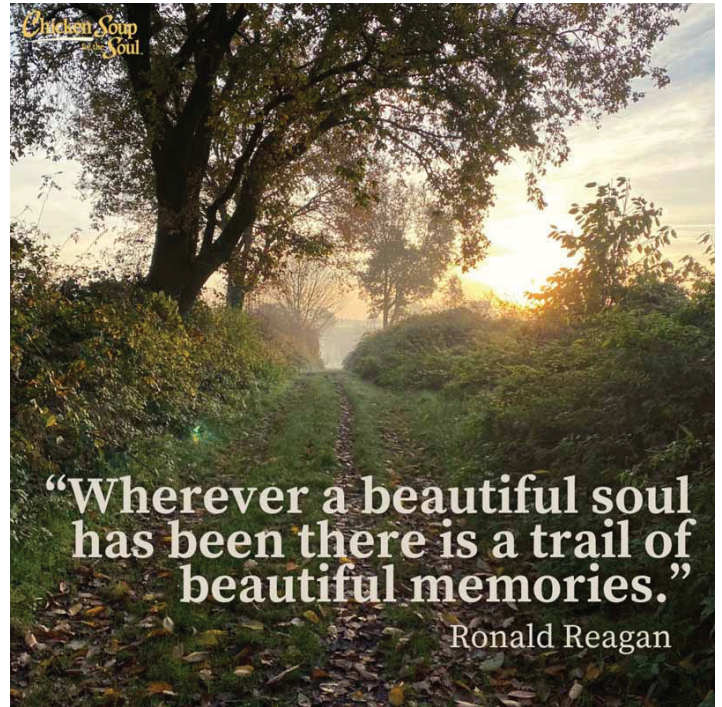


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Groton Community Calendar

Tuesday, Oct. 18

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

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.

Wednesday, Oct. 19

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, boiled potatoes, squash, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg omelets.

School Lunch: Grilled cheese, glazed carrots.

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

Emmanuel Lutheran Confirmation, 6 p.m.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

UMC: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.; YMYF Bible Study, 7 p.m.

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

Thursday, Oct. 20

Senior Menu: Hamburger with bun, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, fruit, ice cream.

School Breakfast: Muffins.

School Lunch: Goulash, corn.

Emmanuel Lutheran WELCA final day packing LWR projects, potluck

UMC: Newsletter items due; UMW Final meeting, 1:30 p.m.; Bible Study with Ashley, 6:30 p.m.



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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Congratulations to Jackson Dinger (Left) & Andrew Marzahn (Right) of Groton Area High School, who have been named Commended Students in the 2023 National Merit Scholarship Program. These two placed in the top 50,000 students across the U.S. who entered the 2023 competition by taking the 2021 preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT). (Courtesy Photo)

Netters beat Langford Area in four sets

Groton Area's netters defeated Langford Area Monday night in Groton, 3-1. Game scores were 25-15, 25-13, 25-27 and 25-14.

Anna Fjeldheim led the Tigers with 16 kills and three ace serves, Sydney Leicht had eight kills and one ace, Jerica Locke six ace serves and one kill, Aspen Johnson seven kills and one block, Hollie Frost had four kills and four blocks, Elizabeth Flihs four kills and two ace serves, Carly Guthmiller had three ace serves, Lydia Meier five kills, Jaedyn Penning four kills, Laila Roberts a kill and an ace serve and Emma Kutter one kill.

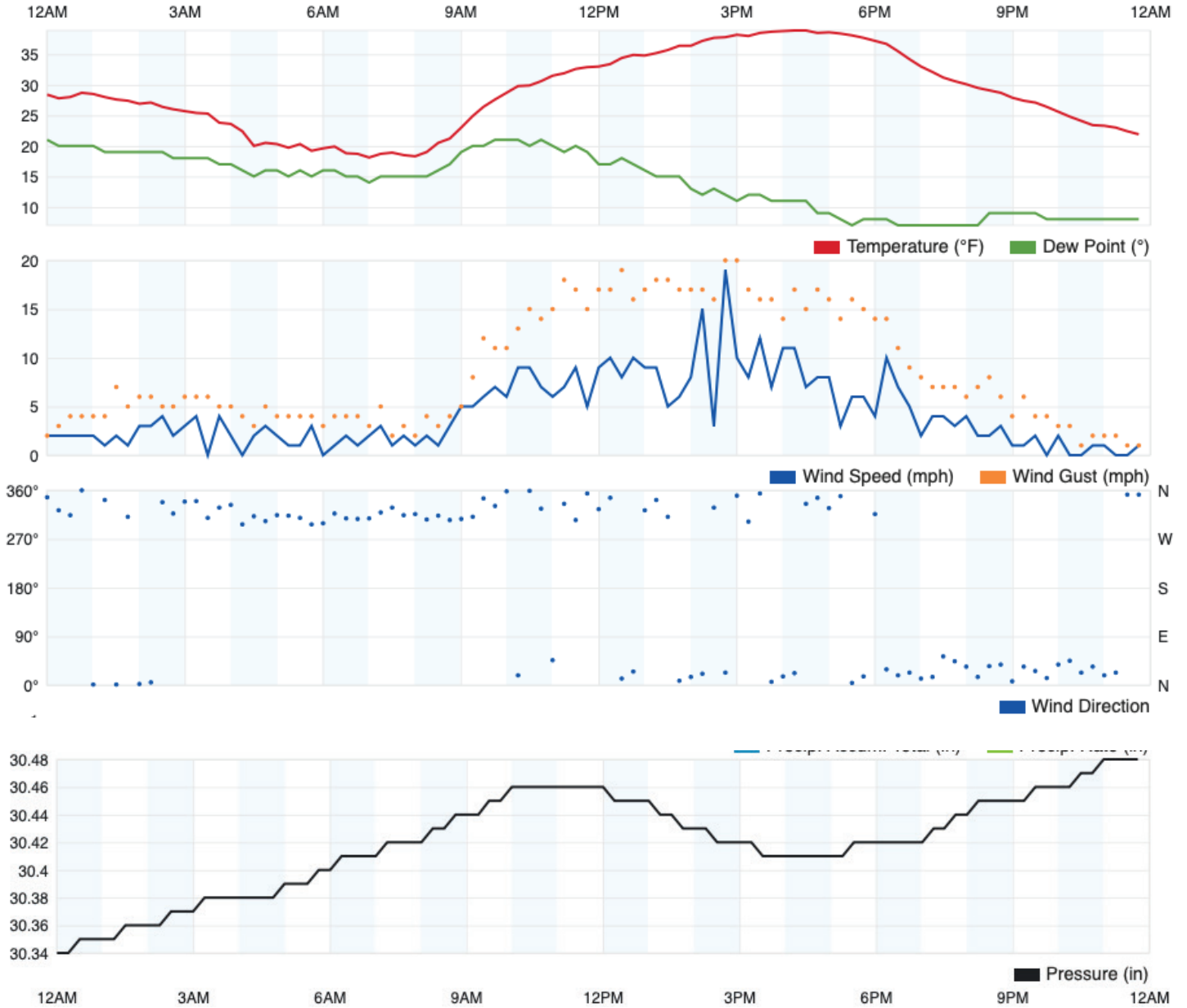
Megan Gustafson led the Lions with nine kills, three ace serves and a block, Montana Marlow had four kills and four ace serves, Eliana Darling three kills and an ace, Tawnee Nelson and Bryanna Peterson each had two kills and Avery West, Cassidy Nelson and Cali Vander Vorst each had one kill.

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 25-13 and 25-17.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 42 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 15 °F

Wednesday



Decreasing
Clouds

High: 64 °F

Wednesday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 32 °F

Thursday



Mostly Sunny

High: 65 °F



Today:

Mostly clear and dry.
Coldest across the east.

Highs: 38 to 50°

Tonight:

Increasing clouds.

Lows: 14 to 27°

Wednesday:

Warming trend begins.
Warmest west river.
Partly cloudy. Breezy by
afternoon.

Highs: 56 to 71°

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

High pressure will keep the region cold and dry again today. The dry conditions will persist through the end of the week, but a warming trend will begin on Wednesday and continue through the weekend.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 38.9 °F at 4:30 PM

Low Temp: 18.1 °F at 7:00 AM

Wind: 20 mph at 3:00 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 51 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1910

Record Low: 12 in 1930

Average High: 58°F

Average Low: 32°F

Average Precip in Oct.: 1.37

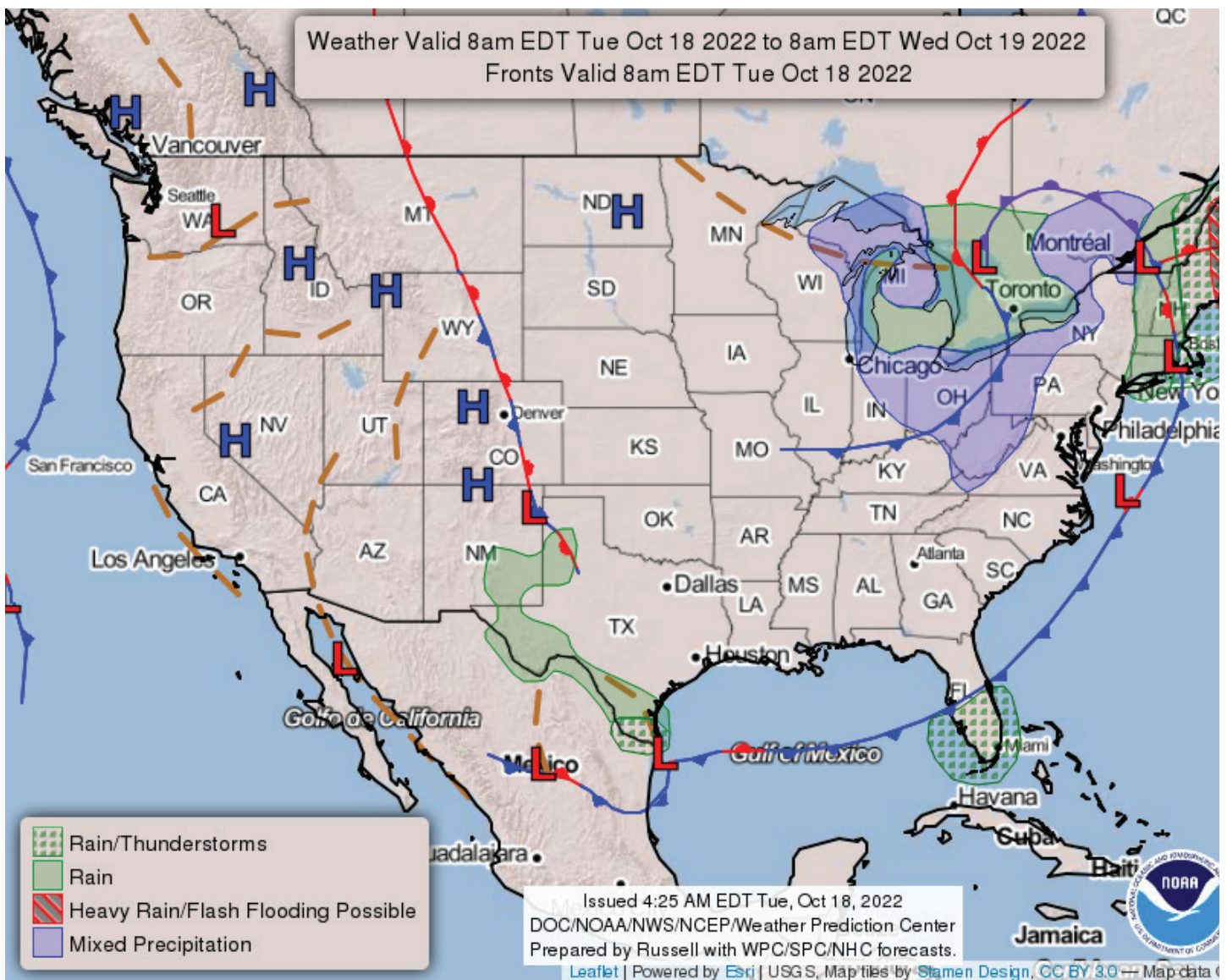
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.45

Average Precip to date: 19.70

Precip Year to Date: 16.50

Sunset Tonight: 6:43:29 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:52:50 AM



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Today in Weather History

October 18, 2012: An area of low pressure rapidly intensified once it moved east of the northern plains. This strengthening resulted in very strong northwest winds across the region. Some of the higher reported wind gusts include 77 mph at the Fort Pierre and Grand River RAWS sites, 74 mph at the Pierre airport, and 70 mph at Murdo, Presho, and Hayes public observation sites.

1906 - A hurricane struck South Florida drowning 124 persons stranded in the Florida Keys. (David Ludlum)

1910 - Northeasterly winds as high as 70 mph (from a hurricane moving northward up the Florida peninsula) carried water out of Tampa Bay and the Hillsboro River. The water level lowered to nine feet below mean low water. Forty ships were grounded. (The Weather Channel)

1916: A tropical depression organized to a tropical storm on October 11 in the western Caribbean. It moved westward, reaching hurricane strength on the 13th before hitting the Yucatán Peninsula on the 15th as a 110 mph hurricane. It weakened over land, and it emerged over the southern Gulf of Mexico as a tropical storm. It quickly re-strengthened to a Category 3 hurricane, hitting Pensacola on October 18. The maximum wind velocity at Mobile was 115 mph from the east at 8:25 am. Pensacola had winds of 120 mph at 10:13 am when the wind instrument tower was blown down.

1930 - A big early season lake effect snowburst on the lee shores of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario produced 47 inches at Gouverneur NY and 48 inches just south of Buffalo. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Thunderstorms in northeastern Texas produced golf ball size hail at Atlanta, along with wind gusts to 86 mph, and four inches of rain. Damage from the storm was estimated at more than a million dollars. Sunny and mild weather continued across much of the rest of the nation. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Eight cities in the southwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Red Bluff CA with a reading of 96 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Unseasonably cold air began to invade the central and eastern U.S. Light snow fell across northern Maine, and snow was also reported in the Great Lakes Region, including the Chicago area. Bismarck ND was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 9 degrees above zero. Five cities in Florida reported record high readings for the date, as temperatures warmed above 80 degrees. Miami FL reported a record high of 90 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

2005 - With the formation of Hurricane Wilma, the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season tied the record for the most named storms for any season (21 storms in 1933), and also tied the record for the most hurricanes in a single season (12 in 1969). Wilma peaked at category-5 intensity on the 19th, with a minimum central pressure falling to 882 millibars (26.05 inches of mercury), the lowest pressure ever recorded in the Atlantic Basin. Wilma also became the most rapidly-intensifying storm on record, with a maximum-sustained surface wind speed increase of 105 mph in a 24-hour period.

2005: Hurricane Wilma developed a tiny, well-defined eye and began intensifying rapidly, reaching Category 5 strength with a record-setting pressure of 882 millibars by October 19. The rapid intensification from a tropical storm to Category 5 hurricane in 24 hours was the fastest ever recorded in the Atlantic Ocean, and the second-fastest worldwide, after Super Typhoon Forrest.

2007: A destructive fall tornado hit Nappanee, Indiana causing extensive damage along its 20-mile path across northeast Marshall, Northwest Kosciusko and southwest Elkhart Counties. High-end EF3 intensity winds near 165 mph were estimated based on the most severe damage over southeast Nappanee. Over 100 structures sustained significant damage or were destroyed in town alone. Despite the widespread damage and time of day, only minor injuries were reported.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Have you ever asked someone to do something for you, and they either did it poorly or "forgot." Maybe they said, "That's on the top of my list. I can't believe I haven't done it yet. Please forgive me," or "I wish you'd have reminded me sooner. You know I want to help you!" Perhaps they were waiting for you to do something for them first.

Had there been something very special or unique in "it" for them for doing the task, it probably would have been done. Most individuals want to receive some type of recognition or reward for helping others. It's usually a "what's in it for me" attitude that paralyzes many from being helpful. When our requests for assistance are for the ordinary, everyday, boring things of life that have little glamour or glory, they are easily set aside for the more important things that bring rewards or recognition. Few willingly become involved with the problems of others when the rewards are small or insignificant.

Everyone needs attention and recognition. It's part of how God made us. However, we must always be conscious of one important fact: Whatever we do must ultimately be done to glorify God. If we do the right "thing" for the wrong reason - to bring recognition to ourselves - we cannot expect God to bless it or us. In fact, we should not expect His blessings at all.

"All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord," wrote Solomon. We rarely stop and think about being accountable to God for every "thing" we do, but we are. God knows our "motives" and "weighs" them in light of His Word. Our motives matter!

Prayer: We ask, Father, to be alert to all that we say or do. May our motives come from our heart that has You and Your Word at its center and will honor You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord. Proverbs 16:2



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

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2022-23 Community Events

- 07/21/2022: Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/22/2022: Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
07/24/2022: Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
07/27/2022: Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm
08/05/2022: Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
08/12/2022: GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
No Date Set: Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot
09/10/2022: Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
09/11/2022: 6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3-5pm
09/11/2022: Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10 a.m.
09/02-04: Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/01/2022: Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/07/2022: Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
10/31/2022: Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2022: United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/13/2022: Snow Queen Contest
11/19/2022: Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course
12/10/2022: Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm
01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
07/04/2023 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start (4th of July)
07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Monday:

Lotto America

19-20-24-30-39, Star Ball: 7, ASB: 2

(nineteen, twenty, twenty-four, thirty, thirty-nine; Star Ball: seven; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$27,080,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 20,000,000

Powerball

19-30-36-46-60, Powerball: 25, Power Play: 3

(nineteen, thirty, thirty-six, forty-six, sixty; Powerball: twenty-five; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$508,000,000

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Ethan def. Avon, 25-16, 25-14, 25-13

Faulkton def. Aberdeen Roncalli, 22-25, 25-21, 25-20, 25-15

Highmore-Harrold def. Crow Creek, 25-5, 25-13, 25-20

Kimball/White Lake def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-6, 25-16, 25-12

Lennox def. Tri-Valley, 28-26, 25-23, 23-25, 25-14

Leola/Frederick def. Ipswich, 3-1

Miller def. Wolsey-Wessington, 26-24, 25-20, 25-21

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. Bon Homme, 25-12, 25-16, 25-17

Platte-Geddes def. Tripp-Delmont/Armour, 25-17, 25-22, 24-26, 25-16

Scotland def. Hanson, 11-25, 18-25, 25-16, 25-12, 15-9

Sioux Falls Lutheran def. Bridgewater-Emery, 25-20, 25-12, 25-19

Timber Lake def. Potter County, 17-25, 25-17, 26-24, 25-20

Viborg-Hurley def. Freeman, 21-25, 25-18, 25-19, 23-25, 15-12

Warner def. North Central Co-Op, 25-12, 25-10, 25-3

Webster def. Aberdeen Christian, 25-14, 25-12, 25-16

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

These Democrats flipped House in 2018. 2022 will be harder.

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Moments after she flipped a longtime Republican congressional seat in 2018, Iowa Democrat Cindy Axne declared that "Washington doesn't have our back and we deserve a heck of a lot better."

Now seeking a third term in one of the most competitive House races, Axne is sounding a similar tone, telling voters she's delivered for Iowans "while Washington politicians bicker."

But Axne and other Democrats from the class of 2018 are campaigning in a much different political environment this year. The anxiety over Donald Trump's presidency that their party harnessed to flip more than 40 seats and regain the House majority has eased. In its place is frustration about the economy

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under President Joe Biden.

And many districts that were once competitive have been redrawn by Republican-dominated state legislatures to become more friendly to the GOP.

"It was a very different world," pollster John Zogby said of 2018. "Inflation's now where we haven't seen in 40 years and it affects everybody. And this is the party in power. With campaigns, you don't get to say, 'But it could have been' or 'But look at what the other guy did.'"

Many swing-district Democrats elected four years ago were buoyed by college-educated, suburban voters, women and young people shunning Trump. That means many defeats for second-term House Democrats could be read as opposition to Trump no longer motivating voters in the same way — even though the former president could seek the White House again in 2024.

Trump continues to shape politics in a far more present sense, too. He's dominated the national Republican Party despite spreading lies about 2020's free and fair presidential election and now facing a House subpoena for helping incite the mob that attacked the U.S. Capitol last year.

Tom Perez, who headed the Democratic National Committee from 2017 until 2021, noted that midterm cycles are historically tough for the president's party and that — plus grim U.S. economic news — would normally raise the question "are Democrats going to get shellacked?"

Instead, Perez thinks many of the toughest congressional races remain close because of the strength of Democrats elected four years ago.

"All these folks from the Class of '18, what they have in common is they're really incredibly competent, accomplished and they've earned the trust of voters in their districts across the ideological spectrum," said Perez, co-chair of the super PAC American Bridge 21st Century. "That, to me, is why we have a chance here, not withstanding the headwinds of the moment, is that incredible combination of candidate quality contrasted with the extreme views of the people who are running against them."

In all, 66 new Democrats won House races in 2018, flipping 41 Republican seats. Their party gave back many of those gains in 2020, with Republicans taking 14 new seats. Those GOP victories included defeating a dozen Democrats elected to the House for the first time the previous cycle.

The Democratic House losses were overshadowed by Biden beating Trump. But this time, the ranks of the 2018 Democratic House class further dwindling may draw more attention — especially if it helps the GOP gain the net five seats it needs to reclaim the chamber's majority.

In addition to Axne, Democrats who may be vulnerable include Reps. Elissa Slotkin of Michigan, Tom Malinowski of New Jersey and Elaine Luria of Virginia. Another Virginia Democrat, Rep. Abigail Spanberger, as well as Reps. Jared Golden of Maine, Angie Craig of Minnesota and Sharice Davids of Kansas all also may face tough reelections.

"The question is, is it going to have similarities to '18 or not in the sense of democracy being on the ballot and a reaction to Trump," former California Democratic Rep. Harley Rouda, who was elected in 2018 but narrowly lost his reelection bid, said of next month's election. "Based on polling and the primaries, it doesn't seem like the voting public is holding Republicans responsible for the Big Lie."

Perez is more sanguine: "The midterm election is supposed to be a referendum on the president, but Donald Trump continues to inject himself" into the nation's politics.

House turnover is common among both parties. By early 2018, almost half of the 87 House Republicans newly elected when their party took control of the chamber during the 2010 tea party surge were gone. More lost that November.

Still, the 2018 class was notable as the largest influx of first-year House Democrats in four-plus decades, and the chamber's youngest and most diverse ever.

Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, said 2018 was also the largest class of new women elected to the House since 1992, with 35 Democrats and one Republican. But 2020 also saw 28 new women elected to Congress, and some were Republicans who defeated Democrats who'd won for the first time the last cycle.

"We had a couple of very strong years in a row, one for Democrats and one for Republicans," Walsh said of women in the House. She said that means that even if the 2018 House Democratic class gets smaller this

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year, "I would not look at one election cycle and say the face of Congress is going back to old, white men." Republicans, meanwhile, have 32 Hispanic nominees and 23 Black nominees running for the House this cycle — both party records. They say their chances of winning the chamber's majority are built more on high inflation and crime rates rising in some places than Trump or last year's insurrection.

"We have a choice between commonsense and crazy," Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said in a statement. "And Americans will vote for Republicans up and down the ballot as a result."

The Democrats' 2018 House class won't dissolve completely. Some incumbents are seeking reelection in safely blue districts, including Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Lucy McBath of Georgia and Colin Allred of Texas, who was the class' co-president.

Democratic Michigan Rep. Haley Stevens, the other co-president, beat fellow 2018 Democratic House class member Andy Levin when the two incumbents squared off in this year's Democratic primary based on their state's new map.

One Democratic 2018 House class member ousted in 2020, former New York Rep. Max Rose, is now running to get back to Congress. Another member, New Jersey Rep. Jeff Van Drew, has since become a Republican.

Former Virginia Rep. Denver Riggleman was a Republican elected in 2018 but lost his 2020 GOP primary. Riggleman is now appearing in a TV ad praising Spanberger.

"She's trying to change Congress and make it work," Riggleman says in the ad. "She puts country first."

Climate Questions: Who is most vulnerable to climate change?

BY DREW COSTLEY AP Science Writer

Most of the world's population has been affected in some way by climate change — 85% of the world, in fact. But the effects of climate change haven't been equally felt by all. Some communities have seen a slight rise in temperature here and there, but others have had their entire communities wiped out.

As the rise of global temperatures and sea-level continues to affect the world with increasingly frequency and intensity, who are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change?

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of an ongoing series answering some of the most fundamental questions around climate change, the science behind it, the effects of a warming planet and how the world is addressing it.

The answer is clear, according to climate scientists, climate and environmental justice experts and international research efforts on the question. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found in a 2022 report that vulnerability to climate change is "exacerbated by inequity and marginalization linked to gender, ethnicity, low income or combinations thereof."

"(The) poor, ethnic minorities, and women are very clearly the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change that we are already seeing today: heat waves; displacement and smoke due to fires; and price shocks due to supply chain interruptions, higher energy prices," Daniel Kammen, a professor of energy at the University of California, Berkeley and a coordinating lead author on IPCC reports, told The Associated Press.

These populations are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change because of racism, sexism and pursuit of profits over protection of people, according to Bineshi Albert, co-executive director of the Climate Justice Alliance.

"Due to the continued search for profits by our current economic system and (by) the fossil fuel industry in particular, there are entire neighborhoods that are deemed worthy of becoming sacrifice zones, and this breaks down every time around race, class, and national lines," she said.

Research also shows that disabled people are more vulnerable to effects of climate change than abled bodied people.

The increased vulnerability to climate change experienced by these populations and who is to blame for

causing these inequities have become increasing topics of conversation at the international level. Debate about loss and damage — the climate harm caused by some nations to others, how much and what should be done about it — has waged on since at least COP23.

A study published in July 2022 found that richer nations like the U.S. caused climate harm to poorer countries.

In terms of repairing damage already caused to vulnerable populations and countries and helping them become less vulnerable, experts told the AP that it starts with including them in developing policies.

"A natural start is to develop policies to target these underserved communities with enhanced attention and support," Kammen said.

Albert said it should go a step further with direct economic investments in communities most vulnerable to climate change.

"Economic resources should go directly to those on the frontlines of the climate crisis to develop and implement their own community-led solutions," she said. "Communities rather than profits must be the motive if we are truly going to solve the climate crisis."

Missiles, exploding drones again hit Ukraine's power, water

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Airstrikes cut power and water supplies to hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians on Tuesday, part of what the country's president called an expanding Russian campaign to drive the nation into the cold and dark and make peace talks impossible.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said nearly one-third of Ukraine's power stations have been destroyed in the past week, "causing massive blackouts across the country."

"No space left for negotiations with Putin's regime," he tweeted.

Depriving people of water, electricity and heating as winter begins to bite and the broadening use of so-called suicide drones that nosedive into targets have opened a new phase in Russian President Vladimir Putin's war. The aerial bombardments appear aimed at wearing down the notable resilience Ukrainians have shown in the nearly eight months since Russia invaded.

Even far from front lines, basic utilities are no longer certainties, with daily strikes reaching far into the country and damaging key facilities, sometimes faster than they can be repaired.

The latest city to lose power and water entirely was Zhytomyr, home to military bases, industries, leafy boulevards and about 250,000 people, some 140 kilometers (85 miles) west of Kyiv.

The city's hospitals switched to backup power after the double missile strike Tuesday on an energy facility, and other settlements in the area also lost electricity, city and regional officials said.

In Kyiv, the capital, missile strikes damaged two power facilities and killed two people, city authorities said. The attack left 50,000 people without power, the facilities' operator said.

Missiles also severely damaged an energy facility in the south-central city of Dnipro.

Russia is also mixing up its modes of attack.

Suicide drones set ablaze an infrastructure facility in the partly Russian-occupied southern Zaporizhzhia region, the regional governor said.

Air-defense S-300 missiles, which Russia has been repurposing as ground-attack weapons as its stocks are being depleted, were used to strike the southern city of Mykolaiv. The body of a man was found in the debris of a building, the region's governor said.

In the eastern city of Kharkiv, eight rockets fired from across the nearby border with Russia hit an industrial area, the regional governor said.

Waves of the explosives-laden suicide drones also struck Kyiv on Monday, hitting energy facilities and setting ablaze and partly collapsing buildings. One drone slammed into a residential building, killing four people.

Ukraine says Russia is getting thousands of drones from Iran. The Iranian-made Shahed drones that hit targets in Kyiv have also been widely used elsewhere in recent weeks.

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An Associated Press photographer caught one of the Iranian drones on camera Monday, its triangle-shaped wing and pointed warhead clearly visible, though the Kremlin refused to confirm their use.

In the past week alone, more than 100 self-destructing Iranian-made drones have slammed into power plants, sewage treatment plants, residential buildings, bridges and other targets in urban areas, Ukraine's Foreign Ministry said.

In a televised address on Monday night, Zelenskyy said Russia is using the drones because it is losing ground in the war.

"Russia doesn't have any chance on the battlefield, and it tries to compensate for its military defeats with terror," he said. "Why this terror? To put pressure on us, on Europe, on the entire world."

In other developments:

— Ukraine's nuclear energy operator said Russian forces have detained two more senior employees at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Energoatom said their whereabouts are unknown. Also unknown are the whereabouts of another executive who was detained earlier in October.

— In Russia, the death toll from the crash Monday of a Russian warplane climbed to at least 13. The Su-34 bomber came down in the port city of Yeysk after one of its engines caught fire during takeoff for a training mission, the Russian Defense Ministry said. It said both crew members bailed out safely, but the plane crashed into a residential area, causing tons of fuel to explode on impact.

Worry grows for Iran woman athlete who climbed without hijab

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — An Iranian female competitive climber left South Korea on Tuesday after competing at an event in which she climbed without her nation's mandatory headscarf covering, authorities said. Farsi-language media outside of Iran warned she may have been forced to leave early by Iranian officials and could face arrest back home, which Tehran quickly denied.

The decision by Elnaz Rekabi, a multiple medalist in competitions, to forgo the headscarf, or hijab, came as protests sparked by the Sept. 16 death in custody of a 22-year-old woman have entered a fifth week. Mahsa Amini was detained by the country's morality police over her clothing.

The demonstrations, drawing school-age children, oil workers and others to the street in over 100 cities, represent the most-serious challenge to Iran's theocracy since the mass protests surrounding its disputed 2009 presidential election.

A later Instagram post on an account attributed to Rekabi described her not wearing a hijab as "unintentional," though it wasn't immediately clear whether she wrote the post or what condition she was in at the time. The Iranian government routinely pressures activists at home and abroad, often airing what rights group describe as coerced confessions on state television.

Rekabi left Seoul on a Tuesday morning flight, the Iranian Embassy in South Korea said. The BBC's Persian service, which has extensive contacts within Iran despite being banned from operating there, quoted an unnamed "informed source" who described Iranian officials as seizing both Rekabi's mobile phone and passport.

BBC Persian also said she initially had been scheduled to return on Wednesday, but her flight apparently had been moved up unexpectedly.

IranWire, another website focusing on the country founded by Iranian-Canadian journalist Maziar Bahari who once was detained by Iran, alleged that Rekabi would be immediately transferred to Tehran's notorious Evin Prison after arriving in the country. Evin Prison was the site of a massive fire this weekend that killed at least eight prisoners.

In a tweet, the Iranian Embassy in Seoul denied "all the fake, false news and disinformation" regarding Rekabi's departure on Tuesday. But instead of posting a photo of her from the Seoul competition, it posted an image of her wearing a headscarf at a previous competition in Moscow, where she took a bronze medal.

Calls to the Iranian Embassy in Seoul rang unanswered Tuesday.

Rekabi didn't put on a hijab during Sunday's final at the International Federation of Sport Climbing's Asia

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Championship, according to the Seoul-based Korea Alpine Federation, the organizers of the event.

Federation officials said Rekabi wore a hijab during her initial appearances at the one-week climbing event. She wore just a black headband when competing Sunday, her dark hair pulled back in a ponytail; she had a white jersey with Iran's flag as a logo on it.

The later Instagram post, written in the first person, offered an apology on Rekabi's behalf. The post blamed a sudden call for her to climb the wall in the competition — although footage of the competition showed Rekabi relaxed as she approached and after she competed. It also sought to describe her travel back to Iran on Tuesday as being "on schedule."

Rekabi was on Iran's 11-member delegation, comprised of eight athletes and three coaches, to the event, according to the federation.

Federation officials said they were not initially aware of Rekabi competing without the hijab but looked into the case after receiving inquiries about her. They said the event doesn't have any rules on requiring female athletes wearing or not wearing headscarves. However, Iranian women competing abroad under the Iranian flag always wear the hijab.

"Our understanding is that she is returning to Iran, and we will continue to monitor the situation as it develops on her arrival," the International Federation of Sport Climbing, which oversaw the event, said in a statement. "It is important to stress that athletes' safety is paramount for us and we support any efforts to keep a valued member of our community safe in this situation."

The federation said it had been in touch with both Rekabi and Iranian officials, but declined to elaborate on the substance of those calls when reached by The Associated Press. The federation also declined to discuss the Instagram post attributed to Rekabi and the claims in it.

Later Tuesday, South Korea's Foreign Ministry acknowledged that the Iranian athlete and her team had left the country, without elaborating.

Rekabi, 33, has finished on the podium three times in the Asian Championships, taking one silver and two bronze medals for her efforts.

So far, human rights groups estimate that over 200 people have been killed in the protests and the violent security force crackdown that followed. Iran has not offered a death toll in weeks. Demonstrations have been seen in over 100 cities, according to the group Human Rights Activists in Iran. Thousands are believed to have been arrested.

Gathering information about the demonstrations remains difficult, however. Internet access has been disrupted for weeks by the Iranian government. Meanwhile, authorities have detained at least 40 journalists, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Iranian officials, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has repeatedly alleged the country's foreign enemies are behind the ongoing demonstrations, rather than Iranians angered by Amini's death and the country's other woes.

Iranians have seen their life savings evaporate; the country's currency, the rial, plummeted and Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers has been reduced to tatters.

In a statement Tuesday, the office of the United Nations high commissioner for human rights called for the immediate release of all those "arbitrarily detained" in the protests. It also criticized the "unabated violent response by security forces" that has seen even children reportedly arrested and killed.

"The continued unnecessary and disproportionate use of force against protesters must stop," the statement said. "Arresting people solely for exercising their rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression constitutes an arbitrary deprivation of liberty."

Liz Truss' waning power brings political plots, and jokes

By JILL LAWLESS and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Powerless, humiliated, labeled a "ghost" prime minister and compared unfavorably to a head of lettuce — this is not a good week for Liz Truss.

Britain's prime minister was scrambling to recover her grasp on power Tuesday after her economic plans

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were ripped up and repudiated by a Treasury chief whom she was forced to appoint to avoid meltdown on the financial markets.

Truss remains in office, for now, largely because her Conservative Party is divided over how to replace her.

In a bid at business as usual, Truss held a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday and met lawmakers from rival Conservative factions, arguing that keeping her in post can provide stability, even though she has had to ditch almost the entire prospectus on which she was elected party leader just six weeks ago.

Chastened but defiant, Truss acknowledged Monday that "mistakes were made" — but insisted she would lead the Conservatives into the next national election.

Few believe that. Britain's lively, partisan press is unusually united in the opinion that Truss is doomed. The Conservative-backing tabloid *The Sun* called her "a ghost PM" and said "for the sake of the country, we cannot go on like this." The left-leaning *Guardian* compared the Conservatives to a mutinous ship's crew, saying "Truss has not left her party. But it appears to have left her."

After *The Economist* said Truss' time in control of the government — before the Sept. 23 "mini-budget" that set the markets aflame — was "roughly the shelf-life of a lettuce," the tabloid *Daily Star* set up a livestream featuring a photo of the prime minister beside a head of iceberg, adorned with a blond wig, eyes and a mouth. It asks "Can Liz Truss outlast this lettuce?" — which, five days in, is gradually turning brown.

Truss initially tried to stay the course after her government's package of 45 billion pounds (\$50 billion) in unfunded tax cuts spooked the markets, pushing up government borrowing costs, raising home mortgage costs and sending the pound plummeting to an all-time low against the dollar. The Bank of England was forced to intervene to protect pension funds, which were squeezed by volatility in the bond market.

Under intense political and economic pressure, Truss last week fired her ally Kwasi Kwarteng as Treasury chief, replacing him with the Cabinet veteran Jeremy Hunt, who had been sidelined since 2019.

On Monday Hunt scrapped almost all of Truss' tax cuts, along with her flagship energy policy and her promise that there will be no public spending cuts, saying there were "many difficult decisions" still to come.

The market for British government bonds and the pound weakened Tuesday as relief over the government's decision to ditch the unfunded tax cuts was tempered by the recognition that the new policies are likely to mean slower economic growth.

The pound fell 0.75% against the U.S. dollar to \$1.1273 in late morning trading in London, after jumping as much as 1.2% on Monday. Yields on 10-year government bonds rose to 4.081% after dropping to 3.973% on Monday. Bond yields, which represent the return investors receive on their money, tend to rise as a borrower's creditworthiness decreases and decline when it improves.

"While one could argue that yesterday's measures have stabilized the public finances in the short term and pulled the U.K. back into the pack as far as market perceptions of fiscal responsibility is concerned, one must question at what price to the economy next year," said Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK.

With opinion polls giving the opposition Labour Party a large and growing lead, many Conservatives now believe their only hope of avoiding electoral oblivion is to replace Truss.

Under Conservative Party rules, Truss is safe from a leadership challenge for a year, but those rules can be changed if enough lawmakers want it. Some Conservative legislators also believe Truss can be forced to resign if the party can agree on a successor. But the many divisions in the party — whose factions range from hard-right Brexiteers to centrist "One Nation" Conservatives — makes that a challenge.

Truss' defeated leadership rival Rishi Sunak, House of Commons leader Penny Mordaunt and popular Defense Secretary Ben Wallace all have supporters, as does Hunt, who many see as the de facto prime minister already. Some even want the return of Boris Johnson, who was ousted in the summer after becoming enmeshed in ethics scandals.

A national election does not have to be held until 2024, and a few Conservatives say Truss should be given a second chance. But lawmaker Charles Walker said that if Truss led the party into the next election, "I think we'll be out (of power) for 15 years."

The chaos is unprecedented even for a country that has experienced plenty of political turbulence in

recent years. Since the shock 2016 referendum vote to leave the European Union, Britain has seen years of bitter wrangling with the EU, two general elections and three prime ministers.

"British politics and economics is convulsed from time to time, as many countries are," said Tony Travers, visiting professor in the Department of Government at the London School of Economics. "But the two coming together — where a political crisis effectively causes an economic one, which then the government has to try to bail itself out from — I think it's pretty well without parallel."

EU faces battle to keep energy prices from tanking economy

By RAF CASERT and SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union leaders enter a crucial stretch this week to make sure runaway energy prices and short supplies do not further tank their struggling economies and foment unrest. At the same time, they need to keep all 27 members united in their opposition to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Leading up to Thursday's start of a key summit, the EU's executive Commission is presenting a blueprint on Tuesday that needs to reconcile the yawning gap between those who want to impose a common gas price cap to keep prices down and those who think it would primarily keep out supplies, further starving industries and businesses.

Then, going into the weekend, EU leaders will seek a compromise during two days of talks, however hard that may be.

EU council president Charles Michel told the 27 leaders in his invitation letter that there were three lines of action: reducing demand, ensuring security of supply and containing prices.

"Europe is facing its week of truth," Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said. "This week it is hit or miss."

It did not take long for EU member countries to realize that the bloc's dependence on Russian energy was a huge political error. They figured it out almost as soon as Putin invaded neighboring Ukraine on Feb. 24. And amid sanctions imposed on Russia's energy sector, the wealthy bloc of 450 million has since been struggling to find ways to keep freezing temperatures from entering the homes of the poorest and businesses from going down for lack of affordable energy.

With nationalists and right-wing populists complaining ever more about the EU's common approach, the ability to find a joint exit strategy from the crisis could have a direct impact on the bloc's future.

"The coming winter could freeze and shatter European sentiment — the shared sense of belonging, mutual trust among European countries, and citizens' emotional attachment to the idea of Europe," said Pawel Zerka of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

Even De Croo, leader of one of the most EU-embracing nations, knows there is no more time to waffle. "The time for excuses has gone. If the EU still wants to be meaningful, contain energy prices and better protect families and businesses in this energy war, it finally has to deliver," he said.

De Croo has been pushing hard in recent weeks to cap the cost of all gas imports to the EU, with other countries like Poland and Greece also increasing the pressure on the EU Commission.

The bloc's executive arm was set to come forward with a plan to deal with the shortages Tuesday. Not an easy task in the light of the fundamental differences between juggernaut Germany, which does not back a full gas price cap, and others who are convinced such a cap will not lead to a decline of offer on the market.

The Commission is expected to come forward with a compromise that would allow for a temporary correction mechanism to kick in in exceptional circumstances and the creation of a new LNG gas index better reflecting the market following the drastic reduction of imports of pipeline gas from Russia.

If any prodding was needed, the International Energy Agency did it early this month by saying that "Europe's security of gas supply is facing unprecedented risk as Russia intensifies its use of natural gas supplies as a political weapon."

Even if hoarding of gas supplies has gone full thrust ahead and reliance on Russian provisions has dwindled to less than 10 percent, dangers still lurks.

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"The possibility of a complete cut-off in Russian gas deliveries cannot be dismissed ahead of the 2022/23 heating season — when the European gas system is at its most vulnerable," the IEA said.

And the energy crisis is ripping deep into the fabric of European society. The ETUC European trade union group said that wages adjusted for inflation have fallen in every EU member state this year by as much as 9%. Meanwhile, corporate profits continued to rise, sometimes by as much as 6.5 percent in Romania, it said.

"People are missing meals, having to scrap the leisure activities. And families have to choose between filling up their cars or turning on the heating," said Manon Aubry, an EU lawmaker from the Left group.

Against such a background of potential social foment, the EU leaders are in line to agree on a system to pool buying of gas to make sure member states stop bidding against one another to boost reserves and push up energy prices overall.

To counter the threat of business failures and industrial decline, EU nations have independently started subsidizing threatened sectors, at the risk of skewing the market. If a wealthy member state can throw billions of euros at an industry while a poorer one has to scrape by and look on jealously, the concept of the EU's common market is under threat.

This is why Germany's 200 billion-euro plan to subsidize its industry to get through the next two winters has come under criticism by many. But then again, keeping Germany's wheels of industry going, could also benefit all. "Usually what is good for Germany is good for us," De Croo said.

Winter is coming: Ukrainians dig in for brutal season ahead

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

KIVSHARIVKA, Ukraine (AP) — Nine-year-old Artem Panchenko helps his grandmother stoke a smoky fire in a makeshift outdoor kitchen beside their nearly abandoned apartment block. The light is falling fast and they need to eat before the setting sun plunges their home into cold and darkness.

Winter is coming. They can feel it in their bones as temperatures drop below freezing. And like tens of thousands of other Ukrainians, they are facing a season that promises to be brutal.

Artem and his grandmother have been living without gas, water or electricity for around three weeks, ever since Russian missile strikes cut off the utilities in their town in Ukraine's eastern Kharkiv region. For them and the few other residents that remain in the complex in Kivsharivka, bundling up at night and cooking outdoors is the only way to survive.

"It's cold and there are bombings," Artem said Sunday as he helped his grandmother with the cooking. "It's really cold. I'm sleeping in my clothes in our apartment."

Adding to the foreboding about the coming winter, Russian strikes on Monday and Tuesday in Kyiv, the capital, and several other Ukrainian cities by drones and missiles targeted power plants. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a tweet Tuesday that over the past week Russian attacks have knocked out 30% of his country's power plants causing "massive blackouts across the country."

As the freeze sets in, those who haven't fled from the heavy fighting, regular shelling and months of Russian occupation in eastern Ukraine are desperately trying to figure out how to dig in for the cold months.

In the nearby village of Kurylivka, Viktor Palyanitsa pushes a wheelbarrow full of freshly cut logs along the road toward his house. He passes a destroyed tank, the remnants of damaged buildings and the site of a 300-year-old wooden church that was leveled as Ukrainian forces fought to liberate the area from Russian occupiers.

Palyanitsa, 37, said he's gathered enough wood to last the entire winter. Still, he planned to begin sleeping beside a wood-burning stove in a rickety outbuilding and not his home, since all the windows in his house have been blown out by flying shrapnel.

"It's not comfortable. We spend a lot of time on gathering wood. You can see the situation we're living in," Palyanitsa said, quietly understating the dire outlook for the next several months.

Authorities are working to gradually restore electricity to the area in the coming days, and repairs to

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water and gas infrastructure will come next, according to Roman Semenukha, a deputy with the Kharkiv regional government.

"Only after that will we be able to begin to restore heating," he said.

Authorities were working to provide firewood to residents, he added, but had no timeline for when the utilities would be restored.

Standing beside his pile of split wood, Palyanitsa was not waiting for government help. He said he didn't expect heating to be restored anytime soon, but that he feels ready to fend for himself even once winter sets in.

"I have arms and legs. So I'm not scared of the cold, because I can find wood and heat the stove," he said.

Authorities in the Ukrainian-controlled areas of the neighboring, hotly contested Donetsk region have urged all remaining residents to evacuate, and warned that gas and water services in many areas will likely not be restored by winter. Like in the Kharkiv region, ordinary Ukrainians are still living in thousands of homes that have been wrecked by Russian strikes, with leaky or damaged roofs and blown-out windows that are unable to provide protection against cold or wet weather.

The threat of a winter without heating has even spread to other areas of Ukraine far from the front lines.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, angered and embarrassed by a Ukrainian strike on a key bridge to annexed Crimea, has intensified Russia's bombing campaign, targeting civilian energy infrastructure around Ukraine and leaving many cities and towns without electricity. Monday's strikes hit Kyiv, Sumy in the northeast and Vinnytsia in western Ukraine.

In the center of Kurylivka, a group of men used a chainsaw to bring down a tree near a bus stop. As they worked, they warned an Associated Press reporter about the Russian land mines still hidden in the surrounding grass.

With so much of the area's towns destroyed and modern comforts all but disappeared, the drive for survival trumps any concerns about the preservation of what was before. With no utilities, homes have become like rudimentary shelters from a medieval age where residents live by candlelight, gather water from wells and bundle up to fend off the cold.

Artem's grandmother, Iryna Panchenko, said she and her grandson have been sleeping in an abandoned apartment next door since all their windows were blown out by a Russian strike.

"After the first explosion wave, we lost one window and two were damaged. After the second explosion, all the other windows were destroyed," she said. "It's very cold living here. It's hard to cook, it's hard to run between the apartment and where we cook. My legs hurt."

Makeshift lean-to structures dot the overgrown courtyards of their apartment complex where residents gather to cook over fires. One woman collected scraps of wood from a ground-floor apartment that was caved in by a Russian rocket strike. Another resident joked that his home had become a five-room apartment after one of its exterior walls collapsed.

Anton Sevrukov, 47, toasted bread and heated a kettle of water over a fire to bring up tea to his disabled mother.

"No electricity, no water, no gas. We are cold," he said. "I'm making tea for my mother on the fire but she only drinks a little bit to warm up for a short time."

In the darkness of his cramped, musty apartment, Sevrukov's mother sat under a blanket on a sofa piled with plates of spoiled food. Zoya Sevrukova said she'd been bedridden for seven years, and that she spends most of her time seated, playing solitaire with a worn pack of cards.

"It's really cold now. If it weren't for my son, I would freeze," she said.

Sevrukov said he'd asked a friend from Kharkiv, the regional capital, to buy him an electric heater — just in case the power is restored. It's almost too much to even think about the deprivation that could lie ahead.

"I hope we'll have electricity soon, so we can live through this winter somehow," he said.

Australia drops recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital

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By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia has reversed a previous government's recognition of west Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the foreign minister said Tuesday, prompting consternation from Israel.

The center-left Labor Party government agreed to again recognize Tel Aviv as the capital. The Cabinet also reaffirmed that Jerusalem's status must be resolved in peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, Foreign Minister Penny Wong said.

Australia remained committed to a two-party solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, and "we will not support an approach that undermines this prospect," Wong said.

Israel's Prime Minister Yair Lapid expressed disappointment in Australia's changed position.

"Jerusalem is the eternal undivided capital of Israel and nothing will change that," Lapid said in a statement.

Wong said her department made an error by updating its website on Australia's revised policy on Israel's capital before Cabinet had confirmed the change.

This led to conflicting media reports on Australia's position before Wong's announcement.

Lapid appeared to blame this media confusion for Australia changing its policy.

"In light of the way the decision was made in Australia, as a hasty response to a mistaken report in the media, one can only hope in other issues the government of Australia behaves more seriously and professionally," Lapid said.

Israel's Foreign Ministry said it will summon the Australian ambassador to express "deep disappointment" over a decision that was "based on short-sighted political considerations."

Senior Palestinian official Hussein Al-Sheikh said he welcomed Australia's decision "and its affirmation that the future of sovereignty over Jerusalem depends on the permanent solution based on international legitimacy."

Former conservative Prime Minister Scott Morrison formally recognized west Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December 2018, although the Australian Embassy remained in Tel Aviv.

The change followed then-U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. President Joe Biden has kept the embassy in Jerusalem as the U.S. steps back from its once-intense mediation between the Israelis and Palestinians, who have not held substantive peace talks in more than a decade.

Wong described Morrison's move as out of step internationally and a "cynical play" to win a byelection in a Sydney locale with a large Jewish population.

Morrison's Liberal Party ran Jewish candidate Dave Sharma who was defeated in the byelection but won the seat in the next general election.

Morrison's government was elected out of office in May after nine years in power.

Nasser Mashni, vice president of the human rights group Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, thanked the government for "differentiating itself from the dangerous political posturing of the previous government."

"This reversal brings Australia back into the international consensus — Australia must not pre-empt the final status of Jerusalem," Mashni said in a statement.

"Israel asserts that the entire city is exclusively theirs, denying Palestinian connection to their ancient spiritual, cultural and economic capital," Mashni added.

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry, which represents Australia's Jewish community, branded the reversal a "gratuitous insult to a key economic and strategic ally."

"This decision panders to the most extreme elements of the Labor Party and will also serve as a disincentive for the Palestinians to return to negotiations," the council said in a statement.

Morrison, who remains an opposition lawmaker, said the government's decision was disappointing.

The decision "represents a further diminution in Australia's support for the state of Israel by the Labor government from the high water mark established by the Morrison government," his office said in a statement.

But opposition leader Peter Dutton left the door open to the conservatives abandoning Morrison's policy.

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"We'll make an announcement about our policy in the run-up to the next election," Dutton told reporters. The next election is due in 2025 .

Opposition foreign affairs spokesperson Simon Birmingham described the change as a "completely unnecessary decision" that followed a "shambolic process."

In the 1967 Mideast war, Israel captured east Jerusalem, home to holy sites of three faiths, along with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinians seek east Jerusalem as the capital of a future state. The status of Jerusalem remains one of the thorniest issues in the decadeslong conflict and has precipitated numerous rounds of violence.

Only a handful of countries, including Kosovo and Guatemala, have joined the U.S. in recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

EXPLAINER: Why Germany is delaying its nuclear shutdown

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has ordered preparations for all of the country's three remaining nuclear reactors to continue operating until mid-April. The move marks another hiccup in the country's long-running plan to end the use of atomic energy. Here is a look at Germany's politically charged debate on nuclear power.

COLD WAR FISSION

West and East Germany began producing nuclear energy in the 1960s, when it was widely considered a safe and clean alternative to the heavily polluting coal the nation had long relied on for much of its power needs. Dozens of reactors of various types were built over the following decades. The newest plant began operation in 1989 — about a year before reunification.

PROTEST MOVEMENT

Concerns about the risks of nuclear power increased with the Three Mile Island incident in 1979 and the disaster at Chernobyl in 1986. Such fears boosted West Germany's environmental movement and the newly formed Green party that is now part of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's governing coalition.

FIRST SHUTDOWN PLAN

A center-left government of Social Democrats and Greens passed a law in 2002 that Germany would build no new nuclear power plants and shut down all existing reactors over the coming decades. The move was part of a broader effort to shift energy production in Germany — known as the Energiewende, or energy transition — away from fossil fuels toward renewable sources such as wind and solar.

SECOND THOUGHTS

A conservative government under Angela Merkel announced in 2010 that Germany would extend the lifetime of its nuclear plants, in part to ensure sufficient supply of cheap, low-carbon energy. Once built, nuclear plants produce significantly fewer greenhouse gas emissions than coal- or gas-fired facilities, while providing a constant amount of energy regardless of the weather that solar parks or wind farms can't always guarantee.

FUKUSHIMA U-TURN

The 2011 incident at Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant prompted a swift reversal, with Merkel declaring that Germany would in fact now accelerate its exit from nuclear power and shut down the last remaining plant by the end of 2022. The move had broad support among voters, but critics pointed out that Germany risked blackouts unless renewable energy was massively ramped up. To prevent this from happening, Germany planned to import natural gas — much of it from Russia — as a "bridge fuel" until sufficient solar and wind power was available. Efforts to find a long-term storage site for Germany's nuclear waste are also still ongoing because nobody wants it.

UKRAINE WAR FALLOUT

With gas flows from Russia sharply reduced due to tensions over the war in Ukraine and global energy prices surging, the German government has been scrambling to prevent an energy crisis this winter. Officials have argued that the three remaining nuclear plants provide only 6% of the country's electricity and

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the real shortage is likely to be in the heating sector, which is powered mainly by gas and coal. But with pressure mounting for Germany to keep its own citizens warm, industry running and to show solidarity to neighboring countries, the Greens-led Energy and Environment ministries agreed to extend the lifetime of two of the plants.

FISSION FRACAS

Fearing blackouts and high energy prices, the Free Democrats — also part of Scholz's government — have lately demanded that all three reactors keep running as long as needed. Experts have questioned whether this would help and the Greens voiced strong opposition. Mounting political pressure and the risk of a government blow-up prompted Scholz to step in Monday and call his junior coalition partners to order with the compromise of keeping the reactors running until April.

'Bad situation': Soaring US dollar spreads pain worldwide

By PAUL WISEMAN, KELVIN CHAN, SAMY MAGDY and AYSE WIETING Associated Press

The cost of living in Cairo has soared so much that security guard Mustafa Gamal had to send his wife and year-old daughter to live with his parents in a village 70 miles south of the Egyptian capital to save money.

Gamal, 28, stayed behind, working two jobs, sharing an apartment with other young people and eliminating meat from his diet. "The prices of everything have been doubled," he said. "There was no alternative."

Around the world, people are sharing Gamal's pain and frustration. An auto parts dealer in Nairobi, a seller of baby clothes in Istanbul and a wine importer in Manchester, England, have the same complaint: A surging U.S. dollar makes their local currencies weaker, contributing to skyrocketing prices for everyday goods and services. This is compounding financial distress at a time when families are already facing food and energy crunches tied to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"A strong dollar makes a bad situation worse in the rest of the world," says Eswar Prasad, a professor of trade policy at Cornell University. Many economists worry that the sharp rise of the dollar is increasing the likelihood of a global recession sometime next year.

The dollar is up 18% this year and last month hit a 20-year high, according to the benchmark ICE U.S. Dollar Index, which measures the dollar against a basket of key currencies.

The reasons for the dollar's rise are no mystery. To combat soaring U.S. inflation, the Federal Reserve has raised its benchmark short-term interest rate five times this year and is signaling more hikes are likely. That has led to higher rates on a wide range of U.S. government and corporate bonds, luring investors and driving up the U.S. currency.

Most other currencies are much weaker by comparison, especially in poor countries. The Indian rupee has dropped nearly 10% this year against the dollar, the Egyptian pound 20%, the Turkish lira an astounding 28%.

Celal Kaleli, 60, sells infant clothing and diaper bags in Istanbul. Because he needs more lira to buy imported zippers and liners priced in dollars, he has to raise prices for the Turkish customers who struggle to pay him in the much-diminished local currency.

"We're waiting for the new year," he said. "We'll look into our finances, and we'll downsize accordingly. There's nothing else we can do."

Rich countries aren't immune. In Europe, which was already teetering toward recession amid soaring energy prices, one euro is worth less than a \$1 for the first time in 20 years, and the British pound has plunged 18% from a year ago. The pound recently flirted with dollar parity after Britain's new prime minister, Liz Truss, announced huge tax cuts that roiled financial markets and led to the ouster of her Treasury secretary.

Ordinarily, countries could get some benefit from falling currencies because it makes their products cheaper and more competitive overseas. But at the moment, any gain from higher exports is muted because economic growth is sputtering almost everywhere.

A rising dollar is causing pain overseas in a number of ways:

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— It makes other countries' imports more expensive, adding to existing inflationary pressures.
— It squeezes companies, consumers and governments that borrowed in dollars. That's because more local currency is needed to convert into dollars when making loan payments.
— It forces central banks in other countries to raise interest rates to try and prop up their currencies and keep money from fleeing their borders. But those higher rates also weaken economic growth and drive up unemployment.

Put simply: "The dollar's appreciation is bad news for the global economy," says Capital Economics' Ariane Curtis. "It is another reason why we expect the global economy to fall into recession next year."

In a gritty neighborhood of Nairobi known for fixing cars and selling auto parts, businesses are struggling and customers unhappy. With the Kenyan shilling down 6% this year, the cost of fuel and imported spare parts is soaring so much that some people are choosing to ditch their cars and take public transportation.

"This has been the worst," said Michael Gachie, purchasing manager with Shamas Auto Parts. "Customers are complaining a lot."

Gyrating currencies have caused economic pain around the world many times before. During the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, for instance, Indonesian companies borrowed heavily in dollars during boom times — then were wiped out when the Indonesian rupiah crashed against the dollar. A few years earlier, a plunging peso delivered similar pain to Mexican businesses and consumers.

The soaring dollar in 2022 is uniquely painful, however. It is adding to global inflationary pressures at a time when prices were already soaring. Disruptions to energy and agriculture markets caused by the Ukraine war magnified supply constraints stemming from the COVID-19 recession and recovery.

In Manila, Raymond Manaog, 29, who drives the colorful Philippine mini-bus known as a jeepney, complains that inflation — and especially the rising price of diesel — is forcing him to work more to get by.

"What we have to do to earn enough for our daily expenses," he said. "If before we traveled our routes five times, now we do it six times."

In the Indian capital New Delhi, Ravindra Mehta has thrived for decades as a broker for American almond and pistachio exporters. But a record drop in the rupee — on top of higher raw material and shipping costs — has made the nuts much costlier for Indian consumers.

In August, India imported 400 containers of almonds, down from 1,250 containers a year earlier, Mehta said.

"If the consumer is not buying, it affects the entire supply chain, including people like me," he said.

Kingsland Drinks, one of the United Kingdom's biggest wine bottlers, was already getting squeezed by higher costs for shipping containers, bottles, caps and energy. Now, the rocketing dollar is driving up the price of the wine it buys from vineyards in the United States — and even from Chile and Argentina, which like many countries rely on the dollar for global trade.

Kingsland has offset some of its currency costs by taking out contracts to buy dollars at a fixed price. But at some point, "those hedges run out and you have to reflect the reality of a weaker sterling against the U.S. dollar," said Ed Baker, the company's managing director.

Translation: Soon customers will just have to pay more for their wine.

Small town in southern Mexico hosts thousands of migrants

By MARIA VERZA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — As migrants, especially Venezuelans, struggle to come to terms with a new U.S. policy discouraging border crossings, one small town in southern Mexico is unexpectedly playing host to thousands of migrants camped far from the U.S. border.

San Pedro Tapanatepec had 7,000 migrants, about 75% Venezuelans, when The Associated Press visited at the beginning of October. By Monday, Mayor Humberto Parrazales estimated the number had grown to 14,000. The AP could not independently verify that figure.

While many Venezuelans had planned to make their way to the U.S. border, the new U.S. policy says only those applying online, and arriving by air, will be admitted. Border crossers will simply be expelled.

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That leaves many camped out in five large tent shelters wondering what they'll do next.

They while away the daytime heat with just a few electric fans to keep the temperature down.

San Pedro Tapanatepec is obviously not where they wanted to wind up. The heat-drenched town in Oaxaca state is only about 180 miles (300 kilometers) from the border with Guatemala. Many of the migrants had thought they forever left Guatemala behind on the long trek that took many of them from the Darien Gap in Panama, through Central America, to Mexico.

Since August, the town has served as a way-station, where migrants would wait for a few days while Mexican immigration authorities issued them a sort of transit pass that gave them time to make it to the U.S. border.

But Parrazales said the flow of that paperwork has slowed down, leaving many more migrants waiting here in an impoverished town ill-equipped to play host to so many people.

"I don't understand anything," Venezuelan migrant Robinson Rodríguez said by phone from Tapanatepec. "If everything at the border is closed, then they shouldn't be handing out these (transit) passes. And if you ask (the authorities), they say they don't know, but they keep handing them out."

Time is not on the migrants' side. Rodríguez had actually received a seven-day transit document, which basically required to leave Mexico with a week. But he had to spend time raising the money to pay for transport to the northern border, and by the time he got it, his pass had expired.

Confusion reigns. Nicaraguan migrant Luis Martinica showed a leaflet containing the a web link for Venezuelans to apply, but it was confusing; if he, as a Nicaraguan, showed up at the U.S. border, would he too be expelled?

Mayor Parrazales has his own set of worries. The town's transformers can no longer handle the electricity needed for the camp, and there have been partial blackouts. Health care, sanitation and water are also a problem.

Still, migrants have to pay for most things, and Parrazales acknowledges the town has seen about \$15 million in extra business selling migrants food, places to sleep, medicine, taxi and bus rides. "They have to pay to charge cell phones," he notes.

Mexico has issued about 77,000 transit passes to Venezuelans so far this year, most of them in the last three months. Like Nicaraguans and Cubans, Venezuelans are hard to deport, both for Mexico and the United States.

Mexico's National Immigration Institute did not respond to requests by the AP about how the camp will be managed after the new U.S. program. In the face of the lack of official information, rumors and tensions run high.

Martinica, the Nicaraguan immigrant, says officials stopped issuing passes for a while "after a dispute in which some Venezuelans offended a police officer."

"There is a big lack of information," Parrazales said. "This is a pressure cooker I'm trying to contain here."

Russian warplane crashes near apartment building, killing 13

MOSCOW (AP) — A Russian warplane crashed Monday into a residential area in a Russian city on the Sea of Azov after suffering engine failure, leaving at least 13 people dead, three of whom died when they jumped from upper floors of a nine-story apartment building to escape a massive blaze.

A Su-34 bomber came down in the port city of Yeysk after one of its engines caught fire during takeoff for a training mission, the Russian Defense Ministry said. It said both crew members bailed out safely, but the plane crashed into a residential area, causing a fire as tons of fuel exploded on impact.

After hours of combing through the charred debris of the building, authorities said 13 residents, including three children, were found dead. Another 19 were hospitalized with injuries.

Vice governor of the region, Anna Menkova, said three of the four victims died when they jumped from the upper floors of the building in a desperate attempt to escape the flames, according to the RIA-Novosti news agency.

The authorities reserved emergency rooms at local hospitals and scrambled medical aircraft. Over 500

residents were evacuated and provided with temporary accommodations.

The Kremlin said Russian President Vladimir Putin was informed about the crash and dispatched the ministers of health and emergencies along with the local governor to the site. Yeysk, a city of 90,000, is home to a big Russian air base.

Surveillance cam videos posted on Russian messaging app channels showed a plane exploding in a giant fireball. Other videos showed an apartment building engulfed by flames and loud bangs from the apparent detonation of the warplane's weapons.

The Su-34 is a supersonic twin-engine bomber equipped with sophisticated sensors and weapons that has been a key strike component of the Russian air force. The aircraft has seen wide use during the war in Syria and the fighting in Ukraine.

Monday's accident marked the 10th reported non-combat crash of a Russian warplane since Moscow sent its troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24. Military experts have noted that as the number of Russian military flights increased sharply during the fighting, so did the crashes.

Report: Taliban killed captives in restive Afghan province

By RIAZAT BUTT Associated Press

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — The Taliban captured, bound and shot to death 27 men in Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley last month during an offensive against resistance fighters in the area, according to a report published Tuesday, refuting the group's earlier claims that the men were killed in battle.

One video of the killings verified by the report shows five men, blindfolded with their hands tied behind their backs. Then, Taliban fighters spray them with gunfire for 20 seconds and cry out in celebration.

The investigation by Afghan Witness, an open-source project run by the U.K.-based non-profit Center for Information Resilience, is a rare verification of allegations that the Taliban have used brutal methods against opposition forces and their supporters, its researchers said. Since taking power in August 2021, the Taliban have imposed a tighter and harsher rule, even as they press for international recognition of their government.

David Osborn, the team leader of Afghan Witness, said the report gives the "most clear-cut example" of the Taliban carrying out an "orchestrated purge" of resistance fighters.

Afghan Witness said it analyzed dozens of visual sources from social media — mostly videos and photographs — to conclusively link one group of Taliban fighters to the killings of 10 men in the Dara District of Panjshir, including the five seen being mowed down in the video.

It said it also confirmed 17 other extrajudicial killings from further images on social media, all showing dead men with their hands tied behind their backs. Videos and photos of Taliban fighters with the bodies aided geolocation and chrono-location, also providing close-ups of the fighters at the scene. These were cross-referenced with other videos suspected to feature the group.

"Using open-source techniques we have established the facts around the summary and systematic execution of a group of men in the Panjshir Valley in mid-September," Osborn said. "At the time of their execution, the detained were bound, posing no threat to their Taliban captors."

Enayatullah Khawarazmi, the Taliban-appointed spokesman for the defense minister, said a delegation is investigating the videos released on social media. He said he was unable to give further details as the investigation is ongoing.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman for the Taliban-run government, was not immediately available for comment.

Last month, Mujahid was reported as saying the Taliban had killed 40 resistance fighters and captured more than 100 in Panjshir. He gave no details on how the 40 men died.

The force fighting in the mountainous Panjshir Valley north of Kabul — a remote region that has defied conquerors before — rose out of the last remnants of Afghanistan's shattered security forces. It has vowed to resist the Taliban after they overran the country and seized power in August 2021.

Ali Maisam Nazary, head of foreign relations at the National Resistance Front for Afghanistan, said: "The

Taliban committed war crimes by killing POWs that surrendered to them point blank and the videos are evidence of this.”

Afghan Witness said it has credible evidence of a further 30 deaths due to last month’s Taliban offensive against alleged resistance fighters in Panjshir.

‘70s Show’ actor Danny Masterson on trial on 3 rape charges

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Danny Masterson, former star of the long-running sitcom “That ‘70s Show,” is about to face three women in court who say he raped them two decades ago at a trial whose key figures are all current or former members of the Church of Scientology.

Opening statements could begin as early as Tuesday in the Los Angeles trial of the 46-year-old Masterson, and while a judge has expressed her determination not to have the church become the center of the proceedings, it will inevitably loom large.

Masterson is charged with raping the women between 2001 and 2003 in his home, which functioned as a social hub when he was at the height of his fame. Masterson has pleaded not guilty to the charges.

One of the women had been Masterson’s longtime girlfriend. Another was a longtime friend, and the third a newer acquaintance.

All three were members of the Church of Scientology, as Masterson still is. All three accusers have since left, and they said the church’s insistence that it deal internally with problems between members made them hesitant at first to go to authorities.

“This is not going to become a trial on Scientology,” Superior Court Judge Charlaine F. Olmedo asserted at a pre-trial hearing. But she said she would allow its discussion as a reason why the women delayed reporting to authorities.

Testimony at a preliminary hearing last year to determine whether Masterson should go to trial last year included frequent use of Scientology jargon that lawyers had to ask the witnesses to explain. And the trial’s witness list is full of members and former members of the church, which has a strong presence in Los Angeles and has counted many famous figures among its members. The list includes former member Lisa Marie Presley, the daughter of Elvis Presley and former wife of Michael Jackson.

Masterson’s initial attorney in the case, Thomas Mesereau, emphasized his client’s Scientology connections, saying his arrest was the result of anti-religious bias from police and prosecutors. The lawyer attempted unsuccessfully to subpoena alleged communications between the accusers and actor Leah Remini, a former Scientologist who has become one of the church’s foremost detractors, authoring a book and hosting a documentary series.

Masterson’s lead attorney for the trial, Phillip Cohen, appears to be taking the opposite approach, seeking in a pretrial motion to minimize mentions of the institution, which has garnered much negative publicity in recent years because of prominent dissidents like Remini. Some potential jurors have been dismissed based on their opinions of the church.

“I think leaving the Church of Scientology out of it is a good plan,” said Emily D. Baker, a former Los Angeles County prosecutor who now works as a legal analyst and podcaster. “I don’t think the general public has an overwhelmingly positive view, I think there is a lot of skepticism.”

Deputy District Attorney Reinhold Mueller, the lead prosecutor, may want to tread carefully on the subject too.

“It can feel heavy handed when you have the government bringing someone’s religion into a prosecution,” said Baker, who is not involved in the case. “I think there is a careful line to be considered. The church is not on trial, you don’t want to give jurors a sense that you’re going after it.”

Masterson is charged with three counts of rape by force or fear, which could mean up to 45 years in prison if he’s convicted.

At last year’s preliminary hearing, one woman testified that they were five years into a relationship when she woke to Masterson raping her one night in 2001.

Another, a onetime friend of Masterson's who had been born into Scientology, testified that, in 2003, he had taken her upstairs from the hot tub at his Los Angeles home and raped her in his bedroom.

The third woman said Masterson raped her on a night in 2003 after texting her to come to his house. She testified she had set boundaries and was clear there was to be no sex.

One of the women, Masterson's friend, unhappy with the way the Scientology ethics board handled her complaint about him, filed a police report in 2004 that didn't result in charges. In 2016, she connected and shared stories with the woman who says she was raped while in a relationship with Masterson. Each would file a police report that year. Masterson's former girlfriend said she did so after telling her story to her husband, who helped her understand that she had been raped. The third woman went to police in 2017.

Masterson's then-attorneys suggested in their cross-examination of the women that all had retroactively reframed consensual sex as rape, and said the age of the incidents made accurate memories impossible.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they were victims of sexual abuse unless they come forward publicly.

Masterson was one of the first Hollywood figures to be prosecuted in the #MeToo era. His is one of several high-profile sexual assault cases that have gone to trial around the fifth anniversary of the reporting of accusations against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, which transformed the #MeToo movement into an international reckoning.

Weinstein's second rape and sexual assault trial — he's already been convicted in New York — is happening simultaneously, just down the hall from Masterson's. In New York, civil trials have begun for actor Kevin Spacey and for screenwriter and director Paul Haggis, who are both being sued for sexual assault.

Haggis is himself a Scientology dissident, and the judge in that case is allowing him to argue that the church is behind the allegations against him.

From 1998 until 2006, Masterson starred as Steven Hyde on Fox's "That '70s Show," which made stars of Ashton Kutcher, Mila Kunis and Topher Grace and is getting an upcoming Netflix reboot with "That '90s Show."

Masterson had reunited with Kutcher on the Netflix comedy "The Ranch" but was written off the show when an LAPD investigation was revealed in December 2017.

Teary Kevin Spacey testifies of sex abuse claims: 'Not true'

By TOM HAYS and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — An emotional Kevin Spacey testified in a New York courtroom Monday that he never made a sexual pass at the actor Anthony Rapp, who has sued for millions of dollars in damages, claiming the Academy Award-winning actor tried to take him to bed when he was 14.

Repeatedly, Spacey denied Rapp's claims that a then-26-year-old Spacey picked him up like a groom does a bride after a 1986 party at his Manhattan apartment and put him on his bed before lying on top of him.

Rapp testified earlier in a civil trial in which he accuses Spacey of assault and battery that he squirmed out from underneath an inebriated Spacey in the fully clothed encounter before fleeing, only to have Spacey follow him to the door and ask if he was sure he wanted to leave.

"They are not true," Spacey said of the allegations, first made in 2017 in an interview with BuzzFeed. The accusations, along with more made by others, brought to an end Spacey's popular role on the Netflix series "House of Cards" and abruptly derailed his career.

Spacey, 63, dabbed tears from his eyes with a tissue and sniffled as he described immediate intense pressure from publicists and lawyers to respond with compassion and empathy and an apology to Rapp's claims.

"They told me I couldn't push back on the story," Spacey recalled. "I knew I wouldn't have any sexual interest in Anthony Rapp or any child. That I knew."

At the time, with the #MeToo movement gaining momentum, "The industry was very nervous. There was a lot of fear in the air about who was going to be next," he said.

He added: "I was shocked. I was frightened and I was confused. ... I knew I had never been alone with

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Anthony Rapp."

After the article, the two-time Oscar winner said on Twitter that he didn't recall the encounter with Rapp, adding: "But if I did behave then as he describes, I owe him the sincerest apology for what would have been deeply inappropriate drunken behavior, and I am sorry for the feelings he describes having carried with him all these years."

His managers said "it was the best way to contain "a crisis that was going to get worse" and to avoid being accused of "being a victim shamer," he said.

Spacey told jurors he now regrets "my entire statement."

"I've learned a lesson, which is never apologize for something you didn't do," he said.

Spacey said he had met Rapp and another aspiring actor, John Barrowman, backstage following Spacey's Broadway performance in "Long Day's Journey into Night." He said he took them to dinner, to a nightclub and finally to his studio apartment, where he flirted with Barrowman — who was 19 at the time — but showed no interest in Rapp before the two visitors left.

"Anthony Rapp seemed like a kid and John Barrowman seemed like a man," Spacey said in an account that was backed up by a deposition by Barrowman. At the time, Rapp was performing in "Precious Sons" on Broadway.

Rapp, a 50-year-old regular on "Star Trek: Discovery" on television who was part of the original Broadway cast of "Rent," has testified that he and Barrowman went home immediately after the nightclub outing and days later Spacey invited him to his apartment party, waiting until other guests left to make a move on him.

The Associated Press does not usually name people alleging sexual assault unless they come forward publicly, as Rapp has done.

Spacey, testifying on a day when Judge Lewis A. Kaplan tossed out Rapp's claim of intentional infliction of emotional distress on the grounds that it duplicated aspects of the assault and battery allegation, also was asked if he has been private about his personal life over his career.

"I grew up in a very complicated family dynamic," he said, explaining that rants by his father when he was a youngster led him to hate bigotry and intolerance.

"My father was a white supremacist and neo-Nazi," Spacey said. "It meant that my siblings and I were forced to listen to hours and hours of my father lecturing us about his beliefs."

As Spacey became interested in theater, he said, he endured the screams of his father who "used to yell at me at the idea that I might be gay."

Prior to Monday's testimony, Spacey said he had "never talked about these things publicly, ever."

He said he had been considering revealing that he was gay publicly for about 18 months before deciding to announce it after Rapp's allegations came out.

Spacey cried as he described immediately regretting the timing of the revelation as he faced backlash in the gay community, including from friends, and others who thought he was using the announcement to change the subject, to deflect.

"It was really wrong and it was really bad and I'm deeply sorry," he said as his voice cracked.

House panel: Trump's bills to Secret Service 'exorbitant'

By BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's private company arranged for the Secret Service to pay for rooms at his properties in excess of government-approved rates at least 40 times, including two charges for more than \$1,100 per room, per night, according to documents released Monday by a congressional committee.

The Secret Service was charged room rates of more than \$800 per night at least 11 times when agents stayed at Mar-a-Lago in Florida, the Trump hotel in Washington, D.C., and other properties, the Democratic-led House Oversight Committee said. It noted that Trump made over 500 trips to his properties while president.

The "exorbitant" rates point to a possible "taxpayer-funded windfall for former President Trump's struggling businesses," Committee Chair Carolyn Maloney of New York wrote in a letter Monday to the Secret

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Service requesting more information.

The Secret Service said it had received the letter and was reviewing it.

The Trump Organization denied that the Secret Service charges were a problem and said it provided rooms and other services at cost, at big discounts or for free.

"The Trump Family is likely the first family in American history to have not profited off of the United States government," said Eric Trump in a statement. He added, "President Trump funded the vast majority of his campaign with hundreds of millions of dollars of his own money and turned away billions of dollars in real estate deals worldwide."

In total, the Trump Organization charged the agency responsible for protecting the president and his family at least \$1.4 million, according to Secret Service records released by the committee. The committee said the total bill was likely higher because the panel only got records through September 2021 and payments for trips abroad were not included.

The former president has been repeatedly criticized by Democrats and government watchdogs for what they say were brazen attempts make money from taxpayer funds during his presidency.

In addition to money from the Secret Service when he and his family visited his clubs and hotels, Trump played host to foreign officials at his properties, also requiring lodging for accompanying agents. The president tried to arrange for his Trump National Doral Golf Club in Florida to be chosen as the venue for a Group of Seven meeting of global leaders, only to pull back after an outcry of about self dealing.

Among the documents released Monday was a bill tied to 2017 trip by Trump's oldest son, Don Jr., to the Trump International Hotel down the street from the White House. That resulted in a Secret Service room charge of \$1,185 per night, more than five times the government-approved per diem rate, the committee said, though the agency is allowed to make exceptions.

Ryan, Vance at odds on abortion, Jan 6 in Ohio Senate debate

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Democratic U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan and Republican JD Vance deflected accusations of being political lapdogs to their parties Monday, as they met in a heated second debate for Ohio's open U.S. Senate seat.

Vance used the face-off hosted by Youngstown's WFMJ-TV to push back against a bit of Ryan name-calling from their first debate last week.

Vance, a venture capitalist and author of "Hillbilly Elegy," said former President Donald Trump was only making a joking reference to a newspaper article when he said Vance had been "kissing my a--" for an endorsement. Vance said everyone at the political rally where Trump made the remark understood it that way.

"The guy who's subservient to the national party is Tim Ryan," Vance said, citing Ryan's voting loyalty toward Democratic President Joe Biden and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California.

Ryan retorted, "JD, you keep talking about Nancy Pelosi. If you want to run against Nancy Pelosi, move back to San Francisco and run against Nancy Pelosi. You're running against me."

Ryan said he stood up to his own party when he once challenged Pelosi for the speakership, and has also supported bipartisan bills alongside retiring GOP Sen. Rob Portman, who has endorsed Vance to take over his seat.

To questions on immigration, police violence and opioid addiction, Vance returned frequently to the topic of the U.S. border with Mexico, which he said Democrats like Ryan have done too little to protect.

"You have got to close the border," he said. "You've got to finish the wall and you've got to make it so that these drug cartels are not able to use the U.S. southern border as a drug trafficking center."

Ryan said he has disagreed with Biden on relaxing certain border regulations and started the Border Technology Caucus to explore how to use technology to keep the boundary secure. He said it would be "a big mistake" to send Vance to Washington given the record of his anti-addiction nonprofit.

Vance said Ryan's words didn't match his record. "You cannot pretend to be a defender of border security

when you voted against border wall funding multiple times.”

On abortion, Vance said that he would vote for the national abortion ban at 15 weeks introduced by Republican U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, but also believes in certain exceptions — such that the 10-year-old Ohio rape victim could have gotten her abortion in the state, for example. He did not explicitly say he supports a rape exception, rather implied that her case probably fell under the exception for protecting the life of the mother.

He said the issue is too complex for him to name all the exceptions he might support on a debate stage.

“I think it’s totally reasonable to say you cannot abort a baby, especially for elective reasons, after 15 weeks of gestation,” he said. “No civilized country allows it. I don’t want the United States to be an exception.” Current Ohio law allows abortions up to 20 weeks’ gestation.

Ryan said he would vote to codify the abortion rights previously protected under *Roe v. Wade*, which generally allowed abortions up under viability, and finds Graham’s bill extreme.

“They’re not happy with people having to go to Illinois. They want people to have to have a passport and have to go to Canada,” he said. “Largest governmental overreach in the history of our lifetime.” he said, calling Vance “not a guy who’s ready to protect the rights of women.”

On police accountability, Vance touted his endorsement by the Ohio Fraternal Order of Police and said he believes adequate protections are in place to root out and discipline bad cops. He said an effort supported by Ryan to strip police of qualified immunity “is why we have the violent crime on our streets right now.”

Ryan said Vance’s position didn’t square with his failure to take seriously the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, where members of the Capitol Police were injured or died.

Vance said the Jan. 6 Committee investigating the siege “has shown from the very beginning that it’s not interested in the truth, that it’s interested in a political hit job” against Trump. He accused Ryan, Democrats and the media of being obsessed with the issue as average Ohioans worry about paying for groceries.

Ryan responded by saying, “If a group of people storm the Capitol while we’re trying to file the paperwork for an election, and they’re trying to prevent that from happening and they want to kill the vice president, like, that needs to be looked into.

“I don’t want to talk about this any more than anybody else. ... But, my God, you’ve got to look into it, JD,” he said.

Weinstein defense can use governor’s wife’s email at trial

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Jurors in the trial of Harvey Weinstein will be allowed to hear that Jennifer Siebel Newsom, wife of California Gov. Gavin Newsom, emailed the movie magnate for advice about dealing with the media amid a scandal involving Gavin Newsom two years after Weinstein allegedly raped and sexually assaulted her, a judge ruled Monday.

The judge granted narrow permission to the defense to introduce evidence of the email sent to Weinstein in 2007, when Gavin Newsom was mayor of San Francisco and was dating Siebel Newsom.

But Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Lisa B. Lench forbid the defense from discussing the underlying issue behind the email — the revelation of an affair Newsom had had in 2005 with an aide. Lench called it “too tangential in relation to this trial.”

Weinstein attorney Mark Werksman argued adamantly for the inclusion of the details.

“Of all things you’d think a woman that is raped by Harvey Weinstein wouldn’t do, it’s ask him how to deal with a sex scandal,” Werksman said.

Deputy District Attorney Marlene Martinez responded: “I’m not sure how Mr. Werksman knows” how a rape victim would behave.

“They do not react in a matter how someone who has not been raped would think,” Martinez said.

Werksman argued that the contents of the email are essential, saying that for Siebel Newsom and the other accusers in the trial, the power dynamic with Weinstein was essential.

“When her boyfriend the mayor seduces an underling’s wife and gets scandalized over it,” she sides

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with the mayor," he said, and suggested it was essential to Weinstein's rights that the judge allow that line of questioning.

The judge suggested the attorney was overstating the case by saying Weinstein's due process was at stake.

"Very dramatic, Mr. Werksman," Lench said.

Werksman replied, "Forgive the melodrama your honor."

Weinstein is charged with raping Siebel Newsom at a Beverly Hills hotel in 2004 or 2005.

In all, he is charged with 11 counts of rape and sexual assault involving five women. He is already serving a 23-year prison sentence for a rape and sex assault conviction in New York.

Siebel Newsom, a documentary filmmaker and actor, began dating Gavin Newsom in 2006, and married him in 2008. He was elected governor in 2018.

The judge also ruled that the prosecution could play for jurors a secret recording that another forthcoming witness in the trial, Ambra Battilana Gutierrez, made of Weinstein in conjunction with New York police in 2015. In the recording, Weinstein apologized for his conduct in a previous meeting, where she said he had touched her thigh and grabbed her breasts.

Police investigated the incident, but prosecutors brought no charges — a decision that came under scrutiny in 2017 when a wave of allegations against Weinstein gave fuel to the #MeToo movement.

"It seems to me that to the extent that it constitutes an admission, that it is admissible," the judge said.

Deputy District Attorney Paul Thompson said he could play just a short excerpt from the recording, but after a discussion with the defense, the two sides agreed he should play all 43 minutes of it.

Gutierrez, an Italian model, is one of four women who have been allowed to testify at the trial about being sexually abused by Weinstein, though their allegations are not among those he is charged with.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they have been sexually abused unless they have come forward publicly, as Gutierrez has done.

Siebel Newsom's identity was first reported by the Los Angeles Times, and her attorney has told the AP and other news outlets that she is among the women Weinstein is charged with sexually assaulting who will testify during the trial.

After a day and a half of arguing motions on what evidence will be heard during the trial, including one in which actor-director Mel Gibson was approved as a prosecution witness, the judge and jurors resumed jury selection in the afternoon.

Siebel Newsom came up again during the process.

"What if I told you that the governor's wife is going to be one of those witnesses?" Weinstein attorney Alan Jackson asked the jury panel. "By the way she will be."

The jury panel already knew this from the juror questionnaire they filled out last week.

When asked if their opinion of the governor or his wife would affect their judgment, none said it would.

At least five jurors said they had never heard of the #MeToo movement when asked by Thompson.

Views were mixed on the movement among those who had strong feelings.

"I believe in the feminine voice being outspoken," one woman said.

Another woman said she didn't have much respect for those who decided that "after 10 years, 'oh this happened to me too.'"

"I think they're looking for their 15 minutes of fame," she said.

US businesses propose hiding trade data used to trace abuse

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

A group of major U.S. businesses wants the government to hide key import data -- a move trade experts say would make it more difficult for Americans to link the products they buy to labor abuse overseas.

The Commercial Customs Operations Advisory Committee is made up of executives from 20 companies, including Walmart, General Motors and Intel. The committee is authorized by U.S. Customs and Border Protection to advise on ways to streamline trade regulations.

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Last week -- ahead of closed-door meetings starting Monday in Washington with senior officials from CBP and other federal agencies -- the executives quietly unveiled proposals they said would modernize import and export rules to keep pace with trade volumes that have nearly quintupled in the past three decades. The Associated Press obtained a copy of the proposal from a committee member.

Among the proposed changes: making data collected from vessel manifests confidential.

The information is vitally important for researchers and reporters seeking to hold corporations accountable for the mistreatment of workers in their foreign supply chains.

Here's how it works: Journalists document a situation where laborers are being forced to work and cannot leave. They then use the shipping manifests to show where the products end up, and sometimes even their brand names and whether they're on a shelf at a local supermarket or a rack of clothes at a local mall.

The proposal, if adopted, would shroud in secrecy customs data on ocean-going freight responsible for about half of the \$2.7 trillion in goods entering the U.S. every year. Rail, truck and air cargo is already shielded from public disclosure under U.S. trade law.

"This is outrageous," said Martina Vandenberg, a human rights lawyer who has filed petitions with CBP seeking to block shipments of goods suspected of being made by forced labor.

"Every year we continue to import and sell millions of dollars in goods tainted by forced labor," said Vandenberg, president of the Washington-based Human Trafficking Legal Center. "Corporate America should be ashamed that their answer to this abuse is to end transparency. It's time they get on the right side of history."

CBP said it would not comment on ideas that have not been formally submitted by its advisory committee but said that the group's proposals are developed with input gathered in public meetings.

But one of CBP's stated goals in creating what it has dubbed a "21st Century Customs Framework" is to boost visibility into global supply chains, support ethical sourcing practices and level the playing field for domestic U.S. manufacturers.

Reports by the AP and other media have documented how large quantities of clothing, electronics and seafood make their way onto U.S. shelves every year as a result of illegal forced labor that engages 28 million people globally, according to the International Labor Organization. Much of that investigative work — whether into clothing made by Uyghurs at internment camps in China's Xinjiang region, cocoa harvested by children in the Ivory Coast or seafood caught by Philippine fishermen toiling in slave-like conditions — starts with shipping manifests.

"Curtailing access to this information will make it harder for the public to monitor a shipping industry that already functions largely in the shadows," said Peter Klein, a professor at University of British Columbia, where he runs the Hidden Costs of Global Supply Chains project, an international collaborative between researchers and journalists.

"If anything, CBP should be prioritizing more transparency, opening up records of shipments by air, road and rail as well."

In its 34-page presentation, the business advisory panel said its goal in further restricting access to customs data is to protect confidential business information from "data breaches" that it says "have become more commonplace, severe and consequential."

The group also wants CBP for the first time to provide importers with advance notice whenever it suspects forced labor is being used. Activists say such a move puts whistleblowers overseas at risk of retaliation.

GM declined to comment, referring all inquiries to the Customs Operations Advisory Committee. Neither Intel nor Walmart responded to AP requests for comment.

In August alone, CBP targeted shipments valued at more than \$266 million for inspection due to suspected use of forced labor, including goods subject to the recently passed Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act. Additionally, last month the U.S. Department of Labor added 32 products — among them acai berries from Brazil, gold from Zimbabwe and tea from India — to its list of goods possibly made with child or forced labor, making them targets for future enforcement actions.

The proposal to make vessel data confidential comes as American companies are under increasing

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pressure from consumers to provide greater transparency regarding their sourcing practices, something reflected in the ambitious language found in many corporate social responsibility statements.

But Vandenberg said the proposed restrictions are in line with less-touted litigation and lobby efforts by major companies to water down enforcement of the U.S. ban on forced labor.

She cited a brief filed last week by the American Chamber of Commerce, the world's largest business federation, in a case now before a federal appeals panel in Washington. At issue is whether tech companies can be held responsible for the death and injury of children in the Democratic Republic of Congo forced to mine cobalt that ends up in products sold in the U.S.

The lawsuit was brought by families of dead and maimed children against tech giants Alphabet (the parent company of Google), Apple, Dell Technologies, Microsoft and Tesla under what's known as the U.S. Trafficking Act, which allows victims to sue ventures that benefit financially from forced labor. The case was dismissed last year after a district judge found the companies lacked sufficient ties to the tragic working conditions in the DRC.

The Chamber of Commerce, in asking the appeals panel to uphold that decision, said the serious global problem of forced labor is best addressed by private industry initiatives, Congress and the executive branch — not U.S. courts.

Such suits "often last a decade or more, imposing substantial legal and reputational costs on U.S. companies that transact business overseas," the Chamber of Commerce wrote in a friend-of-the-court filing.

The mismatch in rules governing disclosure of trade data for different forms of transportation goes back to 1996, when lobbying by the airline industry reversed a law passed by Congress that same year that for the first time required air freight manifests be made public.

In 2017, Scottsdale, Arizona-based ImportGenius — a platform used to search shipping data — was among companies that unsuccessfully sued the federal government seeking to obtain aircraft manifests.

"Suppressing information about goods coming into our country is breathtakingly stupid," said Michael Kanko, CEO of ImportGenius. "From discovering imports of human hair linked to forced labor, to understanding the flow of PPE during the pandemic, to tracking importers of tainted, deadly dog treats, public access to this data has empowered journalism and kept consumers safe. We need more transparency in trade, not less."

At Georgia debate, Abrams and Kemp clash on abortion, crime

By JEFF AMY and BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Republican Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp and Democratic challenger Stacey Abrams painted different visions for the future of Georgia, clashing on the economy, crime, voting and education as they debated Monday night after more than 100,000 Georgians swarmed to the polls of the first day of early voting.

Kemp issued perhaps his clearest commitment yet that he won't pursue any new restrictions on abortion or birth control, clarifying his position on an issue he's sometimes avoided as he seeks a second term.

Abrams, pushing uphill to unseat the incumbent four years after she narrowly lost to Kemp, told voters his record of accomplishments was scant.

"This is a governor who for the last four years has beat his chest but delivered very little for most Georgians," she said. "He's weakened gun laws and flooded our streets. He's weakened ... women's rights. He's denied women the access to reproductive care. The most dangerous thing facing Georgia is four more years of Brian Kemp."

Kemp, though, reminded voters that he had delivered billions in tax relief and rebates to millions of Georgians, crediting his decision to reopen Georgia's economy amid the pandemic for the state's financial strength and repeatedly blaming Democrats for economic difficulties.

"My desire is to continue to help them fight through 40-year-high inflation and high gas prices and other things that our Georgia families are facing right now financially because of bad policies in Washington, D.C., where President Biden and the Democrats have complete control," he said.

Kemp said he "would not" go beyond the "heartbeat bill" he signed in 2019 to ban nearly all abortions

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at six weeks of pregnancy, a point that comes before many women know they're pregnant. The law took effect after the U.S. Supreme Court in June overturned a constitutional right to abortion services. The Georgia law includes exceptions in cases of rape, incest and health risks to pregnant women.

Abrams has criticized the Republican incumbent as an extremist on abortion, leaving him trapped between moderates who want more permissive abortion laws and activists who want the governor to completely ban abortion or restrict Plan B, an over-the-counter contraceptive that can prevent pregnancy even after an egg is fertilized.

The debate question came after Kemp was captured on tape by a voter pressing Kemp to commit to more restrictions. Kemp sought to quell concerns. "That's not my desire" to push any new abortion or birth control legislation, he said.

Libertarian Shane Hazel, who was also on the debate stage, interrupted the other candidates several times to get his point across because he wasn't asked as many questions.

Beyond abortion, Kemp and Abrams rekindled their long-standing feud over voting rights, with Abrams accusing Kemp as governor and previously as secretary of state of trying to make it harder for some Georgians to vote.

Abrams said, however, that she would accept the outcome of the November election after Republicans criticized her for acknowledging Kemp's 2018 victory but refusing to use the word "concede."

"I will always acknowledge the outcome of elections, but I will never deny access to every voter, because that is the responsibility of every American to defend the right to vote," she said.

Kemp urged voters to remember that he was among the Republican governors who relaxed public restrictions early in the COVID-19 pandemic, including resisting widespread mask mandates and school closures during the nation's worst public health crisis in a century.

"Our economy is incredible ... we are the ones that's been fighting for you when Ms. Abrams was not," Kemp said.

Still, he found himself on the defensive from Hazel, who blasted Kemp for ever going along with any restrictions and for endorsing the government-distributed COVID-19 vaccine. Abrams defended her criticism of the reopening as showing prudent caution in a pandemic that killed tens of thousands of Georgians.

Abrams and other Democrats have steamed as Kemp has used the power of the governor's office to spend heavily, noting much of the spending is underwritten by a Democratic COVID-19 relief bill that Kemp opposed. Abrams argues she has a better longer-term vision for Georgia's economy, pledging a much larger teacher pay raise than the \$5,000 Kemp delivered, an expanded Medicaid program, increased access to state contracts for small and minority-owned businesses and broader access to college aid paid for by gambling.

Perhaps the old rivals' most personal clash came on crime and public safety. Kemp, as he has with his campaign ads, spent considerable effort painting Abrams as an enemy of law enforcement, arguing she has no support from Georgia sheriffs and police. She retorted that it's possible to support "justice and safety" at the same time and said Kemp has made Georgia more dangerous by making it legal to carry a concealed weapon without a permit.

Earlier Monday, Kemp rolled out a fresh set of anti-crime proposals, including increasing mandatory prison sentences for recruiting juveniles into a gang to at least 10 years and making it harder for judges to release people who have been arrested without cash bail. "That's what we're doing, going after street gangs," Kemp said.

Abrams recalled a 2021 gun massacre at Asian-owned massage parlors in metro Atlanta. "Street gangs did not shoot six Asian women, going into a gun store, getting a weapon and murdering six women," she said. "Street gangs aren't the reason people are getting shot in parking lots and grocery stores and in schools."

Monday's debate took place as Georgians began flooding the polls for 19 days of early in-person voting. Herb McCaulla, who owns a business selling pop culture memorabilia, praised Kemp on the economy.

"He's doing a great job," McCaulla said in Lilburn in suburban Atlanta. "He kept this state afloat during the COVID craziness."

Democrats said they opposed Kemp over abortion restrictions and loosened gun laws.

"I want Kemp out," Chalmers Stewart said.

More than 4 million people could vote in the state's elections this year, and more than half are likely to cast ballots before Election Day. Gabriel Sterling, an official with the Georgia secretary of state's office, said more than 100,000 people cast early votes Monday. Sterling said that surpassed a previous record of 72,000 for a midterm cycle.

More than 200,000 people have requested mail ballots already, with an Oct. 28 deadline to request them. Early in-person voting will run through Nov. 4.

Kemp and Abrams are scheduled to meet for a second debate on Oct. 30.

LA politicians to lose committee positions over race scandal

By BRIAN MELLEY and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The head of the Los Angeles City Council stripped two members of much of their power Monday to pressure them to resign for participating in a private meeting in which they did not object to a colleague's crude and racist remarks and at times joined in the offensive banter.

Acting Council President Mitch O'Farrell removed Gil Cedillo and Kevin de Leon from committee chairmanships and assignments and named them instead to a board that rarely meets as he turned up the heat on the veteran Democratic politicians.

"These members have lost all credibility, all standing," O'Farrell said at a City Hall news conference.

The two men have refused widespread calls to step down despite widespread condemnation that led former council President Nury Martinez to resign last week.

The leaked recording of the three powerful politicians discussing with a labor leader how to maintain their grip on power and expand Latino influence in the city has plunged the council into chaos as angry protesters shut down meetings last week.

The recording has also derailed their personal ambitions.

By losing committee assignments, their influence in City Hall has dwindled and they have largely become token figures, unable to participate in the day-to-day work of the council and unwanted in council chambers where their appearance is likely to cause an uproar.

The council has moved to censure Cedillo and de Leon but doesn't have the power to remove fellow elected officials from office unless they've been charged with a crime.

O'Farrell said the only path forward is through their resignation or a recall election in the case of de Leon, whose term ends in 2024. Cedillo lost his seat in the primary and will be replaced in December.

Both had been on several high-profile committees, with Cedillo chairing the Housing Committee and De Leon chairing the Homelessness and Poverty Committee.

Under city rules, each council member has to be assigned to one committee, so each man will now serve on the Board of Referred Powers, a rarely used body that takes over when other boards have a conflict of interest.

O'Farrell said the two men should not show up at Tuesday's meeting, which will be held virtually Tuesday because two members have tested positive for COVID-19 since the Oct. 11 meeting.

Councilmember Mike Bonin — the target of Martinez's most offensive remarks — tested positive for the virus after being consoled in the crowded chambers and appeared virtually at the following day's meeting. Councilmember Paul Krekorian tested positive Monday and was experiencing mild symptoms, his spokesperson said.

Meeting remotely will prevent a repeat of last week when angry protesters drowned out O'Farrell as he tried to call Wednesday's meeting to order. He canceled Friday's meeting, saying the council couldn't conduct business until the two men resigned.

Tuesday's agenda includes several items related to the incendiary recording made during a private meeting about the contentious issue of redrawing council districts, which can give some lawmakers significant power and dilute the influence of others — and by extension, disenfranchise the ethnic or racial groups

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they represent.

Martinez dominated the conversation, using profanity and racist slurs as she aired personal grievances. She called Bonin, who is white and gay, a "little bitch." She used a Spanish term to compare his young Black son to a little monkey.

De Leon and Cedillo chimed in and laughed at some of the gossip.

At the meeting, Ron Herrera, who was the president of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor before resigning over the recording, called the group "a little Latino caucus of our own" as they discussed how to undo maps drawn up by a commission to benefit themselves and shore up power.

Some of the conversation focused on the influence of Black councilmembers and their allies, with de Leon referring derisively to Bonin, a white man, as the "fourth Black" on the council who wouldn't stand with Latinos.

While Latinos make up about half the population, they are underrepresented on the council with only four of the 15 seats at the time. Black people, by contrast, make up about 9% of the population and hold three seats.

In addition to electing a new president Tuesday to replace Martinez, the council is scheduled to discuss a charter reform proposal that would add more seats to the City Council to increase representation and decentralize power. It will also discuss creating an independent redistricting commission. Currently, the council appoints the members and then has authority to approve the maps.

Bonin, other council members and Democrats as prominent as President Joe Biden have called on de Leon and Cedillo to resign.

De Leon has apologized for seeming to make or condone "insensitive comments." Cedillo has said he should have objected to the language but didn't make derisive remarks himself.

Both men appeared at the Oct. 11 meeting but walked out after being jeered by raucous protesters who demanded they leave. They haven't appeared in public since.

O'Farrell has spoken with Cedillo and said he is "reconciling his feelings about this transgression and understood the gravity of the moment." He has not been able to reach de Leon.

Haiti calls for help at the UN as world mulls assistance

By EDITH M. LEDERER and EVENS SANON Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United States and Mexico said Monday they are preparing a U.N. resolution that would authorize an international mission to help improve security in Haiti, whose government issued a "distress call" for the people of the crisis-wracked nation.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield made the announcement at an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council as thousands across Haiti organized protests demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry. The demonstrations came on the day the country commemorated the death of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a slave who became the leader of the world's first Black republic.

The U.S. ambassador said the proposed "non-U.N." mission would be limited in time and scope and be led by "a partner country" that was not named "with the deep, necessary experience required for such an effort to be effective." It would have a mandate to use military force if necessary.

She said the resolution being worked on is a "direct response" to a request on Oct. 7 by prime minister Henry and the Haitian Council of Ministers for international assistance to help restore security and alleviate the humanitarian crisis. It reflects one option in a letter from U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to the council on Oct. 9 that called for deployment of a rapid action force by one or several U.N. member states to help Haiti's National Police.

Both Russia and China raised questions about sending a foreign armed force to Haiti.

Haiti has been gripped by inflation, causing rising food and fuel prices, and exacerbating protests that have brought society to the breaking point. Daily life in Haiti began to spin out of control last month just hours after the prime minister said fuel subsidies would be eliminated, causing prices to double. Gangs blocked the entrance to the Varreux fuel terminal, leading to a severe shortage of fuel at a time that ris-

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ing prices have put food and fuel out of reach of many Haitians, clean water is scarce, and the country is trying to deal with a cholera outbreak.

Political instability in Latin America's poorest country has simmered ever since last year's still-unsolved assassination of Haiti's president Jovenel Moïse, who had faced opposition protests calling for his resignation over corruption charges and claims that his five-year term had ended. Moïse had dissolved the majority of Parliament in January 2020 after failing to hold legislative elections in 2019 amid political gridlock.

Haiti's Foreign Minister Jean Victor Geneus said he came to the Security Council with a "distress call" from the Haitian people to tell the world they "are not living — they are suffering."

Haiti urgently needs "robust support" to help the police stem the humanitarian crisis, neutralize the gangs, guarantee fuel distribution and facilitate a return to normal life, he said.

Thomas-Greenfield said the resolution authorizing the security mission is coupled with a resolution obtained by The Associated Press last week that would impose an arms embargo, asset freeze and travel ban on influential Haitian gang leader Jimmy Cherizier, nicknamed "Barbeque." It also would target other Haitian individuals and groups who engage in actions that threaten the peace, security or stability of the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, according to the text obtained Thursday by The Associated Press.

Some diplomats expressed hope for a vote on the sanctions resolution this week, but Russia's deputy U.N. Ambassador Dmitry Polyansky said Moscow can't support quickly pushing through a sanctions resolution.

"In depth analysis and detailed negotiations" are required, he said, "to make sure that the measures are aimed at restoring government control and not be perceived as is frequently the case as a way of punishing the entire country and its people."

The U.S. ambassador stressed that the United States is "keenly aware of the history of international intervention in Haiti, and specifically of concerns about the council authorizing a response that could lead to an open-ended peacekeeping role."

The Security Council and the international community must seek "a different course" to respond to the security and dire humanitarian crises in Haiti, which require "targeted international assistance" that must be coupled with "support for political dialogue and backed by sustained international pressure on the actors supporting gang activity."

Reflecting opposition to foreign interference in Haiti, Marco Duvivier, a 35-year-old auto parts store manager, who joined Monday's protest in Port-au-Prince said: "The U.S. needs Haiti to make its own decisions and not interfere in Haiti's business."

"Life is not going to get better with an international force," he said.

China's deputy U.N. Ambassador Geng Shuang noted prime minister Henry's call, but also the opposition by some political parties and groups to the presence of a foreign armed force in Haiti.

"At a time when the Haitian government lacks legitimacy and is unable to govern, will sending such a rapid action force to Haiti receive the understanding, support and cooperation from the parties in Haiti, or will it face resistance or even trigger violent confrontation from the population?," he asked. "These are things we need to consider ... and to treat with caution."

Since the gang led by "Barbeque" surrounded the fuel terminal, the distribution of more than 10 million gallons of gasoline and fuel and more than 800,000 gallons of kerosene stored on site have been blocked.

Gas stations remain shuttered, hospitals have slashed services and businesses including banks and grocery stores have cut their hours as everyone across the country runs out of fuel.

The situation has worsened a recent cholera outbreak, with hundreds hospitalized and dozens dead amid a scarcity of potable water and other basic supplies.

Haiti's last cholera outbreak was a result of U.N. peacekeepers from Nepal introducing the bacteria into the country's largest river by sewage. Nearly 10,000 people died and more than 850,000 were sickened.

"We don't need a foreign force. It's not going to solve anything," Jean Venel said.

Helen La Lime, the U.N. special envoy for Haiti, told the Security Council in a video briefing from the capital Port-au-Prince that "a humanitarian emergency is now at our doorstep" with disruptions to hospital operations and water supplies impacting the response to the cholera outbreak.

She said appeal by diplomats, the U.N. and others to establish a humanitarian corridor have gone unheeded, and insecurity is rife, with nearly a thousand kidnappings reported in 2022 and millions of children prevented from attending school.

Student loan forgiveness: Here's how to apply

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Monday officially kicked off the application process for his student debt cancellation program, opening the door for millions of Americans to apply for up to \$20,000 in forgiveness. The Biden administration touts it as a simple, straightforward application that should only take about five minutes. Here's how to apply.

Go to studentaid.gov and in the section on student loan debt relief, click "Apply Now."

Be ready to type in some basic personal information. The form asks for: name, Social Security Number, date of birth, phone number and email address. It does not require documentation about your income or your student loans.

Next, review the eligibility rules and confirm that you're a match. For most people, that means attesting that they make less than \$125,000 a year or that their household makes less than \$250,000 a year. If you meet the eligibility rules, click the box confirming that everything you provided is true.

Click "Submit."

After the form is submitted, the Biden administration says it should take four to six weeks to process. The Education Department will use its existing records to make sure your loans are eligible and to look for applicants who might exceed the income limits. Some will be asked to provide additional documentation to prove their incomes. The Education Department estimates that the verification application will take about half an hour, including time to review and upload tax documents.

Most borrowers who apply before mid-November should expect to get their debt canceled before Jan. 1, when payments on federal student loans are scheduled to restart after a pause during the pandemic.

Things could get more complicated, depending on the outcomes of several legal challenges. The Biden administration faces a growing number of lawsuits attempting to block the program, including one filed by six Republican-led states. A federal judge in St. Louis is currently weighing the states' request for an injunction to halt the plan. Biden on Monday said he's confident that the suit will not upend the plan. "Our legal judgment is that it won't," he said, "but they're trying to stop it."

Kanye West to buy conservative social media platform Parler

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN and BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Business Writers

The rapper formerly known as Kanye West is offering to buy right-wing friendly social network Parler shortly after getting locked out of Twitter and Instagram for antisemitic posts.

The acquisition of Parler would give West, legally known as Ye, control of a social media platform and a new outlet for his opinions with no gatekeeper. The question is, who will listen?

Even among the new breed of largely right-wing, far-right and libertarian social apps that purport to support free speech by having looser rules and moderation, Parler's user base is tiny — and with competition only increasing for the relatively small swath of mostly older people who want to discuss politics online, there is no clear roadmap to growing it beyond a niche platform chasing crumbs left by mainstream social media.

If Tesla CEO Elon Musk goes through with his planned purchase of Twitter, things may get even more complicated for Parler. That's because Musk has already made it clear he would like to loosen Twitter's rules and content-moderation efforts, including reinstating the account of former President Donald Trump. If the libertarian and far-right users who left Twitter — either because they felt it was constricting to their political views or because they were kicked off — return, sites like Parler, Gab and Trump's Truth Social could end up losing users.

Parlement Technologies, which owns Parler, and West said Monday the acquisition should be completed in the fourth quarter, but the price and other details were not disclosed. Parlement Technologies said

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the agreement includes the use of private cloud services via Parlement's private cloud and data center infrastructure.

Parler restructured its business last month to form Parlement Technologies, which it said aims to become the "world's premier free speech technology infrastructure and platform." This means that rather than running a single platform such as Parler, the company wants to provide services to other niche sites that are often deemed too extreme for mainstream tech companies to support. A Parlement spokesperson said the deal with West was not yet in the works when the company was restructured and the two transactions are separate.

Ye was blocked from posting on Twitter and Instagram a week ago over antisemitic posts that the social networks said violated their policies. In one post on Twitter, Ye said he would soon go "death con 3 on JEWISH PEOPLE," according to internet archive records, making an apparent reference to the U.S. defense readiness condition scale known as DEFCON.

Ye has also suggested slavery was a choice and called the COVID-19 vaccine the "mark of the beast." Earlier this month, he was criticized for wearing a "White Lives Matter" T-shirt to his collection at Paris Fashion Week.

"In a world where conservative opinions are considered to be controversial we have to make sure we have the right to freely express ourselves," Ye said in a prepared statement.

Parler has struggled amid competition from other conservative-friendly platforms like Truth Social, which are tiny as well compared with mainstream social media sites. Parler had an average of 725,000 monthly active users in the U.S. for the first half of this year, according to Data.ai, which tracks mobile app usage. That's down from 5.2 million in the first half of 2021. Overall, including people outside the U.S., Parler still failed to reach the 1 million mark in the first half of this year.

Truth Social, meanwhile, had 2.4 million monthly users during the same period, despite launching just in February and only on Apple devices, according to Data.ai. The market research firm said another right-leaning platform, Gettr, which launched in July 2021, is ahead of both Parler and Truth Social with about 3.8 million monthly active users.

None of them come close to Twitter, which reported that it had a daily average of about 237.8 million active users during its most recent quarter. Many of the right-wing platforms emerged from opposition to the content-moderation restrictions at mainstream services such as Twitter and Facebook, but they have failed to attract users in large numbers.

Part of that reason may be that most people don't actually want to discuss politics online. According to the Pew Research Center, one-third of tweets sent in the U.S. are political in nature, but these are mainly sent by a small subset of mostly older people. While Americans ages 50 and older make up 24% of the U.S. adult Twitter population, they produce nearly 80% of all political tweets, according to Pew. This is the audience Ye's Parler would have to be courting if the rapper is serious about growing Parler's user base.

Parler launched in August 2018 but it didn't start picking up steam until 2020. It was kicked offline in January 2021 over its ties to the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol earlier that month. A month after the attack, Parler announced a relaunch. It returned to Google Play last month.

"This deal will change the world, and change the way the world thinks about free speech," Parlement Technologies CEO George Farmer, who is married to conservative activist Candace Owens, said in a prepared statement.

Student loan forgiveness application website goes live

By COLLIN BINKLEY and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Monday officially kicked off the application process for his student debt cancellation program and announced that 8 million borrowers had already applied for loan relief during the federal government's soft launch period over the weekend.

He encouraged the tens of millions eligible for potential relief to visit studentaid.gov and touted the application form that the president said would take less than five minutes to complete. An early, "beta

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launch" version of the online form released late Friday handled the early stream of applications "without a glitch or any difficulty," Biden said.

"It means more than 8 million Americans are — starting this week — on their way to receiving life-changing relief," Biden, accompanied by Education Secretary Miguel Cardona, said Monday. The president called his program a "game-changer" for millions of Americans saddled with student loan debt.

The number of borrowers who applied during the testing period already amounts to more than one-fourth of the total number of applicants the administration had projected would submit forms, underscoring the popularity of the program and the eagerness of borrowers to receive the debt relief. Some 8 million borrowers who have income information already on file with the Education Department would see their debt canceled without applying.

Biden's plan calls for \$10,000 in federal student debt cancellation for those with incomes below \$125,000 a year, or households that make less than \$250,000 a year. Those who received federal Pell Grants to attend college are eligible for an additional \$10,000. The plan makes 20 million eligible to get their federal student debt erased entirely.

Biden promised to pursue widespread student debt forgiveness as a presidential candidate, but the issue went through more than a year of internal deliberation amid questions about its legality. His plan sparked intense debate ahead of the midterm elections, with Republicans and some Democrats saying it's an unfair handout for college graduates.

But on Monday, Biden offered a full-throated defense of his decision.

"My commitment was if elected president, I was going to make government work to deliver for the people," Biden said. "This rollout keeps that commitment."

He also took aim at Republican officials who have either criticized the plan or are working in court to defeat it.

"Their outrage is wrong and it's hypocritical," Biden said. "I will never apologize for helping working Americans and middle class people as they recover from the pandemic."

Biden on Monday said the White House has received more than 10,000 comments and calls of thanks from borrowers. Indeed, thousands took to social media to share the form, with many saying they submitted their applications with little trouble.

The Biden administration has touted it as a "simple, straightforward" application. It asks for the borrower's name, Social Security number, contact information and date of birth. It does not require income information but asks users to check a box attesting that they are eligible under the program's income limits.

That information will be checked against Education Department records to help identify applicants who are likely to exceed the income limits, the administration says. Those people will be asked for more information to prove their incomes.

An estimated 1 million to 5 million people will be required to provide that extra documentation, the Education Department said in a recent submission to the White House's Office of Management and Budget.

Creating and processing the form is estimated to cost nearly \$100 million, a figure that angered advocates who view the application as an unnecessary barrier. The form is meant to help exclude the roughly 5% of borrowers who exceed the income limits, but advocates say it could also deter some lower-income Americans who need the relief.

Once the Education Department begins processing applications, borrowers should expect to see their debt forgiven in four to six weeks, officials say. Most applications submitted by mid-November will be processed by Jan. 1 — the day federal student loan payments are set to resume after being paused during the pandemic.

Borrowers will be able to submit applications through the end of 2023.

The Biden administration is pushing ahead with the debt cancellation even as it fights a growing number of legal challenges. Six Republican-led states are suing to block the plan, saying it oversteps Biden's authority and will lead to financial losses for student loan servicers, which are hired to manage federal student loans and earn revenue on the interest.

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A federal judge in St. Louis is now weighing the states' request for an injunction to halt the plan. In court documents, the Education Department has vowed not to finalize any of the debt cancellation before Oct. 23.

Biden acknowledged Monday that litigation is ongoing but said his administration believes the lawsuits won't ultimately affect the program.

Congress probes Jackson water crisis as city and state spar

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG Associated Press/Report for America

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Congress is investigating the crisis that left 150,000 people in Mississippi's capital city without running water for several days in late summer, according to a letter sent to Gov. Tate Reeves by two Democratic officials.

Reps. Bennie Thompson, of Mississippi, and Carolyn Maloney, of New York, sent the letter Monday requesting information on how Mississippi plans to spend \$10 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act and from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and \$429 million "specifically allotted to enhance the state's water infrastructure."

The letter indicates "the start of a joint investigation" by the House Homeland Security and the Oversight and Reform committees into a crisis that deprived Jackson's 150,000 residents of running water for several days in late August and early September, Adam Comis, a staffer for the committee, told The Associated Press.

Thompson's district includes most of Jackson, and he chairs the Homeland Security Committee. Maloney chairs the Oversight and Reform Committee.

Jackson has had water problems for years, and the latest troubles began in late August after heavy rainfall exacerbated problems in the city's main treatment plant, leaving many customers without running water. Jackson had already been under a boil-water notice since late July because the state health department found cloudy water that could make people ill.

Running water was restored within days, and a boil-water notice was lifted in mid-September, but the letter to Reeves says "water plant infrastructure in the city remains precarious, and risks to Jackson's residents persist."

The pair of congressional Democrats requested a breakdown of where the state sent funds from the American Rescue Plan Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, including "the racial demographics and population sizes of each" community that received aid. They also requested information on whether Jackson has faced "burdensome hurdles" to receive additional federal funds. The letter asked Reeves to provide the requested information by Oct. 31.

Mississippi has not yet announced how it will spend American Rescue Plan Act money for water projects. Cities and counties had a Sept. 30 deadline to apply for funding.

According to the letter, which was first reported on by NBC News, Oversight Committee staff learned in a briefing with Jackson officials that the state attempted to limit funding to Jackson for its water system. The state allegedly planned to "bar communities of more than 4,000 people from competing for additional funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law," the letter says.

In their letter, Thompson and Maloney also referenced reporting by the AP that Reeves had a hand in delaying funds for water system repairs in Jackson and claimed to have blocked funds. Reeves' office did not immediately respond to AP's request for comment on the letter.

The Environmental Protection Agency issued a notice in January that Jackson's water system violates the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. In September, federal attorneys threatened legal action against the city if it did not agree to negotiations related to its water system. Lumumba said the city was working with the federal government on a plan to fix the water system.

Failure by city and state officials to provide Jackson residents with a reliable water system reflects decades of government dysfunction, population change and decaying infrastructure. It has also fueled a political battle between GOP state lawmakers and Democratic city officials.

That acrimony continued after the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency announced Friday that

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it is seeking a private contractor to run the Jackson water system for one year. The agreement would be funded by the city of Jackson, according to the proposal released by MEMA.

In a news release Monday, Reeves said his office was told by city officials that Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba is planning to "functionally end the city's cooperation" by "refusing to participate in the process of selecting a water operator."

"Although politics is clearly his priority, we are simply trying to ensure that Jackson water does not fail again," Reeves said. "Ultimately, it may fall to the city council to rein in this radical gambit."

The rancor ensued even though MEMA wrote that it requested a private contractor "in unified command with the City of Jackson."

Reeves threatened to pull state assistance if the city didn't change course. City officials were communicating they "no longer desire state assistance and insist on going it alone," Reeves said.

In a statement, Lumumba retorted that the city had been "going it alone" after years of asking for state support" and that Jackson "has made no mention of ending the City's cooperation" with state and federal officials. The mayor said the city would not agree to the request for a private contractor until it had an opportunity to revise the language in the proposal.

"The City, with support from those who truly are invested in the repair and maintenance of the water treatment facilities, will have the final say," Lumumba said. "We look forward to productive conversations that lead to an actual agreement instead of a headline."

UK leader in peril after Treasury chief axes 'Trussonomics'

By JILL LAWLESS and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The U.K.'s new Treasury chief ripped up the government's economic plan on Monday, dramatically reversing most of the tax cuts and spending plans that new Prime Minister Liz Truss announced less than a month ago. The move raises more questions about how long the beleaguered British leader can stay in office, though Truss insisted she has no plans to quit.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt, said he was scrapping "almost all" of Truss' tax cuts, along with her flagship energy policy and her promise — repeated just last week — that there will be no public spending cuts.

While the reversal of policy calmed financial markets and helped restore the government's economic credibility, it further undermined the prime minister's rapidly crumbling authority and fueled calls for her to step down before her despairing Conservative Party forces her out.

Truss declined to attend the House of Commons to answer a question on the economy from the leader of the opposition, sending House of Commons leader Penny Mordaunt in her place. Mordaunt denied a lawmaker's suggestion that Truss was "cowering under her desk" to avoid scrutiny.

"The prime minister is not under a desk," Mordaunt said, words hardly likely to inspire confidence in the leader who only came to power last month.

Truss' spokesman said the prime minister and Hunt had jointly agreed on the economic changes. But Hunt told Conservative lawmakers that Truss "backed him to the hilt in making difficult decisions" — suggesting he has a free hand to make policy.

With Truss sitting silently beside him, Hunt told lawmakers that he was canceling Truss' plan to reduce the basic rate of income tax by 1 percentage point and most of her other libertarian economic policies. In a message aimed squarely at reassuring the financial markets, he said Britain was "a country that funds our promises and pays our debts."

"And when that is questioned, as it has been, this government will take the difficult decisions necessary to ensure there is trust and confidence in our national finances," Hunt said.

Hunt was appointed Friday after Truss fired his predecessor Kwasi Kwarteng, who spent less than six weeks in the Treasury job. Hunt is seeking to restore the Conservative 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.

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Truss and Kwarteng jointly came up with a Sept. 23 announcement of 45 billion pounds (\$50 billion) in unfunded tax cuts that immediately spooked the financial markets. The cuts fueled investor concerns 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, which were squeezed by volatility in the bond market.

Over the weekend, Hunt has been dismantling that economic plan. The government had already ditched parts of its tax-cutting plan and announced it would make a medium-term fiscal statement on Oct. 31, weeks earlier than previously scheduled.

On Monday, Hunt went further. He 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 — sweeping away one of Truss' signature plans to help Britons facing a cost-of-living crisis as food, fuel and mortgage prices soar.

Hunt told lawmakers that the measures he announced would save 32 billion pounds a year, but that spending cuts were also coming.

"There remain, I'm afraid, many difficult decisions to be announced" in the fuller budget statement on Oct. 31, he said.

Hunt also said he was setting up a new Economic Advisory Council of economists and investment bankers to help inform policy — a far cry from Truss' bid to throw out economic "orthodoxy."

The pound rose more than 1% to above \$1.13 in London after Hunt's announcements. That pushed the U.K. currency back above where it was trading 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 3.947% 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.

Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies think tank, said Monday's announcements would not be enough "to undo the damage caused by the debacle of the last few weeks. But they are big, welcome, clear steps in the right direction."

The financial fiasco has turned Truss into a lame-duck prime minister. She took office just six weeks ago after winning a party election to replace Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who was forced out in July after ethics scandals ensnared his administration. Many Conservatives now believe their only hope is to replace Truss — but they are divided about who should take over.

In a BBC interview, Truss conceded that she had made mistakes. But, she vowed, "I will lead the Conservatives into the next general election."

Few believe that possible. 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 holding an election now would be a wipeout for the Tories, with the Labour Party winning a big majority.

Labour Party economics spokeswoman Rachel Reeves said Truss was "barely in office, and she is certainly not in power," and claimed the Conservatives could not fix the problems they had caused.

"The truth is an arsonist is still an arsonist, even if he runs back into the burning building with a bucket of water," she said.

Chris Beauchamp, chief market analyst at online trading firm IG, said the markets were reassured by the presence of Hunt, a former U.K. foreign secretary and health chief.

"I think markets in some ways would rather things just stayed as they are for a while," he said. "OK, the PM has found her authority quite truncated. But at least you've got the chancellor in place almost running the country.

"I think they're quite content with that slightly odd state of affairs, for the moment."

Suicide drones strike fear in Ukraine's capital, killing 4

By SABRA AYRES, HANNA ARHIROVA and INNA VARENYTSIA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Waves of explosives-laden suicide drones struck Ukraine's capital Monday, setting

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buildings ablaze, tearing a hole in one of them and sending people scurrying for cover or trying to shoot them down in what the president said was Russia's attempt to terrorize civilians.

The concentrated use of the kamikaze drones was the second barrage in as many weeks — after months in which air attacks had become a rarity in central Kyiv. The assault sowed fear and frayed nerves as blasts rocked the city. Energy facilities were struck and one drone largely collapsed a residential building, killing four people, authorities said.

Intense bursts of gunfire rang out as the Iranian-made Shahed drones buzzed overhead, apparently as soldiers tried to destroy them. Others headed for shelter, nervously scanning the skies. But Ukraine has become grimly accustomed to attacks nearly eight months into the Russian invasion, and city life resumed as rescuers picked through debris.

Previous Russian airstrikes on Kyiv were mostly with missiles. Analysts believe the slower-moving Shahed drones can be programmed to accurately hit certain targets using GPS unless the system fails.

Also Monday, a Russian Su-34 warplane crashed in a residential area in the Russian port of Yeysk, on the Sea of Azov, after an engine failure — killing at least four people on the ground, injuring 25 others and starting a fire that engulfed several floors of a nine-story apartment building, authorities said.

Vice governor of the region, Anna Menkova, said three of the victims died when they jumped from the building's upper floors to escape the flames, according to the RIA-Novosti news agency. Six more people were missing.

Both crewmembers, on a training mission, bailed out safely, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

In Kyiv, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said Monday's barrage came in successive waves of 28 drones — in what many fear could become a more common mode of attack as Russia seeks to avoid depleting its stockpiles of long-range precision missiles.

Five drones plunged into Kyiv itself, said Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal. In the Kyiv region, at least 13 were shot down, all flying in from the south, said Yurii Ihnat, a spokesman for Ukraine's air force.

One strike appeared to target the city's heating network, hitting an operations center. Another slammed into a four-story residential building, ripping open a gaping hole and collapsing at least three apartments. Four bodies were recovered, including those of a woman who was 6 months pregnant and her husband, Klitschko said. An older woman and another man also were killed there.

An Associated Press photographer caught one of the drones on camera, its triangle-shaped wing and pointed warhead clearly visible against the blue sky.

"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."

In a televised address to the nation Monday night, Zelenskyy said Moscow was resorting to the drones because it was losing the war.

"Russia doesn't have any chance on the battlefield, and it tries to compensate for its military defeats with terror," he said. "Why this terror? To put pressure on us, on Europe, on the entire world."

Zelenskyy, citing Ukrainian intelligence services, alleges Russia ordered 2,400 drones from Iran. Russia has rebranded them as Geran-2 drones — "geranium" in Russian. A photo of debris from one of Monday's strikes, posted by Klitschko, showed "Geran-2" marked on a mangled tail fin.

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

The drones pack an explosive charge and can linger over targets before nosediving into them. Their blasts jolted people awake, including Snizhana Kutrakova, 42, who lives near one of the strikes.

"I'm full of rage," she said. "Full of rage and hate."

The Russian military said it used "long-range air- and sea-based high-precision weapons" to strike Ukrainian military and energy facilities. They hit "all assigned targets," Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called for European Union sanctions on Iran for providing

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drones to Russia, and both he and Zelenskyy reiterated Ukraine's need for air defenses and weaponry.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the 27-nation bloc is gathering evidence about Iran's drone sales to Russia, and if true, "we will be ready to react with the tools at our disposal." The EU also approved a military training program in Europe for thousands of Ukrainian troops and plans for about 500 million euros (\$486 million) in extra funds to buy weapons for Ukraine.

Iranian-made drones have been used elsewhere in Ukraine in recent weeks against urban centers and infrastructure, including power stations. At just \$20,000 apiece, the Shahed is only a fraction of the cost of higher-tech missiles and conventional aircraft. The Kalibr cruise missile that Russia has used widely in Ukraine costs the military about \$1 million each.

Drone swarms also challenge Ukrainian air defenses. Western nations have promised systems that can shoot down drones but much of that weaponry has yet to arrive and could 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," said Ihnat, the air force spokesman. Some Western-supplied air defense weaponry can only be used during daylight hours when targets are visible, he added.

Russian forces also struck energy infrastructure elsewhere, apparently seeking to compound pressure on Kyiv's government after previous attacks knocked out power supplies.

Shmyhal, the prime minister, said hundreds of settlements were without power after missile attacks in the Dnipropetrovsk and Sumy regions.

Ukraine's nuclear operator said Russian shelling cut power again to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, one of the most worrying flashpoints of the Russian invasion. The nuclear plant, Europe's largest, needs power for critical safety systems. When shelling severs its power supply lines, the plant is forced to rely on diesel generators — a temporary stopgap.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had said Friday that there was no need for more widespread attacks against Ukraine — after an earlier barrage of strikes that he said were retaliation for the bombing of a bridge connecting Ukraine's Russian-occupied Crimean Peninsula with Russia.

However, Putin also said seven of 29 targets designated after the bridge attack were not hit "the way the Defense Ministry had planned," so Moscow's forces would continue to target them. He didn't elaborate.

After months in which strikes in central Kyiv were rare, recent attacks put the country and its capital back on edge.

Monday's strike on Kyiv came amid intensified fighting in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as a continued Ukrainian counteroffensive in the south near Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. Zelenskyy said Sunday there was heavy fighting around the cities of Bakhmut and Soledar in the Donetsk region.

The Donetsk and Luhansk regions make up the industrial east known as the Donbas, and were two of four regions annexed by Russia in September in defiance of international law.

In the south, Ukrainian air forces reported shooting down nine drones in the Mykolaiv region and six in the Odesa region. The governor of the eastern Kharkiv region said overnight attacks on a city and villages killed one and injured four.

Russia and Ukraine also completed a prisoner swap Monday. The Russian Defense Ministry said 110 Russians who were freed included 72 seamen from commercial vessels held since February, while 108 female Ukrainian POWs were handed over to Kyiv authorities, with two saying they wanted to stay in Russia. The Ukrainian side confirmed the exchange but not that two Ukrainians decided to stay in Russia.

Reputed drug dealer accused of raping informant jumps bail

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, La. (AP) — A reputed drug dealer accused of raping a woman police informant sent into his house alone in an unmonitored sting has skipped bail and was a no-show Monday at what was supposed to be the start of his trial.

Antonio D. Jones' alleged attack in which he was caught on video forcing the woman to perform oral sex on him twice was reported in an Associated Press investigation last month that exposed the perils

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such informants can face seeking to “work off” criminal charges in often loosely regulated, secretive arrangements.

“I guess I need to address the elephant that’s not in the room,” Assistant District Attorney Brian Cespiva said during a brief court hearing, adding that federal marshals were actively searching for Jones and “he will be here eventually.”

Jones, a 48-year-old career criminal known as “Mississippi,” had attended previous hearings in the case but was discovered last week to have jumped his \$70,000 bail and fled the central Louisiana area. Prosecutors told AP the amount of Jones’ bail had been “pre-set” and was not unreasonably low despite the violent nature of the charges and his extensive criminal history.

But Jones’ disappearance deepened the scandal over law enforcement’s handling of the case and their treatment of the informant, who was sent into the suspect’s dilapidated house in January 2021 to buy meth with hidden video recording equipment that could not be monitored by law enforcement handlers in real time.

“We’ve always done it this way,” Rapides Parish Sheriff’s Lt. Mark Parker, the ranking officer in the operation, told AP. “She was an addict and we just used her as an informant like we’ve done a million times before.”

Despite the woman’s cooperation and the alleged attack, she was still charged with possession of drug paraphernalia stemming from an arrest that happened about a month before the sting.

The informant, who declined interview requests and is not being named because the AP does not typically identify victims of sexual assault, is expected to testify against Jones if he is ever found.

The case turns in large part on the footage of the attack, which Jones’ own defense attorney argued was “extremely graphic” and too prejudicial to show to jurors, conceding it depicts “forced oral sex.”

According to interviews and confidential law enforcement records obtained by AP, the dealer threatened to put the crying woman “in the hospital” and even paused at one point during the attack to conduct a separate drug deal.

In court papers that baffled prosecutors, defense attorney Phillip M. Robinson even offered to stipulate that “Mr. Jones had specific intent to rape” the woman, contending it would be “difficult for a jury to maintain neutrality and non-bias” after viewing the “violent sexual intercourse.”

Prosecutor Cespiva told the AP that Jones’ charges were recently reduced from forcible second-degree rape to third-degree rape, or simple rape, to make a conviction more likely. He said prosecutors intend to seek consecutive 25-year terms on each count.

“We want to convict this guy” for the informant, said Rapides Parish District Attorney Phillip Terrell. “She wants this to be behind her.”

What we know about the Raleigh shooting victims

By BEN FINLEY, HANNAH SCHOENBAUM and ALLEN G. BREED Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — An avid runner and the mother of three boys. A woman who was the “rock” of her family and knew everyone in the neighborhood. A Navy veteran whose wedding was two weeks away.

These were among the victims of Thursday’s shooting rampage in North Carolina’s capital city, Raleigh, that claimed five lives and wounded two others.

A 15-year-old boy opened fire, killing a total of five people in the city’s Hedingham neighborhood and along the nearby Neuse River Greenway, police said. One of those slain was an off-duty Raleigh police officer who was headed to work. Another person killed was a 16-year-old.

A woman and a second Raleigh police officer also were wounded.

Among the dead were:

NICOLE CONNORS

Connors, 52, was the matriarch of her extended family, the one who “got things done,” her husband Tracey Howard told The Associated Press.

When her father died, she was the one who went to Veterans Affairs to straighten things out — using “choice words” — to ensure he was buried in a veterans cemetery, Howard said. She also left her job in

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human resources to care for her mother after she had a stroke.

"Anything that had to be done, she was going to do it," Howard said. "And she was going to make sure it was done right."

Connors and her husband liked to get out of the house and explore Raleigh's restaurant scene. They had tickets for the next Black Panther film, coming out in November, and planned to go to the North Carolina State Fair.

Late Thursday afternoon, Howard left the house to get food for lunch — he works the third shift — and to buy a lightbulb for the porch. Connors had taken a friend to Red Lobster to celebrate her friend's birthday before coming home.

"She couldn't have been home more than five or 10 minutes before this happened," Howard said.

Connors and a neighbor, who was listed among the wounded, were shot, Howard said.

"Her friend was more or less by the driveway like she was about to go home or was on her way home, and my wife was on the porch," Howard said.

Howard is left to wonder what motivated the shooting.

"It is just a senseless killing," he said. "People outside enjoying the weather, talking. Next thing you know they're gone. It's just stupid. It's senseless."

Connors' neighbors said she was always friendly while walking her Jack Russell terrier, Sami.

Marvin Judd said Connors was a "sweet person" with a "good heart."

"And she was always kind and gentle to everybody she met," Judd said. "She didn't meet strangers. Everybody was a friend to her."

SUSAN KARNATZ

Her husband, Tom Karnatz, told the AP that she "was a very loving wife and amazing mother to our three sons. We're absolutely heartbroken and miss her dearly."

Karnatz, 49, was an avid runner who frequented the greenway where some of the shootings occurred. She had completed 5.1 miles of her planned 7-mile run on the greenway the night she died.

Two cars parked in the driveway had matching 26.2 stickers — marking the mileage of a marathon. The license plate of a minivan said "RUNNR."

In a Facebook post, Tom Karnatz wrote that he and his wife had big — and little — plans together.

"We had plans together for big adventures," he wrote. "And plans together for the mundane days in between. We had plans together with the boys. And we had plans together as empty nesters. We had plans together for growing old. ... Now those plans are laid to waste."

Karnatz had completed the Boston Marathon four times, according to an obituary. She was a school psychologist before pausing to homeschool her three sons, which "brought her joy, purpose and fulfillment."

"She was fun, often tickled by quirky humor, and if she got going, would laugh until she cried," the obituary said. "She listened without judgment, provided wise advice when asked, and offered kind words and gentle reassurance to those around her. Her absence is profound in the hearts of friends and family."

MARY MARSHALL

Marshall, 34, was killed while walking her dog Scruff and was planning to get married on Oct. 29, her sister told NBC News.

"Her fiance Rob, he was just the love of her life," Meaghan McCrickard told NBC. "I think we're going to still do a celebration of life, that's the plan, for the date of the wedding."

"She's got a friend coming from Japan, somebody coming from Florida, from Texas," McCrickard said. "As excited as she was to be married, I know she was more excited to have all the people she loved the most at the same place at the same time."

When the shooting started, Marshall was walking Scruff on the Neuse River Greenway, her sister told NBC.

"She had called her fiance Rob and said, 'I'm walking the dog, I'm hearing these gunshots, can you come home?' And that was the last conversation that they had," McCrickard said.

In another interview with NBC, Marshall's fiance recalled what she had said over the phone: "I need you to come home right now — immediately. Scruff (our dog) has slipped his collar, and I just heard gunshots."

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Marshall went after Scruff. Robert Steele rushed home. When he got there, a detective was outside. "He started asking about tattoos that Mary has," Steele said through tears, while holding the wedding band he planned to give her. "We knew she was gone."

Marshall's step-grandmother, Donna Marshall, told the Raleigh News & Observer that Mary Marshall had served in the Navy and attended culinary school before moving back to the Raleigh area three years ago. "She loved to go to the beach, and she was an absolute fanatic about Disney World," Donna Marshall told the newspaper.

Scruff had effectively chosen Marshall as his owner when he sat on her lap at an animal shelter, her step-grandmother said.

"It's going to be extremely difficult for her mom and dad and her sister and her close family," Donna Marshall said. "It's just going to be awful."

GABRIEL TORRES

Torres, 29, was on his way to work when he was fatally shot in the Hedingham neighborhood, police said. Raleigh Police Chief Estella D. Patterson said Torres was not in uniform or in his patrol car at the time of the shooting, according to the News & Observer.

Torres leaves behind a wife and child, the chief said. Torres was on the job for 18 months. Before that, he served as a U.S. Marine at Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville.

"We ask all of you to please pray and keep in your thoughts Officer Torres and the other victims of this senseless act of evil," the Raleigh Police Protective Association, an advocacy group for officers, said on Facebook.

Back the Blue NC, a nonprofit that advocates for law enforcement officials, launched a fundraiser for Torres' family through GoFundMe. It had raised \$88,000 as of Monday morning.

JAMES THOMPSON

Thompson, 16, was a junior at Knightdale High School in Raleigh, according to a statement from Principal Keith Richardson.

"It is an unexpected loss and we are saddened by it," Richardson said. "Our condolences, thoughts, and prayers go out to James' family, the other victims, their families and all who have been impacted."

The school board chair and superintendent of the Wake County Public School System issued a statement saying they are "shocked, saddened and broken-hearted."

"Our hearts go out to the victims' loved ones, and our community continues to seek answers around this tragedy and solutions to prevent such unspeakable events in the future," the statement said.

Barkley, 'Inside the NBA' crew agree to contract extensions

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

Charles Barkley will not be leaving TNT or the "Inside the NBA" crew for the foreseeable future.

Barkley has signed a 10-year extension with Warner Bros. Discovery Sports, which owns TNT. Barkley's agreement coincides with contract renewals for host Ernie Johnson and analysts Kenny Smith and Shaquille O'Neal.

Barkley has been with TNT since retiring as a player in 2000. He had floated the idea of doing commentary for Saudi-funded LIV Golf this past summer.

"We're all a big family — Ernie, Kenny and Shaquille are brothers to me — and I wouldn't still be here if it wasn't for them and all the amazing people who work on our show," Barkley said in a statement. "I'm not gonna lie, though, this is a life-altering deal ... and I'm blessed to be able to do live television for a living."

"Inside the NBA" begins its 34th season on Tuesday. Johnson has been with the show since the beginning while Smith became a studio analyst in 1998. O'Neal joined the quartet in 2011.

The deals with Johnson, Smith and O'Neal are "long term," but last well beyond the end of Turner's current deal with the NBA in 2024-25. The league is expected to begin rights negotiations soon. Turner has been carrying games since 1984 while ESPN/ABC replaced NBC in 2002.

The other major sports leagues have recently negotiated new rights deals. Amazon is in its first season

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carrying the NFL, with the rest of the league's renewed contracts with other networks kicking in next season. Major League Baseball's new contracts with Fox, ESPN and Turner began this year while the NHL's with Turner and ESPN are in its second season.

Major League Soccer's deal with Apple TV+ begins next season. Besides the traditional networks, the NBA should see increased competition from streaming services trying to get a package of games.

North Carolina No. 1 in preseason AP Top 25 men's basketball

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Basketball Writer

North Carolina surprised just about everyone last year when a talented team led by first-year coach Hubert Davis parlayed a No. 8 seed in the NCAA Tournament into a run to the national title game.

The Tar Heels won't be sneaking up on anyone this year.

With four starters back from the team that lost to Kansas in New Orleans, the Tar Heels are the runaway pick as the preseason No. 1 in the AP Top 25 released Monday. They earned 47 of 62 first-place votes from a national media panel to easily outdistance Gonzaga, the top preseason team the past two years.

"As they opened up their lockers for the first practice of last year, there was a picture of the New Orleans Superdome in there. I wanted them to see where we were headed in April," Davis recalled last week. "The hard work and preparation, the practice that had to be put into place to put ourselves in position to do that. It's the same approach this year compared to last year. The only difference this year is the outside noise.

"Last year," Davis said, "the outside noise didn't think we had a chance. The outside noise this year thinks we do."

Gonzaga received 12 first-place votes while No. 3 Houston had one and fourth-ranked Kentucky the other two. Houston has its highest preseason ranking since 1983, when the third of the Cougars' Phi Slama Jama teams reached its second consecutive title game. Kentucky has its best preseason rank since 2019, when the season ended amid the pandemic.

There was a tie at No. 5 between the Jayhawks, who raised their latest national title banner inside Allen Fieldhouse earlier this month, and Big 12 rival Baylor, which raised its own championship banner the previous season.

It is the 10th time that North Carolina has been preseason No. 1, breaking a tie with Duke for the most in the history of the AP poll. Of those 10, two Tar Heels teams have gone on to win the NCAA title: the 1981-82 team coached by Dean Smith and featuring James Worthy, Sam Perkins and Michael Jordan, and the 2008-09 team coached by Roy Williams and featuring Tyler Hansbrough, Wayne Ellington and Ty Lawson.

A third team, Williams' 2015-16 squad, lost the final to Villanova on Kris Jenkins' buzzer-beating 3-pointer.

"It's an honor to be recognized for our team's potential," Davis said of securing the top spot in the poll, "but the only way for us to reach any of our dreams and goals will be to improve each and every day by our commitment to preparing, practicing and playing to the best of our ability."

Caleb Love, one of the four returning starters for North Carolina along with R.J. Davis, Leaky Black and Armando Bacot, said the focus will be on getting better daily ahead of the ACC grind.

Duke, where Jon Scheyer replaced Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski, was ranked seventh and UCLA eighth. Creighton has its best preseason ranking at No. 9, followed by Arkansas, Tennessee, Texas, Indiana, TCU and Auburn.

"You don't pay a lot attention to it when you're picked ninth," Bluejays coach Greg McDermott said of their preseason ranking in the Big East last season. "You go to work every day and try to get better every day. It's important we approach it the same this year."

The No. 13 Hoosiers have their first ranking since January 2019 and highest in the preseason since 2016.

Villanova, where Kyle Neptune is taking over for Hall of Fame coach Jay Wright, is No. 16, the lowest preseason ranking for the Wildcats since 2008. They were followed by Arizona, Virginia, San Diego State and Alabama.

The final five are Oregon, Michigan, Illinois, Dayton and Texas Tech.

"When I was in school as a player, I never bought into the rankings, what the media would say about

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our ball club. You still got to go out and play the game," Hoosiers coach Mike Woodson said. "Hell, my senior year we were ranked No. 1 and we didn't get it done. So at the end of the day I guess it's kind of nice for our players who haven't experienced that. Again, you got to go out and play. I mean, you got to prove it on the basketball floor. That's when it counts."

CONFERENCE WATCH

The Big 12 and SEC lead the way with five ranked teams. The Big Ten, Pac 12 and ACC have three apiece and the Big East has two. The West Coast, Atlantic 10, Mountain West and American Athletic conferences each have one team in the poll.

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

Texas A&M was the first team outside the poll, followed by UConn, which appeared on 24 of 62 ballots. Miami, Purdue and Saint Louis were also eyeing a spot in the Top 25 when the first regular-season poll is released Nov. 14.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The season begins for most teams Nov. 7, but as usual, the first meeting of heavyweights will be the Champions Classic on Nov. 15 in Indianapolis: No. 4 Kentucky plays Michigan State, unranked in the pre-season poll for the second year in a row, before No. 5 Kansas plays No. 7 Duke in the nightcap.

EXPLAINER: Killer drones vie for supremacy over Ukraine

By The Associated Press undefined

They are precise, small in size, able to engage a target in relatively large numbers like a swarm of wasps and above all, they're cheap.

In Russia's invasion of Ukraine, drones have cemented their reputation as a potent, hard-to-stop and cost-effective weapon to seek out and destroy targets while simultaneously spreading the kind of terror that can fray the resolve of soldiers and civilians alike.

They're also quickly surpassing missiles as the remote weapon of choice because they can be put into any combat theater in greater numbers much more cheaply.

Russia's unleashing of successive waves of the Iranian-made Shahed drones over Ukraine has multiple goals — taking out key targets, crushing morale, and ultimately draining the enemy's war chest and weapons as they try to defend against them.

HOW DO WARTIME DRONES WORK?

The Shahed drones that Russia has rebranded as Geran-2 are packed with explosives and are preprogrammed to loiter overhead until they nosedive into a target. That's reminiscent of Japan's World War II-era kamikaze pilots who would fly their explosive-laden aircraft into U.S. warships and aircraft carriers during the war in the Pacific.

According to the Ukrainian online publication Defense Express, which cites Iranian data, the delta-wing Shahed is 3.5 meters (11½ feet) long, 2.5 meters (8 feet, 3 inches) wide and weighs approximately 200 kilograms (440 pounds). It's powered by a 50-horsepower engine with a top speed of 185 kph (114 mph).

Behnam Ben Taleblu, senior fellow at the Washington-based think tank Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said the drone has already been deployed in Yemen and in a deadly oil tanker attack last year. He said its range is about 1,000 kilometers (621 miles).

The new drone technology does not need trained personnel to be sacrificed nor a huge amount of money spent on building sophisticated aircraft to reach a target.

In Monday's attack on the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, the city's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, said 28 drones made up waves of successive attacks. Fired from a truck launcher in rapid succession, the drones can fly low and slow, better able to avoid radar detection. They can also swarm a target, overwhelming defenses particularly in civilian areas.

But according to Mykola Bielieskov, a research fellow at Ukraine's National Institute for Strategic Studies, the Shahed only carries a 40-kilogram (88-pound) explosive charge, which pales in comparison to the explosive force that a conventional missile's 480-kilogram (1,050-pound) warhead can deliver at a much

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longer range.

"It is difficult to hit serious targets with such drones," Bielieskov said.

SMALL PUNCH BUT LOW COST

At a mere \$20,000 apiece, the Shahed is only a tiny fraction of the cost of a more conventional, full-size missile. For example, Russia's Kalibr cruise missiles, which have seen widespread use in eight months of war, cost the Russian military about \$1 million each.

At such a low cost, the Shahed can be deployed in massive numbers to saturate a target, whether it's a fuel depot or infrastructure and utilities like power or water stations.

Despite its small size, the Shahed's explosive charge appears powerful enough to do damage. In Monday's attacks, one drone struck an operations center while another slammed into a five-story residential building, ripping a large hole in it and collapsing at least three apartments, resulting in the deaths of three people.

Bielieskov from Ukraine's National Institute for Strategic Studies said the Russian military is opting to use Shaheds on civilian targets instead of the battlefield because Ukrainian forces have "learned how to fight them effectively," managing to intercept a little more than half of them.

With no immediate end in sight, the financial burden of the conflict will weigh heavier on Moscow, which isn't receiving billions in weapons transfers from Western nations like Ukraine is. As the conflict essentially becomes one of attrition — who can withstand that human, material and financial burden the longest — finding cheaper but still potent weapons will be key.

For Moscow, the Shahed appears to be such an alternative.

"Shahed-136 is a cheap version of a cruise missile, which Russia can't produce fast," said Bielieskov.

Taleblu said Russia will likely continue to boost its long-range strike capabilities with Iranian drones and reportedly even missiles.

"This should raise alarm bells for Europe and the world," he said.

Russian officials haven't issued any data about the number of missiles fired during the conflict, but Ukraine's defense minister recently alleged that Russia has used most of its high-precision missile arsenal — from 1,844 on the eve of Russia's invasion to 609 by mid-October.

A WAR OF NERVES

The incessant buzzing of the propeller-driven Shahed drones — dubbed "mopeds" by Ukrainians — is equally potent for the terror it can induce in anyone under its flight path. That sound exacerbates anxiety and chips away at morale, for no one on the ground knows exactly when or where the weapon will strike.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy seized on the drones' terror element, posting on social media: "The whole night, and the whole morning, the enemy terrorizes the civilian population."

"Kamikaze drones and missiles are attacking all of Ukraine," he added.

Bielieskov conceded that Shahed drone strikes stir up fears that Ukraine's air defenses are inadequate to meet the threat. But he said their use — even in large numbers — isn't enough to reverse Ukraine's battlefield gains.

Sky-borne terror weapons are nothing new — Nazi Germany employed them during World War II in the form of the V-1 flying bomb or "buzzbomb," the earliest type of cruise missile in the shape of a small aircraft that targeted British cities.

Eight decades later, the much smaller Shahed can be guided to its target at a much cheaper cost, potentially enabling Russian forces to launch many more drones than the 9,500 "buzzbombs" that Nazi Germany unleashed on Britain.

Is Alex Jones verdict the death of disinformation? Unlikely

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A Connecticut jury's ruling this week ordering Alex Jones to pay \$965 million to parents of Sandy Hook shooting victims he maligned was heartening for people disgusted by the muck of disinformation.

Just don't expect it to make conspiracy theories go away.

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The appetite for such hokum and narrowness of the judgments against Jones, who falsely claimed that the 2012 elementary school shootings were a hoax and that grieving parents were actors, virtually ensure a ready supply, experts say.

"It's easy to revel in Alex Jones being punished," said Rebecca Adelman, a communications professor at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. "But there's a certain shortsightedness in that celebration."

There's a deep tradition of conspiracy theories across American history, from people not believing the official explanation of John F. Kennedy's assassination to various accusations of extraterrestrial-visit coverups to unfounded allegations of the 2020 presidential election being rigged. With the Salem witch trials in 1692, they even predated the country's formation.

What's different today? The internet allows such stories to spread rapidly and widely — and helps adherents find communities of the likeminded. That in turn can push such untrue theories into mainstream politics. Now the will to spread false narratives skillfully online has spread to governments, and the technology to doctor photos and videos enables purveyors to make disinformation more believable.

In today's media world, Jones found that there's a lot of money to be made — and quickly — in creating a community willing to believe lies, no matter how outlandish.

In a Texas defamation trial last month, a forensic economist testified that Jones' Infowars operation made \$53.2 million in annual revenue between 2015 and 2018. He has supplemented his media business by selling products like survivalist gear. His company Free Speech Systems filed for bankruptcy in July.

To some, disinformation is the price America pays for the right to free speech. And in a society that popularized the term "alternative facts," one person's effort to curb disinformation is another person's attempt to squash the truth.

Will the Connecticut ruling have a chilling effect on those willing to spread disinformation? "It doesn't even seem to be chilling him," said Mark Fenster, a University of Florida law professor. Jones, he noted, reacted in real time on Infowars on the day of the verdict.

"This will not impact the flow of stories that are filled with bad faith and extreme opinion," said Howard Polskin, who publishes The Righting, a newsletter that monitors the content of right-wing websites. He says false stories about the 2020 election and COVID-19 vaccines remain particularly popular.

"It seems to me that the people who peddle this information for profit may look upon this as the cost of doing business," Adelman said. "If there's an audience for it, someone is going to meet the demand if there's money to be made."

Certainly, the people who believe that Jones and those like him are voices of truth being suppressed by society aren't going to be deterred by the jury verdict, she said. In fact, the opposite is likely to be true.

The plaintiffs awarded damages in the Sandy Hook case were all private citizens, an important distinction in considering its impact beyond this case, said Nicole Hemmer, a Vanderbilt University professor and author of "Partisans: The Conservative Revolutionaries Who Remade American Politics in the 1990s."

The case is reminiscent of Seth Rich, a young Democratic Party aide killed in a Washington robbery in 2016, she said. Rich's name was dragged — posthumously — into political conspiracy theories, and his parents later sued and reached a settlement with Fox News Channel.

The message, in other words: Be wary of dragging private citizens into outlandish theories.

"Spreading conspiracy theories about the Biden administration is not going to get Fox News Channel sued," Hemmer said. "It is not going to get Tucker Carlson sued."

Tracing the history of outlandish theories that sprout and thrive in the web's murky corners is also difficult. Much of it is anonymous. It's still not clear who is responsible for what is spread on QAnon or who makes money off it, Fenster says.

If he was a lawyer, he said, "Who would I go after?"

Despite any pessimism about what the nearly \$1 billion Sandy Hook judgment might ultimately mean for disinformation, the dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania says it still sends an important message.

"What this says is we can't just make up truths to fit our own ideological predilections," John Jackson said. "There is a hard and fast ground to facts that we can't stray too far from as storytellers."

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Consider the lawsuit filed against Fox News Channel by Dominion Voting Systems, a company that makes election systems. It claims Fox knowingly spread false stories about Dominion as part of former President Donald Trump's claims that the 2020 election had been taken from him. Dominion has sought a staggering \$1.6 billion from Fox, and the case has moved through the deposition phase.

Fox has defended itself vigorously. It says that rather than spreading falsehoods, it was reporting on newsworthy claims being made by the president of the United States.

A loss in a trial, or a significant settlement, could impose a real financial hardship on Fox, Hemmer said. Yet as it progresses, there's been no indication that any of its commentators are pulling punches, particularly concerning the Biden administration.

Distrust of mainstream news sources also fuels the taste among many conservatives for theories that fit their world view — and a vulnerability to disinformation.

"I don't think there's any incentive to move toward well-grounded reporting or to move in the direction of news and information instead of commenting," Hemmer said. "That's what they want. They want the wild conspiracy theories."

Even if the crushing verdict in Connecticut this week — coupled with the \$49 million judgement against him in August by the Texas court — muzzles or minimizes Jones, Adelman says others are likely to take over for him: "It would be wrong to misinterpret this as the death knell of disinformation."

Clean Water Act at 50: environmental gains, challenges unmet

By JOHN FLESHER AP Environmental Writer

Lifelong Cleveland resident Steve Gove recalls when the Cuyahoga River symbolized shame — fetid, lifeless, notorious for catching fire when sparks from overhead rail cars ignited the oil-slicked surface.

"It was pretty grungy," said the 73-year-old, an avid canoeist in his youth who sometimes braved the filthy stretch through the steelmaking city. "When you went under those bridges where the trains were hauling coke from the blast furnaces, you had to watch for cinders and debris falling off."

It wasn't the only polluted U.S. river. But outrage over a 1969 Cuyahoga fire — the latest in a series of environmental disasters including a 3-million-gallon oil spill off California's Santa Barbara months earlier — is widely credited with inspiring the Clean Water Act of 1972.

As officials and community leaders prepared to celebrate the law's 50th anniversary Tuesday near the river mouth at Lake Erie, the Cuyahoga again is emblematic. This time, it represents progress toward restoring abused waterways — and challenges that remain after the act's crackdown on industrial and municipal sewage discharges and years of cleanup work.

A 1967 survey found not a single fish in the river between Akron and Cleveland. Now, there are more than 70 species including smallmouth bass, northern pike and muskellunge. Limits on eating them have been lifted. The Cuyahoga is popular with boaters. Parks and restaurants line its banks.

"I have folks come into my office routinely from other states and around the world, wanting to see the Cuyahoga River," said Kurt Princic, a district chief for the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. "They want to know how we got from where it was in the '60s to where it is today. It starts with the Clean Water Act, partnerships and hard work."

Yet the river remains on a U.S.-Canada list of degraded "hot spots" in the Great Lakes region; it's plagued by erosion, historic contamination, storm water runoff and sewage overflows. Toxic algae blooms appear on Lake Erie in summer, caused primarily by farm fertilizer and manure.

HALF EMPTY, HALF FULL

The Clean Water Act established ambitious goals: making the nation's waters "fishable and swimmable" and restoring their "chemical, physical and biological integrity." It gave the newly established U.S. Environmental Protection Agency broad authority to set and enforce regulations.

"We've made tremendous progress," EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in an Associated Press interview Friday. "By passing the Clean Water Act, Congress solidified the importance of protecting our lakes, rivers and streams for generations to come."

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Experts and activists agree many waterways are healthier than they were, and cleanups continue. The Biden administration's 2021 infrastructure package includes \$50 billion to upgrade drinking water and wastewater treatment systems, replace lead pipes and cleanse drinking water of toxic PFAS, known as "forever chemicals."

But the law's aims have been only "halfway met," said Oday Salim, director of the University of Michigan's Environmental Law and Sustainability Clinic. "If you spoke to most clean water policy advocates today, they'd be pretty disappointed in how long it has taken to get halfway."

The measure's crowning achievement, Salim said, is a program that requires polluting industries and sewage treatment plants to get permits limiting their releases into waters. EPA also set pollution standards for 50 industries.

Yet the agency is far behind on strengthening those requirements to reflect pollution control technology improvements, said Eric Schaeffer, a former EPA enforcement chief and executive director of the Environmental Integrity Project, which has sued the agency over the delays.

Two-thirds of the requirements haven't been updated in more than 30 years, the group said in a March report that blamed the outdated ones for "more pollution from oil refineries, chemical plants, slaughterhouses and other industries pouring into waterways." Pollution control plans for large watersheds and regulatory enforcement are weak, it said, while EPA and state environmental agencies have endured repeated budget cuts.

One result, Schaeffer said, is that more than 50% of lake, river and stream miles periodically assessed are still classified as impaired.

Regan acknowledged EPA has "some more work to do" but had an "aggressive agenda to curtail pollution and upgrade standards and enforcement policies at a pace that science allows us to do."

"We can't ignore that the previous administration did not take action," he said. "We also can't ignore that we have the same staffing levels that we had in the late '80s. I think we're doing a really good job of beginning to make up for lost time."

RUNOFF LEFT OUT

The Clean Water Act prompted many states to prohibit laundry detergents containing phosphorus. Some had labeled Lake Erie "dead" as the soaps fueled algae blooms that sapped oxygen and killed fish.

The bans caused a turnaround in the 1980s. Erie was blue once more instead of brown.

Yet the algae blooms were back within a couple of decades — this time because of a problem the Clean Water Act had sidestepped.

Its emission limits and permitting requirements apply to wastes released into waters through pipes or ditches from identifiable sources, such as factories. But it doesn't regulate runoff pollution from indirect sources — fertilizers and pesticides from farm fields and lawns; oil and toxic chemicals from city streets and parking lots — that flow into waterways when it rains.

Such runoff pollution is now the leading cause of U.S. waterway impairments.

Scientific studies say manure and fertilizer from livestock operations spread on crop fields are largely to blame for sprawling summer algae in western Lake Erie and the "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico, which receives massive heartland runoff from the Mississippi River. They're also the top pollutant in Chesapeake Bay.

Environmental groups who have long argued the law allows regulation of large livestock farm pollution sued EPA this month, demanding a tougher approach. But federal and state agencies rely mostly on voluntary programs that provide financial assistance to farms for using practices such as planting cover crops that hold soil during off-seasons and buffer strips between croplands and streams. Farm groups resist making such practices mandatory.

"Agriculture politics are the third rail," said the Environmental Integrity Project's Schaeffer. "The farm lobby is powerful."

Stan Meiburg, director of the Center for Energy, Environment and Sustainability at Wake Forest University and a former EPA deputy administrator, favors requiring farms and other runoff sources to bear costs of environmental damage they cause if a workable system could be found.

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"But it's not clear to me that such a thing exists in the real world," he said. "I find it unlikely that any legislation any time soon is going to impose wide-scale restrictions on how farmers conduct their activities."

A more practical approach, he said, is convincing farmers that anti-runoff practices are in their economic interest.

WETLAND WARS

A case argued this month before the U.S. Supreme Court involved one of the longest-running debates about the Clean Water Act: Which waters does it legally protect?

Lakes, rivers and streams are covered, as are adjacent wetlands. But 40 years of court battles and regulatory rewrites have left unsettled the status of wetlands not directly connected to a larger water body — and of rain-dependent "ephemeral" streams that flow only part of the year.

"We want to preserve and protect our ability and statutory authority to regulate in this area," EPA's Regan said, describing wetlands as crucial for filtering out pollutants that otherwise would flow downstream. They also store floodwaters and provide habitat for a multitude of plants and animals.

His agency is rewriting rules for those disputed waters, even as the Supreme Court prepares to provide its own interpretation from the case of an Idaho couple who wants to build a house on land with swampy areas near a lake.

"What's at stake here is at least half the waterways in this country," said Jon Devine of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The National Association of Homebuilders, which supports the Idaho couple's challenge of an EPA order to stop work on their house, says states are better suited to oversee isolated wetlands and ephemeral streams than EPA or the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which handles some cases.

"The federal government doesn't have the bandwidth to regulate every single tiny wetland away from anything that would be considered navigable," said Tom Ward, the group's vice president for legal advocacy. State regulation was lax 50 years ago but has improved and "they know their waters," he said.

JUSTICE FOR ALL

Environmental justice — the quest for environmental policies that treat everyone fairly, including communities of color — is a high-profile issue nowadays, although it began with early 1980s protests over a hazardous waste landfill in an impoverished, majority-black community in Warren County, North Carolina.

But for Crystal M.C. Davis, the movement began the day after the infamous 1969 Cuyahoga fire, when Carl Stokes, Cleveland's first Black mayor, called a news conference and filed a complaint with the state seeking help in cleaning up the river. His brother, U.S. Rep. Louis Stokes, asked Congress for help — another step toward the Clean Water Act.

"The renaissance of the Cuyahoga River is personal to us," said Davis, who is Black and a vice president of the Alliance for the Great Lakes. "That's why we have to stop and celebrate, even though there's still room for improvement."

Regan, EPA's first Black administrator, said funding provided by the infrastructure package will help the agency apply the law in keeping with science and in partnerships with state and local agencies.

"So no matter the color of your skin ... or your ZIP code, you can enjoy safe, reliable water," he said.

Amazon faces off with union in fight for a second warehouse

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The startup union that clinched a historic labor victory at Amazon earlier this year is slated to face the company yet again, aiming to rack up more wins that could force the reluctant retail behemoth to the negotiating table.

This time, the Amazon Labor Union and the nation's second-largest private employer are facing off in the town of Schodack, near Albany, New York. Workers at the warehouse there, which employs roughly 800 people according to Amazon, will finish voting in a union election on Monday. The votes will be tallied Tuesday by the National Labor Relations Board.

"There are also a lot of odds against us, but I think there's definitely a huge possibility we might win,"

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said Sarah Chaudhry, an 18-year old who's been organizing workers since joining the company two months ago. "I can't jinx it."

The face-off near the state's capitol — one of the most unionized metro areas in the country, according to Unionstats.com — marks the third time the ALU is taking on Amazon following its initial win at a Staten Island facility in April. That victory — the first ever for an Amazon facility in the U.S. — came as a surprise even to those sympathetic to the union's calls for a \$30 hourly wage and better working conditions for warehouse workers.

But soon enough, challenges began to appear. A loss at a second, nearby warehouse in May took some wind out of the union's sail. Fractures were exposed when some prominent organizers left the group.

Elsewhere, the union lost time and resources attempting to cement its lone win. Amazon has accused the ALU and the NLRB's field office in Brooklyn of tainting the vote. In a quest for a redo election, the company filed more than two dozen objections with the agency, triggering a lengthy process that could take years to resolve.

Last month, a federal labor official who presided over the hearings ruled against the company, which has noted it intends to appeal. During an interview last month, Amazon CEO Andy Jassy also signaled the retail giant could drag the case to federal court.

"Amazon is ready to fight this to the death," said John Logan, the director of labor and employment studies at San Francisco State University. "And the problem for the Amazon Labor Union is if you only have one warehouse ... you're never going to have enough leverage to force the company to bargain."

The election in Albany offers the ALU a chance to show its win isn't a one-off, experts say. Heather Goodall, the main worker organizer in the facility, launched the campaign at the warehouse in May, three months after joining the company and a month after the Staten Island win. Her passion for unionizing, she said, came from the death of her son, who committed suicide six years ago while working for a large company.

"So when I heard that there were working conditions that were suspicious in my own community — and I have a 17- and 15-year-old that attends the school district in the area where Amazon conducts its business — I wanted to see firsthand what was going on," Goodall said.

Amazon launched its own campaign to push back the organizing effort. As it did with other warehouses, the company held mandatory meetings at the Schodack facility in an attempt to persuade workers to reject the union. It also put up flyers and signs across the warehouse urging workers to "vote no."

"Don't sign an ALU card," the company said on one sign posted on a screen at the facility. "The ALU is untested and unproven."

"We've always said that we want our employees to have their voices heard, and we hope and expect this process allows for that," Paul Flanagan, an Amazon spokesperson, said in a statement.

Last week, Amazon workers at a separate facility in California's Moreno Valley filed for their own union election, seeking to join the ALU. Nannette Plascencia, who has worked at the warehouse for seven years, said she and her colleagues have been attempting to organize the facility for more than two years, but the company's famously high turnover rate had made it challenging to build up enough support.

Another election spearheaded by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union at a warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama, remains too close to call with 416 challenged ballots still waiting for adjudication. The vote, held this spring, was the union's second attempt to organize there, following a prior loss that it contested.

Unlike Starbucks stores that have voted to unionize by the hundreds in the past year, organizing Amazon warehouses is a much more arduous task. The facilities typically employ hundreds -- or thousands — of employees. And it can take months to build up enough showing of support for an election.

Amazon warehouse workers at a facility in Garner, North Carolina, a suburb of Raleigh, have been organizing for months and plan to file for an election by the end of summer next year, said Tim Platt, an Amazon worker who's been soliciting support for the campaign under a group called Carolina Amazonians United for Solidarity and Empowerment, or CAUSE. Organizers are taking their time to file for an election so they can be confident of the outcome by the time workers start voting.

The workers there chose not to align with the ALU, though organizers still coordinate with each other

routinely. Platt said workers might join another union in the future. They've met with the Teamsters, which launched a division last month focused on organizing Amazon workers. But for now, Platt said they're only focused on organizing.

Mendoza, ALU's director of communications, said the union is trying to support other workers forming their own organizing committees across the country. However, their main task will be filing their own election petitions and building up more support at the facility that voted to unionize in case it needs to call for an action, such as a strike.

The union has been able to hire two full-time staff to help out with trainings and meetings. A \$250,000 donation from the American Federation of Teachers has also allowed them to get office space in Staten Island. They're building support, but it takes time, Mendoza said.

"You can lose some elections or win other ones," he said. "We're not concerned about an individual result the way Amazon is. They can't really afford to lose one."

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 struck Kyiv, setting buildings ablaze and sending residents running for cover. City life quickly resumed, though hours later air raid sirens were triggered again, and metro stations filled up with worried but calm residents.

The strikes were 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 enemy can attack our cities, but it won't be able to break us," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a social media post.

The 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.

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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 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 Postavnychi, 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, Postavnychi 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."

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

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — From his home in Collegeville, 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

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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: 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."

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 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 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

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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 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.

Climate Questions: How much has the climate changed already?

By DANA BELTAJI Associated Press

Relentless drought in China, East Africa, the U.S. West and northern Mexico, devastating floods in Pakistan and Kentucky, scorching heat waves in Europe and the Pacific Northwest, destructive cyclones in southern Africa and intense hurricanes in the U.S. and Central America make up just some of the recent extreme weather events that scientists have long predicted would be more intense with a warming climate.

"With just over one degree of warming since pre-industrial times, we are already seeing more extreme weather patterns," said Elizabeth Robinson, director of the Grantham Research Institute in London.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of an ongoing series answering some of the most fundamental questions around climate change, the science behind it, the effects of a warming planet and how the world is addressing it.

Scientists have been tracking precisely how much the climate has already changed due to human activity. Temperatures around the world have been inching upwards.

The average global temperature today, which tends to be compared to estimates for the pre-industrial era that kickstarted the mass burning of fossil fuels, has shot up between 0.9 and 1.2 degrees Celsius (1.6 to 2 degrees Fahrenheit) since 1850, in large part due to human activity, according to estimates in the most recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Most of that warming has happened from 1975 onwards, at a rate of 0.15 Celsius (0.27 Fahrenheit) to 0.2 Celsius (0.36 Fahrenheit) per decade.

Most people are living in areas that have heated up more than the global average, "partly that is urbanization — people move into cities, which are urban heat islands — and partly populations growing," Robinson said. Urban areas, packed with plenty of heat-absorbing infrastructure like roads and buildings and less cooling tree cover, become "islands" of warmer weather.

Sea levels, which have swelled due to both warming, expanding oceans and the melting of ice over land, have also been jumping up more rapidly. In the twentieth century, seas were rising by about 1.4 millimeters (0.06 inches) a year, but that's doubled to 3.6 millimeters a year (0.14 inches) in the past fifteen years, data suggests. Seas have risen by about 21 to 24 centimeters (8 to 9 inches) so far since 1880 on average, according to estimates, with the IPCC suggesting this will likely be up to 43 to 84 centimeters (17 to 33 inches) by 2100.

While the climate and global temperatures have fluctuated throughout the Earth's history, it is the rate of change that is most alarming to researchers. Fossil fuels — made up of ancient decomposing plants and animals deep in the earth — have been dug up at extraordinary rates. Scientists are now starting to pinpoint "details about rates and magnitudes and timing of changes" as well as the varying impact on regions, said Brown University climate scientist Kim Cobb.

With the planet already facing the effects of climate change, adapting to hazards is one major way humans can limit the damage. Weather-related disaster deaths are generally trending lower globally as forecasts, preparedness and resilience improves, scientists say.

"The extent to which people are harmed by an extreme weather event is strongly influenced by government policies," Robinson said, but added that "there are limits to adaptation."

Climate Questions: What's going on with climate change?

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By DANA BELTAJI Associated Press

Addressing climate change — a now ubiquitous term for the warming of the planet caused by humans emitting carbon dioxide and methane from coal, oil and natural gas into the atmosphere — is becoming exponentially more pressing, with the language of scientists, officials and activists becoming more serious with every passing year.

The most recent report by the world's top body of climate scientists gave a damning assessment of where the world is headed if more isn't done to curb global warming. Already, more extreme weather events are happening across the globe, from longer, more intense and more frequent droughts and heat waves to devastating floods and wetter hurricanes, attributed at least in part to climate change.

How the planet got here, the current and future effects of climate change, and what to do next, are all questions that experts have been researching for decades.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of an ongoing series answering some of the most fundamental questions around climate change, the science behind it, the effects of a warming planet and how the world is addressing it.

There may be an uptick in climate-related policy, discussions and activism, but the science isn't all that new.

Scientists in the early 1800s began to recognize that some gasses and water vapor could trap heat in the atmosphere. And for the last sixty years, researchers could definitively measure that carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere were rising, thanks to a CO₂-monitoring station at Mauna Loa in Hawaii.

Meteorologists in the middle of the twentieth century also started to understand the climate as a "system that is dynamic, constantly changing, and perhaps also vulnerable to external forcing and alteration," said Martin Mahony, a lecturer of human geography at the University of East Anglia who studies the history of climate science and its interactions with politics.

Add to that the knowledge that CO₂ levels were going up and scientists started realizing that this could be a major issue.

"In the 1960s, you start getting conferences and workshops on 'the CO₂ problem' ... bringing meteorologists together with the geophysicists and other folks to think through the implications of this in very abstract, theoretical terms," Mahony said.

But it wasn't long before this theoretical puzzle became a serious concern.

By the late eighties, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was set up to assess how much the climate is warming and if humans have anything to do with it.

Ever since its first report in 1990, the link between fossil fuels and global warming was clear. Coal, oil and natural gas for electricity, heating, transport, industries like steel and cement-making, and the gasses from agriculture and refrigerants, are burning up the planet.

Scientists say that average global temperatures have gone up by around 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit) since the middle of the nineteenth century, causing hotter temperature extremes, rising seas and weather disasters, with experts warning that more catastrophic climate events are on the way as the world warms up further.

"It's not just going to be heatwaves, drought, wildfires and hurricanes. It's going to be water resources, it's going to be food supplies ... it's going to be national security concerns that are going to be more apparent than they are right now," said Brown University climate scientist Kim Cobb.

Those living in the least developed nations or in poorer communities are often the most vulnerable to climate change. Many have called for rich, high-polluting countries, like the U.S. and much of Europe, to pay their share so that developing countries are more resilient to weather extremes and can curb their use of fossil fuels. Known as "loss and damage" in climate negotiations, it's an area that nations have struggled to agree on in recent years.

In a somewhat rare moment of agreement between rich nations and more climate-vulnerable, low-

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emitting ones, countries at the U.N.'s annual climate conference in Paris in 2015 did agree to limit warming to "well below" 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times, with the aim of capping the average global temperature rise to 1.5 Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit).

Alternatives to fossil fuels, like solar and wind energy, need to be scaled up dramatically if the Paris climate goals are to be met, experts say. Newer technologies, like carbon capture or green hydrogen, which are currently too expensive, untested at scale or both, will also have to be deployed to limit warming. Changes in people's personal lives can also make a difference, although the large reductions come from government policies and choices made by giant corporations, rather than individuals.

Although some effects of global warming are locked in, many scientists believe that curbing warming to just a few more tenths of a degree is achievable, but only if drastic action is taken very quickly.

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 and continues to rally his supporters with lies about voter fraud, has spent months raging against Joe Biden, reshaping down-ballot 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.

Even as he faces multiple investigations, including a criminal probe into the handling of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate, Trump has been holding raucous rallies in battleground states, where he alternates between touting his 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.

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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. Republicans 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 Bennet, who is seeking reelection this

year. Although Bennet is favored to win, he's facing a concerted challenge from Joe O'Dea, a Republican businessman.

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.

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.

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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.

Today in History: October 18, U.S. gets Alaska

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Oct. 18, the 291st day of 2022. There are 74 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 18, 1867, the United States took formal possession of Alaska from Russia.

On this date:

In 1648, Boston shoemakers were authorized to form a guild to protect their interests; it's the first American labor organization on record.

In 1892, the first long-distance telephone line between New York and Chicago was officially opened (it could only handle one call at a time).

In 1898, the American flag was raised in Puerto Rico shortly before Spain formally relinquished control of the island to the U.S.

In 1954, Texas Instruments unveiled the Regency TR-1, the first commercially produced transistor radio.

In 1962, James D. Watson, Francis Crick and Maurice Wilkins were honored with the Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology for determining the double-helix molecular structure of DNA.

In 1968, the U.S. Olympic Committee suspended Tommie Smith and John Carlos for giving a "Black power" salute as a protest during a victory ceremony in Mexico City.

In 1969, the federal government banned artificial sweeteners known as cyclamates (SY'-kluh-maytz) because of evidence they caused cancer in laboratory rats.

In 1972, Congress passed the Clean Water Act, overriding President Richard Nixon's veto.

In 1977, West German commandos stormed a hijacked Lufthansa jetliner on the ground in Mogadishu, Somalia, freeing all 86 hostages and killing three of the four hijackers.

In 1984, actor Jon-Erik Hexum, 26, was taken off life support six days after shooting himself in the head

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with a pistol loaded with a blank cartridge on the set of his TV show "Cover Up."

In 2001, CBS News announced that an employee in anchorman Dan Rather's office had tested positive for skin anthrax. Four disciples of Osama bin Laden were sentenced in New York to life without parole for their roles in the deadly 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies in Africa.

In 2010, four men snared in an FBI sting were convicted of plotting to blow up New York City synagogues and shoot down military planes with the help of a paid informant who'd convinced them he was a terror operative. (James Cromitie, David Williams, Onta Williams and Laguerre Payen were each sentenced to 25 years in prison.)

Ten years ago: The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York ruled that a federal law defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman was unconstitutional. (The following June, the Supreme Court would use that case to strike down provisions keeping legally-married same-sex couples from receiving federal benefits that were otherwise available to married couples.)

Five years ago: President Donald Trump rejected claims that he had been disrespectful to the grieving family of a slain U.S. soldier in a phone call to the family. Instead of accepting awards at the CMT Artists of the Year show in Nashville, singer Jason Aldean and other stars honored the victims of the mass shooting at a country music festival in Las Vegas.

One year ago: Colin Powell, a trailblazing soldier and diplomat who was the first Black person to serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and also the first to serve as secretary of state, died at 84 of COVID-19 complications. Jury selection got underway in the trial of three white men charged with fatally shooting a Black man, Ahmaud Arbery, as he was running in their Georgia neighborhood. (All three would be convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.) Attorneys said the families of those killed, wounded and scarred in the 2018 Florida high school massacre had reached a \$25 million settlement with the Broward County school district.

Today's Birthdays: College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Mike Ditka is 83. Singer-musician Russ Giguere is 79. Actor Joe Morton is 75. Actor Pam Dawber is 72. Author Terry McMillan is 71. Writer-producer Chuck Lorre is 70. Gospel singer Vickie Winans is 69. Director-screenwriter David Twohy (TOO'-ee) is 67. International Tennis Hall of Famer Martina Navratilova is 66. Actor Jon Lindstrom is 65. International Hall of Fame boxer Thomas Hearns is 64. Actor Jean-Claude Van Damme is 62. Jazz musician Wynton Marsalis is 61. Actor Vincent Spano is 60. Rock musician Tim Cross is 56. Singer Nonchalant is 55. Former tennis player Michael Stich (shteeek) is 54. Actor Joy Bryant is 48. Rock musician Peter Svensson (The Cardigans) is 48. Actor Wesley Jonathan is 44. R&B singer-actor Ne-Yo is 43. Country singer Josh Gracin is 42. Olympic gold medal skier Lindsey Vonn is 38. Jazz singer-musician Esperanza Spalding is 38. Actor-model Freida Pinto is 38. Actor Zac Efron is 35. Actor Joy Lauren is 33. U.S. Olympic and WNBA basketball star Brittney Griner is 32. TV personality Bristol Palin is 32. Actor Tyler Posey is 31. Actor Toby Regbo is 31.