9,700-acre property received nearly \$4.3 million in U.S. Department of Agriculture subsidy payments from 1995-2020, according to the Environmental Working Group database, causing some to question Noem's much-espoused ideology of freedom from government involvement.

"It's hard to be libertarian when you're taking federal money with both hands," said Larry Pressler, who represented South Dakota in the U.S. Senate and House as a Republican and later ran unsuccessfully as an Independent. "I know (Noem's) family and they're wonderful people, but they've taken every kind of farm aid and subsidy. We can't go around preaching about libertarianism if we're taking federal money for farms, infrastructure, education and so forth. South Dakota runs on federal aid. We just don't like to admit it."

Rough-and-tumble primary for governor

By the spring of 2016, there was already talk of a hotly contested Republican primary for governor when Dennis Daugaard's second term would end in 2018. Attorney General Jackley was expecting a sturdy challenge from state legislator and legacy candidate Mark Mickelson, whose father and grandfather both served as governor.

Republican lawmaker Lee Schoenbeck mentioned Noem's potential candidacy as the "800-pound gorilla in the room," and she announced she was running for governor six days after her 2016 re-election to the House, beating a deadline to transfer funds left from the U.S. House campaign into a state account for governor. The decision was made after she met with Mickelson and learned that he would not be running.

That left a primary with Noem facing Jackley, a self-described "consistent conservative" who cam-

paigned on traditional party priorities, noting that he signed onto cases as attorney general defending religious liberty and restricting access to abortion while defending "law and order" at home with prosecutions stemming from the state's EB-5 and Gear Up scandals.

Noem's camp highlighted her farm and ranch background while dismissing Jackley as a "government lawyer" presiding as attorney general over a state with rising cases of violent crime and drug arrests, which Jackley countered by questioning Congress' efforts to stop narcotics from being smuggled across the southern border.

"She was a very strong and worthy opponent," Jackley told News Watch. "I've always said that whether it was on a college track (as an athlete) or in a courtroom, I run my race and try my case. In other words, I was running for governor because of what I felt I could do for South Dakota, the vision that we had, the leadership team we had. I was running irrespective of whoever else was running."

Noem had considered and ultimately declined a primary run against Rounds in 2014 for the open Senate seat vacated by retiring three-term Democrat Tim Johnson. But now the timing felt right. Her stint in Washington had been marked by frequent weekend trips to Castlewood, S.D., to see her family, with the natural inclinations of a wife and mother pushing her toward another bold career gambit, this time in the direction of home.

"It was another example of her being willing to take a risk," said Schaff. "You're talking about a sitting U.S. Representative who could have cake-walked to re-election for the rest of her career deciding to take a plunge into a competitive gubernatorial race."

Whereas in earlier campaigns Noem's gender had been of secondary consideration, this time she put it out front, trumpeting the possibility of South Dakota electing its first female governor. She also knew from experience the right time to sharpen her elbows. Late in the race, with polls showing a tight margin, Noem's campaign launched TV ads hitting Jackley for his handling of a case involving a former Department of Criminal Investigation agent who received a \$1.5 million state settlement on the heels of a discrimination and retaliation lawsuit.

Jackley's performance as South Dakota's top prosecutor had been his platform – he had successfully argued a U.S. Supreme Court case that allowed South Dakota to tax purchases made from online retailers – but he was forced to defend himself against charges of malfeasance at the most crucial stage of the race. His efforts fell short as Noem surged with 56% of the vote to seal the nomination.



Gov. Kristi Noem posted this image of herself getting the first dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine on Twitter in April 2020. Noem urged residents to get vaccinated, but opposed vaccine mandates. Photo: Courtesy Gov. Noem's

office

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Noem wrote in her book that the 2018 election was “like a knife fight in a ditch,” to which Jackley responds: “I hope I was more professional than that. If I wasn’t, I apologize to the people of South Dakota.”

Close win for state’s first female governor

The excitement surrounding Noem’s primary triumph was tempered by her inability to pull away from Democratic challenger Billie Sutton in the general election. Sutton, a four-term state senator and former bronc rider paralyzed from the waist down from a rodeo injury at age 23, had a ranch background of his own, with his ubiquitous cowboy hat accentuating his West River roots.

Jackley, still stinging from primary mudslinging, didn’t endorse Noem until late October of 2018, a few weeks after the non-partisan Cook Political Report shifted the race from “Likely Republican” to “Toss-up,” with election analysts citing indications that Noem’s team was taking the race for granted.

Cracks in Noem’s “rising star” profile started to show. Statewide polling showed she trailed Sutton 51% to 40% with women and that her overall unfavorable rating in South Dakota stood at 37%, compared to 33% for Trump. Efforts to portray Sutton as a raging liberal, a tried-and-true tactic for Republicans in statewide races, largely fell flat due to his support for abortion restrictions and gun rights.

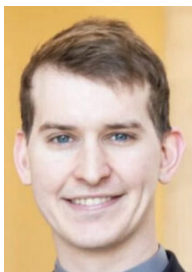
“Kristi Noem is a hyper-aggressive, largely negative campaigner,” Hildebrand said about the race. “Her message to voters was, ‘I stood with Trump, I’m an ideological Republican and Billie Sutton is the devil.’”

On election night, her winning margin of 51% to 48% was conspicuous in a state where Republican candidates had won 10 consecutive gubernatorial races by an average of 23 points. It was not the sort of mandate Noem had sought for her first executive role, with a steep learning curve ahead.

Noem has blamed her administration’s early struggles on extreme weather, noting that federal disasters were declared in 58 of 66 counties and on three reservations in 2019 due to tornadoes and flooding. Others point to Noem’s inexperience and staffing decisions to explain misfires such as the much-ridiculed “Meth. We’re on It” ad campaign, an ill-fated crusade against hemp legislation and legal setbacks the state incurred for cracking down on potential Keystone XL pipeline protests, which led the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council to temporarily ban her from the Pine Ridge Reservation.

By March of 2020, a little over a year after being inaugurated, Noem was on her third chief of staff and her approval rating stood at 43%, daunting prospects for a governor about to face the most significant public health crisis in state history.

South Dakota in national spotlight



Ian Fury

Ian Fury recalls driving across the Midwest in the early stages of the COVID pandemic to start his new job as Noem’s communications director. He was recruited by senior advisor Maggie Seidel, a former Koch Institute media strategist who came to Pierre in November 2019 to shore up the governor’s sagging policy and public relations efforts.

Fury, who had spearheaded communications for Ohio U.S. Rep. Jim Jordan, made the trip from Ohio to Pierre the first week of April 2020, as the contrast in pandemic response between various states and governors took on political tones.

“There were flashing billboards in Ohio telling people to stay home, that it wasn’t safe to go outside, and signs in Illinois telling people only to go out for necessary errands,” said Fury. “Then I cross the border into South Dakota and get to Sioux Falls and there’s a flashing billboard that says, ‘Facts not Fear,’ encouraging people to visit the state website.

It wasn’t downplaying COVID. It wasn’t saying to ignore COVID. It was saying to get the facts, and it was the only state where I had seen a message that wasn’t explicitly fear-mongering.”

Fury helped turn it into a political creed that would elevate the governor’s profile, and he felt uniquely suited to do so. He grew up in Houston with parents firmly entrenched conservative politics. His father, Mark, was chairman of the Committee for Texas Right to Life, where his mom, Jill, served as a volunteer. Mark also served on the board of the Texas Republican Party and Jill was a precinct captain.

Fury attended high school in Nebraska and then set off for Hillsdale College in south-central Michigan, a conservative liberal arts institution that gained national influence in the debate over the politicization of history and civics curriculum in public schools. He graduated with a degree in political economy in 2015

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and started working for Sam Brownback, a Kansas senator at the time, followed by a stint with the Koch brothers-funded Americans for Prosperity before getting the job with Jordan, one of Trump's top defenders during the first impeachment process.

By the time he reached Pierre, South Dakota coronavirus cases were surging, with the Smithfield Foods pork processing plant in Sioux Falls the No. 1 hot spot in the country. After shutting down schools in March and writing a letter to Smithfield (along with Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken) asking that the plant suspend operations for 14 days, Noem reversed her stance on mitigation measures around the same time Trump called on states to "open up this incredible country" by Easter, which fell on April 12.

Noem rebuffed calls for statewide shutdowns and mask mandates, citing "science, facts, and data," and coordinated with the White House on a state clinical trial for hydroxychloroquine, a malaria drug Trump touted as treatment for hospitalized COVID patients that the FDA later said has "not been shown to be safe and effective for treating or preventing COVID-19."

These actions led to lavish praise from conservative media outlets and castigation from left-leaning pundits such as MSNBC anchor Rachel Maddow, who challenged Noem's "crazy denialism" to her nightly audience of 3 million viewers. The fact that more than 3,000 South Dakotans suffered deaths related to COVID-19 is not lost on Noem (the state ranks 11th in most deaths per 100,000 residents, according to CDC data), but in her book she defends the state's response to the pandemic as "our finest hour."

"It's less that she found her voice and more that she found her moment," said Fury. "And I would point out that the national prominence that came with it wasn't driven by seeking clout. When the Smithfield outbreak happened, Rachel Maddow talked about Gov. Noem on the air five nights in a row. The Washington Post and New York Times were writing about South Dakota, and she was defending her position."

Politics during a pandemic

The irony of Noem's stance was noted by South Dakota's far-right legislators, who recalled her April 6 "stay at home" executive order directed toward Minnehaha/Lincoln County residents 65 and older or with an underlying medical condition. Noem's office also brought COVID-related bills to the floor of the legislature during a hectic March 30 veto day session, including one that would have given her state health secretary the power to shut down or restrict public or private businesses, parks, schools and other locations that "promote public gathering" if they didn't follow CDC guidelines during the health emergency.

"After the House killed those bills, I saw reports that she had gone to Florida and badmouthed Ron DeSantis for shutting down beaches and things," said Russell, referencing Florida's governor, who is also considered a national GOP presidential hopeful.



Lance
Russell

Russell also noted: "She saw how the tea leaves were trending and in a calculating change of heart, she took on that persona of not shutting anything down and criticizing other governors for doing so. Technically, the South Dakota House kept the state open."

Noem shrugged off such criticism and pushed forward, engaging in a legal standoff with tribal officials over their use of roadside checkpoints to try to control the spread of the coronavirus on reservations. She placed no restrictions on the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, which brought nearly 500,000 visitors to the Black Hills in August of 2020 and contributed to "widespread transmission" of COVID-19, according to CDC researchers.

"South Dakotans inherently look after one another," said Reynold Nesiba, a Democratic state senator from Sioux Falls. "We pride ourselves on helping each other, whether it's bringing in the harvest or taking care of someone who is unwell. During COVID, it seemed like we were more interested in scoring political points. It could have been an opportunity for the governor to use her leadership to bring us together as a state; instead she used it to fan the divisiveness and push us further apart."

The strategy brought her closer to Trump, who announced plans for Fourth of July fireworks at Mount Rushmore with no social distancing, adhering to Noem's "personal responsibility" doctrine. As for National Park Service concerns about embers from fireworks sparking wildfires, or Native American activists outraged at Trump's celebration on sacred land during a summer of racial reckoning, none of it prevented the

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patriotism-themed display – with imagery later used in election-year ads – from moving forward.

“She had basically decided that she was going to go all in and be an open Trump supporter,” said Schaff. “I think that changed things for her and her thoughts on the future. She got the whiff of presidential aspirations, and once you get a hold of that, I suspect it’s very hard to let go.”

Lewandowski makes his mark



Former Donald Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski holds a poster for South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem during the CPAC event in February 2021. Photo: Courtesy Jabin Botsford,

The Washington Post

Early fanfare surrounding Trump’s Mount Rushmore visit on July 3, 2020, centered on Ellsworth Air Force Base, where the president and his contingent touched down on Air Force One.

Trump and First Lady Melania Trump were greeted at the bottom of the steps by Noem and Thune, with no handshakes and six feet of separation, in accordance with CDC guidelines. A few moments later, Lewandowski descended the stairs and greeted the governor with a handshake and kissed her on the cheek before retreating to the background.

The gesture did not nothing to tamp down speculation about Lewandowski’s growing influence on Noem’s political affairs, a relationship that coincided with her rise in national stature during the COVID pandemic.

“Corey writes a lot of her stuff,” said Hildebrand. “I think she saw that she could have a significant fundraising advantage nationally, especially at the small donor level, if that was the language she spoke. And he helped her get there.”

Lewandowski is a longtime political operative who mounted an unsuccessful campaign for state legislature while attending college at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell, after which he decided to boost candidates, not be one. At the age of 25, he ran a re-election effort for Ohio Republican Congressman Bob Ney and then worked as deputy chief of staff, making headlines in 1999 when he was arrested for carrying a handgun and several rounds of ammunition into the Longworth House Office Building on Capitol Hill.

“He was returning to Ohio with his laundry,” Ney explained at the time. “He forgot the gun was in there.”

His penchant for going rogue was sealed when he ran the U.S. Senate campaign of New Hampshire Republican party outsider Bob Smith in 2002, a failed primary effort that saw Lewandowski take heat for indirectly tying rival candidate John E. Sununu to terrorism because he accepted support from an Arab-American anti-discrimination group in the aftermath of 9/11. Sununu, of Lebanese descent, is the son of former New Hampshire governor John H. Sununu, who served as chief of staff to George H.W. Bush.

“I would use the term ‘he’s dead to us’ to explain the relationship between Lewandowski and the Sununu family,” said Andy Smith, a political science professor who runs the University of New Hampshire’s Survey Center. “That was not a good move for Corey.”

Lewandowski worked for Americans for Prosperity before being hired as Trump’s campaign manager in late 2014. Controversy erupted again when he was accused of yanking the arm of Breitbart News reporter Michelle Fields at a Trump event in Florida in March 2015. Lewandowski was fired as campaign manager in June 2016 after clashing with campaign chairman Paul Manafort, but he has maintained ties to his former boss and used that relationship to secure consulting and lobbying jobs, with MAGA-style populism a common thread.

“Corey’s a good ground-game campaign person and organizer – I don’t want to sell him short,” said Smith, a veteran of the New Hampshire political scene. “But his biggest connection obviously is Trump, and

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he's using those connections and maybe the impression that if he's working with somebody, that person gets Trump's tacit endorsement. He's been capitalizing on that for a while."

Noem's faith in Lewandowski was tested on the night of Sept. 26, 2021, when he was accused of sexual harassment and threatening behavior by Trump donor Trashelle Odom at a Las Vegas charity event also attended by Noem.

"I was intimidated and frightened and fearful for my safety and that of my family members," Odom, the wife of an Idaho construction company executive, said in a statement to police. She claimed that Lewandowski harassed her repeatedly while seated next to her at the event, touched her leg and buttocks, bragged about his violent past and became angry when she rejected his advances.

"It was apparent that my reactions to Lewandowski's stories, threats and aggressive sexual advances were not normal for Lewandowski as he ultimately threw his drink on me, hitting my dress, shoe and foot," Odom said in the statement. She added that at one point in the evening, "I saw Gov. Noem and intended on introducing her to my sister and stepson, who both had joined me on the trip. Gov. Noem told me that she had texted Corey to stop touching me. This was confusing for my sister and stepson."

A Trump spokesman responded to the allegations by saying that Lewandowski, who has been married since 2005 and has four kids, "will no longer be associated with Trump World." Noem's office said she was also cutting ties with Lewandowski, with Fury insisting that Lewandowski was merely a volunteer and "will not be advising the Governor in regard to the campaign or official office."

Lewandowski was ultimately charged with misdemeanor battery for the Las Vegas incident, but according to a deal with prosecutors, the charges will be dismissed if Lewandowski completes eight hours of impulse control counseling, serves 50 hours of community service and stays out of trouble for a year.

By the time he cut that deal in September 2022, he had worked his way back into Noem's political circle. She appeared with Lewandowski at an August 2022 fundraiser for Massachusetts GOP gubernatorial nominee Geoff Diehl, where Noem and Diehl strolled the north end of Boston, eating pizza and hob-knobbing with merchants.

The Trump-endorsed Diehl, who has questioned the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election, said that he and Noem "very much share the same values" when asked about her extreme positions on abortion. Lewandowski also worked for U.S. Senate candidate Jane Timkin of Ohio, who was endorsed by Noem in August of 2021. Timkin spoke of "widespread fraud and irregularities" in the 2020 election, without citing evidence, and praised Lewandowski's experience in high-level campaigns without mentioning the allegations in Las Vegas.

"People will overlook a lot of sins if they think Corey can help them get elected," said Smith, though Timkin failed to land Trump's endorsement and finished fifth in the Ohio primary, while Diehl trails Democratic gubernatorial candidate Maura Healey by as many as 24 points in recent Massachusetts polls.

Asked about Noem's Trump-inspired political transformation, Smith added: "It's the mood of the country and the mood of the Republican Party. If the party shifts, you have to go where the party is and try to run in front of the parade. A skillful politician is the one who can do that and not make it look too opportunistic."

Battling inside and outside the GOP

One problem with being a "political chameleon," Noem's detractors say, is that your true colors become harder to find. But a politician's first instinct can be revealing.

When the Republican-dominated South Dakota Legislature pushed through a transgender athlete bill in 2021 that would have banned trans females from competing in sports programs in South Dakota, Noem initially voiced support but then issued a style-and-form veto, expressing concern about college sports being included and financial repercussions if the NCAA boycotted events.

"The NCAA is a private association," Noem said at a press conference following her decision not to sign the bill. "That means they can do what they want to do. And even though I fundamentally disagree with them when it comes to this issue, if South Dakota passes a law that's against their policy, they will likely take punitive action against us."

Though Noem tried to rally support for a "Defend Title IX Now!" coalition, she was assailed by hard-

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core conservatives as a “sellout” who “caved” to corporate interests. In a contentious interview on Fox News, host Tucker Carlson asked her: “Why not just say, ‘Bring it on, NCAA. I’m a national figure. Go ahead and try and exclude us. I will fight you in the court of public opinion and defend principle.’ Why not just do that?”

The first-term governor took a more aggressive position for the 2022 legislative session. Her office put forth a retooled bill, removing logistical challenges for schools and adding a clause to provide legal representation from the attorney general for various entities in case they were sued. But the swiftness with which the reactionary right had turned on her was instructive.

“She went on Tucker Carlson and kind of got beat up,” said Schaff. “He made her look bad, which is hard to do. He made her look weak and dissembling, so I think she came to the realization that ‘this could hurt me; I won’t veto that thing a second time.’ And she didn’t.”



Republican Gov. Kristi Noem, at right, appears with Democrat Jamie Smith and Libertarian Tracy Quint at a Sept. 30 gubernatorial debate in Rapid City. Photo: Courtesy of KOTA

Close governor’s race awaits

In her videotaped message at the Media Research Center event in Washington D.C., Noem framed her hands-off approach to the pandemic as a nod to individual liberties, portraying South Dakota’s wide-open spaces as a red-state haven where freedom rings.

She justifies her national travel – made possible by payments and in-kind contributions through her Victory Fund PAC – as part of her role as state ambassador, extolling the virtues of South Dakota to boost tourism. Noem’s administration used \$5 million in coronavirus relief funds in 2020 for the same purpose, running an ad campaign featuring the governor and state landmarks such as Mount Rushmore and the Badlands.

“We invited freedom-loving Americans to come to South Dakota,” Noem told the Media Research Center audience, “and they came to our state in record numbers.”

South Dakota Department of Tourism Secretary Jim Hagen said the state is on track to “either match or surpass the \$4.4 billion in visitor spending we experienced in 2021,” though National Park visitation is slightly down, and hotel room nights declined over the summer “with astronomical gas prices and crippling inflation causing American families to cancel their trips,” according to Hagen.

Noem’s travel schedule is also targeted to boost her politically – with appearances and digital ads in key electoral states – but it’s not clear how much her time away from Pierre hurts her at home.

“There are lots of people who say she shouldn’t have ambition, but my perspective would be that you hope everybody has a little bit of ambition,” said Card, the USD political science professor. “Her opponents would say it’s a question of whether she’s speaking to us or speaking to (out-of-state audiences).”

South Dakota voters have traditionally been wary of officeholders who place national priorities ahead of state issues. Thune’s attacks on Daschle in 2004 focused on the Senate Majority Leader and his wife being entrenched in Washington, including a video clip of Daschle saying, “I’m a D.C. resident,” though Daschle’s campaign offered evidence that he was speaking in jest.

“I would advise South Dakota politicians to pay attention to South Dakota issues,” said Pressler, who blamed his own 1996 Senate loss to Democrat Tim Johnson on inattention to local concerns. “Be careful not to get too far off the reservation, so to speak. That would be my advice to all South Dakota politicians who want to be elected or re-elected.”

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Others point to the fact that Daschle was embroiled in a high-stakes race in a ruby-red state against a rising Republican star in 2004, while Noem has history and money on her side against an opponent running his first statewide campaign in a tough election year for Democrats.

"Whatever Jamie Smith is, he isn't John Thune," said Schaff, shrugging off the Thune/Daschle comparison. "He's not a Republican running in a Republican state in a Republican year with A-level political talent, which was Thune in 2004. Jamie Smith isn't that. You might say that Noem has popularity to burn, and if she's burned a little bit because she has cultivated a bit of a national profile, I doubt it costs her re-election."

Also looming is an ethics investigation involving Noem's alleged interference in a state agency's evaluation of her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license, which involved a state employee receiving a \$200,000 settlement after filing a wrongful termination suit.

The state's Government Accountability Board determined there was evidence Noem acted improperly but refused to publicly disclose the "appropriate action" it took after making that finding, ending the matter in the public eye but allowing questions about the process to remain.

"The longer the issue stays on people's minds and they talk about it, the worse off it is for her," said Card. "Part of that is the lack of transparency that was written into the statutes, whether things are handled in public or private. If there's a private reprimand, no one will know, and that will feed into our South Dakota suspicion that somebody's getting a better deal."

Re-election bids are a referendum on the incumbent, which is especially true in this case. A vote for Noem is not just for a second term as governor but a tacit endorsement of her political prospects, which may or may not take her away from gubernatorial duties. A loss would be a staggering blow to her political ascendancy and MAGA-fueled momentum, not to mention one of the most consequential election results in South Dakota history.

"I don't think this election is about Kristi Noem's career," said Nesiba. "This election is about the future of South Dakota, and South Dakotans see Jamie Smith as more in line with their values and their concerns than they do with the current governor. That's why she's going to lose, and she doesn't seem to be aware that that's about to happen."

It could be that even Noem's most vocal critics don't know what makes her tick. Maybe she's still figuring it out herself, veering from star-spangled freedom fighter to calculating climber, sailing on political winds. One thing in Noem's favor, said Schaff, is her understanding of her home state, which gives her the courage of her convictions, however flexible they might be.

"The thing that inoculates her from some of the criticism is that it's really hard to out-South Dakota Kristi Noem," he said. "And I don't think that she's lost that touch."

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



ABOUT Stu Whitney

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Mobridge-Pollock wins 2022 Battle of the Tigers

Groton Area took the Battle of the Tigers trophy to Mobridge Friday night as the gridiron teams met for the final regular season game. The trophy ended up staying in Mobridge as the home team posted a 30-12 win over Groton Area.

Groton Area scored first with 6:26 left in the first quarter when Colby Dunker caught a three-yard pass from Lane Tietz. The PAT kick was blocked and it was 6-0, Groton Area, after the first quarter.

Mobridge-Pollock would score twice in the second quarter, once at the 5:52 mark and the other with just three seconds left in the half. The first was on a Turner Pfitzer 16 yard pass from Holden Eisemann. Aiden Shoenhard ran in the PAT and Mobridge-Pollock took an 8-6 lead. The second touchdown was a Shoenhard pass from Eisemann for 16 yards. Eisemann connected with Pfitzer for the PAT and it was 16-6 in favor of Mobridge-Pollock at half time.

Groton Area would score with 6:21 left in the third quarter on a two-yard run by Taylor Diegel. The PAT run failed and it was 16-12.

Mobridge-Pollock would score two more times in the fourth quarter. With 10:42 left, Shoenhard would score on an eight yard run and he caught the PAT pass from Eisemann. The second was with 5:51 left in the game on a Shoenhard one yard run with the PAT run failing this time.

Mobridge-Pollock will advance to the playoffs on October 20th, taking on Aberdeen Roncalli. The Tigers finished in 15th place in the state while the Cavaliers are in second place.

Groton Area had four fumbles and recovered them all. Mobridge-Pollock had three fumbles and Groton Area recovered two of them. Groton Area had 11 first downs while Mobridge-Pollock had 19.

In rushing, Groton Area had 33 carries for 199 yards. Andrew Marzahn had 15 carries for 79 yards, Lane Tietz had seven for 64, Taylor Diegel had eight for 33 yards and one touchdown, Keegan Tracy had one for 16 yards and Colby Dunker had two for seven yards. Mobridge-Pollock had 37 carries for 182 yards. Aiden Shoenhard had 21 carries for 105 yards while Simon Fried and eight for 67 yards.

In passing, Groton Area completed 14 of 24 passes for 146 yards with one touchdown and two interception. Receivers were Tate Larson with six catches for 65 yards, Marzahn with two catches for 61 yards, Dunker had three for 11 yards and one touchdown, Ethan Gengerke had one for five yards, Diegel had one for three yards and Tracy had one for one yard.

Mobridge-Pollock completed 11 of 23 passes for 168 yards and two touchdowns. Mark Sandquist had three catches for 56 yards, Pfitzer had five for 51 yards, Shoenhard had two for 40 yards and Shane Henderson had one for 21 yards.

Defensive leaders for Groton Area were Marzahn and Dunker with 11 tackles each, Logan Ringgenberg and Diegel each had eight and Holden Sippel had seven. Mobridge-Pollock was led by Coy. Hinsz with seven tackles and Shoenhard and Carter Hinsz each had six.

Groton Area finishes the season with a 3-5 record. Mobridge-Pollock is 4-4.

The Life of Alvin Bahr



Funeral services for Alvin Bahr, 87, of Turton will be 2:00 p.m. on Friday, October 21st at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Ferney. Rev. Dwaine Doremus will officiate. Burial will follow in St. Paul's Cemetery, Ferney under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Visitation will be held at the chapel on Thursday from 5-7 p.m. with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m.

Alvin passed away October 14, 2022 at Avera St. Lukes Hospital, Aberdeen.

Alvin Marvin was born on June 5, 1935 in Ferney to Ernest and Emma (Stange) Bahr. He attended a one room school house in Ferney and later graduated from Groton High School in 1953. He began farming with his brother, Art. He met the love of his life, Donna Sondergard, on a blind date and they were wed on June 15, 1970. Together they were blessed with two children. Alvin had a passion for farming and did so until he was unable.

Through the years, he raised cattle, hogs, chickens and sheep. He also had many farm cats and several dogs. In December of 1982, the family moved to Turton.

Alvin was a true cowboy at heart and was rarely not seen in his cowboy hat and boots. He enjoyed watching old westerns on TV and was an avid Cleveland Indians baseball fan. He and Donna liked going out to eat and were affectionately known as "Ma and Pa" at their favorite restaurant. In earlier years, they traveled often to the Black Hills, Minnesota, Wisconsin and North Dakota. Alvin was well read and enjoyed discussing politics. Above all, he enjoyed spending time with family.

Celebrating his life is his wife of 53 years, who he called "his angel" Donna, his children, Marvin Bahr (Carrie Whitaker) of Brookings, Roxanne Fey of Groton, three grandchildren, Stephanie Dahlman, Nicole Fey, Steven Fey and two great-grandchildren Casey and Allis Dahlman.

Preceding him in death were his parents, siblings, Lydia Nowak, Julia Knapp, Arthur Bahr and two infant siblings.

Casketbearers will be Jeff Miles, Preston Miles, Donnie Miles, Steven Fey, Nicole Fey and Stephanie Dahlman.

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Weekly Vikings Recap - Week 6

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

If you're a fan of punting, this was the game for you. For yet another week, the Vikings win despite not playing even close to their best game. Remarkably, the Vikings were outgained by a total of 224 yards by a Miami Dolphins team without their starting quarterback. Despite a 5-1 record now, it still feels like we are not sure how good this Vikings team can be.

In the first half, the Vikings' offense could not have gotten off to a worse start to begin the game by going three-and-out on their first four drives. Coming into the game, the Dolphins' defense was last in the league in forcing three-and-outs but somehow were able to completely fluster the Vikings' offense. Thanks to several penalties, the Dolphins were unable to capitalize on any of their opportunities, ultimately scoring only 3 points in the first half.

When the Vikings' offense got the ball to start their fifth drive, things started to change. For the first time all game, the Vikings were able to get a first down and the offense seemed like it started to click. In only six plays, they drove down the field to the Dolphins' 1-yard line. On the very next play, the Vikings ran a play-action pass, leading to Kirk Cousins finding a wide-open Irv Smith Jr in the back of the endzone for a touchdown.

As the first half was coming to an end, things started to not go the Dolphins' way. Dolphins' starting quarterback Skylar Thompson, who performed fairly well today, hurt his throwing hand after hitting a Vikings helmet and missed the rest of the game. Then, former Vikings QB Teddy Bridgewater, came into the game to replace Thompson and threw an untimely interception to Harrison Smith. The INT allowed the Vikings to get the ball into field goal range, setting up a Greg Joseph kick as time expired in the first half. After looking mediocre at best, the Vikings somehow had a 10-3 lead heading into halftime.

The second half was a repeat of the first half for both teams. Both the Dolphins and Vikings combined for seven straight three-and-outs and an unimpressive one total yard to start the half. But just like in the first half, the Vikings were able to put together a seven-play touchdown drive. This time Kirk Cousins threaded the needle to Adam Thielen in the back of the endzone to give the Vikings a 16-3 lead. However, Greg Joseph missed the extra point, which caused a surge of anxiety in the heart of every Viking fan.

After a quick touchdown drive by the Dolphins to cut the Vikings' lead to 16-10, the Vikings went three-and-out for the ninth time in the game, giving the ball back to the Dolphins with a chance to win. As the Dolphins started to move into Viking's territory, it appeared that we would have yet another Vikings' game coming down to the wire. However, the Vikings' defense had other thoughts. First, Harrison Smith forced a fumble on Jaylen Waddle. And, after an impressive Dalvin Cook 53-yard run that gave the Vikings a 24-10 lead, Patrick Peterson picked off Teddy Bridgewater to secure the victory for the Vikings. Thanks to a garbage time touchdown by the Dolphins, the final score came out as Vikings 24 - Dolphins 16.

The star of the game had to be the Vikings' pass rush as they dominated the Dolphins' offensive line to a total of six sacks. Za'Darius Smith, in particular, was a force to be reckoned with today as he seemed to be in the backfield almost every play. Although a total of two sacks is a good stat to have, it does not do justice to how impressive he was against the Dolphins.

Now, the Vikings head into their bye week with a two-game lead over the Green Bay Packers in the NFC North division. Although an early bye week is not always the best thing for a team, hopefully, the Vikings can use the extra week to get their offense back on track to what it should be.

Caring for the Caregiver

Every day in the clinic or hospital I meet extraordinary caregivers. They are the ones who have gone above and beyond the call of duty; sometimes for years at a time. When you ask them how they do it, they shrug and smile. I am not talking about any doctor, nurse, or therapist. I am referring to those who care for and look after their elderly friends and family members. This can be a spouse, adult child, adult grandchild, neighbor, or even a good friend.

There are many reasons that people volunteer to be caregivers. Spouses can often not imagine living apart from each other. Adult children and grandchildren may want to

return the care that they were given growing up. Neighbors often have a relationship of caring that spans years. Whatever the reason, these people answered the call for help.

Those who have stepped up to care for another person deserve our praise and admiration. What they also need and deserve is our help and support. Caring for another person around the clock can be exhausting. Chronic health conditions, like dementia, incontinence issues, or balance issues, can further complicate that care. Caring for someone else can cause a strain in relationships between spouses, siblings, and extended family. I have seen caregivers ignore their own health and refuse admission to the hospital for themselves. They do this because they fear that there will be no one to care for their loved one if they are not there.

The responsibility for caring for another person can affect all aspects of life for the caregiver. Jobs, school, and vacations can be challenging when taking on a full time caregiving role. Even a trip to the grocery store is complicated when caring for someone who needs constant supervision to be safe. There are resources to help caregivers, but finding them can be difficult.

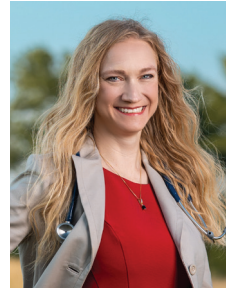
Many caregivers do not know where to look for help. Adult daycare or respite care for weekends or nights can be difficult to find or prohibitively expensive. There are several national organizations with resources such as AARP, the Alzheimer's Association, Family Caregiver Alliance, and the National Council on Aging. These organizations all have websites with great tips that can offer support for caregivers.

Do not forget to reach out to your family member's primary care physician or clinic care coordinator. They may be able to help you reach out to local resources and support groups. Know that caregivers should never do this all alone. We want to help and support the care you give. The goal is keeping everyone happy, healthy and well cared for – including the caregiver. Thank you for all you do. How can we help?

Jill Kruse, D.O. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices as a hospitalist in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show providing health information based on science, built on trust, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Based on Science, Built on Trust

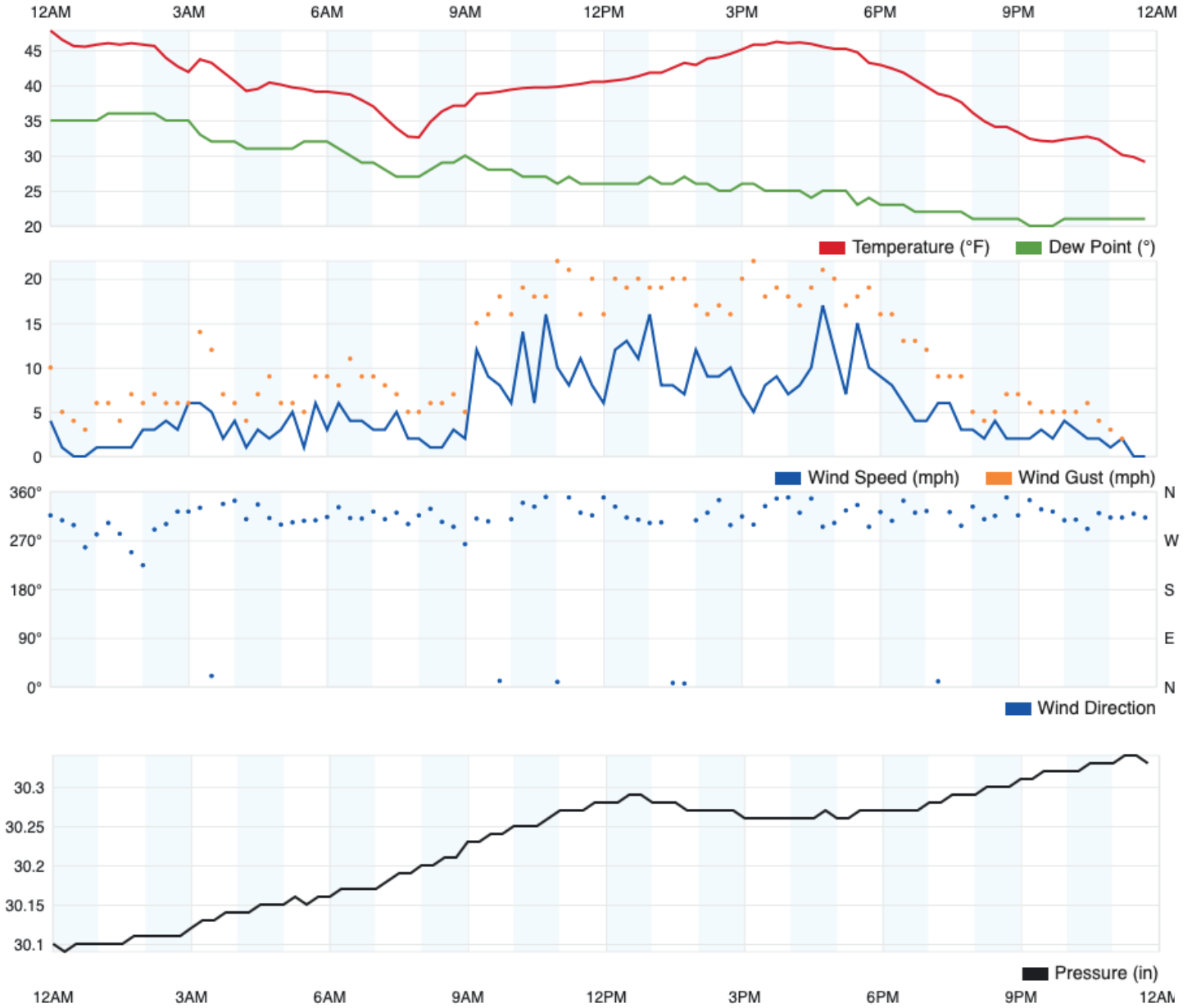


Jill Kruse, DO

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 39 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 10 °F

Tuesday



Sunny

High: 40 °F

Tuesday Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 20 °F

Wednesday

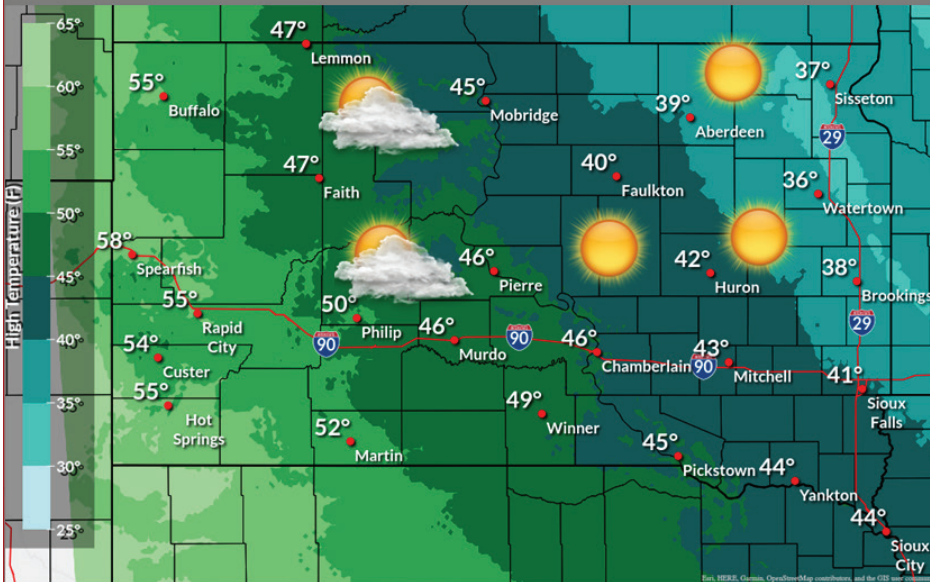


Mostly Sunny

High: 60 °F

High Temperatures Today

Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abr



Maximum Temperature Forecast

	10/17	10/18	10/19	10/20	10/21	10/22
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Aberdeen	40	41	61	65	64	69
Britton	37	39	56	61	62	68
Eagle Butte	43	46	66	66	64	70
Eureka	41	43	62	65	61	68
Gettysburg	42	43	61	65	58	68
Kennebec	45	46	64	70	67	76
McIntosh	43	47	64	69	62	66
Milbank	36	39	55	60	63	68
Miller	42	43	62	67	66	73
Mobridge	45	48	67	71	67	71
Murdo	46	49	64	70	62	75
Pierre	47	48	66	70	63	75
Redfield	40	42	61	65	62	71
Sisseton	37	40	56	61	63	68
Watertown	36	38	54	58	61	66
Webster	35	37	53	57	60	65
Wheaton	35	38	54	59	61	66

The cool weather continues through Tuesday, with warmer air moving in for the second half of the week. Dry weather looks to continue through Saturday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 28 °F at 11:58 PM

Low Temp: 28 °F at 11:58 PM

Wind: 22 mph at 10:54 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 55 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 1910

Record Low: 15 in 1976

Average High: 59°F

Average Low: 33°F

Average Precip in Oct.: 1.29

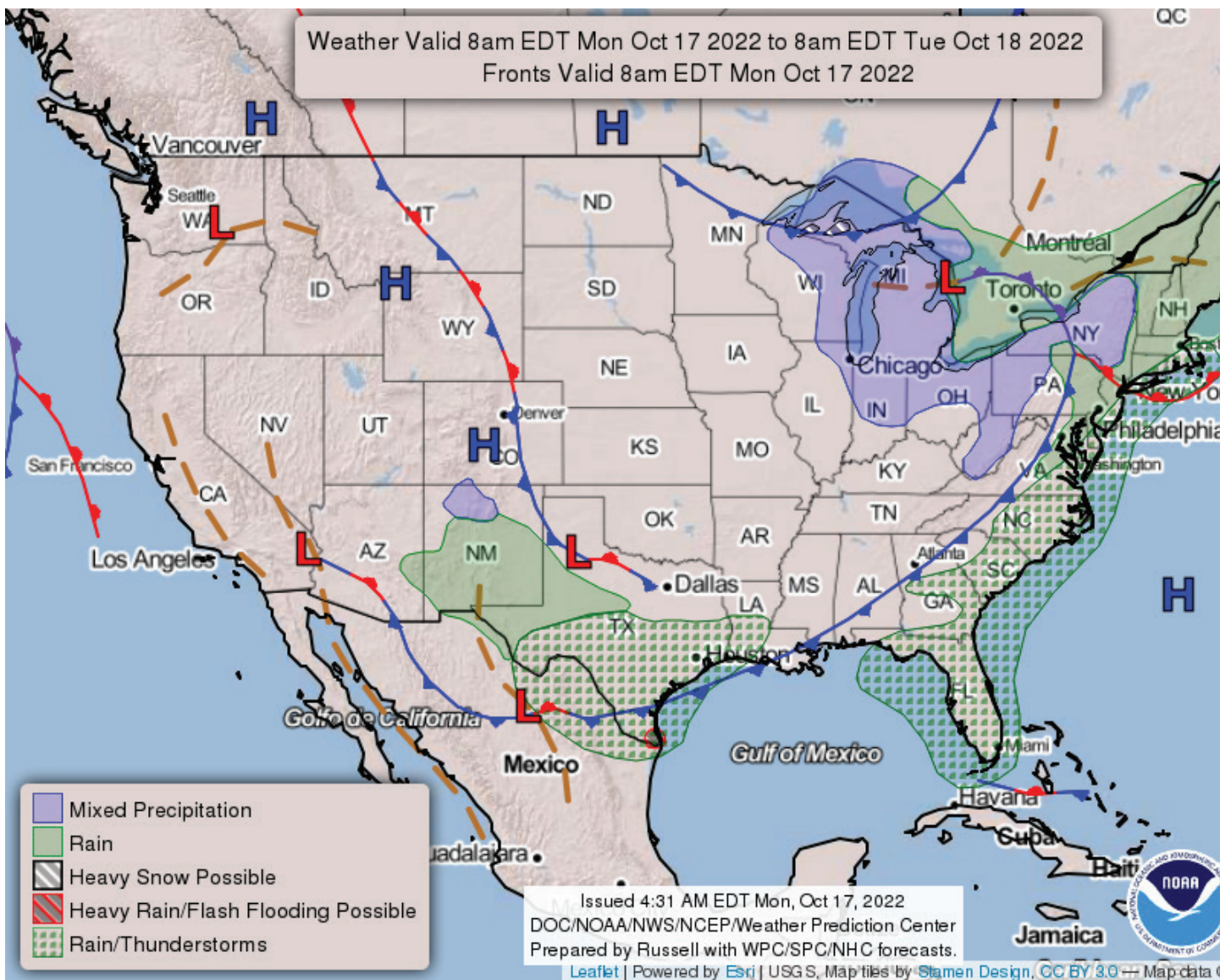
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.45

Average Precip to date: 19.62

Precip Year to Date: 16.50

Sunset Tonight: 6:45:12 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:51:30 AM



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Today in Weather History

October 17, 1910: The temperature in Aberdeen, South Dakota, warmed to 90 degrees on this day. This reading is the latest day in the calendar year in which the high temperature reached 90 degrees.

October 17, 2011: A strong low-pressure system to the northwest and a strong high-pressure system to the southeast brought stiff southerly winds across central and north-central South Dakota from the late morning until the early evening. South winds of 30 to 40 mph with gusts over 60 mph caused spotty damage across the region. The high winds created large waves on Lake Oahe near Pierre, which damaged several docks along with some boats at a marina. There were also some tree branches downed across the region, along with some damage to a few structures. With the high winds, warm temperatures, and low humidity, several grassland fires also broke out across parts of the region. The maximum wind gust of 68 mph occurred in Corson County.

1781 - General Cornwallis attempted to escape encirclement by crossing York River, "but a violent storm arose" dispersing his boats causing him to ask for an armistice. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1910: A category 4 hurricane moved north-northeast, passing just east of the Dry Tortugas. The maximum storm surge observed in Key West was 8 feet, with 15-foot waves at what is now Fort Zachary Taylor State Park.

1950 - Small but powerful Hurricane King struck Miami, FL. The hurricane packs winded to 122 mph, with gusts to 150 mph. Hurricane King then moved up the Florida peninsula to Georgia. Four persons were killed and damage was 28 million dollars. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1971: Great balls of fire were observed just ahead of a tornado moving down the main street of Wray, Colorado. However, little other electrical activity accompanied the storm. Nine people were injured in the storm, all at a trailer court at the edge of town.

1984: A snowstorm struck northern Utah producing a record 18 inches in 24 hours at Salt Lake City and 40 inches at the nearby Alta Ski Resort. The town of Magna, located ten miles west of Salt Lake City, did not receive any snow at all. The storm was responsible for a fifty-vehicle pile-up along Interstate 15 near Farmington, Utah.

1987 - It was a great day for an Oktoberfest, or to enjoy the colors of autumn, as much of the nation enjoyed sunny and mild weather. Columbia SC dipped to 34 degrees, marking their third morning in a row of record cold. Bakersfield CA reached 80 degrees for the 143rd day in a row to break a record established in 1940. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the Middle Mississippi Valley and the Lower Ohio Valley. Severe thunderstorms spawned three tornadoes in Indiana, including one which injured four persons. Strong thunderstorm winds at Connerville IND caused three million dollars damage. Thunderstorms in Illinois produced hail two inches in diameter Colfax. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms representing the remnants of Hurricane Jerry deluged southeast Kentucky with four to six inches of rain in 18 to 24 hours, resulting in widespread flash flooding. Flooding resulted in more than five million dollars damage. Temperatures again warmed into the 80s and lower 90s in the southeastern U.S. Lakeland FL and Orlando FL reported record highs of 95 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) 1997: Late on October 17, Super Typhoon Ivan attained its peak intensity with winds of 185 mph and an official barometric pressure of 905 mbar. On the same day, while near peak intensity, Typhoon Joan was located about 1300 miles east of Typhoon Ivan.

1998: During the weekend of October 17-18, 1998, torrential rains fell over southern and southeast Texas. Up to 22 inches of rain fell, which first resulted in deadly flash flooding from San Antonio to Austin followed by record-breaking river floods along several South Texas rivers the following week. Based on provisional data from the USGS, which is subject to revision, the flood peak for this event was the highest known peak stage at 15 locations. Tragically, a total of 31 people died during the event (26 drownings, two tornado deaths, two heart attacks, and one electrocution/drowning). At least 17 of the drowning victims were in vehicles that were either driven into water or were swept away by rapidly rising water. Preliminary property damage estimates approached three-quarters of a billion dollars.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

IT TAKES MORE THAN GOOD PLANS

It had been a long, trying and tiring day. It seemed as though there was one demand after another - each more consuming than the preceding one. While sitting alone and looking out the window at a yard filled with pine trees, my little dog Bella came and sat at my feet. Finally, I thought, here's someone who has come to comfort me.

Shortly after she sat down and looked into my eyes, she began to bark loudly. Not wanting to be disturbed, I tried to avoid looking at her - hoping she would come to the conclusion that I did not want to be bothered. It didn't work. She persisted until I looked at her, shook my head, got up from my chair, and fed her.

What I find so amazing is that she expects to be fed at the same time each day. It is as though she has a plan in place organized around a clock. Not so, because she does not have the ability to plan. Only man, created in the image of God, has been given the ability to plan. It is a God-given gift and to be used to glorify and honor the Lord. And notice, if you will, that it comes from the heart - our very essence - the sum total of all the gifts God has given to us.

Notice also, "the answer of the tongue comes from the Lord." We may make the most intricate, time-consuming and carefully designed plans for what we think is best for us and others. But, in the end, only God knows what is best for every situation, decision, problem or plan.

We must always recognize the sovereignty of God in all things. We must wait upon Him to speak to us and give us the assurance that our plans agree with His Word and will!

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to understand that the best plans ever conceived will fail without Your blessing. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the proper answer of the tongue. Proverbs 16:1



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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News from the Associated Press

UK Treasury chief scraps nearly all government tax cut plans

By JILL LAWLESS AND DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — U.K. Treasury chief Jeremy Hunt on Monday reversed most of an economic package announced by the government just weeks ago, including a planned cut to income tax.

In a bid to soothe turbulent financial markets, Hunt said he was scrapping “almost all” the tax cuts announced last month and signaled public spending cuts are on the way.

Hunt said a planned 1 percentage point cut to the basic rate of income tax that had been due to take effect next year won’t happen. He also scaled back a cap on energy prices designed to help households pay their bills. It will now be reviewed in April rather than lasting two years.

Hunt was appointed Friday after Prime Minister Liz Truss fired Kwasi Kwarteng, who spent less than six weeks in the Treasury job. Truss and Kwarteng jointly came up with a Sept. 23 announcement of 45 billion pounds (\$50 billion) in unfunded tax cuts that spooked financial markets, sent the pound to record lows and forced the Bank of England to take emergency action.

Monday’s hastily scheduled announcement came two weeks before Hunt is due to set out a medium-term fiscal plan.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP’s earlier story follows below.

LONDON (AP) — The new U.K. Treasury chief will announce details of his tax and spending plans Monday, two weeks ahead of schedule, in a bid to calm markets roiled by the government’s economic policies.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt is expected to ditch more of the measures announced by the government of Prime Minister Liz Truss on Sept. 23.

Truss drafted Hunt in on Friday after she fired his predecessor, Kwasi Kwarteng. Plans by Truss and Kwarteng for 45 billion pounds (\$50 billion) in tax cuts — including an income tax reduction for the highest earners — without an accompanying assessment of how the government would pay for them sent the pound plunging to a record low against the U.S. dollar and the cost of government borrowing soaring.

The Bank of England was forced to step in to buy government bonds to prevent the financial crisis from spreading to the wider economy.

The government has since ditched parts of its tax-cutting plan and announced it would make a medium-term fiscal statement on Oct. 31. But the market remained jittery, and Hunt has decided he must make a statement to calm the waters even sooner.

The Treasury said he would make a public statement, followed by a statement to the House of Commons, on Monday afternoon. Hunt spent the weekend in crisis talks with Truss, and also met Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey and the head of the government’s Debt Management Office.

Hunt’s moves are aimed at restoring the government’s credibility for sound fiscal policy after Truss and Kwarteng rushed out a plan for tax cuts without detailing how they would pay for them.

The unfunded tax cuts fueled investor concern about unsustainable levels of government borrowing, which pushed up government borrowing costs, raised home mortgage costs and sent the pound plummeting to an all-time low against the dollar. The Bank of England was forced to intervene to protect pension funds squeezed by volatility in the bond market.

Hunt was under pressure to act before financial markets opened on Monday because the central bank’s support for the bond market ended Friday.

The early response from investors was positive.

The pound rose 0.5% to \$1.1229 in early trading in London. The British currency is now trading for roughly the same price it was on Sept. 22, the day before Kwarteng announced the tax cuts.

Yields on 10-year government bonds, an indicator of government borrowing costs, fell to 4.060% from 4.327% on Friday. It was 3.495% on Sept. 22. Bond yields tend to rise as the risk of a borrower defaulting increases and fall as that risk declines.

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But analysts warned the positive market news might only be a temporary reprieve.

"Trussenomics may have been ripped up and fed to the shredder but the author of the big gamble remains in power, and has the final say on the direction of travel," said Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown.

"Investors are craving more stability but, given the flip-flopping we've had so far in her super-short tenure, economic policy uncertainty remains and that's likely to be the key driver in the bond markets and on foreign exchange desks," she said.

The financial fiasco has turned Truss into a lame-duck prime minister, and Conservative lawmakers are agonizing about whether to try to oust her. She took office just six weeks ago after winning a party election to replace Prime Minister Boris Johnson. He was forced out in July after serial ethics scandals ensnared his administration.

China's party congress promises continuity, not change

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The overarching theme emerging from China's ongoing Communist Party congress is one of continuity, not change.

The weeklong meeting, which opened Sunday, is expected to reappoint Xi Jinping as leader, reaffirm a commitment to his policies for the next five years and possibly elevate his status even further as one of the most powerful leaders in China's modern history.

A look at what's happened so far, and what's to come: ____

MORE OF THE SAME

This is not an inflection point for the party. That happened 10 years ago when it named Xi as leader, though it wasn't evident at the time.

Since then, Xi has reoriented China both domestically and internationally. The military has staked claims to disputed territory while diplomats have become more assertive, saying China won't be bullied by the U.S. and others.

Xi has brought back stronger state control over the economy and society, expanding censorship and arrest to stifle dissent. An unprecedented crackdown on corruption has brought down hundreds of senior officials, including some potential political rivals.

All of that is here to stay — that was the message from a 1-hour-and-45-minute party report that Xi delivered to the opening session on Sunday.

Willy Lam, a senior fellow with the Jamestown Foundation think tank, noted the report described a "Chinese-style modernization" that must conform to socialist values.

"China will stick to its own road," the Hong Kong-based Lam said. "It will not borrow any measures or governance style from foreign countries." ____

NO GDP

China on Monday abruptly canceled the announcement of third-quarter economic growth figures due out Tuesday.

No specific reason was given. The GDP report was likely to conflict with the confident tone of the party congress by showing the economy grew by as little as 3% in the latest quarter, barely half the official 5.5% target.

The economy is struggling under the weight of severe COVID-19 restrictions imposed by Xi's government, a sharp real estate slowdown and the fallout from the war in Ukraine.

A woman who answered the phone in the press office of the National Bureau of Statistics said only that the postponement was due to "work arrangements."

ELEVATING XI

Xi has already swept away competitors and consolidated power. The question is whether he will gain even more power — and how.

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Practically, he has placed himself in charge of the military, foreign policy, the economy and most other matters through a series of party working groups that he heads.

Symbolically, his ideology, known as Xi Jinping Thought, was enshrined in the party congress at the previous congress in 2017.

Another amendment to the constitution is on the agenda for this week's congress. No details have been divulged, but analysts say it could further raise his status in the party. ____

THE NEW LEADERS

It is customary for the party to unveil its top leadership for the next five years the day after the congress closes, with the small group named to the Politburo Standing Committee identified for the first time when they parade out on stage.

Xi is widely expected to be at the top, getting a third five-year term. That would dispense with an unwritten agreement for party leaders to step down after two terms.

The others named to the Standing Committee, which currently has seven members, could offer clues to Xi's future and the direction of policy.

He is expected to stack the committee with loyalists. Analysts wonder whether China's economic slump will force him to temper his enthusiasm for a state-run economy and include supporters of a more market-oriented approach.

No obvious successor was picked for the current Standing Committee in 2017, signaling that Xi was eyeing a third term. Doing so again would suggest he plans an even longer stay. ____

WAIT FOR THE WEEKEND

With most of this week's sessions behind closed doors, none of this is likely to be known until the weekend. Any amendment to the constitution would typically be announced at the closing session on Saturday, and the new leadership paraded out on Sunday. ____

ZERO-COVID BLUES

Many Chinese are weary of pandemic restrictions that have disrupted their lives and the economy. For them, the more immediate question is whether there will be any easing after the party congress.

The answer is probably not immediately, and when changes do come, they will most likely be gradual.

The Communist Party is always eager to portray the country in a positive light during the congress and avoid any societal disruptions — and a major COVID-19 outbreak would be one.

But party officials are expected to remain cautious about opening up even after the congress, as it is uncertain how widely COVID-19 will spread when travel and other restrictions are eased.

Plus there's always another major event to worry about. As a follow-up to the party congress, China's legislature will meet next year, probably in March. Many Chinese are preparing to hunker down at least until after that.

Agency says BTS members will serve in South Korea's military

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The members of K-pop band BTS will serve their mandatory military duties under South Korean law, their management company said Monday, effectively ending a debate on exempting them because of their artistic accomplishments.

Big Hit Music said the band's oldest member, Jin, will revoke his request to delay his conscription at the end of the month and undertake the required conscription steps. The six other members also plan to serve in the military, according to the company's notice to financial regulators, which it described as management-related information that could possibly affect investment decisions.

Big Hit issued another statement on Twitter, saying the company and BTS members are "looking forward to reconvening as a group again around 2025 following their service commitment."

No further information on the timing of their service was given. The band members performed together in Busan over the weekend in support of the city's EXPO bid, which will be their last concert as a group until they finish serving in the military, according to their label.

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"Each BTS member for the time being will focus on their individual activities based on their plans to serve in the military," Hybe Corp., the parent company of Big Hit, said in an email to The Associated Press.

The announcement came after Lee Ki Sik, commissioner of the Military Manpower Administration, told lawmakers this month that it would be "desirable" for BTS members to fulfil their military duties to ensure fairness in the country's military service.

After enlisting, Jin and other BTS members will receive five weeks of combat training before being assigned to specific units and duties, according to officials at the Military Manpower Administration, who stressed that the singers would go under the same process as other South Korean men.

While South Korea's military for years had assigned enlisted entertainers to duties related to producing radio and TV material promoting the military, the "entertainment soldier" system was retired in 2013 following complaints over fairness.

Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup had said in August that if BTS members join the military, they would likely be allowed to continue practicing and to join back with the group for tours overseas.

Whether the BTS members must serve in the army had been a hotly debated issue in South Korea as Jin faced possible enlistment early next year. Jin turns 30 in December, the age at which men can no longer delay enlistment. Other members are currently between 25 and 29 years old, with Suga turning 30 in March.

Under South Korean law, most able-bodied men are required to perform 18-21 months of military service, but special exemptions had been granted for athletes and artists who excel in certain international competitions that have been tied with national prestige.

The band — its other members being J-Hope, RM, Jungkook, V and Jimin — launched in 2013 and has a legion of global supporters who call themselves the "Army."

After building a huge following in Asia, BTS expanded its popularity in the West with its 2020 megahit "Dynamite," the band's first all-English song that made it the first K-pop act to top Billboard's Hot 100. The band has performed in sold-out arenas around the world and was even invited to speak at United Nations meetings.

Since South Korea's draft interrupts young males in their professional careers or studies, the dodging of military duties or creation of exemptions is a highly sensitive issue. Opinion surveys in recent weeks showed that the public was split over whether the BTS members should serve in the military.

Satellite photos show damage at Iran prison amid protests

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A fire that burned through part of Iran's notorious Evin Prison damaged one of the largest buildings at the complex, according to satellite photos analyzed Monday, as authorities raised the death toll in the still-murky incident, saying at least eight prisoners were killed.

What happened on Saturday night at the prison — which houses both inmates convicted on criminal charges to political prisoners held by the country's competing intelligence arms — remains unclear. Online videos purport to show chaotic scenes with a prison siren wailing as flames rise from the complex, the apparent crackle of gunfire and people screaming: "Death to the dictator!"

The fire erupted as nationwide anti-government protests triggered by the death of a young woman after being detained by the country's morality police entered a fifth week.

Tensions in Iran have escalated to a point unseen since the mass demonstrations that accompanied the country's 2009 Green Movement protests. A fire at one of Tehran's most heavily guarded facilities potentially raises the stakes for those continuing to rally against the government and the mandatory headscarf, or hijab, for women after the death of Mahsa Amini.

Satellite photos taken Sunday by Planet Labs PBC and analyzed by The Associated Press show the roof burning away from a large building that's part of the northern section of Evin Prison.

The Iran Prison Atlas, a project by the California-based rights group United for Iran, which collects data on Iranian prisons and prisoners, had previously identified the structure's wards as housing prisoners convicted on fraud and theft cases — not those held on political charges. However, the Iran Prison Atlas

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has warned that wards have changed over the years.

The reformist newspaper Etemad on Monday quoted Mostafa Nili, a lawyer for some political prisoners at Evin, as identifying one of the affected areas as Ward 8. He described those imprisoned there as political prisoners serving sentences handed down by the courts and others convicted on financial charges.

He also said political prisoners in Ward 4 of the prison inhaled tear gas during the incident. The semi-official Tasnim news agency also said Evin's Wards 6 and 7 sustained damage as well. Iranian state television rushed a camera crew to the site early Sunday morning, filming a reporter walking through one ward with prisoners asleep in bunks as firefighters doused the embers of the blaze. The TV described the fire as having taken place at a sewing workshop.

Iran's judiciary on Monday raised the death toll from the blaze to eight.

Authorities have blamed "rioters" for setting the blaze, though they haven't described what measures they took against the prisoners on site. Video of the fire purports to show people on the roof of the building, tossing liquid on the flames at first. Apparent gunfire echoes through other videos, including what appears to be some sort of ordinance being lobbed into the prison complex, followed by the sound of an explosion.

As the fire grew larger, one video includes voices shouting: "Death to the dictator!" That cry against Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has become common at night in Tehran amid the protests, even though it carries the risk of a death sentence in a closed-door Revolutionary Court.

The protests erupted after public outrage over the death of 22-year-old Amini in police custody. She was arrested by Iran's morality police in Tehran for violating the Islamic Republic's strict dress code. Iran's government insists Amini was not mistreated in police custody, but her family says her body showed bruises and other signs of beating after she was detained.

Evin Prison, which holds detainees facing security-related charges — including dual citizens — has been charged by rights groups with abusing inmates. The facility has long been known for holding political prisoners as well as those with ties to the West who have been used by Iran as bargaining chips in international negotiations.

Meanwhile, European Union foreign ministers were examining imposing sanctions on Iranian officials over their suspected role in the crackdown against the protests. They were expected to agree to slap travel bans and asset freezes.

"It's very important that we sanction the ones that are responsible for atrocities against Iranian people, the young people who are demonstrating for their fundamental rights," Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod told reporters in Luxembourg, urging for "a strong, strong stand here."

Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn said the EU "must send a signal that this is not acceptable."

Later, Belgian Foreign Minister Hadja Lahbib said the EU would target 11 officials and four "entities," which are often security agencies, government departments, companies or banks. She did not provide details.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said the EU "cannot and will not close our eyes" to the crackdown in Iran. She said the bloc's foreign ministers "will launch a further specific, sanctions package that holds to account those responsible."

Iran's morality police will be on the list, she said but declined to say how many individuals and entities will be sanctioned ahead of formal decisions.

"It is also clear that, if this regime continues to pummel its population in this way, there will be further targeted sanctions packages against those responsible," she said.

Ukraine: Explosions rock Kyiv, struck by waves of drones

By SABRA AYRES Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Waves of explosive-laden suicide drones struck Ukraine's capital as families were preparing to start their week early Monday, the blasts echoing across Kyiv, setting buildings ablaze and sending people scurrying to shelters.

Even in a city that has become grimly accustomed to air strikes since Russia launched its invasion in February, such a concentrated use of drones sowed terror and frayed nerves, with people nervously scan-

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ning the skies as they sought shelter.

Exactly how many drones nose-dived into the capital wasn't immediately clear. Drones used in the attack appeared to include Iranian-made Shaheds. Previous Russian air strikes on Kyiv were mostly with missiles.

In the Kyiv region alone, 13 or more drones were shot down, all of them as they flew in from the south, said a spokesman for the Ukrainian Air Force, Yuriy Ihnat.

Other drones got through. The capital's central Shevchenko district was among the areas hit, with apartment blocks damaged and a non-residential building on fire, Kyiv city mayor Vitali Klitschko said. He said 18 people were rescued from the rubble of one apartment building and that rescue workers were trying to extract two other people known to be under the debris.

An Associated Press photographer who was out shooting morning scenes of Kyiv caught one of the drones on camera, its triangle-shaped wing and pointed warhead clearly visible against the blue sky. Drones came in several waves and buzzed overhead with angry hums from their engines.

There was no immediate word of casualties. The drones' intended targets weren't immediately clear but Russian air strikes over the past week have hit infrastructure, including power facilities. One drone that hit an apartment building caused at least three apartments to completely collapse and left a gaping hole. Rescue workers scrambled on the rubble searching for victims amid grey smoke.

"The whole night, and the whole morning, the enemy terrorizes the civilian population," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a social media post. "Kamikaze drones and missiles are attacking all of Ukraine."

"The enemy can attack our cities, but it won't be able to break us," he wrote.

Social media video posts showed drones buzzing over the capital and smoke billowing in the early morning light. The sound of sustained gunfire could also be heard in one post, seemingly trying to shoot a drone down.

The Iranian-made Shaheds, which Russia has rebranded as Geran-2 drones, pack an explosive charge and can linger over targets before nosediving into them. They can be fired one after the other from racks. Their distinctive A-shaped wing make them readily identifiable. Andrii Yermak, the head of the Ukrainian president's office, also confirmed in a social media post that Shahed drones were among those used in the strike on Kyiv.

Iran has previously denied providing Russia with weapons, although its Revolutionary Guard chief has boasted about providing arms to the world's top powers, without elaborating.

The drones have also been repeatedly used by Russia elsewhere in Ukraine in recent weeks to target urban centers and infrastructure, including power stations. They are comparatively cheap, costing in the region of US\$20,000, and can be used in swarms.

Their numbers present a challenge to Ukrainian air defenses, said Ihnat, the Air Force spokesman. Some air defense weaponry supplied by Western nations can only be used during daylight hours when targets are visible, he added.

Western nations have promised to bolster Ukrainian air defenses with systems that can shoot down drones but much of that weaponry has yet to arrive and, in some cases, may be months away.

"The challenges are serious, because the air defense forces and means are the same as they were at the beginning of the war," Ihnat said.

Strikes in central Kyiv had become a rarity in the last several months after Russian forces failed to capture the capital at the beginning of the war. Early morning strikes last week were the first explosions heard in Kyiv's city center in several months, and put Kyiv as well as the rest of the country back on edge. Monday's blasts seemed to continue what many fear could become more common occurrences in urban centers.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said last week's strikes were in retaliation for the bombing of a bridge connecting the Crimean peninsula with the Russian mainland. Putin blames Ukraine for masterminding the blast, which suspended traffic over the bridge and curtailed Moscow's ability to use the bridge to supply Russian troops in the occupied regions of southern Ukraine.

The strike on Kyiv comes as fighting has intensified in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in recent days, as well as the continued Ukrainian counteroffensive in the south near Kherson and Zapor-

izhzhia. Zelenskyy said in his Sunday evening address that there was heavy fighting around the cities of Bakhmut and Soledar in the Donetsk region. The Donetsk and Luhansk regions make up the bulk of the industrial east known as the Donbas, and were two of four regions annexed by Russia in September in defiance of international law.

On Sunday, the Russian-backed regime in the Donetsk region said Ukraine had shelled its central administrative building in a direct hit. No casualties were reported.

Ukrainians' resilience persists despite new Russian barrage

By SABRA AYRES and JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — When massive, coordinated Russian bombardments shook cities and towns across Ukraine a week ago to trigger a new phase in the Kremlin's war, one strike left a huge crater in a popular Kyiv children's playground and ripped open a central intersection.

The next day, traffic flowed over the newly asphalted road, and life in the capital had returned to near normal. The response to Russia's new wave of attacks was to get back to work, stroll in the warm autumn sun and tend to final harvests from summer vegetable gardens.

A similar scene played out in the central Ukrainian city of Dnipro that day, where city workers repaired a road overnight after it was destroyed by shelling in that coordinated attack.

"We worked all night, gritting our teeth," wrote Dnipro Mayor Borys Filatov on Facebook the day after the Oct. 10 attack. The post included before and after photos of where the strike had hit and the completed repairs.

"We will restore and rebuild everything. But our hatred will live for centuries," he said.

Ukrainians' resilience in the nearly 8-month-old war continues to be unwavering, despite an uptick in attacks that are seen as Russian President Vladimir Putin's vengeful response to an explosion that damaged a Moscow-built bridge to the Kremlin-annexed Crimean Peninsula on Oct. 8.

Russian missiles and Iranian-made drones struck at least 10 regions across the country two days later, targeting critical infrastructure such as power plants and waterworks in major urban centers. The barrage left 19 dead and more than 100 wounded in the most extensive attacks since the early days after the Russian invasion began on Feb. 24.

On Monday, explosives-laden suicide drones once again struck Kyiv, sending residents running for cover.

It is an intensified version of what has been a shift in Russian tactics aimed at making life more difficult for Ukrainians, particularly for those far from the front lines.

But the more the Kremlin threatens to make the upcoming winter intolerable, the more Ukrainians seem to unite in their intent to defeat Putin.

The Ukrainian government is urging a national reduction of energy consumption and, in some regions, implementing rolling blackouts as repairs are done to damaged power stations and facilities.

Ukrenergo, the state energy company, reported that on Oct. 15, residents of the Kyiv region had reduced their daily average electricity consumption by 7%, allowing the utility to avoid forced blackouts.

"This is a direct result of the fact that Ukrainians deliberately limited the use of electrical appliances in the evening hours," the company said in a Facebook post Sunday.

Danylo, 20, a student in Kyiv, said he has reduced his electricity use at home "because we understand that this is a way to protect ourselves from complete loss."

Danylo, who declined to give his last name, added: "Now, it is a trend to work for a common victory," he said.

Similar resilience also can be seen emerging from the devastation and ruins along the front lines in eastern and southern Ukraine.

After retreating from eastern regions like Kharkiv, Russia has focused its strikes on Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv and surrounding towns nearly every night as a Ukrainian counteroffensive makes steady gains in the partially occupied southern flank.

Of all the Ukrainian areas that have paid a high price in the war, the Saltivka neighborhood on the

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northeastern edge of Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, has borne some of the greatest burdens.

The area's residential blocks were once home to about a third of Kharkiv's 1.4 million residents. But as Russian forces launched the invasion, they swept in to reach the neighborhood's edge and pummeled it with rockets and artillery. Dozens were killed.

Saltivka, especially its northern reaches, was pounded for months until scarcely a building remained without major damage, leaving vast swaths of the area virtually uninhabitable. Tens of thousands were forced to flee.

Those who remained wander now like ghosts among the charred skeletons of what was once one of Ukraine's largest residential areas. Despite what they've lost, many say they are unwilling to compromise with Russia to stop the fighting.

"Without victory, there is no Ukraine," said Hryhorii Ivanovich, 67, as he applied rebuilt a brick wall on his balcony that was destroyed by a Russian rocket, along with the front half of his living room. "There is no compromise, only Ukrainian victory."

Maintaining such resolve, however, is more difficult for those who have lost a loved one in the war.

Lyubov Mamedova, whose son was killed this month by a Russian land mine, said he had enthusiastically signed up to fight at the beginning of the war, certain that Ukraine would defeat the invaders.

Mamedova, between fits of tears, said Ukraine must continue to protect its freedom, something she said was important to her son.

"We will fight," she said. "He always said, 'Victory is ours.'"

While many Ukrainians remain steadfast in their determination to drive Russia out by military means, some believe a political solution must be sought to end the bloodshed.

Oleh Postavnychy, 39, was filling water bottles from a public faucet in a courtyard near his home in Saltivka, where he's remained since the war began despite his apartment being significantly damaged.

A diplomatic solution needed to be reached to halt the violence, Postavnychy said, but not one that cedes any Ukrainian lands.

"We need to find some compromise because neither (the Russians) nor us need this war," he said. "Normal people shouldn't suffer ... but we can't give them our territories. These are our territories. They were conquered not only by our great-grandfathers but our great-great-grandfathers."

Pregnant women struggle to find care after Pakistan's floods

By RIAZAT BUTT and SHAZIA BHATTI Associated Press

RAJANPUR, Pakistan (AP) — The first five months of Shakeela Bibi's pregnancy were smooth. She picked out a name, Uthman, made him clothes and furniture. She had regular checkups at home and access to medicine. Then an ultrasound revealed the baby was upside down. The doctor told Bibi to take extra care and rest.

And then came this summer's massive floods. Bibi's home in the southern Pakistani city of Rajanpur was inundated.

When she spoke to The Associated Press last month, she was living in a camp for displaced families. With her due date approaching, she was afraid over the possibility of a breech birth with almost no health care accessible.

"What happens if my health deteriorates suddenly?" Shakeela said. She has a blood deficiency and sometimes low blood pressure, but she said she can't have a proper diet in the camp. "I've been in a camp for two months, sleeping on the ground, and this is making my situation worse."

Pregnant women are struggling to get care after Pakistan's unprecedented flooding, which inundated a third of the country at its height and drove millions from their homes. There are at least at least 610,000 pregnant women in flood-affected areas, according to the Population Council, a U.S.-based reproductive health organization.

Many live in tent camps for the displaced, or try to make it on their own with their families in flood-wrecked villages and towns. Women have lost access to health services after more than 1,500 health

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facilities and large stretches of roads were destroyed. More than 130,000 pregnant women need urgent care, with some 2,000 a day giving birth mostly in unsafe conditions, according to the United Nations.

Experts fear an increase in infant mortality or health complications for mothers or children in a country that already has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in Asia. They also warn of dangerous, long-term repercussions for women, such as an increase in child marriage and unwanted pregnancies because of the disruptions in the lives and livelihoods of families.

Rasheed Ahmed, a humanitarian analyst at the U.N. Population Fund, said the health system was already poor before, and he warned now of "death, disability, and disease" if the health of pregnant women is ignored.

"The biggest shortage is female health care workers, medical supplies and medicine," he said. "Resources are another challenge. What are the government's priorities? Are they willing to spend the money?"

At camps in the flood-hit towns of Fazilpur and Rajanpur, pregnant women told the AP they had received no treatment or services for their pregnancies since arriving at the camps nearly two months ago. Clinics handed out medicines for minor ailments, but nothing for mothers-to-be. The next day, after the AP visited a local medical center to alert their plight, female health workers went to check on the women and distribute calcium sachets and iron supplements.

Shakeela Bibi and her family eventually left the camp, taking their tent with them and setting it up close to their wrecked home. Authorities gave them a month's worth of flour, ghee, and lentils. She is now past her due date, but doctors have assured her that her baby is fine and don't think she will need a Caesarian.

Perveen Bibi, an 18-year-old who is five months pregnant and not related to Shakeela, said the lack of health facilities in the camp forced her to travel to a private clinic and pay for an ultrasound and check-up. But she was prescribed medicine she can't afford to buy.

"I used to have a good diet, with dairy products from our livestock," she said. The family had to sell their livestock after the floods because they had no place to keep them and no way to feed them.

"We need female doctors, female nurses, gynecologists," said Bibi, who has one daughter and is expecting a boy. She had a son around a year ago, but he died a few days after his birth. "We can't afford ultrasound or IV. We're just getting by."

In the camps, families of five, seven or more eat, sleep, and spend their days and nights in one tent, sometimes with just one bed between them. Most sleep on floor mats. Some survivors only have the clothes they fled in and rely on donations.

Outdoor taps are used for washing clothes, washing dishes, and bathing. The pregnant women said there were shortages of clean water and soap. They were scared of infections because of open defecation at the camps. A bathroom was set up, but it has no roof and tents surround it.

Amid the devastation, organizations and individuals are doing what they can — the UNFPA is delivering supplies for new-born babies and safe delivery kits across four flood-hit provinces.

A Karachi-based NGO, the Mama Baby Fund, has provided 9,000 safe delivery kits, which include items for new-borns, across Sindh and Baluchistan provinces, as well as antenatal and postnatal check-ups for 1,000 women. The Association for Mothers and Newborns, also based in Karachi, has provided more than 1,500 safe delivery kits, mostly in Sindh.

Ahmed from the UNFPA says pregnant women have different needs to the rest of the displaced population, needs that aren't being met by state efforts.

"The government's response is very general, it's for the masses. It's about shelter, relocation," Ahmed said. "I've heard about women miscarrying because of mental stress, the physical stress of displacement and relocation,"

The health crisis triggered by the flooding will reverberate among women because it will take long to rebuild health facilities and restore family planning, according to Saima Bashir from the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics.

"Women and young girls are very vulnerable in this situation," said Bashir. She pointed to increasing reports of child marriage.

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Even before the floods, 21% of Pakistani girls were married before the age of 18, and 4% before the age of 15, according to U.N. figures.

The rate is increasing for several reasons. Some parents marry off their daughters as a way to obtain financial support from the boy's family so they can rebuild their homes. Others fear for the safety of their girls in displaced camps and believe marrying them off will protect them from abuse or secure their future. Also, the destruction of schools in the floods closes off other options; some girls who would have gotten an education or possibly gone on to work will stay at home instead.

In the next few years, those girls will get pregnant, Bashir said, especially given limited access to contraception.

"There will be more unwanted pregnancies," she said. "This is ... compounding this crisis, and it's adding to the population."

Tax the rich for more EVs? California Democrats split

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A California ballot measure that would tax the rich to help put more electric cars on the road may seem tailor-made to win support from Democrats in a state known for climate leadership, but Proposition 30 has one notable opponent: Gov. Gavin Newsom. That's put the Democratic governor on the opposite side of his own party and against his traditional environmental allies.

The proposition before voters would add a 1.75% tax on personal income of more than \$2 million, or fewer than 43,000 people. State analysts estimate it would raise up to \$5 billion a year, mostly to help people buy electric vehicles and to build charging stations, with some also dedicated to resources for fighting wildfires.

Environmental and health group backers say California needs dedicated funding to speed the transition away from gas-powered cars and help lower planet-warming emissions. Transportation accounts for 40% of California's greenhouse gas emissions, and increasingly deadly wildfires are another major source of carbon.

"We can't meet our climate goals without something like this," said Mary Creasman, chief executive officer for California Environmental Voters. "It's either going to be all of us who pays, or it's going to be the wealthiest who can afford to pay."

Newsom has branded Proposition 30 as a money grab by ridesharing giant Lyft, which has spent at least \$45 million backing it. State regulators have mandated that all rideshare trips be zero-emission by 2030. Uber has not taken a position on the measure.

"Don't be fooled, Prop. 30's being advertised as a climate initiative, but in reality it was devised by a single corporation to funnel state income taxes to benefit their company," Newsom says in one TV ad.

Supporters reject that characterization, saying that Lyft got involved after environmental groups were already discussing a ballot measure. Creasman said it was important to "call our own team and governor out for lying" about the origins of the measure.

In an election year where Newsom is expected to cruise to reelection for a second term, the fight over Proposition 30 has become perhaps the most contentious of the season for Democrats. It comes months after state air regulators approved a Newsom-backed plan to ban the sale of most new gas-powered cars in the state by 2035. Newsom notes that he has already dedicated \$10 billion to various programs aimed at boosting EV adoption over the next six years.

Half the money raised in Proposition 30 for electric vehicles would go into an equity account designed to expand transportation options and limit air pollution in low-income or disadvantaged neighborhoods. It could be used to help people buy electric cars or to put cleaner delivery trucks, buses and even e-bikes on the roads.

Wildfires, too, have become an increasingly urgent problem as climate change makes the state hotter and drier. Most of the state's deadliest and most destructive wildfires have occurred in the last few years, and the state estimates wildfires released more than 85 million metric tons of carbon emissions in 2021

— more than the annual emissions from electricity.

Lyft says it supports the measure because reducing emissions is good climate policy.

“Proposition 30 funds this through a tax on individuals who earn more than \$2 million a year. I’m fortunate enough to be impacted by this tax and happy to pay it to help turn back the clock on this existential threat,” Logan Green, the company’s chief executive officer, wrote in a blog post.

Joining Newsom in opposing the measure are the California Teachers Association, the California Chamber of Commerce and some venture capitalists who are helping fund the “No” campaign.

The money raised by the tax wouldn’t count toward a state budget rule that says a certain percentage of revenue must go to K-12 education, a provision the teachers don’t like. Meanwhile, the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst’s Office said the proposal could force lower spending in other areas based on certain budget rules, something supporters of the measure dispute.

Business groups note that California’s personal income tax is already the highest in the nation, and the ballot measure would put it over 15% for the highest earners. Loren Kaye, foundation president for the California Chamber of Commerce, also warned that a rapid expansion of electric vehicles could strain the energy grid, an argument the Newsom administration has rejected.

Backers of Proposition 30 include the California Democratic Party, the Clean Air Coalition, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the American Lung Association, which have rejected characterizations that the measure is designed to benefit Lyft specifically, noting there’s no provision that would expressly set aside money for rideshare drivers.

While Newsom’s existing commitment to electric vehicle infrastructure is significant, the state needs a more stable long-term revenue source, supporters argue. The tax increase would last for 20 years if the measure passes.

“We need a consistent, reliable source of funding that keeps us going through good budget years and bad budget years,” said Bill Magavern, policy director for the Coalition for Clean Air. Referring to Lyft, he added, “If the goal is to limit pollution, does it matter who is driving the EV?”

Landmark trial begins over Arkansas’ ban on trans youth care

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — The nation’s first trial over a state’s ban on gender-confirming care for children begins in Arkansas this week, the latest fight over restrictions on transgender youth championed by Republican leaders and widely condemned by medical experts.

U.S. District Judge Jay Moody will hear testimony and evidence starting Monday over the law he temporarily blocked last year prohibiting doctors from providing gender-confirming hormone treatment, puberty blockers or surgery to anyone under 18 years old. It also prevents doctors from referring patients elsewhere for such care.

The families of four transgender youth and two doctors who provide gender-confirming care want Moody to strike down the law, saying it is unconstitutional because it discriminates against transgender youth, intrudes on parents’ rights to make medical decisions for their children and infringes on doctors’ free speech rights. The trial is expected to last two weeks.

“As a parent, I never imagined I’d have to fight for my daughter to be able to receive medically necessary health care her doctor say she needs and we know she needs,” said Lacey Jennen, whose 17-year-old daughter has been receiving gender-confirming care.

Arkansas was the first state to enact such a ban on gender-confirming care, with Republican lawmakers in 2021 overriding GOP Gov. Asa Hutchinson’s veto of the legislation. Hutchinson, who had signed other restrictions on transgender youth into law, said the prohibition went too far by cutting off the care for those currently receiving it.

Multiple medical groups, including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, oppose the bans and experts say the treatments are safe if properly administered.

But advocates of the law have argued the prohibition is within the state’s authority to regulate medical

practices.

"This is about protecting children," Republican Attorney General Leslie Rutledge said. "Nothing about this law prohibits someone after the age of 18 from making this decision. What we're doing in Arkansas is protecting children from life-altering, permanent decisions."

A similar law has been blocked by a federal judge in Alabama, and a Texas judge has blocked that state's efforts to investigate gender-confirming care for minors as child abuse. Children's hospitals around the country have faced harassment and threats of violence for providing gender-confirming care.

"This latest wave of anti-trans fever that is now spreading to other states started in Arkansas and it needs to end in Arkansas," said Holly Dickson, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Arkansas, which filed the lawsuit on behalf of the families.

A three-judge panel of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in August upheld Moody's preliminary injunction blocking the ban's enforcement. But the state has asked the full 8th Circuit appeals court to review the case.

Most say voting vital despite pour US outlook: AP-NORC poll

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — From his home in Colledgeville, Pennsylvania, Graeme Dean says there's plenty that's disheartening about the state of the country and politics these days. At the center of one of this year's most competitive U.S. Senate races, he's on the receiving end of a constant barrage of vitriolic advertising that makes it easy to focus on what's going wrong.

But the 40-year-old English teacher has no intention of disengaging from the democratic process. In fact, he believes that the first national election since the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol is "more significant" than in years past.

"This could very well sway the country in one direction or another," the Democratic-leaning independent said.

Dean is hardly alone in feeling the weight of this election. A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center of Public Affairs Research finds 71% of registered voters think the very future of the U.S. is at stake when they vote this year. That's true of voters who prefer Republicans win majorities in Congress, and those who want to see Democrats remain in control, though likely for different reasons.

While about two-thirds of voters say they are pessimistic about politics, overwhelming majorities across party lines — about 8 in 10 — say casting their ballot this year is extremely or very important.

The findings demonstrate how this year's midterms are playing out in a unique environment, with voters both exhausted by the political process and determined to participate in shaping it. That could result in high turnout for a midterm election.

In the politically divided state of Michigan, for instance, over 150,000 voters have already cast absentee ballots. A total of 1.6 million people have requested absentee ballots so far, surpassing the 1.16 million who chose the option in the 2018 midterm election.

In follow-up interviews, poll respondents reported distinct concerns about the country's direction despite agreement that things are not working.

Rick Moore, a 67-year-old writer and musician in Las Vegas, said he's dissatisfied with President Joe Biden, and "not just because I'm a Republican." Moore called him "more of a puppet" than any other president in his lifetime.

"It's important to me that Republicans are in control of as much as possible because we're not going to get rid of the Democratic president anytime soon," Moore said.

In general, Moore said, he doesn't like the way Democratic politicians run their states, including Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak, adding that Democrats are "using the word democracy to make all of us do what they want."

"I would just like to see my voice more represented," he said.

Since the last midterm elections, voters have grown more negative about the country and people's rights:

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70% say they are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the U.S., up from 58% in October 2018.

Republicans have become enormously dissatisfied with a Democrat in the White House. While Democrats have become less negative since Donald Trump left office, they remain largely sour on the way things are going.

Fifty-eight percent of voters also say they are dissatisfied with the state of individual rights and freedoms in the U.S., up from 42% in 2018. About two-thirds of Republicans are now dissatisfied, after about half said they were satisfied when Trump was in office. Among Democrats, views have stayed largely the same, with about half dissatisfied.

Shawn Hartlage, 41, doesn't think her views as a Christian are well represented, lamenting that she'd love to vote "for someone that really stood for what you believe," but that it's very important to her to vote anyway.

The Republican stay-at-home mother of two in Washington Township, Ohio, said the direction of the country is "devastating," noting both inflation and a decline in moral values.

"I'm scared for my children's future," Hartlage said. "You always want to leave things better for them than what you had, but it's definitely not moving in that direction."

Teanne Townsend of Redford, Michigan, agrees that things are moving backward. But the 28-year-old called out abortion, health care and police brutality as especially concerning areas in which rights are being threatened.

"We have minimum progression in the right direction for a lot of areas, especially for people of minority (groups). Their rights are not the same as those of other races and cultures," the Democrat, who is African American, said.

A children's health and mental health specialist, Townsend said she's voting for her constitutional right to an abortion this year. If passed, the state's ballot initiative would guarantee abortion rights in the Michigan Constitution.

"I feel like it's just a lot that's at stake," Townsend said, adding that she's both "optimistic and nervous" about the outcome but that it's "the right thing" for people to be able to vote on it.

The poll showed majorities of voters overall say the outcome of the midterms will have a significant impact on abortion policy, with Democratic voters more likely than Republican voters to say so. Most voters across party lines say the outcome will have a lot of impact on the economy.

More voters say they trust the Republican Party to handle the economy (39% vs. 29%), as well as crime (38% vs. 23%). Republicans also have a slight advantage on immigration (38% vs. 33%). The Democratic Party is seen as better able to handle abortion policy (45% vs. 22%), health care (42% vs. 25%) and voting laws (39% vs. 29%).

Despite the uncertainty in the outcome, Dean in Pennsylvania has faith in the American system to work for the will of the people.

"I think it's important that our representatives represent what the majority of people want," Dean said. "That's what we claim we do in this country and it feels like it is what should happen. And I am hopeful."

For Biden and Trump, 2022 is 2020 sequel — and 2024 preview?

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — This year's midterm elections are playing out as a strange continuation of the last presidential race — and a potential preview of the next one.

Donald Trump, who refused to exit the stage after his defeat, has spent months raging against Joe Biden, reshaping downballot campaigns that normally function as a straightforward referendum on the incumbent president.

The result is an episode of political shadowboxing with little precedent, as the current president and his immediate predecessor — and possible future challenger — crisscross the country in support of their party's candidates.

Trump has been holding raucous rallies in battleground states, where he alternates between touting his

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handpicked candidates and denouncing his enemies. He belittles and excoriates Biden while lying, as he did in Ohio last month, that “we didn’t lose” the last election.

Biden has so far steered clear of some of the tightest midterm races, instead focusing on fundraisers and official events where he draws contrasts between Democratic and Republican policy agendas. He often avoids direct references to “the last guy,” but on Saturday in Oregon, Biden warned that “Trump controls the Republican Party.”

Sometimes the two men travel to the same places, such as when they visited Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, within days of each other, a reflection of the narrow political map that will determine which party controls the U.S. Senate.

“It’s remarkably unusual,” said Jeffrey Engel, founding director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University, who strained to think of any comparison in previous election cycles.

“Without exception, since the Great Depression” — Republican Herbert Hoover tried to plot a path back to power despite losing to Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932 — “we have not had a former president who believed they still had a viable political career ahead of them,” he said.

Neither Trump nor Biden has formally announced they will run again. Trump has come close to declaring his candidacy, and Biden has said he intends to seek a second term.

If they face off again, the competition between them could become one of the longest and impactful political duels in American history, spanning several years and multiple elections.

Voters seem to have little appetite for a rematch.

A recent AP-NORC poll shows only about 3 in 10 Americans want either Biden or Trump to run for president in two years. Just 5 in 10 Democrats want Biden to seek a second term, while 6 out of 10 Republicans hope to see Trump seek the presidency again.

Engel said another battle between Biden and Trump would likely prove dispiriting.

“What that fundamentally means is our country is not moving forward,” he said. “I have not met anybody who relishes that campaign.”

However, it’s clear that both men see their fortunes tied to the other.

When CNN’s Jake Tapper asked Biden whether he’s the only one who could fend off his predecessor in another campaign, the president sidestepped the question but expressed confidence about his chances.

“I believe I can beat Donald Trump again,” he said.

Trump would take issue with the use of the word “again” — he continues to spread the lie that Biden only took office through voter fraud.

It’s an integral part of Trump’s political message, and he never fails to bring it up at rallies for Republican candidates who have endorsed his false views on the last election. Sometimes the rhetoric dives even deeper into conspiracies, a reminder that another campaign could represent an even sharper break with reality.

In Arizona, during his most recent rally, Trump darkly suggested that Biden is surrounded by “vicious, very smart people” who are “pulling strings.”

“No one thought this could happen in our country, and it all happened because of a rigged and stolen election,” he said.

The former president has also tightened his embrace of the QAnon conspiracy theory, which portrays Trump as battling sinister, hidden forces.

Using his Truth Social platform, Trump shared an image of himself wearing a Q lapel pin overlaid with the words “The Storm is Coming,” referencing his eventual victory over opponents who would be tried — or even executed — on live television.

People close to Trump have said they believe a strong performance by Republicans in November will further encourage Trump to run again in two years, as he has been openly teasing for months.

In addition to his rallies, which earn candidates local media attention and fire up the Republican base, Trump has been helping candidates in other ways, holding fundraisers and tele-rally calls on their behalf. Most significantly, last week, his new super PAC, MAGA Inc., reserved nearly \$5 million in airtime for ads in key states attacking the opponents of his favored candidates.

The first round of ads from the group notably do not feature Trump or even mention his name. Repub-

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icans have expressed frustration that Trump was hoarding small-dollar donations for himself and refusing to help the candidates he had pushed voters to nominate, despite sitting on an enormous war chest.

But Mike DuHaime, a longtime Republican strategist, isn't sure the outcome of the midterms will make a difference in Trump's plans for the next presidential race.

"He'll take credit for every win and deflect blame for every loss," he said.

Trump has claimed, as he did in Pennsylvania last month, that the midterms are "a referendum on the corruption and extremism of Joe Biden and the radical Democrat party."

But DuHaime said Trump has prevented that from happening by injecting himself into this year's races, providing a boost to Biden, whose poll numbers remain underwater as voters express concerns about the economy.

"Trump is no ordinary president, nor did he really seem to care about the party," he said. "He seems to care about himself more than the party that put him in office."

Biden's circle has a similar view. An adviser, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal conversations, said those around Biden see the midterms as having become more of a choice than a referendum. Trump's presence on the trail, the adviser said, is seen as helping make Democratic points for them.

Celinda Lake, a Democratic pollster, said the only thing more helpful would be if Trump announced another presidential campaign.

"He's getting dangerously close to that," she said.

Biden has deferred any announcement about his own candidacy until after Election Day, keeping his focus on the midterms.

Like other incumbent presidents in an election year, Biden has blended his political and governmental duties as voting begins.

He stopped in Colorado on Wednesday to designate the first national monument of his administration, fulfilling the wishes of the state's senior Democratic senator, Michael Bennett, who is seeking reelection this year. Although Bennett is favored to win, he's facing a concerted challenge from Joe O'Dea, a Republican businessman.

Groups mobilize to help voters confronting new election laws

By SUDHIN THANAWALA and GARY FIELDS Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Rhonda Briggins spent much of Election Day in 2020 at an Atlanta polling place handing out water and snacks to encourage voters to stay in an hourslong line to cast their ballots, something her historic Black sorority has done for decades in Georgia.

This election, Briggins and some of her thousands of sorority sisters are trading that role for a potentially more contentious one: ensuring voters aren't disenfranchised by a slew of new voting restrictions passed by the Republican-led Legislature. They include a ban on giving food and drinks to waiting voters.

The law, which a federal judge allowed to go forward this election cycle, was too confusing for the sorority to take a chance doing its traditional "line relief," said Briggins, chair of the Delta Sigma Theta Strategic Partnerships Task Force and a member of the sorority's Decatur alumnae chapter.

"The line between criminalization and being helpful is too close," she said. "We don't want to get to that point."

Georgia is one of several states where voters will face new hurdles to casting a ballot during the November election under laws passed by Republican-led legislatures following former President Donald Trump's false claims that voter fraud cost him reelection in 2020. The restrictions have prompted groups that assist voters to reorient themselves so they can avoid running afoul of new barriers.

They anticipate confusion and conflict at the polls, and are redoubling efforts to register and educate voters.

Since 2021, lawmakers in 21 states have passed at least 42 restrictive laws, according to an analysis by the Brennan Center for Justice. At least 33 of those are in effect for this year's midterms. Some include

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multiple changes, such as legislative packages in Georgia and Texas. Others, as in Arizona, are less expansive or in some cases not yet applicable.

The 98-page bill in Georgia contained dozens of changes to state voting law. They include shortening the time to request a mail ballot, rolling back the pandemic-driven expansion of ballot drop boxes and reducing early voting before runoff elections.

The state had argued that the water and refreshment ban was necessary to protect against the potential for illegal campaigning or vote-buying. State lawyers also argued that it was too close to the upcoming election to make changes.

"Again, we're not telling anybody who to vote for," Briggins said of the assistance the sorority offered in previous years. "We're offering water because you have been in line eight hours."

Faith Works, a group organized by Black church leaders in response to the Georgia law, is providing grants to help more than more than 1,000 churches mobilize voters. It also aims to deploy 200 chaplains around the state to defuse any tension at polling sites.

Bishop Reginald Jackson, who presides over more than 500 African Methodist Episcopal churches in Georgia and helped create the group, blasted the new law as an attempt to suppress Black voters after they helped Democrats win the presidential contest in Georgia two years ago for the first time since 1992.

"It's designed and intended to be a punishment to Blacks for turning out to vote in such large numbers in 2020," he said.

Republicans have pushed back on the criticism that their new law limits voting, noting that it also expands weekend early voting.

Voting rights groups in Georgia and elsewhere are adapting to the altered landscape. In Arizona, Mi Familia Vota is focused on voter education, including letting people know that a law passed this year requiring proof of citizenship to register to vote in federal elections is not in effect this cycle.

That provision is expected to affect Latino voters heavily, in part because one element of the law requires local election officials to notify prosecutors if a would-be voter doesn't provide proof of citizenship and the state election officials can't find proof in various government databases.

"It is part of a continuation to make it harder for people to vote," said Hector Sanchez Barba, executive director of Mi Familia Vota. His group joined the U.S. Department of Justice in filing a court challenge to the law.

A sweeping law pushed through the GOP-controlled Texas Legislature in 2021 led to thousands of ballot rejections during the state's March primary, according to an analysis by The Associated Press.

Texas Secretary of State John Scott said one county largely avoided rejections by including an insert with instructions on how to fill out the mailed ballot and its return envelope. He said the practice has since been suggested to every county.

The Texas Civil Rights Project, a nonpartisan group that challenged the new law, spent much of a recent training session for lawyers on the law's mail ballot identification requirement and the greater difficulty the law creates for removing problematic poll watchers.

Claude Cummings Jr., first vice president of the NAACP chapter in Houston, said the law's identification requirement is especially hard on older Black voters.

"There's only one way to fix this — educate, educate, educate," Cummings said. It's a theme picked up by other groups such as MOVE Texas, which held over 60 events in the state on voter registration day, all targeting younger, would-be voters.

Georgia's Senate Bill 202 — signed into law last year by Republican Gov. Brian Kemp — was one of the first voting measures passed after Trump's defeat. In addition to making it a misdemeanor to hand out food or drinks to any voter standing in line, the law limits voters' ability to cast a provisional ballot if they go to the wrong precinct. It also allows any Georgia voter to challenge the eligibility of an unlimited number of other voters within the same county.

Elections offices already have fielded challenges to the eligibility of thousands of voters in metro Atlanta.

The New Georgia Project, a group founded by Democratic gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, has

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trained legal professionals to fight any baseless attempts to disqualify voters, accost them for handing out water or wrongly deny them the right to cast a provisional ballot, said Aklima Khondoker, the group's chief legal officer.

Khondoker said the group will be "hypervigilant about election administration issues, disenfranchisement, criminalization of both voters and everyday good volunteerism activities."

The Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda, another group that aims to increase access to the polls, helped organize information sessions about the new law in Savannah, Macon, Augusta and other cities over the summer. The group bought scanners so people could copy bank statements or other forms to request an absentee ballot if they didn't have a driver's license or state-issued identification card, said Helen Butler, the group's executive director. SB202 replaced signature verification for absentee ballots with an identification requirement.

The community organizing group Georgia STAND-UP will host block parties near some voting precincts so people can get water and food before they get in line to vote, CEO Deborah Scott said. The group plans to use tape measures to make sure the events are more than 150 feet (46 meters) from the precinct to comply with the new law.

Rev. Timothy McDonald, III, senior pastor of Atlanta's First Iconium Baptist Church and another leader of Faith Works, recently led a brainstorming session that included a discussion about how to counter voter challenges. McDonald urged the groups in the room to publicize a voter protection hotline and said voters should bring a utility bill with them, in addition to their identification, to verify their address.

"There's going to be some shenanigans on that day," he warned.

How Michael Flynn goes local to spread Christian nationalism

By MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

VENICE, Fla. (AP) — It was less than three weeks before the Sarasota County, Florida, school board election when the former White House national security adviser weighed in on the local political race.

"These 'woke' members need to be defeated in detail this upcoming election," Michael Flynn posted on Telegram on Aug. 6. "Our children's lives and futures are at risk when our school boards here in Florida and around the nation shove (critical race theory) and transgender nonsense down their throats."

A few days later, the retired three-star Army general who spent decades enmeshed in international conflict weighed in again on the local election. "'WOKE' SOBs operating in many counties and on many school boards across the country" have to be voted out or censured "and some just need to be arrested."

Later that month, Flynn's chosen candidates — who were also backed by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis — ousted three school board members.

Flynn, who just eight years ago under President Barack Obama led the U.S. military's intelligence agency, now is at the center of a far-right Christian nationalist movement that has a growing influence in the Republican Party. In speeches across the U.S., he urges his supporters to get involved in local politics as a way to change the country from the bottom up.

"Local action equals national impact," Flynn says at nearly every stop.

This story is part of an ongoing investigation from The Associated Press and the PBS series "Frontline" that includes the upcoming documentary "Michael Flynn's Holy War," premiering Tuesday on PBS and online.

In Sarasota County, Flynn and his allies have created a kind of laboratory for his approach, energizing local conservative activists through social media and public appearances, and gatherings at a venue called The Hollow that has become a meeting place for the far right. He questions American democratic institutions, repeats lies about the 2020 election, attacks the news media and embraces conspiracy theories about COVID-19. One of the groups he's welcomed into the fold is the violent extremist group the Proud Boys.

The political marriage between a man who once sat at the right hand of President Donald Trump and local extremists in Sarasota County starts in some ways on Jan. 6, 2021, and with their failed attempts to

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thwart the democratic process and keep Trump in power.

It was insurrection day and Flynn, American flag hat atop his head, sat in the VIP section of the rally as Trump urged his supporters to march on the U.S. Capitol and stop Congress from confirming that he had lost the election.

Less than two miles away, James Hoel, decked out in tactical gear, a walkie-talkie on his chest, advanced past the Capitol barricades with fellow members of the Proud Boys, at the vanguard of the deadly riot.

There's no evidence the two men knew each other on that day. But in the 21 months since Trump's fight to stay in office came to an end, their paths and interests have crossed again and again.

The Associated Press and the PBS series "Frontline" reported last month that Flynn's movement envisions Christianity as the basis of American life and institutions; where the right to bear arms is paramount; where abortion is illegal; where concepts such as systemic racism and gay or transgender rights have no place in the schools; and where people who disagree are called "Marxists," or perverts, and are excluded from American civic life.

Flynn has drawn together election deniers, mask and vaccine opponents, insurrectionists and leaders in state and local Republican parties who are continuing the attack on American democracy and institutions that came to a head on Jan. 6.

After the failed insurrection, Flynn moved to Sarasota County and set out to build a political community of like-minded people. He found an operating base of sorts at a place known as The Hollow in rural Venice. It's a 10-acre site that's at times a children's playland, wedding venue, organizing space and weapons training ground.

The Hollow's owner, Victor Mellor Sr., is a former Marine who posted on Facebook that he "Just knocked on front doors" of the Capitol on Jan. 6. Mellor told "Frontline" that he was proud he was there that day and once suggested on social media that he would have a "J6 reunion at the Hollow."

Flynn first visited the site in May 2021, and the next day, Mellor posted on Facebook that there was a "war going on" and pledged "all our resources to the Flynns in this battle." Since then the Hollow has turned into a center of activity for Sarasota County's far right.

Last fall, the Hollow drew thousands to events with Flynn in attendance where doctors distributed mask and vaccine waivers for school children. The site hosts political groups and candidates, offers free playdates — with water slides, zip lines and a bouncy house — has advertised classes on "Biblical citizenship," food storage and wound and trauma care, and provides access to a neighboring, unpermitted gun range to ex-military and law enforcement. The gun range has hosted groups as large as 40 and has offered free shooting lessons to children as young as 6.

Visitors enter through a bunker-like windowless hallway, painted black and filled with quotes, many of which push the idea that violent revolution is part of the nation's history and possibly its future. "To disarm the people is the best and most effectual way to enslave them," reads one. A Thomas Jefferson line reads: "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."

In a meeting space inside, a banner promises "any attempt of violence towards our children will be met with overwhelming deadly force." On another wall hangs a "soldier's prayer," signed by Flynn, that reads in part: "Let Your truth be my shield and buckler/Against the fiery darts — the lies — of the enemy."

The bunker then opens onto an expansive outdoor space decorated with American flags and bunting and landscaped with palm trees, pathways and pergolas. One winding path connects to an adjacent property that includes the gun range. Mellor said he added a 10-foot cross at Flynn's suggestion.

Reporters for AP and "Frontline" visited the outskirts of the Hollow in February. Later, Mellor invited a "Frontline" crew inside for a tightly controlled visit and sat down for an interview. Mellor said he was not a right-wing extremist and expressed concern the Hollow would be portrayed as "a militia camp." He added: "But it is absolutely the opposite spectrum of that."

Flynn has been visiting the Hollow regularly for over a year, and supporting it financially. After Hurricane Ian swamped the site with several feet of water, Flynn and Mellor visited it together by boat, Mellor told AP. He shared a photo of the two of them, surrounded by floodwaters, folding an American flag.

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It was at The Hollow where Flynn was seen mixing with Proud Boys, including Hoel.

Photos and video posted on Facebook and a public Telegram chat show Flynn at The Hollow with men wearing the Proud Boys' signature yellow and black shirts or other gear with the group's logo. Sarasota lawyer Ron Filipkowski, who tracks far-right figures online, circulated a photo posted on Facebook in September 2021 that showed a man wearing a Proud Boys hat, yellow shirt and bandanna standing with Mellor and Flynn.

The Proud Boys played an important role in the insurrection. One of its members, Jeremy Bertino, pleaded guilty this month to seditious conspiracy for his role in the attack.

Samantha Kutner, an extremism researcher who is an expert on the Proud Boys and runs the consultancy Glitterpill LLC, said grievance is a driving factor in the group: they paint themselves as victims of a progressive society that wants to emasculate them.

Many Proud Boys attended the deadly "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. They've been designated a terrorist organization by the governments of Canada and New Zealand and labeled a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit legal advocacy group.

Hoel and other Sarasota Proud Boys have taken Flynn's presence and words as a rallying cry, echoing them in public Telegram chat groups they use to organize their political activities. They have often shared messages from Flynn as a way to encourage each other to get involved in local politics.

In October 2021, Flynn was the featured guest for a family event at the Hollow, "Halloween with General Flynn." Messages from a public chat on Telegram show Proud Boys and their wives organized to volunteer.

On Oct. 19, Proud Boy Nick Radovich suggested a person whose username is "MilkshakePB" could volunteer for the event. "I can try and take Halloween off to help. Is there a job list and time slot," MilkshakePB replied. A Proud Boy who goes by the nickname Milkshake has been charged and pleaded not guilty for his alleged actions on Jan. 6.

"Interested in seeing General Flynn and (state GOP Rep. Anthony) Sabatini at the Hollow at no cost? Can you help volunteer for 3 hours at the Halloween event?" Radovich's wife, Melissa, wrote Oct. 23, one of several posts she made about the event.

The event promised a "haunted hike" and trick-or-treating for kids, but it also included political speeches by a number of far-right activists, including Flynn and Kimberly Fletcher of Moms for America, one of the groups that organized the rallies in Washington on Jan. 5 and 6, 2021. Organizers said 1,000 people came. A video shows that during the event, Flynn got a standing ovation before telling the crowd that Republicans need to improve their election tactics.

"I can tell you exactly how the Democratic Party does precinct training and then who they put in charge," Flynn said. "They know exactly where to put people, where to put the thugs."

He suggested those in the audience should register to be precinct volunteers and poll watchers.

Later that night, Nick Radovich posted a video in a public Telegram chat saying he had met Flynn, and the general had congratulated him for being part of a group that protested outside the school board chair's house, calling for her to come outdoors for a "redress of grievances." Local media had reported on Proud Boys' involvement in the protest.

"He said good, keep it up," Radovich said in the video. "So, anybody seeing this should know that we have his approval."

Two weeks later, Hoel posted a photo he took with Flynn at the Hollow: Hoel wears a Proud Boys shirt, and next to him, Flynn holds up for the camera a Proud Boys emblem.

Mellor told "Frontline" that some Proud Boys had volunteered at the Hollow before he knew they were members of the extremist group.

"They're just dads and husbands and their kids come out here, OK? You know, they're part of the society," he said and added that the Proud Boys are "just another organization that just like any organization is welcomed here."

It is not clear whether Flynn has a formal relationship with the Hollow, and he and Mellor declined to answer questions on the subject.

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Mellor said in a written statement that one of Flynn's nonprofits, America's Future Inc., had recently donated \$25,000 to purchase an observation dome for a 14.5-inch telescope for the Hollow's new science and nature program. Flynn has also been soliciting money for the Hollow through a crowdfunding campaign for The America Project, a group he started last year and that AP and "Frontline" previously reported has been spending millions on efforts to advance its agenda, including by undermining trust in elections.

Some Sarasota residents told AP and "Frontline" that Proud Boys have tried to intimidate people at school board meetings — labeling those who supported masks or sympathized with gay children as "perverts."

Angela Wynn said she was harassed by a group of Proud Boys when she attended a women's rights rally with her 10-year-old. She believes Flynn's outspoken presence in Sarasota has given members of the group confidence and validation.

"Maybe back in the day they would have tried to hide who they are," Wynn said. "But now they're just so emboldened and they have this sense of empowerment."

At one protest, children were photographed hoisting Proud Boys flags.

Carol Lerner, a public education activist and retiree in Sarasota County who is opposed to Flynn's politics, has visited The Hollow twice and tracked the Proud Boys activities in Sarasota and at The Hollow.

She says Flynn, with the help of Mellor and the Proud Boys, is building an infrastructure to further the attack on American democracy that came to a head on Jan. 6 and using The Hollow to build a community and teach children anti-democratic values.

"It's pretty. It's nice. It fills a need. Then you look at what their worldview is, what they're fighting for. It's scary. It's quite frightening," Lerner said. "It's kind of like a socialization of insurrection."

THE CAMPAIGNS

Flynn has said in public speeches that he and his supporters have "flipped" 250 school boards across the country to people who agree with his views. He declined to provide a list of the communities he was referring to. But it's certain that he counts Sarasota County as one of his success stories.

Flynn, Mellor and the Proud Boys supported candidates in Sarasota that they believed would stand against mask and vaccine mandates, ban books they see as objectionable and stop any talk of sexual orientation.

Campaign finance records show that Mellor, his business and The Hollow together donated more than half the money raised by a political action committee that backed those candidates. The PAC paid for a mobile billboard calling one Jewish school board candidate a liar and "baby killer," drawing condemnation from people who noted the term's history as an antisemitic slur. Flynn's The America Project kicked in \$5,000 to the PAC in the days after the uproar.

As the school board campaign raged, Flynn and his supporters branched out beyond schools. "General Flynn is submitting his application to the Republican Executive committee on Monday," Nick Radovich wrote on Telegram July 9. "Patriots need to control the Republican party, my wife will bring you an application to join so we can take over the republican party and get rid of the RINOS. Send me date and time where she can meet you."

In the following weeks, dozens of people submitted paperwork to join the executive committee of the Sarasota County Republican Party, including Flynn, several Flynn family members, Hoel and his wife. The Herald-Tribune newspaper was first to report Flynn's application to the committee.

On Sept. 8, Hoel and Flynn were sworn in to the party's executive committee. Flynn signed up to be a poll watcher.

A Sarasota Republican Party spokesman, Rod Thomson, would not comment on whether the party endorses the views Flynn espouses. He said the party was just following its rules when it approved Flynn and Hoel to the 270-member executive committee.

Kutner and others who study extremism see a mutually beneficial relationship between Flynn and Proud Boys, likening it to when then-President Donald Trump called for the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by" ahead of the 2020 election. Flynn is working to consolidate various factions within the GOP, while Proud Boys are trying to gain visibility and legitimacy while deflecting from their actions and involvement during Jan. 6, Kutner said.

"They are trying to engage in local politics," she said, "because that's where the fight is now."

FLYNN RESPONDS

Mellor told AP in a written statement that he and Flynn are "experiencing and nurturing a true grassroots movement in its purest form."

"I assure you; this is only the beginning."

Flynn has not answered several questions sent to him since August, both before and after AP and "Frontline" published the article about his political movement on Sept. 7. But a few days after it ran, he held a 90-minute live-streamed response without providing any substantive rebuttal to the article's findings.

He did, however, reiterate his commitment to local action.

"We're on the battlefield that I believe is the most important battlefield, which is the local battlefield," he said. "The terrain that I have chosen to fight on is the local battlefield, the local terrain. And I think that that's the terrain that will win the day."

Warnock answers Libertarian wildcard in Ga.; Walker skips

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Libertarian Chase Oliver isn't going to win Georgia's pivotal U.S. Senate race. But the 37-year-old Atlanta businessman could help determine whether Democrats or Republicans control the Senate over the final two years of President Joe Biden's term.

Oliver is the third name on the ballot in the marquee matchup between Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock and Republican Herschel Walker.

In most states, that name would be an afterthought. But Georgia law requires an outright majority to win statewide office. With polls suggesting a tight contest between Warnock and Walker, it may not take a considerable share of the vote for Oliver to force a runoff, potentially repeating the 2020 scenario when Georgia's two runoffs helped Democrats secure narrow control on Capitol Hill.

"I don't have any interest in partisan bickering. I owe no allegiance to either party. I only owe allegiance to you, the voter," Oliver said Sunday night on an Atlanta debate stage, as he urged Georgia voters to "send a message" to the two major parties by denying both Warnock and Walker a first-round victory.

The Atlanta Press Club debate was likely Oliver's lone opportunity in the spotlight. He shared the stage with Warnock. An empty podium stood between them to represent Walker, who declined the Press Club's invitation.

Warnock, the 53-year-old senior pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church who won the seat in a 2021 special election, and Walker, a 60-year-old businessman and former football star, met in their only scheduled one-on-one debate Friday in Savannah. Oliver was not included in that debate because he did not meet organizers' polling threshold.

Oliver used his platform Sunday to pitch a third way in American politics. But he also acknowledged that perhaps his best opening to attract support comes from Walker's struggles to navigate his rocky past, including reports that the staunch anti-abortion Republican paid for the 2009 abortion of a then-girlfriend who later gave birth to their child. Oliver also suggested that Walker, who is making his first bid for public office, doesn't have the policy depth for the job.

"I can properly articulate the message of small government in a way that we just haven't seen Herschel doing," Oliver said after the debate, adding a sports metaphor given Walker's iconic status as a former University of Georgia running back. "If you want to suit up and get on the field ... you can't just walk off when you don't want to play. So I think he should have shown up tonight."

A runoff, if needed, would take place Dec. 6, setting up a four-week blitz after the general election, Nov. 8. That's half the time of Georgia's runoff campaign two years ago, when Warnock and Jon Ossoff prevailed over their Republican rivals with Senate control at stake.

Whether a Georgia runoff could again decide the Senate majority will depend on the outcomes of competitive races in Arizona, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Nevada and elsewhere. The Senate now is divided 50-50, with Vice President Kamala Harris giving Democrats the tie-breaking vote. Georgia is the only Senate

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battleground that faces a runoff possibility.

Neither Warnock nor Walker has publicly discussed a possible second round.

"We're focused on getting the job done Nov. 8," Walker spokesman Will Kiley said ahead of Sunday's debate.

Warnock on Sunday minimized Oliver's candidacy, declaring "the reality" that either he or Walker "will represent Georgia in the Senate." And he noted that early in-person voting begins Monday. "The people of Georgia can avoid a runoff. They can show up tomorrow," he said.

He noted Walker's absence: "Half of being a senator is showing up." And he mocked Walker for pulling out a badge during their Friday debate as supposed proof that the Republican has been a law enforcement officer. Walker has never been a trained, sworn law enforcement official, though he stood by his claims in an NBC News interview this weekend, according to partial transcripts released Sunday by the network.

Though Warnock sidestepped Oliver, the Libertarian still put the senator on the defensive, noting that inflation has continued despite Warnock touting Democrats' "Inflation Reduction Act." Warnock also pushed back on Oliver's critiques of Washington dysfunction, pointing to measures he's worked on with Republicans: a highway project with Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, a maternal mortality bill with Florida's Marco Rubio and a measure with Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville to expand markets for peanut farmers.

Warnock did not take questions from reporters after the debate.

Oliver, who is gay, took Walker to task for his rhetoric against LGBTQ persons. "I'm tired of seeing my community demonized over and over again, particularly by Republicans," he said.

Since 2014, Libertarians in Georgia have won 2% of the vote, on average, in contests for governor and U.S. senator.

Even if Walker gives Oliver his best opening to increase that share, it's not necessarily true that Oliver's candidacy would help Warnock in the long run.

In November 2020, Libertarian Senate candidate Shane Hazel won 2.3% of the vote in a race where Ossoff was challenging Republican incumbent David Perdue. Perdue led Ossoff in the general election by about 88,000 votes, but finished with 49.7% of the nearly 5 million votes, mere thousands from a majority that would have meant a second term and a continued GOP majority in the Senate.

With a second chance, Ossoff outpolled Perdue by about 55,000 votes and won a full term.

Warnock won his seat over then-Sen. Kelly Loeffler, a Republican, the same night as Ossoff. But Loeffler and Warnock had advanced to a runoff from a 20-candidate special election field that featured candidates of all parties, so neither of them had come close to an outright majority in the first round.

Before the debate Oliver told The Associated Press that forcing a runoff this time would mean "that there were enough voters who felt like they weren't being listened to."

Once on stage, he confirmed he had no intention of endorsing either Warnock or Walker if the two meet in a second round. "It's not my job," he said, "to make a decision for you on who to support in a theoretical runoff."

Brazil's da Silva, Bolsonaro clash in 1st one-on-one debate

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Brazil's former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and incumbent Jair Bolsonaro clashed in their first one-on-one debate Sunday, two weeks before the presidential election's runoff.

Debates in the election's first round featured several other candidates, none of whom garnered more than 5% of the Oct. 2 vote. During the debates, they were largely distractions from the two obvious frontrunners.

On Sunday, the two repeatedly called each other liars during an encounter lasting about 1 ½ hours. The term was used more than a dozen times by each of the candidates in the TV Band debate that, otherwise, was less aggressive than many analysts had expected.

"You are a liar. You lie every day," da Silva said during one exchange. Bolsonaro frequently said: "You can't come here to tell people these lies."

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Earlier this month, da Silva, who is universally known as Lula, won the election's first round with 48% of the vote compared to Bolsonaro's 43%. Polls indicate the leftist former president, who governed between 2003-2010, remains the frontrunner, though his lead has shrunk considerably.

Each candidate focused on the issues that, according to polls, represent their adversary's weak points: for Bolsonaro, the COVID-19 pandemic that killed 680,000 Brazilians, and for da Silva, corruption scandals involving his Workers' Party.

Da Silva and Bolsonaro are expected to take part in one more debate, days before the vote, on TV Globo, Brazil's most popular network.

Bills rally to beat Chiefs 24-20 in playoff rematch

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Von Miller had just finished talking about the importance of the Buffalo Bills beating the Kansas City Chiefs at Arrowhead Stadium when he stopped in the hallway outside the visiting locker room and grabbed Josh Allen in a hug.

The Bills quarterback was masterful again on Sunday.

This time, it was in a winning effort.

Allen threw for 329 yards and three touchdowns, including the go-ahead toss to Dawson Knox with 1:04 left, and the Bills held on for a 24-20 victory to exact a measure of revenge for their epic overtime loss to Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs in last year's playoffs.

"I've come to this stadium a whole bunch of times. Been at this same podium. But I ain't have many smiles," Miller said. "It just feels so good to go out there with my teammates, to work toward something like this and come out on top."

Stefon Diggs had 10 catches for 148 yards and a touchdown, and Gabe Davis also had a TD catch after torching Kansas City for four of them in January, as the Bills (5-1) won in the same place their season had ended the past two seasons.

It was the divisional round in January. It was the AFC championship game the year before that.

"Nothing we did last year translates to what we're doing this year," Allen said with a shrug. "What happened in the past, that's where it is. All we can do is focus on the next one. Today was the next one."

For a moment, it looked as if it could be the next heartbreak.

The Chiefs got the ball back after Knox's touchdown with plenty of time left. But after Mahomes misfired on first down, Buffalo cornerback Taron Johnson jumped his pass to Skyy Moore and picked him off with 51 seconds left.

The Bills ran out the clock from there.

"It was a great battle. You love these games," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. "You just don't want to be sitting on this end of it. But you love the competition and the way the guys get after it."

Mahomes finished with 338 yards passing to go with two touchdowns and two interceptions, including one in the end zone early in the game. JuJu Smith-Schuster had five catches for 113 yards and a touchdown.

The down-to-the-wire nail-biter was a fitting follow-up to their playoff game, when the teams combined to score 25 points in the final two minutes of regulation, and the Chiefs (4-2) won it on the first possession of overtime.

The teams scored on their final six possessions that night, and they picked up Sunday right where they left off — with a small caveat. The Bills and Chiefs both marched the length of the field in the first quarter, chewing up defenses that looked downright lost, only to turn the ball over when they reached the red zone.

Then the similarities to their incredible divisional playoff game really began.

Mahomes, at his improvisational best, stayed alive long enough in a collapsing pocket to find Smith-Schuster for a 42-yard TD reception. And after the Bills blew another red-zone opportunity, when Allen threw incomplete on fourth-and-goal at Kansas City's 3, Buffalo answered with a touchdown drive in the final minute of the half.

Backed up to its own 1-yard line, Allen threw a dart to Davis for a first down. He hit Knox, Diggs and

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Khalil Shakir on his next three throws, then had Davis beat rookie cornerback Joshua Williams for a 34-yard TD catch.

The drive took 73 seconds, covered 96 yards and gave the Bills a 10-7 lead.

And just like January, the Chiefs answered in seconds. Only instead of using 13 to drive within range of Harrison Butker's 49-yard field goal to force overtime, they had 16 seconds to move 27 yards and set up his 62-yarder to knot the game.

The back-and-forth continued in the second half: Buffalo took the lead after Butker's 51-yard miss when Diggs hauled in a long TD catch, then Kansas City drove 83 yards and Mecole Hardman tied it with his short reception.

When the Bills failed on another fourth-down attempt, Butker added a 44-yarder to give Kansas City a 20-17 lead.

But unlike January, the Bills made the plays down the stretch.

Allen's scrambling, hurdling run on their go-ahead drive got them in scoring position, and his throw to Knox — a pinpoint dime along the sideline — gave the Bills the lead. And when Johnson came up with his interception a few minutes later, the Bills had their long-awaited revenge in Kansas City.

"There were still some bad memories from this place last year," Knox said, "so it was nice to wipe those from our minds."

TOUGH GUY

Bills safety Jordan Poyer, who missed last week's game against Pittsburgh with a rib injury, was medically cleared to play but not to fly. So, he drove 973 miles each way — about 15 hours in the car — to be on the field Sunday. Poyer wound up making four tackles in the game.

STATS AND STREAKS

Allen had a career-best 13 straight completions before missing on his first throw of the fourth quarter. ... Miller had two sacks, giving him 16 in 19 games against Kansas City. ... Chiefs DT Chris Jones, who had a controversial roughing-the-passer penalty last week, tripped Allen for a sack in the fourth quarter. ... Chiefs TE Travis Kelce had eight grabs for 108 yards.

INJURY REPORT

Bills: RT Spencer Brown (ankle) was carted off in the second quarter. CB Dane Jackson left with a stinger in the third.

Chiefs: CB Rashad Fenton (hamstring) was inactive. CB Jaylen Watson left briefly in the fourth.

UP NEXT

Bills: Off next week before facing the Packers on Oct. 30 in Buffalo.

Chiefs: Visit the 49ers next Sunday in their final game before their bye.

Postal worker holdup leads to muscle car theft ring arrests

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — Thieves are using cloned key fobs to steal Dodge muscle cars and other high-powered vehicles directly from dealerships and even automakers in Michigan, then selling them for tens of thousands of dollars less than their value, according to authorities and court records.

For one Ohio-based theft ring, it all came crashing down after a January holdup of a U.S. postal worker led authorities to connect several men to brazen car thefts in the Detroit area, long home to the country's biggest automakers, including Dodge, which is now owned by international conglomerate Stellantis.

Investigators then discovered that new Chargers, Challengers, Durangos and Ram pickups worth \$50,000 to \$100,000 were turning up in Ohio, Indianapolis and East Coast shipping ports after being sold on the street for \$3,500 to \$15,000, according to a criminal complaint.

Thieves in the Detroit area are primarily going after Dodge vehicles with Hellcat engines, including Chargers and Challengers — "the fast ones," Sgt. Jerry Hanna with the Macomb Auto Theft Squad said.

"If a patrol car gets them, they are not stopping and they're faster than patrol cars. They're 150 mph all day," he said.

Instead of stealing them off the street, they're driving them straight off dealership and assembly plant lots.

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Just this year, about a half-dozen vehicles — primarily Dodge Ram TRX pickups — were taken from a lot outside an assembly plant in Macomb County.

After security measures were stepped up at some lots with Dodge vehicles, more than a dozen 2022 Ford F-150 Raptor pickup trucks were swiped from a plant lot in June in suburban Dearborn. More than a dozen Ford Mustangs were stolen in early September from the automaker's assembly plant in Flat Rock, southeast of Detroit.

Thieves have targeted Dodges by using handheld electronic "pro pads" — a locksmith's tool that can clone keys by plugging into interior ports in the vehicles, according to the federal complaint in the Ohio case.

Authorities weren't looking for stolen vehicles when they stopped Devin Rice on Jan. 31 after a postal worker in Shaker Heights, outside Cleveland, was robbed at gunpoint of a mailbox key. But court records show that a search of his car and then his home turned up not just stolen mail, bogus checks, and credit and debit cards, but also a Ram pickup, a Range Rover SUV and a Dodge with a Hellcat engine — all stolen.

Rice and others were indicted in federal court in Ohio in June. Jaylen Harris, Lavelle Jones and Hakim Benjamin are charged with conspiracy and interstate transport of stolen vehicles. Rice, Harris and Jones also are charged with mail theft. Their trials are scheduled next year.

Harris' attorney declined comment. The AP left email and phone messages seeking comment from attorneys for Benjamin, Rice and Jones.

Harris told the FBI that he and Jones had been in contact through Instagram with people in the Detroit area to get stolen vehicles, according to the complaint. Harris said those thieves "were also selling to buyers in other areas, including Chicago and Indianapolis," the complaint said.

Videos posted on social media show how the high-horsepower vehicles outpaced and evaded police.

A judge stated in a detention order that "Benjamin drove a 2022 Dodge Challenger valued at \$95,000 at 120 mph down Ohio's State Route 2 on a Sunday evening in February."

"Spike strips were eventually needed to remind Benjamin that the law required him to comply with police orders" the judge wrote.

About two years ago, police in Ohio's Ottawa County began noticing the vehicles blasting along state Route 2. The sheriff's office got calls about reckless driving, Capt. Aaron Leist said.

"These cars are going 140-150 mph. All have the Hellcat engines. We had a lot of pursuits. We did not catch them all," he said.

Investigators learned the vehicles mostly were being stolen in the Detroit area and taken to Cleveland. Some also were destined for Memphis, Tennessee, Leist said.

"We started working with (Stellantis) in early 2022," he said. "They would call us and tell us 'We have these cars missing.'"

A spokeswoman for Stellantis declined to comment.

Added security measures at some lots have included concrete barriers, according to law enforcement.

Then last fall, a dealership's showroom northwest of Detroit was broken into. Someone drove a Ram pickup through the building's glass wall and "all the other cars followed suit," said Jeff Schneider, general manager at Szott Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram in Highland Township.

"I think they were able to find some keys in a desk drawer and used them," he added.

Police tracked one of the stolen cars, a Durango Hellcat SRT valued at about \$100,000, to a suburb northwest of Detroit. The driver had crashed into a brick wall while fleeing. A 2021 Dodge Durango GT, 2021 Dodge Ram TRX and a 2017 Dodge Charger Hellcat SRT were later recovered.

Authorities arrested four people. They were not believed to have stolen the vehicles, but to have paid \$5,000 for one.

"In the Detroit area they are selling them for like \$3,500," Hanna said. "Once they get that money in their pockets they go out and steal another one."

For dealerships and their insurance companies, the cost is high. Even recovered vehicles can't be sold for what they were once worth.

Schneider said his dealership came up with an "old school" solution: parking boots.

"It's a deterrent that works amazingly," he said. "We put boots on all the Hellcats."

Radioactive waste found at Missouri elementary school

FLORISSANT, Mo. (AP) — There is significant radioactive contamination at an elementary school in suburban St. Louis where nuclear weapons were produced during World War II, according to a new report by environmental investigation consultants.

The report by Boston Chemical Data Corp. confirmed fears about contamination at Jana Elementary School in the Hazelwood School District in Florissant raised by a previous Army Corps of Engineers study.

The new report is based on samples taken in August from the school, according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Boston Chemical did not say who or what requested and funded the report.

"I was heartbroken," said Ashley Bernaugh, president of the Jana parent-teacher association who has a son at the school. "It sounds so cliché, but it takes your breath from you."

The school sits in the flood plain of Coldwater Creek, which was contaminated by nuclear waste from weapons production during World War II. The waste was dumped at sites near the St. Louis Lambert International Airport, next to the creek that flows to the Missouri River. The Corps has been cleaning up the creek for more than 20 years.

The Corps' report also found contamination in the area but at much at lower levels, and it didn't take any samples within 300 feet of the school. The most recent report included samples taken from Jana's library, kitchen, classrooms, fields and playgrounds.

Levels of the radioactive isotope lead-210, polonium, radium and other toxins were "far in excess" of what Boston Chemical had expected. Dust samples taken inside the school were found to be contaminated.

Inhaling or ingesting these radioactive materials can cause significant injury, the report said.

"A significant remedial program will be required to bring conditions at the school in line with expectations," the report said.

The new report is expected to be a major topic at Tuesday's Hazelwood school board meeting. The district said in a statement that it will consult with its attorneys and experts to determine the next steps.

"Safety is absolutely our top priority for our staff and students," board president Betsy Rachel said Saturday.

Christen Commuso with the Missouri Coalition for the Environment presented the results of the Corps' study to the school board in June after obtaining a copy through a Freedom of Information Act request.

"I wouldn't want my child in this school," she said. "The effect of these toxins is cumulative."

GOP hopefuls turn to Pence to broaden appeal before election

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — In Donald Trump's assessment, Mike Pence "committed political suicide" on Jan. 6, 2021.

By refusing to go along with the former president's unconstitutional push to overturn the results of the 2020 election, Pence became a leading target of Trump's wrath and a pariah in many Republican circles.

But the final weeks of the intensely competitive 2022 election suggest the former vice president's fortunes have shifted as he lays the groundwork for his own potential campaign for the White House in 2024.

The man who was booed last year at a conservative conference is now an in-demand surrogate for Republican candidates, including some who spent their primaries obsessively courting Trump's endorsement, in part by parroting Trump's election lies.

Pence has been traveling the country, holding events and raising millions for candidates and Republican groups, including signing fundraising solicitations for party committees.

For some campaigns in tight races, Pence is seen as something of a neutralizing agent who can help broaden their appeal beyond Trump's core base of support. That includes Arizona, with a key Senate race on Nov. 8 and what is expected to be a hotly contested stop in the 2024 presidential campaign.

Last week, Pence endorsed Senate nominee Blake Masters, who has struggled to pivot from the primary

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to win over moderates in a state where one-third of voters are registered independents.

"He takes a little bit of the edge off Masters with a lot of voters," veteran GOP strategist Scott Reed said. "You know Masters is new to this, first time candidate, said some silly things he probably regrets during the campaign."

Yet the endorsements can seem jarring given that Pence has spent much of the past year pushing back on Trump's election lies, which spurred the violent mob that descended on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, while Pence was trying to preside over the formal congressional certification of Joe Biden's presidential victory. Pence and members of his family had to be rushed to safety and held for hours in an underground loading dock as the marauders roamed the hallways, some chanting, "Hang Mike Pence!" and erected a makeshift gallows outside.

Masters, during the primary, baselessly denied the 2020 results, recording a video in which he said he thought Trump had won. Masters claimed on his website that, "if we had had a free and fair election, President Trump would be sitting in the Oval Office today."

Trump said when he endorsed Masters in June: "Blake knows that the "Crime of the Century" took place, he will expose it and also, never let it happen again."

Pence made no mention of that in Phoenix on Tuesday.

"What I came here to Arizona to say is not only is Blake Masters the right choice for the United States Senate, the people of Arizona deserve to know Blake Masters may be the difference between a Democrat majority in the Senate and a Republican majority in the Senate," Pence said.

Pence, along with Masters and Gov. Doug Ducey, took just three questions, two of them from conservative websites. When a television reporter noted that Masters has questioned the 2020 election, a spokesman for Masters cut him off before he could finish his question.

Masters is not the only election denier Pence has endorsed or assisted.

Two days after the Masters event, Pence was in Georgia headlining a fundraiser for Burt Jones, the nominee for lieutenant governor. Jones not only embraced Trump's claims of widespread election fraud and called for a statewide investigation into the 2020 race, but also signed on to be one of his state's fake alternate electors — a scheme that is now under criminal investigation.

Last month, Pence campaigned in New Hampshire for Senate nominee Don Bolduc, a retired Army general who also spent his primary campaign telling voters the 2020 race was stolen from Trump.

Marc Short, a longtime Pence adviser, declined to set a red line for candidates Pence would and would not endorse.

"It's more about making sure that he's being a team player where he needs to be," he said. "I think as a lot of these candidates look to solidify the party behind them, Pence can be helpful."

There is no evidence of any widespread fraud or manipulation of voting machines in the 2020 election, underscored by repeated audits, court cases and the conclusions of Trump's own Department of Justice. Still, support of false election claims run deep among GOP candidates this year.

Short said Pence was happy to support candidates who had moved past 2020, as he has urged the party to do.

"If people sort of acknowledged a mistaken position before, he certainly wants to reward that," said Short. "I think he wants to help conservatives first and foremost, but if people who were elected are now adopting new position about the events of Jan. 6," he said, "then that's a positive."

Reed, the Republican strategist, said he wasn't surprised by the candidates Pence had chosen to back.

"He's a big picture party guy. And it doesn't surprised me that he's hustling as hard as he is for people who may not be 100% Pencers," Reed said. "By doing these kinds of events," he added, "they're going to take another look at him if he decides to run."

Gates Foundation pledges \$1.2B to eradicate polio globally

BERLIN (AP) — The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation says it will commit \$1.2 billion to the effort to end polio worldwide.

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The money will be used to help implement the Global Polio Eradication Initiative's strategy through 2026. The initiative is trying to end the polio virus in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the last two endemic countries, the foundation said in a statement Sunday.

The money also will be used to stop outbreaks of new variants of the virus. The announcement was made Sunday at the World Health Summit in Berlin.

The foundation says in a statement on its website that it has contributed nearly \$5 billion to the polio eradication initiative. The initiative is trying to integrate polio campaigns into broader health services, while it scales up use of the novel oral polio vaccine type 2.

The group also is working to make national health systems stronger so countries are better prepared for future health threats, the statement said.

"The last steps to eradication are by far the toughest. But our foundation remains dedicated to a polio-free future, and we're optimistic that we will see it soon," said foundation CEO Mark Suzman.

Pakistan has reported 20 polio cases so far this year, all in the north-western Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Afghanistan, which has registered two cases this year, previously lacked access to vaccines because of violence and the Taliban banning polio teams in areas under its control. However last year, a few months after they took over Afghanistan, the Taliban agreed to allow United Nations health workers to begin a national campaign.

Pakistan has long struggled with Islamic militants targeting polio workers and the police protecting them, falsely claiming that vaccinations are a Western campaign to sterilize children. This year, it has the added challenge of unprecedented rainfall destroying road networks and health facilities, limiting vaccination drives, and displacing communities.

Despite the billions of dollars that have gone into the effort to eradicate polio since 1988 — the program costs about \$1 billion every year — the World Health Organization and partners have missed repeated deadlines to wipe out the disease and have come under sustained criticism for failing to adapt to challenges. In recent years, for example, there have been more cases of polio linked to the oral vaccine used in eradication efforts than those caused by the wild virus.

Numerous experts have also questioned whether more money is what's needed to eradicate polio, as the initiative is already one of the best funded in global public health and has rarely faced any funding gaps. Although WHO and partners have reduced the incidence of polio by more than 99%, that progress was largely made in the first 10 years. The disease remains stubbornly entrenched in war-torn regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan and there have been dozens of vaccine-triggered outbreaks in Africa and elsewhere in recent years, including the U.S. and Israel.

An independent panel formed to evaluate the eradication effort's progress has repeatedly identified significant strategic mistakes made by countries, WHO and their donors, warning that their reluctance to change course, among other issues, may ultimately allow polio to resurge.

The eradication initiative is a public-private partnership led by a group of national governments that includes the Gates Foundation, Rotary International, the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Ukraine: Rockets strike mayor's office in occupied Donetsk

By SABRA AYRES Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Pro-Kremlin officials on Sunday blamed Ukraine for a rocket attack that struck the mayor's office in Donetsk, a city controlled by the separatists, while Ukrainian officials said Russian rocket strikes hit a town across from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, among other targets.

The attacks came as Russia's war in Ukraine nears the eight-month mark. Kyiv also reported holding the line in continued fierce fighting around Bakhmut, where Russian forces have claimed some gains amid a seven-week Ukrainian counteroffensive that has led Russian troops to retreat in some other areas.

On the front line, "the key hotspots in Donbas are (neighboring towns) Soledar and Bakhmut, where

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extremely heavy fighting continues,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a video address Sunday.

Those towns and Donetsk are in the industrialized Donbas region, where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting Kyiv since 2014. The Donetsk region is among four that were illegally annexed by Russia last month.

Zelenskyy accused Russia of including convicts “with long sentences for serious crimes” in its front-line troops in return for pay and amnesty — something Western intelligence officials have also asserted.

The municipal mayor’s building in Donetsk was seriously damaged by the rocket attack. Plumes of smoke swirled around the building, which had rows of blown-out windows and a partially collapsed ceiling. Cars nearby were burned out. There were no immediate reports of casualties. Kyiv didn’t claim responsibility or comment on the attack.

Kremlin-backed separatist authorities have accused Ukraine of numerous strikes on infrastructure and residential targets in the occupied regions using U.S.-supplied long-range HIMARS rockets.

Last week, the Kremlin launched what is believed to be its largest coordinated air and missile raids yet on Ukraine’s infrastructure. The wide-ranging attacks included the use of self-destructing explosive drones from Iran, and killed dozens of people.

Zelenskyy’s office said Moscow was shelling towns and villages along the front line in the east Sunday, and that “active hostilities” continued in the southern Kherson region.

The rockets at Nikopol, across from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, damaged power lines, gas pipelines, and a raft of civilian businesses and residential buildings, Ukrainian officials said. Russia and Ukraine have for months accused each other of firing at and around the nuclear plant, which is Europe’s largest. It’s run by its pre-occupation Ukrainian staff under Russian oversight.

The region of Zaporizhzhia also was illegally annexed by Russia last month, despite the fact that some 20% of it remains under Ukrainian military control.

Meanwhile, in western Russia along the border with Ukraine, officials said air defenses shot down “a minimum” of 16 Ukrainian missiles in the Belgorod region, Ria Novosti reported. Russian authorities in border regions have accused Kyiv of frequently firing at their territory, and say civilians have been wounded. Ukraine hasn’t claimed responsibility or commented on the alleged attacks.

Russia has used Belgorod as a staging ground for shelling and missile attacks on Ukrainian territory.

Meanwhile, Russia opened an investigation into a shooting in that region Saturday in which two men from a former Soviet republic who were training at a military firing range killed 11 and wounded 15 during target practice, before being slain themselves. The Russian Defense Ministry called the incident a terrorist attack.

Other developments:

— France, seeking to puncture perceptions that it has lagged in supporting Ukraine, confirmed it’s pledging air-defense missiles and stepped-up military training to Ukraine. Up to 2,000 Ukrainian soldiers will be embedded with military units in France, rotating through for several weeks of combat training, specialized training in logistics and other needs, and training on equipment supplied by France, the French defense minister, Sébastien Lecornu, said in an interview published in Le Parisien.

— The Institute for the Study of War, a think tank in Washington, accused Moscow late Saturday of conducting “massive, forced deportations of Ukrainians,” which it said likely amount to ethnic cleansing.

It referenced statements made this week by Russian authorities that claimed that “several thousand” children from a southern region occupied by Moscow had been placed in rest homes and children’s camps amid the Ukrainian counteroffensive. The original remarks by Russia’s deputy prime minister, Marat Khusnullin, were reported by RIA Novosti on Friday.

Russian authorities have previously admitted to placing children from Russian-held areas of Ukraine, who they said were orphans, for adoption with Russian families, in a potential breach of an international treaty on genocide prevention.

— The Ukrainian military accused pro-Kremlin fighters of evicting civilians in occupied territories to house officers in their homes, an act it described as a violation of international humanitarian law. It said the evic-

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tions were happening in Rubizhne, in the eastern Luhansk region. It didn't provide evidence for its claim.

— A Russian commander wanted for his role in the downing of a Malaysian airliner over eastern Ukraine in 2014 has been deployed to the front, according to social media posts by pro-Kremlin commentators. Posts by Maksim Fomin and others said Igor Girkin, also known as Strelkov, has been given responsibility for an unspecified Russian front-line unit.

Girkin has been on an international wanted list over his alleged involvement in the downing of Kuala Lumpur-bound flight MH17, which killed 298 people. He remains the most high-profile suspect in a related murder trial in a Dutch court, with a verdict expected Nov. 17.

Recently, Girkin's social media posts have lashed out at Moscow's battlefield failures. Ukraine's defense intelligence agency said Sunday it would offer a \$100,000 reward to anyone who captures him.

Biden turning to Trump-era rule to expel Venezuelan migrants

By COLLEEN LONG and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two years ago, candidate Joe Biden loudly denounced President Donald Trump for immigration policies that inflicted "cruelty and exclusion at every turn," including toward those fleeing the "brutal" government of socialist Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela.

Now, with increasing numbers of Venezuelans arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border as the Nov. 8 election nears, Biden has turned to an unlikely source for a solution: his predecessor's playbook.

Biden last week invoked a Trump-era rule known as Title 42 -- which Biden's own Justice Department is fighting in court — to deny Venezuelans fleeing their crisis-torn country the chance to request asylum at the border.

The rule, first invoked by Trump in 2020, uses emergency public health authority to allow the United States to keep migrants from seeking asylum at the border, based on the need to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Under the new Biden administration policy, Venezuelans who walk or swim across America's southern border will be expelled and any Venezuelan who illegally enters Mexico or Panama will be ineligible to come to the United States. But as many as 24,000 Venezuelans will be accepted at U.S. airports, similar to how Ukrainians have been admitted since Russia's invasion in February.

Mexico has insisted that the U.S. admit one Venezuelan on humanitarian parole for each Venezuelan it expels to Mexico, according to a Mexican official who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke condition of anonymity. So if the Biden administration paroles 24,000 Venezuelans to the U.S., Mexico would take no more than 24,000 Venezuelans expelled from the U.S.

The Biden policy marks an abrupt turn for the White House, which just weeks ago was lambasting Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, both Republicans, for putting Venezuelan migrants "fleeing political persecution" on buses and planes to Democratic strongholds.

"These were children, they were moms, they were fleeing communism," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said at the time.

Biden's new policy has drawn swift criticism from immigrant advocates, many of them quick to point out the Trump parallels.

"Rather than restore the right to asylum decimated by the Trump administration ... the Biden administration has dangerously embraced the failures of the past and expanded upon them by explicitly enabling expulsions of Venezuelan migrants," said Jennifer Nagda, policy director of the Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights.

The administration says the policy is aimed at ensuring a "lawful and orderly" way for Venezuelans to enter the U.S.

Why the turnaround?

For more than a year after taking office in January 2021, Biden deferred to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which used its authority to keep in place the Trump-era declaration that a public health risk existed that warranted expedited expulsion of asylum-seekers.

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Members of Biden's own party and activist groups had expressed skepticism about the public health underpinnings for allowing Title 42 to remain in effect, especially when COVID-19 was spreading more widely within the U.S. than elsewhere.

After months of internal deliberations and preparations, the CDC on April 1 said it would end the public health order and return to normal border processing of migrants, giving them a chance to request asylum in the U.S.

Homeland Security officials braced for a resulting increase in border crossings.

But officials inside and outside the White House were conflicted over ending the authority, believing it effectively kept down the number of people crossing the border illegally, according to senior administration officials.

A court order in May that kept Title 42 in place due to a challenge from Republican state officials was greeted with quiet relief by some in the administration, according to officials who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss internal discussions.

The recent increase in migration from Venezuela, sparked by political, social and economic instability in the country, dashed officials' hopes that they were finally seeing a lull in the chaos that had defined the border region for the past year.

By August, Venezuelans were the second-largest nationality arriving at the U.S. border after Mexicans. Given that U.S. tensions with Venezuela meant migrants from the country could not be sent back easily, the situation became increasingly difficult to manage.

So an administration that had rejected many Trump-era policies aimed at keeping out migrants, that had worked to make the asylum process easier and that had increased the number of refugees allowed into the U.S. now turned to Title 42.

It brokered a deal to send the Venezuelans to Mexico, which already had agreed to accept migrants expelled under Title 42 if they are from Guatemala, Honduras or El Salvador.

All the while, Justice Department lawyers continue to appeal a court decision that has kept Title 42 in place. They are opposing Republican attorneys general from more than 20 states who have argued that Title 42 is "the only safety valve preventing this Administration's already disastrous border control policies from descending into an unmitigated catastrophe."

Under Title 42, migrants have been expelled more than 2.3 million times from the U.S. after crossing the country's land borders illegally from Canada or Mexico, though most try to come through Mexico.

The administration had announced it would stop expelling migrants under Title 42 starting May 23 and go back to detaining and deporting migrants who did not qualify to enter and remain in the U.S. — a longer process that allows migrants to request asylum in the U.S.

"We are extremely disturbed by the apparent acceptance, codification, and expansion of the use of Title 42, an irrelevant health order, as a cornerstone of border policy," said Thomas Cartwright of Witness at the Border. "One that expunges the legal right to asylum."

A separate lawsuit from the American Civil Liberties Union also is trying to end Title 42, an effort that could render the administration's proposal useless.

"People have a right to seek asylum — regardless of where they came from, how they arrive in the United States, and whether or not they have family here," said ACLU lawyer Lee Gelernt.

UK leader Liz Truss goes from triumph to trouble in 6 weeks

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — When Liz Truss was running to lead Britain this summer, an ally predicted her first weeks in office would be turbulent.

But few were prepared for the scale of the sound and fury — least of all Truss herself. In just six weeks, the prime minister's libertarian economic policies have triggered a financial crisis, emergency central bank intervention, multiple U-turns and the firing of her Treasury chief.

Now Truss faces a mutiny inside the governing Conservative Party that leaves her leadership hanging

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by a thread.

Conservative lawmaker Robert Halfon fumed on Sunday that the last few weeks had brought "one horror story after another."

"The government has looked like libertarian jihadists and treated the whole country as kind of laboratory mice on which to carry out ultra, ultra free-market experiments," he told Sky News.

It's not as if the party wasn't warned. During the summertime contest to lead the Conservatives, Truss called herself a disruptor who would challenge economic "orthodoxy." She promised she would cut taxes and slash red tape, and would spur Britain's sluggish economy to grow.

Her rival, former Treasury chief Rishi Sunak, argued that immediate tax cuts would be reckless amid the economic shockwaves from the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The 172,000 Conservative Party members -- who are largely older and affluent -- preferred Truss' boosterish vision. She won 57% of members' votes to become leader of the governing party on Sept. 5. The next day, she was appointed prime minister by Queen Elizabeth II in one of the monarch's final acts before her death on Sept. 8.

Truss' first days in office were overshadowed by a period of national mourning for the queen. Then on Sept. 23, Treasury chief Kwasi Kwarteng announced the economic plan he and Truss had drawn up. It included 45 billion pounds (\$50 billion) in tax cuts -- including an income tax reduction for the highest earners -- without an accompanying assessment of how the government would pay for them.

Truss was doing what she and allies said she would. Libertarian think-tank chief Mark Littlewood predicted during the summer there would be "fireworks" as the new prime minister pushed for economic reform at "absolutely breakneck speed."

Still, the scale of the announcement took financial markets, and political experts, by surprise.

"Many of us, wrongly, expected her to pivot after she won the leadership contest in the way many presidents do after winning the primaries," said Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London. "But she didn't do that. She actually meant what she said."

The pound plunged to a record low against the U.S. dollar and the cost of government borrowing soared. The Bank of England was forced to step in to buy government bonds and prevent the financial crisis from spreading to the wider economy. The central bank also warned that interest rates will have to rise even faster than expected to curb inflation that is running at around 10%, leaving millions of homeowners facing big increases in mortgage payments.

Jill Rutter, a senior fellow at the Institute for Government think tank, said Truss and Kwarteng made a series of "unforced errors" with their economic package.

"They shouldn't have made their contempt for economic institutions quite so clear," she said. "I think they could have listened to advice. And I think one of the things that they got very wrong was to announce one part of the package, the tax cuts ... without the spending side of the equation."

As the negative reaction grew, Truss began to abandon bits of the package in a bid to reassure her party and the markets. The tax cut for top earners was ditched in the middle of the Conservative Party's annual conference in early October as the party rebelled.

It wasn't enough. On Friday, Truss fired Kwarteng and replaced her longtime friend and ally with Jeremy Hunt, who served as health secretary and foreign secretary in the Conservative governments of David Cameron and Theresa May.

At a brief, downbeat news conference, the prime minister acknowledged that "parts of our mini budget went further and faster than markets were expecting." She reversed a planned cut in corporation tax, another pillar of her economic plan, to "reassure the markets of our fiscal discipline."

Truss is still prime minister in name, but power in government has shifted to Hunt, who has signaled he plans to rip up much of her remaining economic plan when he makes a medium-term budget statement on Oct. 31. He has said tax increases and public spending cuts will be needed to restore the government's fiscal credibility.

Still, Hunt insisted Sunday: "The prime minister's in charge."

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"She's listened. She's changed. She's been willing to do that most difficult thing in politics, which is to change tack," Hunt told the BBC.

The Conservative Party still commands a large majority in Parliament, and -- in theory -- has two years until a national election must be held. Polls suggest an election would be a wipeout for the Tories, with the Labour Party winning a big majority.

Conservative lawmakers are agonizing about whether to try to replace their leader for a second time this year. In July, the party forced out Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who led them to victory in 2019, when serial ethics scandals ensnared his administration.

Now many of them have buyer's remorse about his replacement. Under party rules, Truss is safe from a leadership challenge for a year, but some Conservative legislators believe she can be forced to resign if the party can agree on a successor. Defeated rival Sunak, House of Commons leader Penny Mordaunt and popular Defense Secretary Ben Wallace are among the names being mentioned as potential replacements. Johnson, who remains a lawmaker, still has supporters, too.

Junior Treasury minister Andrew Griffith argued Sunday that Truss should be given a chance to try to restore order.

"This is a time when we need stability," he told Sky News. "People at home are just tearing their hair out at the level of uncertainty. What they want to see is a competent government getting on with (the) job."

China's Xi calls for military growth as party congress opens

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Sunday called for faster military development and announced no change in policies that have strained relations with Washington and tightened the ruling Communist Party's control over society and the economy.

China's most influential figure in decades spoke as the party opened a congress that was closely watched by companies, governments and the public for signs of official direction. It comes amid a painful slump in the world's second-largest economy and tension with Washington and Asian neighbors over trade, technology and security.

Party plans call for creating a prosperous society by mid-century and restoring China to its historic role as a political, economic and cultural leader. Beijing has expanded its presence abroad including a multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative to build ports and other infrastructure across Asia and Africa, but economists warn reversing market-style reform could hamper growth.

"The next five years will be crucial," Xi said in a televised speech of one hour and 45 minutes to some 2,000 delegates in the cavernous Great Hall of the People. He repeatedly invoked his slogan of the "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," which includes reviving the party's role as economic and social leader in a throwback to what Xi regards as a golden age after it took power in 1949.

The congress will install leaders for the next five years. Xi, 69, is expected to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as general secretary and promote allies who share his enthusiasm for party dominance.

The party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army, needs to "safeguard China's dignity and core interests," Xi said, referring to a list of territorial claims and other issues over which Beijing says it is ready to go to war.

China, with the world's second-largest military budget after the United States, is trying to extend its reach by developing ballistic missiles, aircraft carriers and overseas outposts.

"We will work faster to modernize military theory, personnel and weapons," Xi said. "We will enhance the military's strategic capabilities."

Xi cited his government's severe "zero-COVID" strategy, which has shut down major cities and disrupted travel and business, as a success. He gave no indication of a possible change despite public frustration with its rising cost.

The congress will name a Standing Committee, the ruling inner circle of power. The lineup will indicate

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who is likely to succeed Premier Li Keqiang as the top economic official and take other posts when China's ceremonial legislature meets next year.

Analysts are watching whether a slump that saw economic growth fall to below half of the official 5.5% annual target might force Xi to compromise and include supporters of market-style reform and entrepreneurs who generate wealth and jobs.

Xi gave no indication when he might step down.

During his decade in power, Xi's government has pursued an increasingly assertive foreign policy while tightening control at home on information and dissent.

Beijing is feuding with Japan, India and Southeast Asian governments over conflicting claims to the South China and East China Seas and a section of the Himalayas. The United States, Japan, Australia and India have formed a strategic group dubbed the Quad in response.

The party has increased the dominance of state-owned industry and poured money into strategic initiatives aimed at nurturing Chinese creators of renewable energy, electric car, computer chip, aerospace and other technologies.

Its tactics have prompted complaints that Beijing improperly protects and subsidizes its fledgling creators and led then-President Donald Trump to hike tariffs on Chinese imports in 2019, setting off a trade war that jolted the global economy. Trump's successor, Joe Biden, has kept those penalties in place and this month increased restrictions on Chinese access to U.S. chip technology.

The party has tightened control over private sector leaders including e-commerce giant Alibaba Group by launching anti-monopoly, data security and other crackdowns. Under political pressure, they are diverting billions of dollars into chip development and other party initiatives. Their share prices on foreign exchanges have plunged due to uncertainty about their future.

The party has stepped up censorship of media and the internet, increased public surveillance and tightened control over private life through its "social credit" initiative that tracks individuals and punishes infractions ranging from fraud to littering.

Last week, banners criticizing Xi and "zero COVID" were hung from an elevated roadway over a major Beijing thoroughfare in a rare protest. Photos of the event were deleted from social media, and the popular WeChat messaging app shut down accounts that forwarded them.

Xi said the party would build "self-reliance and strength" in technology by improving China's education system and attracting foreign experts.

The president appeared to double down on technology self-reliance and "zero COVID" at a time when other countries are easing travel restrictions and rely on more free-flowing supply chains, said Willy Lam, a politics specialist at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Xi was joined on stage by party leaders including his predecessor as party leader, Hu Jintao, former Premier Wen Jiabao and Song Ping, a 105-year-old party veteran who sponsored Xi's early career. There was no sign of 96-year-old former President Jiang Zemin, who was party leader until 2002.

The presence of previous leaders shows Xi faces no serious opposition, said Lam.

"Xi is making it very clear he intends to hold onto power for as long as his health allows him to," he said.

Xi made no mention of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which Beijing refuses to criticize. He defended a crackdown on a pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, saying the party helped the former British colony "enter a new stage in which it has restored order and is set to thrive."

Xi's government also faces criticism over mass detentions and other abuses against mostly Muslim ethnic groups and the jailing of government critics.

Amnesty International warned that extending Xi's time in power will be a "disaster for human rights." In addition to conditions within China, it pointed to Beijing's efforts to "redefine the very meaning of human rights" at the United Nations.

Xi said Beijing refuses to renounce the possible use of force against Taiwan, the self-ruled island democracy the Communist Party claims as its territory. The two sides split in 1949 after a civil war.

Beijing has stepped up efforts to intimidate Taiwanese by flying fighter jets and bombers toward the island. That campaign intensified further after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in August became the highest-

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ranked U.S. official to visit Taiwan in a quarter-century.

"We will continue to strive for peaceful reunification," Xi said. "But we will never promise to renounce the use of force. And we reserve the option of taking all measures necessary."

Taiwan's government responded that its 23 million people had the right to determine their own future and would not accept Beijing's demands. A government statement called on China to "abandon the imposition of a political framework and the use of military force and coercion."

The Communist Party leadership agreed in the 1990s to limit the general secretary to two five-year terms in an effort to prevent a repeat of power struggles from earlier decades. That leader also becomes chairman of the commission that controls the military and holds the ceremonial title of national president.

Xi made his intentions clear in 2018 when he had a two-term limit on the presidency removed from China's Constitution. Officials said that allowed Xi to stay if needed to carry out reforms.

The party is expected to amend its charter this week to raise Xi's status as leader after adding his personal ideology, Xi Jinping Thought, at the previous congress in 2017.

The spokesperson for the congress, Sun Yeli, said Saturday the changes would "meet new requirements for advancing the party's development" but gave no details.

California city rests easier after serial killings arrest

STOCKTON, Calif. (AP) — Residents of Stockton, California, were able to rest easier following the weekend arrest of a man suspected of killing six men and wounding a woman in a series of shootings over a period of three months in Northern California, the city's mayor said Sunday.

Mayor Kevin Lincoln said he shed tears of relief when he was informed that the suspect who police believe had terrorized Stockton since July was taken into custody around 2 a.m. Saturday.

Wesley Brownlee was dressed in black, wore a mask around his neck, had a handgun and "was out hunting" for another possible victim when he was arrested while driving around the Central Valley city, where five of the shootings took place, Police Chief Stanley McFadden said at a Saturday news conference.

"The city was able to sleep a little bit better last night," Lincoln said Sunday morning. "No resident of this city should have to walk around town looking over their shoulder in fear."

The mayor credited residents of Stockton who called in hundreds of tips to investigators that eventually led to the arrest of the 43-year-old suspect.

It wasn't immediately clear on Sunday whether Brownlee, of Stockton, had an attorney to speak on his behalf. He was expected to be arraigned Tuesday on murder charges.

"This person caused a lot of hurt, caused a lot of trauma," Lincoln said. "My prayer, my hope, as mayor is that our community begins the process of healing as a result of the serial killings."

Police had been searching for a man clad in black who was caught on video at several of the crime scenes in Stockton, where five men were ambushed and shot to death between July 8 and Sept. 27. Four were walking, and one was in a parked car.

Police believe the same person was responsible for killing a man 70 miles (113 kilometers) away in Oakland in April 2021 and wounding a homeless woman in Stockton a week later.

Investigators have said ballistics tests and video evidence linked the crimes. A police photo showed the black-and-gray weapon allegedly carried by the suspect. It appeared to be a semi-automatic handgun containing some nonmetallic materials.

At Saturday's news conference, a moment of silence was held for the victims.

Juan Vasquez Serrano, 39, was killed in Oakland on April 10, 2021, and Natasha LaTour, 46, was shot in Stockton on April 16 of that year but survived. The five men killed in Stockton this year were Paul Yaw, 35, who died July 8; Salvador Debudey Jr., 43, who died Aug. 11; Jonathan Hernandez Rodriguez, 21, who died Aug. 30; Juan Cruz, 52, who died Sept. 21; and Lawrence Lopez Sr., 54, who died Sept. 27.

Police said Brownlee has a criminal history and is believed to have also lived in several cities near Stockton, but they did not give further details.

After receiving hundreds of tips, investigators located and watched the place where Brownlee was living.

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"Based on tips coming into the department and Stockton Crime Stoppers, we were able to zero in on a possible suspect," McFadden said. "Our surveillance team followed this person while he was driving."

Investigators watched his patterns and determined that he was out searching for another victim, the chief said.

"We are sure we stopped another killing," he said.

McFadden added that Brownlee was detained after engaging in what appeared to be threatening behavior, including going to parks and dark places, stopping and looking around before driving on.

Investigators were still processing evidence and trying to identify a motive for the attacks, Officer Joseph Silva, a police spokesperson, said Sunday. Police said some victims were homeless, but not all. None were beaten or robbed, and the woman who survived said her attacker didn't say anything.

The police chief thanked various local, state and federal agencies that took part in the investigation, including the FBI, U.S. Marshals and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

Local investigators had also worked with police in Chicago to determine whether the killings might be linked to two 2018 murders in that city's Rogers Park neighborhood. Authorities said videos of suspects showed a man in black with a distinctive walk.

However, Chicago police said Friday that there didn't appear to be any link.

AP Top 25: Tennessee up to No. 3, 'Bama's top-5 streak ends

BY RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

Tennessee moved to No. 3 in The Associated Press college football poll behind No. 1 Georgia and No. 2 Ohio State after knocking off Alabama.

The Crimson Tide was one of five unbeaten teams to fall during a wild weekend and dropped three places to No. 6 in the AP Top 25 presented by Regions Bank. Alabama swapped places with the Vols after losing to them 52-49 on a field goal as time expired Saturday.

Georgia remained No. 1 and received 31 first-place votes and Ohio State had 17 first-place votes.

The Vols received 15 first-place votes and have their best ranking since starting the 2005 season at No. 3. The last time Tennessee was ranked this highly in the second half of the season was 2001, reaching the top 10 in late October and headed into the SEC championship at No. 2.

No. 4 Michigan moved up a spot Sunday, switching places with No. 5 Clemson after the Wolverines blew out now-No. 16 Penn State.

No. 7 Mississippi moved up two spots and No. 8 TCU, No. 9 UCLA and No. 10 Oregon all moved into the top 10.

POLL POINTS

The Crimson Tide had its string of 40 straight appearances in the top five snapped. It was the longest such active streak in the country.

Georgia now has the longest run of top-five appearances with 24.

The Tide's latest top-five run is only the third longest of the Saban era. The Tide's 68 straight top-five appearances from 2015-19 is the AP poll record, and a string of 48 consecutive top-five rankings from 2011-13 is tied for fourth.

EXPLAIN YOUR VOTE

Tennessee made a case to be the No. 1 team in the country, and it swayed some voters.

Those who bought in on the Vols cited a resume that includes four victories against teams that were ranked at the time (at Pitt, Florida, at LSU and Alabama).

"I voted Tennessee No. 1 because the Vols' strength of schedule is far superior to UGA and Ohio State," said Ron Counts of the Idaho Statesman in Boise.

For comparison, Georgia has played just one team (Oregon) that has been ranked at any point this season. Ohio State has played three, though only one was ranked at the time (Notre Dame) and all of those opponents have at least three losses.

Plus, beating Alabama doesn't happen often and holds a lot of weight with voters. No team this season

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has beaten a team with a better ranking at the time the game was played than Tennessee.

"It was a tough call between Tennessee and Georgia for No. 1," said Kellis Robinett of The Wichita (Kansas) Eagle. "I have been voting the Bulldogs ahead of everyone else for several weeks, mostly because their blowout victory over Oregon has aged like a fine wine. But I think beating Alabama is slightly more impressive."

So why only No. 3 for Tennessee?

The ranked-at-the-time argument falls flat for some voters, who were less impressed with victories against Florida and Pitt and give Georgia and Ohio State credit for being more dominant overall.

"I've been high on Tennessee all year, but I don't think ranking them No. 3 is any kind of snub this week," said Mike Barber of the Richmond (Virginia) Times-Dispatch.

IN

— No. 22 North Carolina is ranked for the first time this season.

— No. 25 Tulane is this week's breakthrough team. The Green Wave (6-1) is ranked for the first time since 1998, when quarterback Shaun King led them to an unbeaten season and No. 7 in the final Top 25.

OUT

— Kansas lost two straight games after snapping a poll drought of 13 years and is unranked again.

— James Madison is out after becoming the first team to be ranked in its first season as an FBS member.

The Dukes lost 45-38 on the road at new Sun Belt rival Georgia Southern.

CONFERENCE CALL

SEC — 6 (Nos. 1, 3, 6, 7, 19, 24).

ACC — 5 (Nos. 5, 13, 14, 22, 23).

Big 12 — 4 (Nos. 8, 11, 17, 20).

Big Ten — 4 (No. 2, 4, 16, 18).

Pac-12 — 4 (Nos. 9, 10, 12, 15).

American — 2 (Nos. 21, 25).

RANKED vs. RANKED

After six games matching ranked teams this past weekend, five more are on tap, including the first top-10 matchup in the Pac-12 since the 2016 conference championship game (No. 4 Washington and No. 9 Colorado).

No. 14 Syracuse at No. 5 Clemson.

No. 20 Texas at No. 11 Oklahoma State.

No. 9 UCLA at No. 10 Oregon.

No. 24 Mississippi State at No. 6 Alabama.

No. 17 Kansas State at No. 8 TCU.

Family mourns miner's death in Turkey, demanding punishment

By MEHMET GUZEL and ZEYNEP BILGINSOY Associated Press

AMASRA, Turkey (AP) — "My one and only, where are you," a mother cried at a cemetery beside a freshly-laid mound of earth. She couldn't process the death of her 33-year-old son who was killed in a coal mine explosion in northern Turkey.

Selcuk Ayvaz was among the first to be buried, following a funeral Saturday where his coffin was wrapped in the red and white Turkish flag. Relatives told his stunned 3-year-old daughter to say farewell to his coffin. His wife, who is expecting their third child — a boy — any day now, was distraught, slowly eating a chocolate bar from the hand of a social worker.

Friday's explosion at the state-owned Turkish Hard Coal Enterprise's (TTK) mine in the Black Sea town of Amasra killed 41 miners and injured 11. Five of the injured are in critical condition in an Istanbul hospital, suffering from burns that cover 65% to 85% of their bodies, according to the health minister.

There were 110 miners when the blast occurred. Fifty-eight of them made it out on their own or were rescued.

Ayvaz's father kissed a photo of him twice, saying "my baby." Recep Ayvaz, 62, said he rushed to Amasra

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from his village when he heard of the mine explosion.

"I waited and waited and there was no news," he explained. He then received word that his son was at the children's hospital. When he got there, he saw cars in front of the morgue and his eldest son identified his brother's body.

"I asked them to show me and they showed me my child," the father said, describing his son's head injuries. "His hair, his mustache were all burned, his sides blackened, it's still in front of my eyes, I can't forget it."

The Turkish flag was hanging on their house of mourning.

"Our pain is huge. What can I say? My daughter-in-law is at home, she's about to give birth in two or three days. My wife is doing very bad. She fainted two or three times and the same for my daughter-in-law," Recep Ayvaz said.

Energy Minister Fatih Donmez said preliminary assessments indicated the tragedy was caused by a fire-damp explosion — when methane mixes with air and fire — creating a dangerous underground situation.

The minister announced Sunday coal production at the Amasra mine would be stopped until investigations are completed, the state-run Anadolu Agency said. Five prosecutors were investigating, according to the justice minister.

But Ayvaz's mother Habibe wasn't appeased. The 63-year-old said she heard there was a gas leak in the mine and questioned why her son was sent into it at all.

"It's a massacre outright, a massacre," she said, inconsolable. "I am calling on our president, I am calling on Mr. Suleyman (Soylu, interior minister), punish them and may God damn them," she said referring to the mine's contractors.

Another deceased miner's mourning relative told Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday during a live broadcast that there had allegedly been a gas leak in the mine. Erdogan said earlier the mine was the most advanced in Turkey and the energy minister had inspected it only a month ago.

A 2019 report by Turkey's Court of Accounts, which was shared by an opposition lawmaker and some media, said there were "serious accident risks" of firedamp explosions at a depth of 300 meters below sea level and urged the mine to follow inrush directives as gas content was already high where samples were taken.

Friday's blast took place at that level. It's unclear if the mine followed the directives, but TTK said the claim was "completely false" and that the high methane readings referred to the levels of gas in the coal rather than the mine itself.

The deadliest mine disaster in Turkey was in 2014 when 301 coal miners died following an explosion in the western town of Soma.

"My only thought is the children. We can't cry next to them," Ayvaz's aunt Elmas said.

The sentiment was echoed by her brother, the elder Ayvaz, who was trying to plan ahead.

"We need to get them accustomed to it. When they ask 'where's my father' at age 10 or 15, I will tell them. But until they ask me, I will just get them accustomed."

LA's Black-Latino tensions bared in City Council scandal

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

Cross-cultural coalitions have ruled Los Angeles politics for decades, helping elect both Black and Latino politicians to top leadership roles in the huge racially and ethnically diverse city.

But a shocking recording of racist comments by the City Council president has laid bare the tensions over political power that have been quietly simmering between the Latino and Black communities.

Nury Martinez, the first Latina elected president of the Los Angeles City Council, resigned from her leadership role last week, then from the council altogether, after a leaked recording surfaced of her making racist remarks and other coarse comments in discussion with other Hispanic leaders.

Martinez said in the recorded conversation, first reported by the Los Angeles Times, that white Councilmember Mike Bonin handled his young Black son as if he were an "accessory," and described the son as

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behaving "parece changuito," or like a monkey. She also made denigrating comments about other groups, including Indigenous Mexicans from the southern state of Oaxaca, who she termed "feos," or ugly.

The recording, released anonymously a year after it was made, stunned and hurt many in the Black community, which makes up a little less than 9% of the city's roughly four million residents. Concerns inside that group, which has long counted on council seats and other city posts in heavily African American neighborhoods, have been growing in recent years as the Latino share of the population has swollen to nearly half and Hispanic politicians have started assuming more high-ranking roles.

Danny J. Bakewell, Sr., the executive publisher of the Los Angeles Sentinel, a Black-run newspaper, wrote afterward of "the cancerous divisiveness that has been secretly harming our progress."

"To discover that these conversations are a part of the dialogue of the very people entrusted to lead the city of Los Angeles and to realize that there is a plot amongst them to minimize the voice and political power of the Black community makes it even more reprehensible," Bakewell added.

Los Angeles is no stranger to racial and ethnic tension.

The Watts riots left 34 dead in 1965 after violence broke out following the arrest of an African American man pulled over for drunken driving.

The videotaped beating of Black motorist Rodney King by white Los Angeles police officers in 1991 following a high-speed chase sparked an international furor.

Riots erupted across the city the following year when three of the officers were acquitted on excessive force charges and the jury failed to reach a verdict on the fourth. The rioting lasted six days and killed 63 people, underscoring racial tensions in the city, especially between the Black community and Korean Americans, whose businesses were often targeted.

But Los Angeles also has a history of cooperation among racial and ethnic groups going back to the 1930s, said Manuel Pastor, a professor of sociology and American studies and ethnicity at the University of Southern California.

He said diverse groups, by working together, helped elect Black Mayor Tom Bradley, who served two decades ending in 1993, and Hispanic Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa in 2005.

"The kind of sentiments expressed in that conversation do exist in the Latino community more broadly," Pastor said of the racist comments on the recording. But he said most Hispanics in the city reject that way of thinking.

Pastor called for a moment of reflection, saying "there's an interesting opportunity here for the Latino community to examine anti-Blackness and colorism, in the Latino community."

The now-infamous conversation about frustrations over redistricting maps produced by a city commission was recorded in October 2021. The others present were Councilmembers Gil Cedillo and Kevin de León and Los Angeles County Federation of Labor President Ron Herrera.

Martinez referred to Bonin, who is gay, as a "little bitch" and De León called Bonin the council's "fourth Black member."

"Mike Bonin won't f---ing ever say peep about Latinos. He'll never say a f---ing word about us," said De León.

It is unclear who recorded the exchange.

For the Rev. Eddie Anderson, the Black senior pastor of the McCarty Memorial Christian Church in Los Angeles, the "horrific statements by the highest officials in local government" were just part of "a plan to dilute the Black vote and power in our community."

"There was a real plan of Black erasure, of people who have been here a long time building this city," Anderson said.

The pastor, among those who sat last year on the Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission that helped draw the map, noted the recorded conversation was just weeks before final approval.

He said much of the quibbling over redistricting centered on a district that includes parts of south Los Angeles, Koreatown and Baldwin Hills and which elected Tom Bradley, the grandson of a slave, to the council before he was mayor.

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Latino leaders around the U.S. denounced the recorded remarks and called for Martinez and the others to resign.

"At a time when our nation is grappling with a recent rise in hate speech and hate crimes, these comments have deepened the pain that our communities have endured," said Sen. Alex Padilla, who earlier served as the council's youngest president.

Clarissa Martinez, vice president of the Latino Vote Initiative for UnidosUS, a leading national civil rights organization, said: "our community was deeply offended by the racist and dehumanizing comments made by those four Los Angeles elected and appointed officials."

"Their being Latino is particularly painful because our community understands what it's like to be subjected to mistreatment and attempts to diminish our voice," she added. But she insisted, "We know we are building on something much stronger than the backward behavior of these four people because our communities have a strong trajectory of working together."

Tanya Kateri Hernandez, professor at Fordham University School of Law, said the idea that people of color are always united ignores colonialism and racial baggage from many different places and generations.

The issue of anti-Blackness in Latino communities in the U.S. and globally is much broader than this one instance, extending to Afro Latinos, Africans and West Indians, said Hernandez, who wrote the book "Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality."

The Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission alluded to squabbling among various groups when it submitted its final map a year ago.

"It wasn't our job to protect elected officials, their jobs, or their political futures," commission chairman Fred Ali said in a statement. "We hope the Council conducts its deliberations with the same amount of transparency and commitment to equity that this Commission did."

Religious polarization in India seeping into US diaspora

By DEEPA BHARATH and MARIAM FAM Associated Press

In Edison, New Jersey, a bulldozer, which has become a symbol of oppression of India's Muslim minority, rolled down the street during a parade marking that country's Independence Day. At an event in Anaheim, California, a shouting match erupted between people celebrating the holiday and those who showed up to protest violence against Muslims in India.

Indian Americans from diverse faith backgrounds have peacefully co-existed stateside for several decades. But these recent events in the U.S. — and violent confrontations between some Hindus and Muslims last month in Leicester, England — have heightened concerns that stark political and religious polarization in India is seeping into diaspora communities.

In India, Hindu nationalism has surged under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party, which rose to power in 2014 and won a landslide election in 2019. The ruling party has faced fierce criticism over rising attacks against Muslims in recent years, from the Muslim community and other religious minorities as well as some Hindus who say Modi's silence emboldens right-wing groups and threatens national unity.

Hindu nationalism has split the Indian expatriate community just as Donald Trump's presidency polarized the U.S., said Varun Soni, dean of religious life at the University of Southern California. It has about 2,000 students from India, among the highest in the country.

Soni has not seen these tensions surface yet on campus. But he said USC received blowback for being one of more than 50 U.S. universities that co-sponsored an online conference called "Dismantling Global Hindutva."

The 2021 event aimed to spread awareness of Hindutva, Sanskrit for the essence of being Hindu, a political ideology that claims India as a predominantly Hindu nation plus some minority faiths with roots in the country such as Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism. Critics say that excludes other minority religious groups such as Muslims and Christians. Hindutva is different from Hinduism, an ancient religion practiced by about 1 billion people worldwide that emphasizes the oneness and divine nature of all creation.

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Soni said it's important that universities remain places where "we are able to talk about issues that are grounded in facts in a civil manner," But, as USC's head chaplain, Soni worries how polarization over Hindu nationalism will affect students' spiritual health.

"If someone is being attacked for their identity, ridiculed or scapegoated because they are Hindu or Muslim, I'm most concerned about their well-being — not about who is right or wrong," he said.

Anantanand Rambachan, a retired college religion professor and a practicing Hindu who was born in Trinidad and Tobago to a family of Indian origin, said his opposition to Hindu nationalism and association with groups against the ideology sparked complaints from some at a Minnesota temple where he has taught religion classes. He said opposing Hindu nationalism sometimes results in charges of being "anti-Hindu," or "anti-India," labels that he rejects.

On the other hand, many Hindu Americans feel vilified and targeted for their views, said Samir Kalra, managing director of the Hindu American Foundation in Washington, D.C.

"The space to freely express themselves is shrinking for Hindus," he said, adding that even agreeing with the Indian government's policies unrelated to religion can result in being branded a Hindu nationalist.

Pushpita Prasad, a spokesperson for the Coalition of Hindus of North America, said her group has been counseling young Hindu Americans who have lost friends because they refuse "to take sides on these battles emanating from India."

"If they don't take sides or don't have an opinion, it's automatically assumed that they are Hindu nationalist," she said. "Their country of origin and their religion is held against them."

Both organizations opposed the Dismantling Global Hindutva conference criticizing it as "Hinduphobic" and failing to present diverse perspectives. Conference supporters say they reject equating calling out Hindutva with being anti-Hindu.

Some Hindu Americans like 25-year-old Sravya Tadepalli, believe it's their duty to speak up. Tadepalli, a Massachusetts resident who is a board member of Hindus for Human Rights, said her activism against Hindu nationalism is informed by her faith.

"If that is the fundamental principle of Hinduism, that God is in everyone, that everyone is divine, then I think we have a moral obligation as Hindus to speak out for the equality of all human beings," she said. "If any human is being treated less than or as having their rights infringed upon, then it is our duty to work to correct that."

Tadepalli said her organization also works to correct misinformation on social media that travels across continents fueling hate and polarization.

Tensions in India hit a high in June after police in the city of Udaipur arrested two Muslim men accused of slitting a Hindu tailor's throat and posting a video of it on social media. The slain man, 48-year-old Kanhaiya Lal, had reportedly shared an online post supporting a governing party official who was suspended for making offensive remarks against the Prophet Muhammad.

Hindu nationalist groups have attacked minority groups, particularly Muslims, over issues related to everything from food or wearing head scarves to interfaith marriage. Muslims' homes have also been demolished using heavy machinery in some states, in what critics call a growing pattern of "bulldozer justice."

Such reports have Muslim Americans afraid for the safety of family members in India. Shakeel Syed, executive director of the South Asian Network, a social justice organization based in Artesia, California, said he regularly hears from his sisters and senses a "pervasive fear, not knowing what tomorrow is going to be like."

Syed grew up in the Indian city of Hyderabad in the 1960s and 1970s in "a more pluralistic, inclusive culture."

"My Hindu friends would come to our Eid celebrations and we would go to their Diwali celebrations," he said. "When my family went on summer vacation, we would leave our house keys with our Hindu neighbor, and they would do the same when they had to leave town."

Syed believes violence against Muslims has now been mainstreamed in India. He has heard from girls in his family who are considering taking off their hijabs or headscarves out of fear.

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In the U.S., he sees his Hindu friends reluctant to engage publicly in a dialogue because they fear retaliation.

"A conversation is still happening, but it's happening in pockets behind closed doors with people who are like-minded," he said. "It's certainly not happening between people who have opposing views."

Rajiv Varma, a Houston-based Hindu activist, holds a diametrically opposite view. Tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the West, he said, are not a reflection of events in India but rather stem from a deliberate attempt by "religious and ideological groups that are waging a war against Hindus."

Varma believes India is "a Hindu country" and the term "Hindu nationalism" merely refers to love for one's country and religion. He views India as a country ravaged by conquerors and colonists, and Hindus as a religious group that does not seek to convert or colonize.

"We have a right to recover our civilization," he said.

Rasheed Ahmed, co-founder and executive director of the Washington D.C.-based Indian American Muslim Council, said he is saddened "to see even educated Hindu Americans not taking Hindu nationalism seriously." He believes Hindu Americans must make "a fundamental decision about how India and Hinduism should be seen in the U.S. and the world over."

"The decision about whether to take Hinduism back from whoever hijacked it, is theirs."

Zafar Siddiqui, a Minnesota resident, is hoping to "reverse some of this mistrust, polarization" and build understanding through education, personal connections and interfaith assemblies. Siddiqui, a Muslim, has helped bring together a group of Minnesotans of Indian origin — including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and atheists — who meet for monthly potlucks.

"When people sit down, say, over lunch or dinner or over coffee, and have a direct dialogue, instead of listening to all these leaders and spreading all this hate, it changes a lot of things," Siddiqui said.

But during one recent gathering, some argued over a draft proposal to at some point seek dialogue with people who hold different views. Those who disagreed explained that they didn't support reaching out to Hindu nationalists and feared harassment.

Siddiqui said that for now, future plans include focusing on education and interfaith events spotlighting India's different traditions and religions.

"Just to keep silent is not an option," Siddiqui said. "We needed a platform to bring people together who believe in peaceful co-existence of all communities."

New UK Treasury chief insists Truss retains control

By MIKE FULLER Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The new U.K. Treasury chief on Sunday insisted Prime Minister Liz Truss retains control of her government despite having to roll back her signature economic policies weeks into her premiership.

Jeremy Hunt was drafted in to lead the Treasury after Truss sacked Kwasi Kwarteng amid rising pressure following the turbulent market reaction to the new administration's "mini-budget."

"The prime minister's in charge," Hunt, a former foreign and health secretary, told the BBC when he was asked whether he now held all the power at Downing Street.

Truss and Kwarteng had slowly unraveled key elements of their economic vision, including tax cuts for top earners and a halt on corporation tax rises, before the prime minister gave in to financial market instability and tanking polling figures and fired Kwarteng.

Hunt has now said taxation will rise and public spending will shrink, despite Britain's growing cost-of-living crisis.

He said he had been surprised to receive the call to return to the Cabinet, but he was "honored" to join the government as he shared Truss' desire to prioritize economic growth.

"She has changed the way we're going to get there, but she has not changed the destination, which is to get the country growing," Hunt said.

It remains unclear if Truss, who throughout this summer's leadership campaign secured the support of a majority of Conservative Party members but not of its lawmakers, can ward off any plots to oust her.

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Tory lawmaker Robert Halfon told Sky News on Sunday that many colleagues remained unhappy and the situation "has to improve".

Opposition leader Keir Starmer has pressed the Labour Party's call for an immediate general election to restore stability, saying the Conservatives are "at the end of the road".

Hunt has suggested an election is not imminent, saying Truss will be judged on how her government performs over the next 18 months. The Conservatives want to win back the trust of the public before any national vote.

Recent polls have placed the Conservative Party at a vote share of around 25%, a far cry from the 42.4% share they received in December 2019 which handed then-leader Boris Johnson a commanding majority in Parliament.

The current prime minister argued she still held credibility during a four-question news conference on Friday when she announced the appointment of Hunt.

Pope extends reform process for year amid apathy, criticism

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis has decided to extend by a year a lengthy global consultation of ordinary Catholics about the future of the Catholic Church, amid limited participation by the laity and seeming resistance to his reforms from the hierarchy.

Francis announced Sunday that the planned 2023 gathering of bishops would now take place in two stages — one session in October 2023 and a second in October 2024 — to allow more time to find a way forward.

Francis in 2021 formally opened a two-year consultation process on the topic of "synodality," or a more decentralized structure of the church with the laity having a greater role. The process is part of Francis' long-term goal of making the church more inclusive, participatory and responsive to real-world issues facing ordinary Catholics.

As part of the process, the Vatican asked dioceses, religious orders and other Catholic groups to embark on local listening sessions so ordinary Catholics could talk about their needs and hopes for the church. Bishops conferences in August reported back the results, and an organizing committee recently met near Rome and completed a synthesis document.

But several dioceses and bishops conferences reported minimal participation. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, for example, reported 700,000 people participated in the consultation, in a country of 66.8 million Catholics. Many European countries also reported participation rates below 10%.

In addition, many of Francis' opponents have scoffed at the entire initiative. A leading critic and former Vatican official, Cardinal Gerhard Mueller of Germany, recently warned that it represented a "hostile takeover" of the church. Others have pointed to a similar consultation process underway in Germany that has badly divided the church, amid debate on hot-button issues such as sexual morality, women in leadership roles and the church's treatment of LGBTQ Catholics.

Announcing the yearlong extension Sunday, Francis said the fruits of this first phase had been many "but in order to reach a full maturity, it's necessary that we not rush things." Adding in another year, he said, would allow for a "more extended discernment."

"I trust that this decision will lead to an understanding of synodality as a constitutive dimension of the church, and to help everyone live it as a path of brothers and sisters who offer witness to the joy of the Gospel," Francis said in his noon blessing overlooking St. Peter's Square.

Already, the Vatican office organizing the meeting had extended by several months the deadline to let ordinary dioceses and bishops conferences report back. That office said Sunday the decision to extend the whole process by another year would "foster more mature reflection for the greater good of the church."

It's not the first time that Francis has split a synod meeting up into two sessions, with a year of breathing room in between them. He did that for his synod on the family, which took place over the course of two sessions in 2014 and 2015, and resulted in his 2016 document that opened the door to letting divorced

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and civilly remarried Catholics receive Communion.

Today in History: October 17, Einstein arrives in the U.S.

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Oct. 17, the 290th day of 2022. There are 75 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 17, 1933, Albert Einstein arrived in the United States as a refugee from Nazi Germany.

On this date:

In 1610, French King Louis XIII, age nine, was crowned at Reims, five months after the assassination of his father, Henry IV.

In 1777, British forces under Gen. John Burgoyne surrendered to American troops in Saratoga, New York, in a turning point of the Revolutionary War.

In 1807, Britain declared it would continue to reclaim British-born sailors from American ships and ports regardless of whether they held U.S. citizenship.

In 1910, social reformer and poet Julia Ward Howe, author of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," died in Portsmouth, R.I. at age 91.

In 1931, mobster Al Capone was convicted in Chicago of income tax evasion. (Sentenced to 11 years in prison, Capone was released in 1939.)

In 1966, 12 New York City firefighters were killed while battling a blaze in lower Manhattan. The TV game show "The Hollywood Squares" premiered on NBC.

In 1967, Puyi (poo-ye), the last emperor of China, died in Beijing at age 61.

In 1973, Arab oil-producing nations announced they would begin cutting back oil exports to Western nations and Japan; the result was a total embargo that lasted until March 1974.

In 1978, President Carter signed a bill restoring U.S. citizenship to Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

In 1979, Mother Teresa of India was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1989, an earthquake measuring 6.9 in magnitude struck northern California, killing 63 people and causing \$6 billion worth of damage.

In 2018, residents of the Florida Panhandle community of Mexico Beach who had fled Hurricane Michael a week earlier returned home to find homes, businesses and campers ripped to shreds; the storm had killed at least 59 people and caused more than \$25 billion in damage in Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia.

Ten years ago: Federal authorities in New York said a Bangladeshi student had been arrested in an FBI sting after he tried to detonate a phony 1,000-pound truck bomb outside the Federal Reserve building in Manhattan. (Quazi Mohammad Rezwanaul Ahsan Nafis was sentenced to 30 years in prison.)

Five years ago: Just hours before President Donald Trump's latest travel ban was due to take effect, a federal judge in Hawaii blocked most of the ban, saying it suffered from the same flaws as the previous version. U.S.-backed Syrian forces gained control of the northern Syrian city of Raqqah, which was once the heart of the Islamic State group's self-styled caliphate.

One year ago: Police in Haiti said a notorious gang known for brazen kidnappings and killings was believed responsible for abducting 17 missionaries from a U.S.-based organization, including five children. (Two of the missionaries were released in November; the others would go free in December.) Russia reported its largest daily number of new coronavirus infections to date, more than 70% higher than the number a month earlier. Allie Quigley scored 26 points and Candace Parker added 16 points, 13 rebounds and five assists to help the Chicago Sky win its first WNBA championship with a 80-74 Game 4 victory over the Phoenix Mercury.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Gary Puckett is 80. Actor Michael McKean is 75. Actor George Wendt is 74. Actor-singer Bill Hudson is 73. Atlanta Braves manager Brian Snitker is 67. Astronaut Mae Jemison is 66. Country singer Alan Jackson is 64. Movie critic Richard Roeper is 63. Movie director Rob Marshall is 62.

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Actor Grant Shaud is 62. Animator Mike Judge is 60. Rock singer-musician Fred LeBlanc (Cowboy Mouth) is 59. Singer Rene' Dif is 55. Reggae singer Ziggy Marley is 54. Actor Wood Harris is 53. Singer Wyclef Jean (zhahn) is 53. World Golf Hall of Famer Ernie Els is 53. Singer Chris Kirkpatrick ('N Sync) is 51. Rapper Eminem is 50. Actor Sharon Leal is 50. Actor Matthew Macfadyen is 48. Actor Felicity Jones is 39. Actor Chris Lowell is 38.