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Groton Community Calendar

Friday, Oct. 21

Senior Menu: Chicken rice casserole, green beans, spinach salad, chocolate pudding with bananas, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Eggs and sausage.

School Lunch: Fish nuggets, tiny whole potatoes.

Volleyball hosts Redfield. (8th grade match at 6 p.m. in gym, C match at 5 p.m. followed by JV and varsity. Wear NEON night.

Saturday, Oct. 22

State Cross Country Meet in Huron

Emmanuel Lutheran WELCA fall retreat, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Sunday, Oct. 23

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

St. John's worship, 9 a.m.; Zion Lutheran worship, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship/confirmation for Milestones for freshmen, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School; Serve at Bethesda, 2 p.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

UMC: Conde Worship, 8:30 a.m.; coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m. (third graders receive Bibles during worship); Sunday School after children's sermon during worship.

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

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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You can ask "why" all you want, but it doesn't mean a damn thing if you're not listening to the answer.

Author Unknown

Chicken Soup
for the Soul

Monday, Oct. 24

Senior Menu: French dip sandwich, macaroni salad, seasoned cabbage, waldorf salad.

School Breakfast: Mini pancakes.

School Lunch: Pepperoni pizza, mixed vegetables.

Volleyball at Britton (rescheduled from Oct. 28). C match at 5 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity.

Noon: Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center with potluck dinner.

3:30 p.m.: 5th grade band introduction.

**HELP
WANTED!**

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.



With a campaign focused on character, Jamie Smith sees 'genuine' shot at upsetting Gov. Kristi Noem

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

On debate night in South Dakota, Karen Marso parked her car and quickly scooted across a road in Rapid City to join a group of three dozen backers of gubernatorial candidate Jamie Smith.

The gaggle of Smith supporters was there to await the arrival of the Democratic nominee just before the Sept. 30, 2022, debate between Smith, Libertarian candidate Tracey Quint and incumbent Republican Gov. Kristi Noem.

The fact Marso was there to welcome Smith marked a major shift for the 68-year-old retiree and her husband, John, who were both lifelong Republicans until a few years ago, when Donald Trump was elected president.

The turmoil of the Trump presidency turned them away from GOP politics and politicians, including Gov. Noem, who has aligned herself closely with Trump and the national Republican Party, Karen Marso said.

But Marso's support for the Democratic candidate had far more to do with Smith than with allegiance to one party or another, she said.

The pre-debate rally would be the third time Marso had met Smith, and she has been impressed every time with his attitude and approach as well as his policy positions.

"I just think he's really genuine, and he really cares," she said. "I think you can tell just by looking in somebody's eyes, and you can tell when someone is genuine or fake, and he's for real."

Marso said she doesn't appreciate Noem's actions to overturn the voter-approval legalization of adult-use marijuana in 2020, and her refusal to support a woman's right to abortion in the case of rape or incest. "Plus, she's an election denier and I'm tired of that," Marso said.

Swing voters like Marso may hold the key to the 2022 gubernatorial election, which a recent South Dakota State University poll of registered voters indicated is closer than many thought, with Noem at 45% support and Smith at 41%, within the poll's 4% margin of error.

The narrow poll results underscore what has suddenly become a closely watched campaign pitting a well-funded, well-known, hard-charging Republican incumbent with potential presidential aspirations against a relatively inexperienced Democrat who has little money and name recognition in a state dominated by



Jamie Smith, the Democratic nominee for governor, shakes hands with supporters during a rally for Smith prior to the Sept. 30, 2022 gubernatorial debate in Rapid City. Photo: Bart

Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch

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"I don't find Jamie Smith extreme in anything, and I wouldn't call him a liberal Democrat, I really wouldn't ... he's just the kind of guy that everybody loves, he's a guy who's really hard not to love. When he talks to you he really listens and he really cares."

-- Republican Speaker of the House Spencer Gosch

conversations with Jamie than I ever have had with the governor, and she's from my own party," Gosch said. "Jamie Smith to me, I think he's a great guy...as a person, I consider us really, really good friends because he's just the kind of guy that everybody loves, he's a guy who's really hard not to love. When he talks to you he really listens and he really cares, and he remembers things."

Smith, the minority leader in the South Dakota House, said he has traveled the state and felt enough support for his campaign and enough distaste for Noem's positions and divisive politics that he sees a legitimate shot at an upset in the election on Nov. 8, 2022.

"I wouldn't count me out at all, because people are looking for decency in government," Smith said. "There could very well be a huge surprise when people wake up on Nov. 9."

Teacher, coach, father, lawmaker

Smith, 51, was born and grew up in Sioux Falls, the son of educators. His mother's parents were farmers and his grandpa on his dad's side was one of the founders of Raven Industries, now a major agricultural technology firm in Sioux Falls. "I grew up in a very loving family," he said.

Smith, according to friends, was a popular and active student in high school, where he was a wrestler in the 140-pound weight class and finished top 5 in the state tournament his two final years. Smith attended college on a music scholarship at Augustana University, majoring in communications. The deep-voiced Smith was a bass in chorus and theater both in high school and college, and later would serve as the announcer at state prep wrestling tournaments.

After college graduation, his first job was as the voice and operator of Wilbur the Coyote, the animatronic animal that delivered pizzas and jokes to patrons of the Gigglesbee's family fun center in Sioux Falls. Smith was promoted to management and helped open a Gigglesbee's in Rapid City.

He later returned to college, earned a teaching degree and entered the classroom, teaching middle school science in Sioux Falls. He also coached wrestling and football at the middle and high school levels, including at Axtell Park Middle and Roosevelt High.

Republican voters and elected officials.

In numerous political ads and mailers, the Noem campaign and the state Republican Party have painted Smith as too liberal or "too extreme for South Dakota."

A recent mailer from the party said Smith pushed vaccine mandates, marched with Black Lives Matter "radicals," supported open national borders and wanted to confiscate legally owned guns from South Dakotans.

But a leading Republican in the state Legislature, who knows Smith well, said the Democratic candidate for governor is not extreme in his views and is a lawmaker who works well with people of all backgrounds and political positions.

"I don't find Jamie Smith extreme in anything ... and I wouldn't call him a liberal Democrat, I really wouldn't," said House Speaker Spencer Gosch, R-Glenham. "Just take a look at the talking points they are throwing out, because this is all they can find. If that's all you can find against Jamie Smith, most of that stuff is a little weak. It's personal and they're not going after Smith on his record because there's not that much they disagree with."

Gosch said he has found Smith to be a likable lawmaker who is a great listener and valued colleague, even though the two disagree on many political issues.

"I would tell you that between Jamie Smith and the governor, I've had a much more cordial relationship and

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"I still love teaching and coaching, and I'm a teacher and coach at heart," he said.

Smith met his wife, Kjerstin, while in chorus at Augustana but didn't find a romantic connection until a few years later when Smith took her on a dance date to the Mr. and Mrs. Club at the El Riad Shrine in Sioux Falls. After 23 years of marriage, the Smiths have raised two sons, Johnathan and Isaac, and have a goldendoodle dog named Maggie.

Smith eventually left teaching and took a job selling orthopedic medical parts before earning a real estate license. Smith remains an agent with Hegg Realtors in Sioux Falls.

Smith ran for the state House of Representatives in 2016 and won a seat in District 15, a swath of downtown Sioux Falls between Interstate 29 and 229.

In his second term, in 2019, Smith was elected by his peers as house minority leader, a position he still holds.

Throughout his time in office, Smith said he has worked to develop a reputation as a builder of bridges between lawmakers of different parties and people who disagree on issues.

"I heard years ago the saying that, 'We can disagree without being disagreeable,' and I really do believe that and I try to look for the good in everybody," Smith said. "If there's people I disagree with, I always think about how that other person loves their mom and dad and kids and grandparents as much as I do, so I kind of start at that point."

In his free time, Smith is an occasional hunter but more of an avid angler who fishes for walleye on the Missouri River and who has also taken his family on fishing trips to Lake of the Woods in Canada.

On Native American Day in October, Smith traveled through Indian Country in western South Dakota and shot hoops with a young Native boy while also meeting with local residents and officials.

"What they want is someone to work with them and show up and walk beside them, who listens and who avails themselves to them," he said. "Their concerns are the same as other South Dakotans — we all want a better life for our kids and a good situation for our parents when they get old."

During two days in Indian Country, Smith said he frequently heard about Noem's poor relationship with tribes and disconnect from tribal residents, including how Noem was once banned from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

"It shouldn't be an us-and-them type of mentality; Native Americans should be a part of the fabric of South Dakota and not like an addition to the state," he said. "There's definitely challenges but there's a lot of good going on, too."

Smith said his message to Native residents was the same as it is to all residents of the state: "I'm going to be there with you, and I'm going to step in stride with you and work to make life better for all South Dakotans."

Making the campaign about truth, honesty and character

Smith announced his candidacy for governor in February 2022 and began the race with little money or name recognition.

He remains well behind in the fundraising category, according to state and federal campaign records. From January to May 2022, the latest state campaign-finance reporting period, Smith had raised \$137,000 and had \$110,000 in reserves. He had received only one out-of-state donation, a \$500 contribution from the Unified Rural Democrats of America.



Jamie Smith, fourth from left, smiles with friends after graduating from Augustana University in Sioux Falls in 1993. Photo: Courtesy Jamie Smith

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Karen Marso of Rapid City attended a rally in support of Democratic gubernatorial candidate Jamie Smith prior to the debate on Sept. 30, 2022. Marso said she finds Smith to be genuine and caring. Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch

Noem campaign claimed that Smith was “endangering families.”

“Extreme Jamie Smith wants complete government control over your family,” the ad states. It goes on to make some of the other common claims against Smith by the Noem campaign: that he supported mask and vaccine mandates; that he endorsed the Black Lives Matter movement; that he supports opening U.S. borders; that he wants to infringe on the rights of gun owners; and that he supports higher taxes.

“Each of these policies endanger South Dakota families,” the ad concludes. Noem has also tried hard to tie Smith to President Joe Biden, launching a website called “Jamieandjoe” to push the claims. Noem’s campaign uses inflammatory language to describe Smith, saying he wants to “indoctrinate our children,” that he bows to the “leftist mob” and that he is opposed to secure elections.

In a pair of interviews, Smith brushed aside many of those criticisms, which he said are overblown and in some cases downright inaccurate. For example, he said he supports the Second Amendment and is a gun owner, but also supported a bill that would have allowed for removal of guns from people formally declared mentally ill.

Smith said he isn’t concerned by his “F” rating with the National Rifle Association, and puts more emphasis on what he said is a business-friendly “A” rating by the chambers of commerce in Sioux Falls and Rapid City.

He noted that he did support Joe Biden over Bernie Sanders during the 2020 Democratic primary, but that he has never met Biden. Many of the other claims against him, especially that he is “too extreme” for South Dakota, are simply baseless, he said.

Meanwhile, Smith has attacked Noem for her frequent out-of-state travel and for catering to national political extremists.

Smith calls out Noem for what he calls her questionable ethics, in regard to use of state planes for personal trips and for interfering in the process to help get her daughter an appraiser’s license, for which Noem was sanctioned by a panel of South Dakota judges.

“South Dakotans know the difference between right and wrong,” Smith said in an interview, repeating

In contrast, Gov. Noem, 50, is running what is believed to be the most highly funded gubernatorial campaign in state history. As of the May 2022 reporting period, Noem had \$7.8 million in reserves in her state campaign fund and had received nearly \$900,000 in out-of-state contributions.

Additionally, in 2021, Noem raised \$7.9 million in advance of the gubernatorial election, according to state records. Federal Elections Commission records show that Noem’s national Noem Victory Fund raised \$2.9 million and spent \$2.2 million from Jan. 1, 2022, to Sept. 30, 2022.

In one respect, Smith has gained significant name recognition since the start of the campaign, as Noem and the state Republican Party have continually attacked Smith’s political and legislative record on television, in radio ads and in a consistent barrage of mailers.

In a September 2022 press release announcing a new TV ad campaign, the

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one of his most effective lines from the Sept. 30 debate with Noem.

To a large extent, Smith has worked to make the campaign one focused on character, trust, truth and honesty — all things he claims Gov. Noem has lost during her political career.

“It’s just a smear campaign in which they demonize certain words, and it’s from the playbook and the state of politics right now from her part of her party,” Smith said. “It’s not very imaginative, but it must work to scare people and not tell the truth about who a person is. In this day and age, it’s important to share ideas, and to show how we’re different but also alike.”

Smith said he wishes he had done more in the one and only debate between the gubernatorial candidates to refute what he says are lies told by Noem about him. But he adds that he believes there remains a place in politics for a positive campaign focused on issues, even if it is becoming more rare.

“I know that people have come numb and skeptical of politicians, or people that work in government, because of the past several years where somebody created the idea that there [are] facts and alternative facts,” Smith said. “I believe there are facts and then there are lies.”

On his campaign website, Smith outlines seven major policy priorities, including:

- Economy: Support technical education and job-training programs to keep young people from leaving the state.
- Agriculture: Initiate property-tax relief, promote value-added ag, and separate agriculture and natural resources back into individual agencies.
- Healthcare: Expand Medicaid, allow access to abortion, increase access to rural health services and support failing nursing homes.
- Education: Raise teacher pay, extend local control over K-12 education.
- Integrity: Expand financial reporting by politicians, require staff to sign ethics pledges and allow voter-approved legal cannabis to become law.
- Crime: Focus on prevention and rehabilitation, support addiction recovery, fight the methamphetamine epidemic, keep guns away from those with mental illness.
- Native American issues: Reconcile with tribes, engage tribal leaders in government, create economic opportunities in tribal communities.

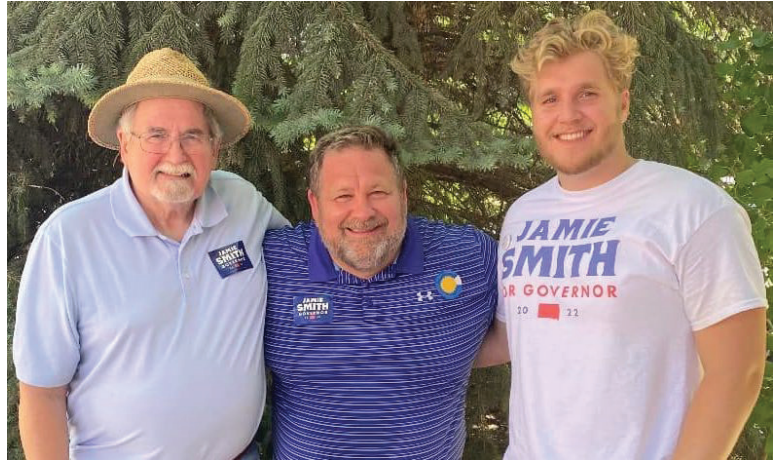
According to the legislative-tracking website billtrack50.com, Smith was a sponsor of 68 separate bills or resolutions during the 2022 legislative session, of which 29 passed or were eventually signed into law.

Bills that passed included a tax on revenues from proposed carbon-dioxide pipelines and appropriations for a nursing home in Lyman County, for a biomedical research facility at the University of South Dakota, and to develop use of 3-D printing of concrete homes in tribal communities.

Bills that failed included a proposal to prohibit possession of a loaded firearm while intoxicated from alcohol or marijuana; to reduce the penalty for drug ingestion from a felony to a misdemeanor; and a bill to prohibit private funding of active-duty National Guard or state guard missions.

Smith said he stands by his record and will continue to be open and honest about his positions if he is elected governor.

“There’s a lot of great people across this state; there’s a lot of people who want a government that reflects



State Rep. Jamie Smith, center, the Democratic nominee for governor in South Dakota, stands with his father, J.R. Smith, at left, and with one of his sons, Johnathan, at right, in Tabor, S.D. in 2022. Photo: Courtesy Jamie Smith

their hard work, their commitment to their families, and that want somebody that is working hard for them," Smith said. "I'd like them to know that there's a guy who wants to be governor who tells the truth, who is focused on them and their needs, who is willing to jump in there and do the work for the people of South Dakota, and do it for them, and not do it for myself or any other reason."

A man of 'grace and positivity'

Tiffany Kortan has been a good friend of Smith for more than 30 years, ever since they met the summer before high school in a production of "Annie" at the Orpheum Theater in Sioux Falls. (Smith played the scoundrel Daniel "Rooster" Hannigan and Kortan played a singing Boylan sister.)

The Class of 1989 graduates from Washington High School were active together in choir and swing choir, and had many mutual friends, Kortan said. At Washington, Smith was the lead in several theater productions, served as student council president and was in the homecoming court, she said.

"I admired Jamie for reaching out to all students; no matter the friend group, he just was a great guy to everyone," she said.

Since then, Kortan has watched Smith's positive traits flourish as they entered adulthood. The two have had frequent interactions through the years. Smith sang at the wedding of Kortan and her husband, and sang at the weddings of Kortan's daughters, and helped broker a home purchase by one of Kortan's daughters.

Smith and Kortan's husband both coached youth wrestling in Sioux Falls, and as couples, the Kortans and Smiths went with a group to Mexico to celebrate turning 40, and recently went to Arizona to celebrate their 50ths.

Kortan said Smith has an upbeat, outgoing personality that allows him to work and speak respectfully with others, even those who disagree with him.

"Serving as a Democrat, he's in the minority party, so he's always trying to work with others who might not see things exactly the way he does," said Kortan, a registered Democrat. "That's a hard position to be in, and I think he's done that with grace and positivity."

Kortan said she believes Smith can bring his positive personal traits to the office of governor and help make South Dakota a better state. "I think Jamie is very genuine, and he really cares about people and he really cares about South Dakota," said Kortan, 51, a math teacher at Sioux Falls Memorial Middle School. "I just feel like he's a person I can count on, that I've always been able to count on, and I think the state of South Dakota can count on him, too."

Rep. Chris Johnson, R-Rapid City, is the assistant majority leader in the South Dakota House, and has worked with Smith on a handful of legislative issues.

Johnson said he and Smith work together well, even though they disagree politically. The two appeared together in weekly press conferences hosted by the House leadership from both parties during the annual legislative sessions.



Gubernatorial candidate Jamie Smith poses for a picture with his wife, Kjerstin, at an event in 2019. Jamie Smith is a real estate agent in Sioux Falls and his wife is a librarian. Photo: Courtesy Jamie Smith

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"I would not support him for governor, period, because I disagree with his political stances and think they would be very damaging to the state ... but personally, I get along with him just fine. He's a very congenial man and I enjoy his sense of humor and he presents himself very professionally."

-- Rep. Chris Johnson, R-Rapid City, speaking about Jamie Smith."

"He doesn't have a lot of self-interest and he's not in it to show somebody how important he is. The fact he had to be asked and encouraged to run tells you he wasn't out looking to make a name for himself."

Soli said Smith has shown to her and others that he is a good listener who works well with people of all backgrounds and interests.

"He has the gifts: the intelligence, the caring, the thoughtfulness, and the ability to truly work with people and recognize their gifts," Soli said. "He also has a lot of integrity."

State Rep. Jennifer Keintz, D-Eden, is a first-term lawmaker who has worked in marketing and real estate and now owns a realty and auction business in the northeast corner of South Dakota.

Keintz said she would often get a call from Smith while driving home from Pierre during her first legislative session in 2021, and Smith would just check in to see if Keintz was doing OK or if she had any questions or needed anything.

During the waning days of the 2022 session, Keintz, 49, said she had a rough day in the Legislature, and popped into Smith's office in the Capitol to decompress.

"He's got this great open-door policy, and I had a couple things happen that were really tough," Keintz recalled. "I went in and sat down, but I just burst into tears, which I wasn't expecting."

Keintz said she was immediately embarrassed, but was touched by how Smith handled the sudden outpouring of emotion.

"Jamie jumped up from his desk and ran over and sat next to me and wanted to know what was going on," Keintz said. "That's not something that just anybody would do. I guess I just needed to vent, and being around him is a place where I feel comfortable doing that, because that's the kind of guy he is — he cares about people and he's going to be there to help people or help them deal with whatever they're

"We live in two different worlds politically, and I would not support him for governor, period, because I disagree with his political stances and think they would be very damaging to the state," Johnson said in an interview with News Watch. "But personally, I get along with him just fine. He's a very congenial man and I enjoy his sense of humor and he presents himself very professionally."

Johnson added: "You can be friends with somebody you disagree with; that's an important part of the whole process."

Former lawmaker Karen Soli of Sioux Falls got to know Smith when he was her daughter's teacher at Axtell Park Middle School, where Smith's wife was also an educator.

"They were her favorite teachers, and she became their first babysitter for their son who is now in college," Soli said.

Soli, who lives in the same House district as Smith, encouraged him to run for office when a seat opened six years ago. Smith was reluctant at first, Soli said, but after they made a trip together to Pierre during the legislative session, Smith was hooked.

Since then, Soli said she has watched as Smith has grown into a state leader with the confidence, knowledge and determination to be governor.

"I think it would be incredibly challenging to be a Democratic governor in a Republican majority state, but I know he can do it," she said.

Soli said she has been impressed with how devoted Smith is to South Dakota and its residents.

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going through.”

When Keintz was approached in July to be Smith’s running mate and join the Democratic ticket as the candidate for lieutenant governor, she said she was honored to do so.

Keintz said she has been impressed with Smith’s willingness to work with and listen to all members of the Legislature, including those in the opposing party.

“I saw him numerous times working with Republicans on a variety of issues, and he just focused on getting things done and working for the people of South Dakota, and not creating rifts and drama among people,” she said. “He was just there to do work and I can see how beneficial that will be for him as governor.”

Keintz said it’s clear to many in Pierre that Noem “can’t even get along with her own party,” and that



The 2022 Democratic gubernatorial ticket in South Dakota includes state Rep. Jennifer Keintz, running for lieutenant governor, and Rep. Jamie Smith, candidate for governor. Photo:

Courtesy Jamie Smith

Noem has had a rocky relationship with the conservative arm of the South Dakota Republican caucus.

“Many people who’ve been around South Dakota politics a long time who say they’ve never seen this kind of dissension among the ranks,” Keintz said. “Jamie is just not that kind of person; he’s absolutely genuine. What you see one on one is the same person you see in group settings.”

Keintz said she and Smith have “a nice balance” in their personal histories that make them a good team. In addition to the gender difference, Keintz was born in South Dakota but moved to the East Coast for several years in her 20s and 30s, while Smith has remained in Sioux Falls his entire life. Both have children, but while Smith’s are young adults, Keintz is the mother of a 5-year-old.

“We just complement each other in a lot of ways, and I think it creates a nice balance,” Keintz said. “But fundamentally we share the same values so it’s a good partnership.”

Keintz said she feels she and Smith have done well in deflecting the criticisms from Noem that they are too liberal for South Dakota, that they oppose the Second Amendment and that they are in favor of transgendered girls playing female sports.

Keintz said that many conservatives support commonsense gun control measures, and that transgender sports is a non-issue in South Dakota.

“Jamie and I believe that trans girls are girls, so they’re not boys playing girls sports,” she said. “It’s not even happening in South Dakota anyway.”

Keintz said she is hopeful South Dakota voters from all parties will recognize the significant differences between Smith and Noem and make their choice on Election Day to trust that Smith is the right person to lead the state. The election, she said, will likely come down to the growing number of Independent voters and to Republican voters who decide to change course and vote for a Democratic governor.

“The level of enthusiasm for Jamie is just amazing and so energizing across the political spectrum,” Keintz said. “People are ready for a change and they’re ready for somebody like Jamie who we can count on. The question is whether people will be able to make that change. They’re unhappy with Kristi Noem, but will they be able to vote for a different party than they have in the past?”

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

NOAA's U.S. Winter Outlook 2022-2023

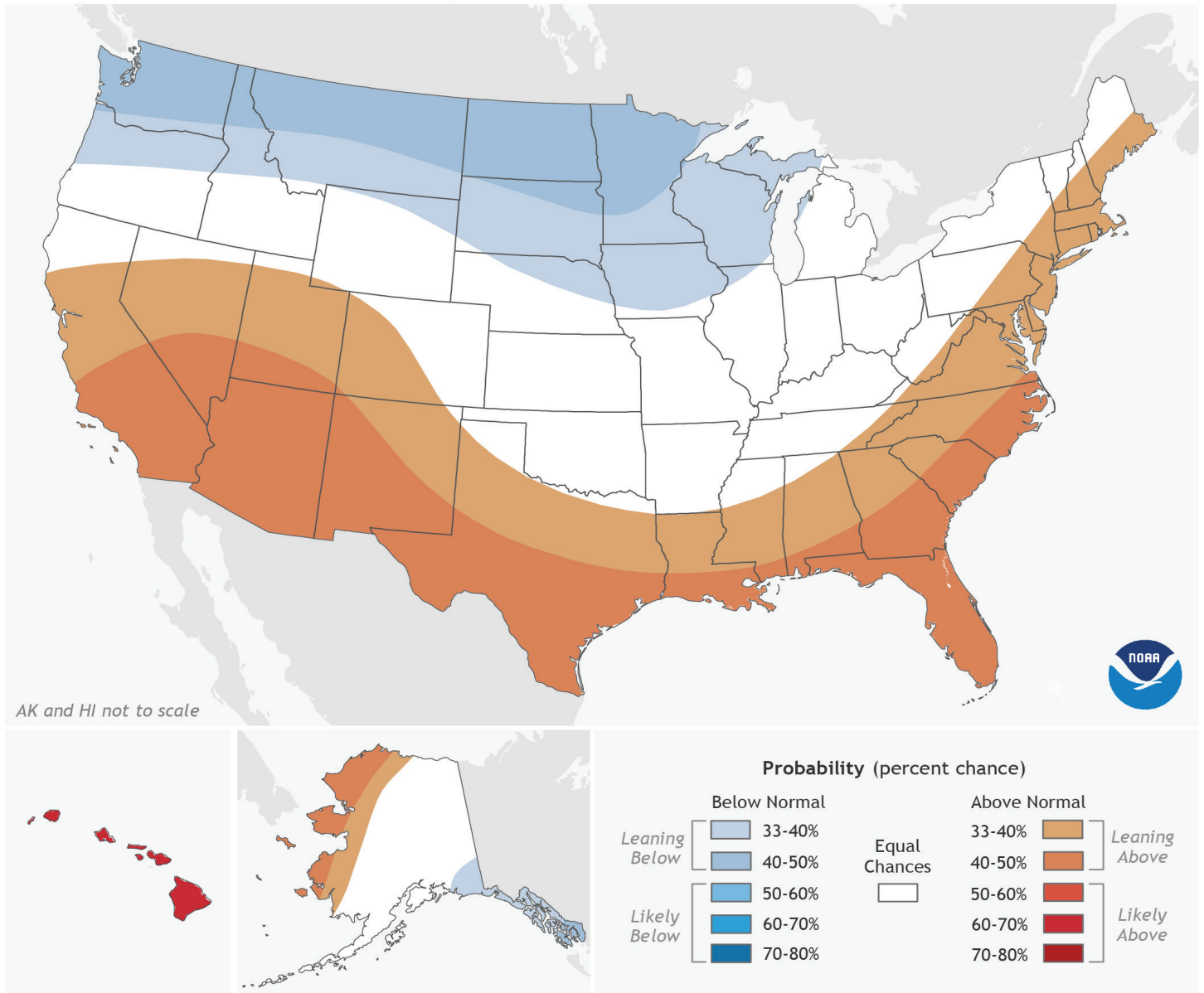
Winter Outlook 2022-2023 (December-January-February)

La Niña returns for the third consecutive winter and is a key player in the 2022-2023 winter outlook.

Temperature

- The greatest chance for warmer-than-average conditions are in western Alaska, and the Central Great Basin and Southwest extending through the Southern Plains.
- Warmer-than-average temperatures are also favored in the Southeastern U.S. and along the Atlantic coast.
- Below-normal temperatures are favored from the Pacific Northwest eastward to the western Great Lakes and the Alaska Panhandle.

Winter 2022-23: U.S. Temperature Outlook



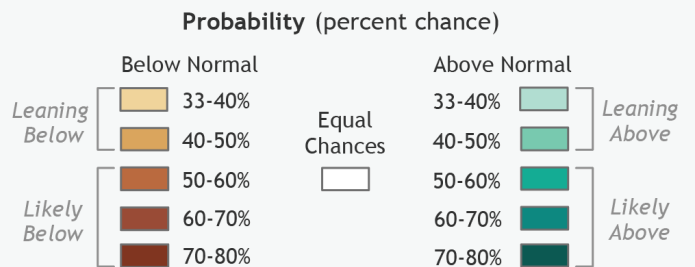
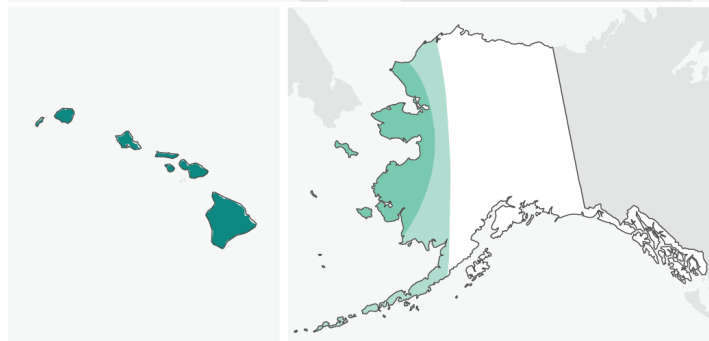
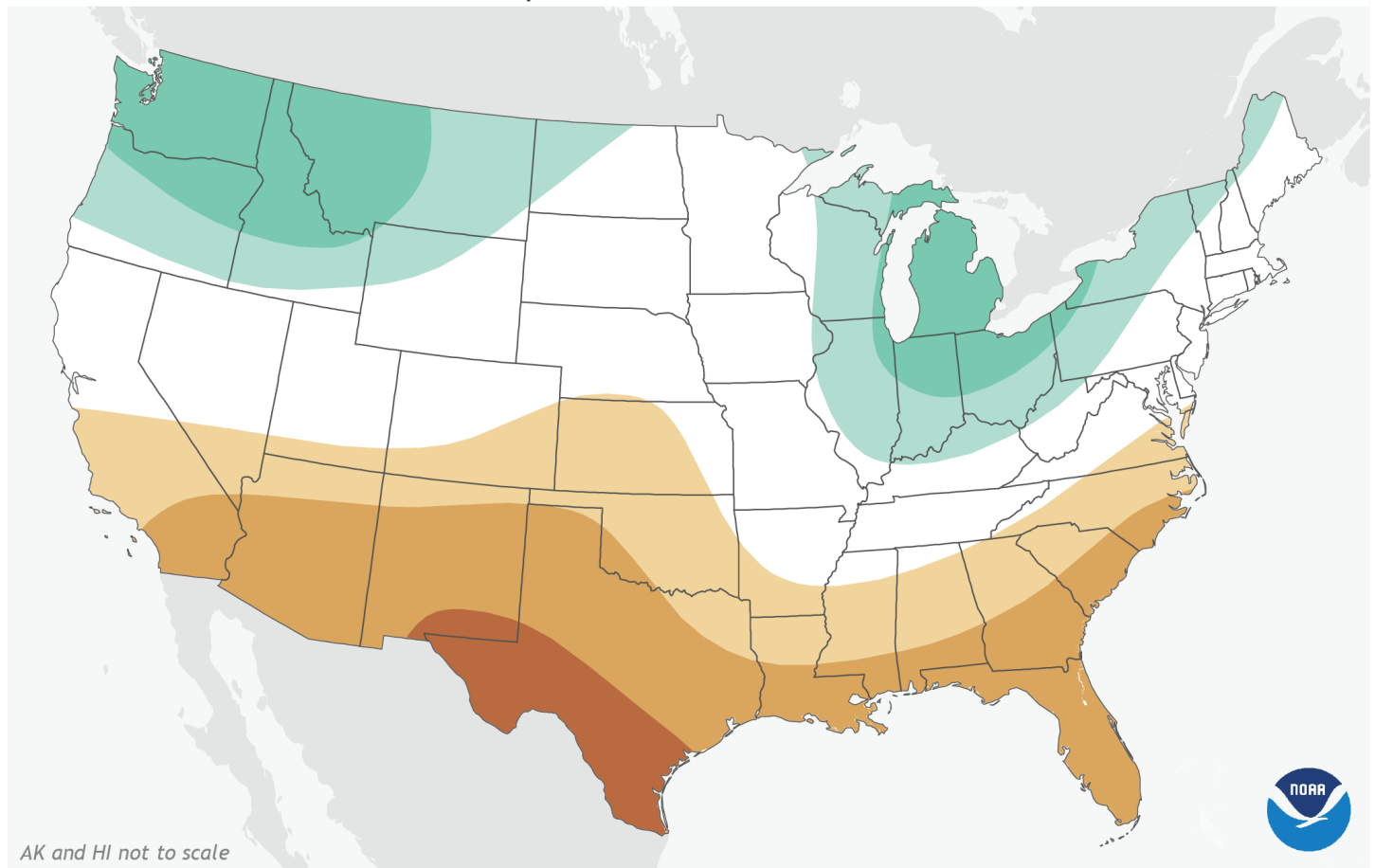
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Precipitation

- Wetter-than-average conditions are most likely in western Alaska, the Pacific Northwest, northern Rockies, Great Lakes and Ohio Valley.
- The greatest chances for drier-than-average conditions are forecast in portions of California, the Southwest, the southern Rockies, southern Plains, Gulf Coast and much of the Southeast.
- The remainder of the U.S. falls into the category of equal chances for below-, near-, or above-average seasonal total precipitation.

Winter 2022-23: U.S. Precipitation Outlook



Precipitation Outlook
for December 2022 - February 2023
Issued 20 October 2022

NWS Climate Prediction Center
Map by NOAA Climate.gov

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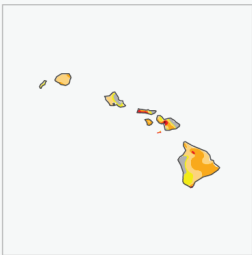
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Drought

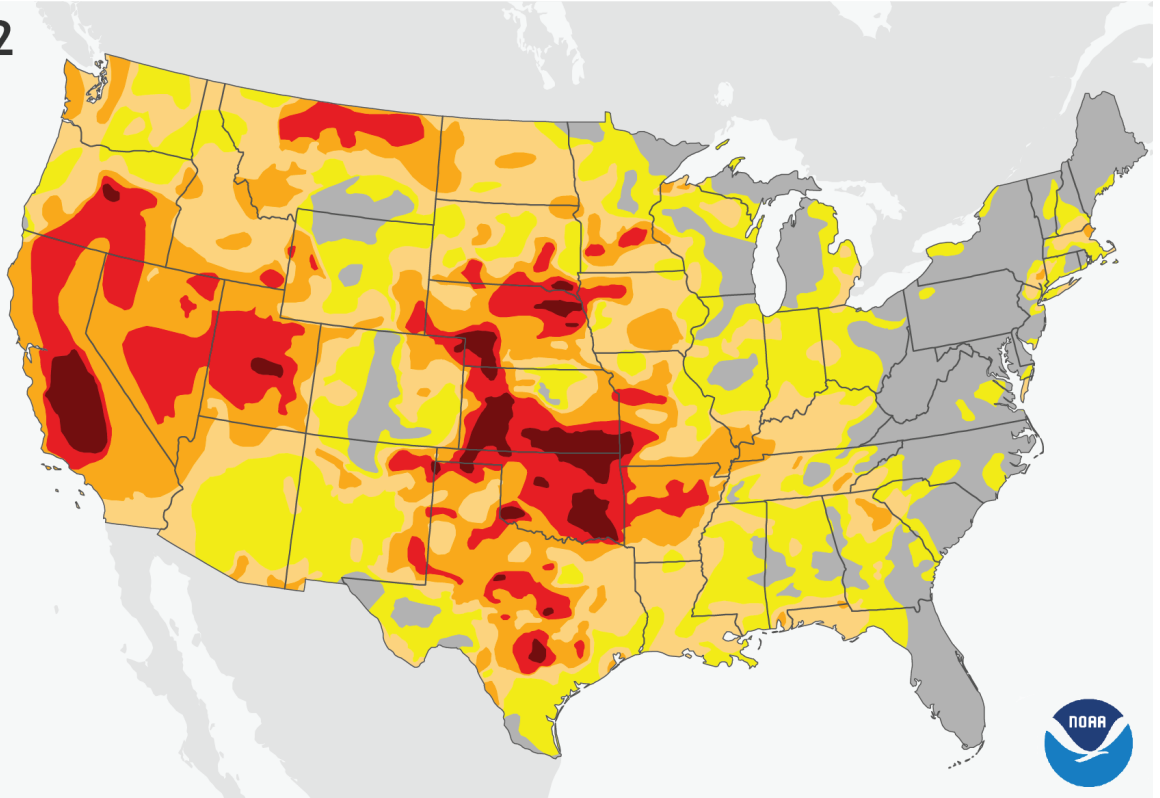
- Widespread extreme drought continues to persist across much of the West, the Great Basin, and the central-to-southern Great Plains.
- Drought is expected to impact the middle and lower Mississippi Valley this winter.
- Drought development is expected to occur across the South-central and Southeastern U.S., while drought conditions are expected to improve across the Northwestern U.S. over the coming months.

Winter 2022

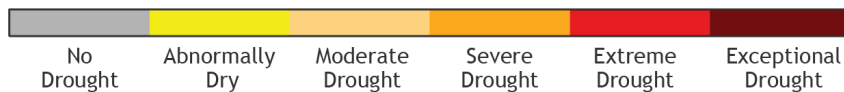
U.S.
Drought
Monitor



AK and HI not to scale



October 20, 2022



Climate.gov
Data: NDMC

Groton Daily Independent

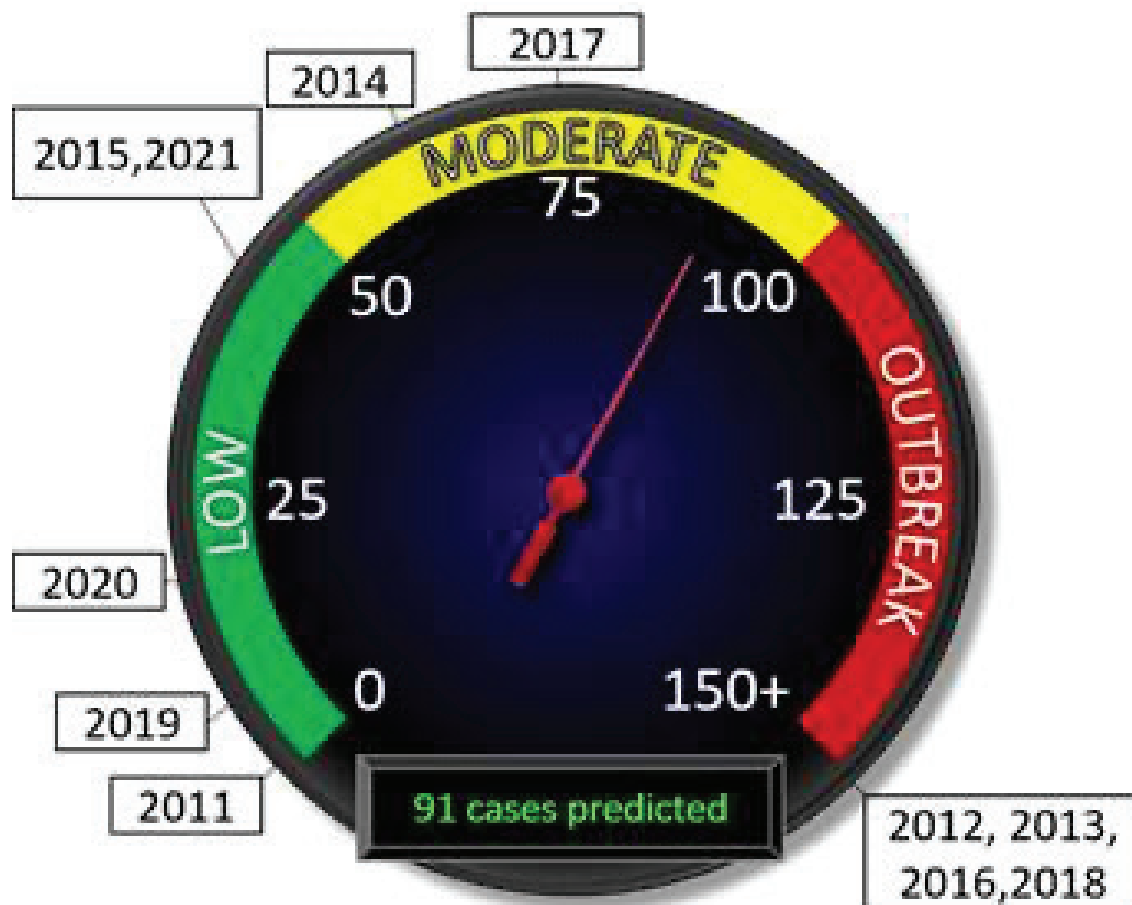
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SD WNV (as of October 20) (Final for the season)

- 69 human cases reported (Beadle, Bon Homme, Brookings, Brown, Brule, Clark, Codington, Day, Deuel, Dewey, Douglas, Edmunds, Faulk, Grant, Hamlin, Hand, Hanson, Hughes, Jerauld, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, Marshall, McCook, Mellette, Minnehaha, Miner, Pennington, Potter, Sanborn, Spink, Sully, Turner, Union, Walworth, Yankton)
- 13 human viremic blood donors (Beadle, Brown, Brule, Hand, Lake, Minnehaha, Potter, Roberts, Spink)
- 7 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of October 20): 766 cases (AL, AZ, AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, MO, NE, NJ, NM, NY, NC, ND, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA, WI, WY) and 52 deaths

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2022, South Dakota (as of October 20)



New Beauty Salon opens in Groton

by Dorene Nelson

Paityn Bonn, a 2017 graduate of Groton High School, is the proud owner of Lavish Luxury, Groton's newest beauty salon. The salon is located on the corner of Highway 37 and 3rd Ave. Her parents are Greg and Stacey Bonn from Conde, SD.

"I received my training at Lake Area Technical College in Watertown," Bonn explained. "I did all of my pre-clinical study and work there, graduating in 2019."

"The cosmetology program at Lake Area begins with classroom work and quickly shifts to hands-on-practice," she smiled. "My very first 'customers' were mannequins who couldn't complain when I made a mistake with my scissors!"

"From the mannequin heads we progressed to 'real' live customers," Bonn stated, "but all of our work was supervised and checked by our instructors before the customer left. Customers also received a nice discount for being our willing guinea pigs!"

"I started working in Groton at Karma Salon on Groton's Main Street," Bonn explained, "but decided to offer another option for the local gals. Right now I'm the only one working here but have room for another hair dresser as well as an additional person for massages."

"Some of the many different services avail-



Paityn Bonn opens new beauty salon in Groton.

(Photo by Dorene Nelson)



able here include hair cuts for men and women, colors, and extensions," she listed. "I also do facials, waxing, and lash extensions."

"I do not do manicures or pedicures and don't plan to offer that at this time," Bonn stated. "I will soon have tanning available since the two tanning beds have arrived, and I hope they will be ready for customers by November 1st."

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"My tanning customers will have two choices: they can use the lay down or the stand up tanning bed," she smiled. "Stand up tanning beds help to prevent uneven tanning or wrinkled skin that might be an issue in the horizontal version."

"I plan to make the tanning booths available 24 hours a day by offering key cards for private, after-hour visits," Bonn explained. "There is an outside door that can be used whether I'm here or not. This might appeal to those whose own work hours conflict with my shop's hours."

"I opened my business on October 4th and have the following hours available: on Monday through Thursday, I'm open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., Bonn listed. "I'm open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Fridays with Saturday appointments for special occasions only."

"I also have a lot of hair products available in the salon," she said, "but customers can also access these products and more on my online store front and have them delivered to their doorstep!"

"I'm really happy to be open and working in this beautiful new building," Bonn admitted. "The work on this building started in August and finished in September."

"Anyone wanting an appointment should call or text me at 605-397-3000. I'm anxious to meet you and help you become your most beautiful self!"



Bahr interns in second grade



Ashtyn Bahr, daughter of Dion and Sam Bahr and Katie Lilly, is an intern with Mrs. Emily Dinger in second grade. "I help get the classroom ready each morning by sorting papers and putting them in the students' mail boxes," Bahr explained.

"I also make copies for Mrs. Dinger and help any child who is struggling with an assignment," she listed. "My little brother is in this classroom, and I really enjoy being here to help and watch him with his friends."

"Mainly I like helping and observing Mrs. Dinger," Bahr smiled. "She is an amazing teacher, and the kids all love her! This internship has given me an excellent idea of what being a teacher is really like and how much hard work and yet how rewarding it is."

"I participate in show choir, band, and the all-school plays," she said. "I also help out at the Jungle by making pizzas for the customers. In my spare time I enjoy listening to music and reading books."

"After high school I plan to go to college either at the University of South Dakota or maybe St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas," Bahr stated. "I'd like to major in acting with a minor in marketing business."

- Dorene Nelson

Johnson interns in fourth grade



Aspen Johnson, the daughter of Fred and Melanie Johnson, is interning in the fourth grade with Mrs. Susan Fjeldheim. "I decided to try this to see if teaching would be a good fit for me," Johnson admitted. "I've been trying to make a decision between teaching and nursing."

"I have several jobs here in the fourth grade classroom," she explained. "I make copies for Mrs. Fjeldheim, cut papers and other projects for the students, and help the fourth graders with their reading."

"I've really enjoyed working here and find that my various jobs are all quite easy," Johnson admitted. "Mrs. Fjeldheim has the hard ones of explaining and teaching to these kids each day!"

"The best part of working here is being with the students every day," she smiled. "They are fun to be around and to help. I've really enjoyed being here."

"I'm involved in several different sports including volley ball, basketball, and track as well as being a member of the color guard for the high school marching band," Johnson listed.

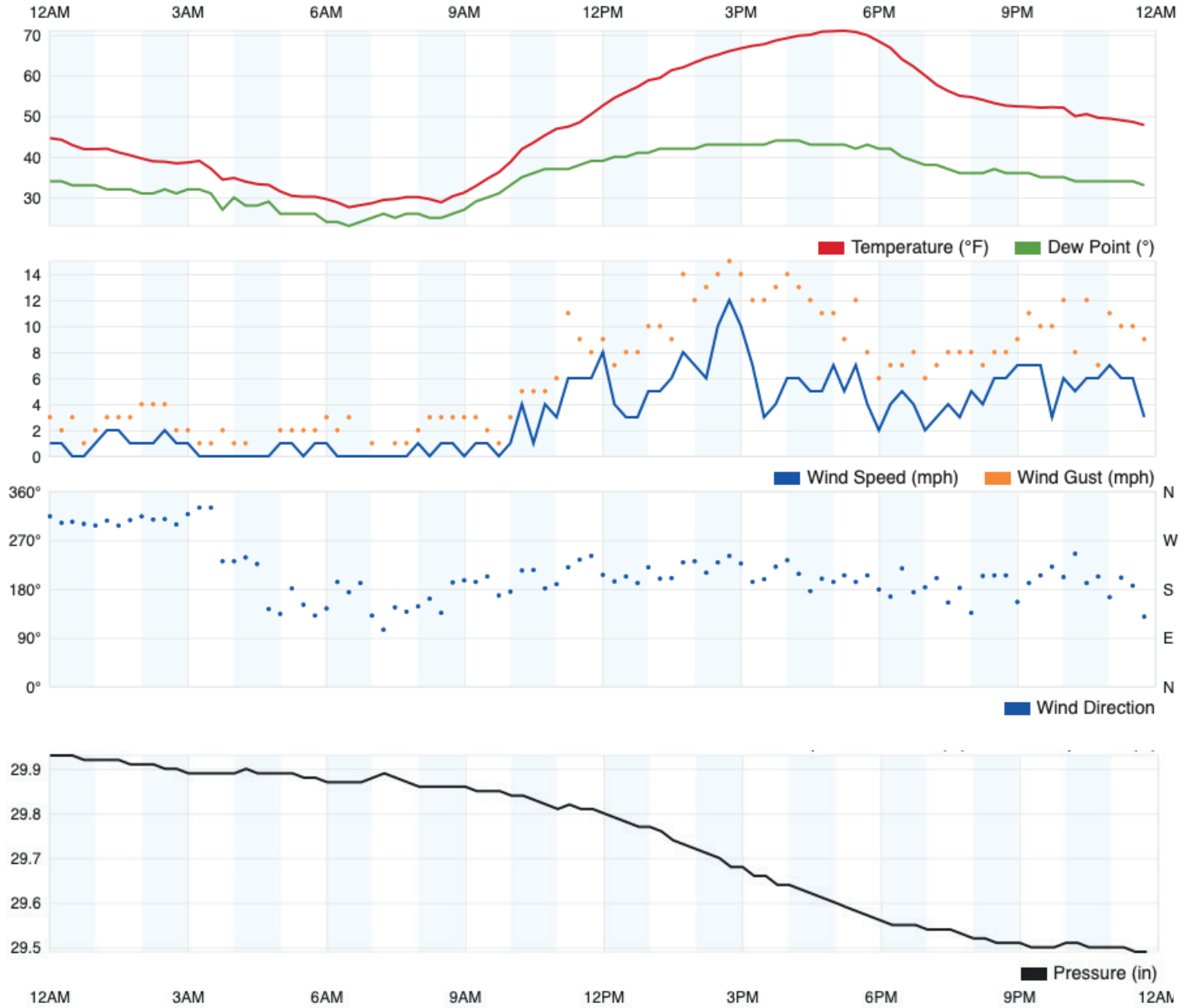
"After I graduate from high school, I have decided to attend Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell and major in nursing," she said. "Even though I've really enjoyed this internship in the elementary school, I think I prefer nursing over teaching. I also might try to play college volleyball."

- Dorene Nelson

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny

High: 65 °F

Tonight



Increasing
Clouds

Low: 41 °F

Saturday



Mostly Sunny

High: 71 °F

Saturday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 44 °F

Sunday



Mostly Sunny
then Slight
Chance
Showers

High: 75 °F

Warm into the Weekend



Today

H: 60 – 70°F



Saturday

H: 67 – 80°F



Sunday

H: 61 – 78°F

Cold front moving
in from the west



Aberdeen, SD

Warm temperatures can be expected today through Sunday. A low pressure system will impact the region Sunday night through Monday night, bringing gusty northwesterly winds and much colder temperatures. The storm system will hopefully bring much needed precipitation as well.

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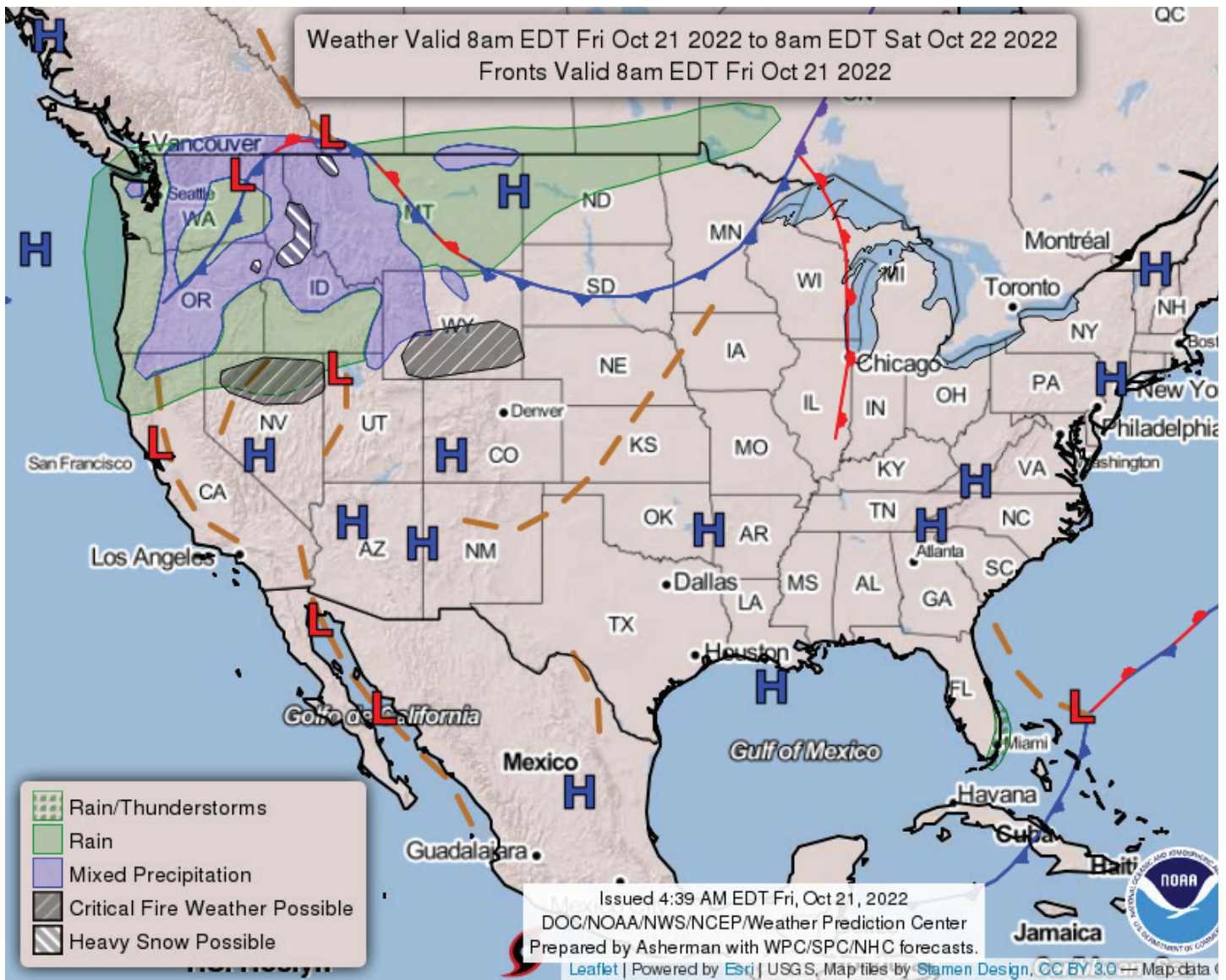
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 71 °F at 5:13 PM
Low Temp: 28 °F at 6:26 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 10:18 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 42 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 86 in 1947
Record Low: 9 in 1987
Average High: 56°F
Average Low: 31°F
Average Precip in Oct.: 1.58
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.45
Average Precip to date: 19.91
Precip Year to Date: 16.50
Sunset Tonight: 6:38:25 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:56:53 AM



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Today in Weather History

October 21, 1987: Cold arctic air continued to invade the central U.S. Eleven record lows were reported in the Great Plains Region, including lows of 12 degrees at Valentine, Nebraska, and 9 degrees at Aberdeen, South Dakota. Temperatures warmed rapidly during the day in the Southern and Central Plains Region. Goodland, Kansas warmed from a morning low of 24 degrees to an afternoon high of 75 degrees.

1934: A severe windstorm lashed the northern Pacific coast. In Washington State, the storm claimed the lives of 22 persons, and caused 1.7 million dollars damage, mostly to timber. Winds, gusting to 87 mph at North Head, WA, produced waves twenty feet high on the Puget Sound.

1957 - The second in a series of unusual October storms hit southern California causing widespread thunderstorms. Santa Maria was drenched with 1.13 inches of rain in two hours. Hail drifted to 18 inches in East Los Angeles. Waterspouts were sighted off Point Mugu and Oceanside. (20th-21st) (The Weather Channel)

1966: An avalanche of mud and rocks buries a school in Aberfan, Wales, killing 148 people, mostly young students. The elementary school was in a valley below where a mining operation dumped its waste. In the days leading up to October 21, there was heavy rain in the area. After five months of investigation and the deposition of more than 100 witnesses, it was determined that the tip had blocked the natural course of water down the hill. As the water was soaked into the tip, pressure built up inside until it cracked, with devastating results. The site of the disaster later became a park.

1975: Carlton Fisk made history on this day because of a walk-off home run in the 1975 World Series, after rain had postponed it for three days.

1987 - Cold arctic air continued to invade the central U.S. Eleven record lows were reported in the Great Plains Region, including lows of 12 degrees at Valentine NE, and 9 degrees at Aberdeen SD. Temperatures warmed rapidly during the day in the Southern and Central Plains Region. Goodland KS warmed from a morning low of 24 degrees to an afternoon high of 75 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Joan, the last hurricane of the season, neared the coast of Nicaragua packing 125 mph winds. Joan claimed more than 200 lives as she moved over Central America, and total damage approached 1.5 billion dollars. Crossing more than 40 degrees of longitude, Hurricane Joan never strayed even one degree from the 12 degree north parallel. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably cold weather continued to grip the south central and southeastern U.S. Twenty cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Calico AR with a reading of 26 degrees, and Daytona Beach FL with a low of 41 degrees. Squalls in the Great Lakes Region finally came to an end, but not before leaving Marquette MI buried under 12.7 inches of snow, a record 24 hour total for October. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010: Tornadoes do occur in South America. A tornado rampaged through Poza del Tigre, a northern Argentinean town, leaving at least six are dead and over 100 wounded.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

HELP NEEDED

James had unwrapped all of his birthday presents except one. It was a small truck that had a bubble of plastic over it that was sealed to a piece of cardboard. He tried desperately to separate the plastic from the cardboard but had no success. Initially, he thought he could separate the two by trying to slip his small fingernail between them. But his nail was too short. Then he tried to carefully squeeze the plastic to see if it would "open up" enough space for him to get his hand on the truck. That plan failed, too. Then he put the plastic bubble on the table and pushed on the cardboard thinking that was the solution. Frustrated, he looked at the little truck with teary eyes. It was a prize that became more valuable each time he tried to unwrap it.

Then he looked up at his Dad and asked, "What can I do to get my truck out of the box?"

"Well," said his Dad, "you could ask me for help."

Every plan that James had and tried failed. They all seemed sensible to him, but when he tried to make them work, nothing happened. Then he lifted his eyes and found someone who would help him to achieve his goal successfully.

"In his heart, a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps" is great wisdom, worth accepting, and constantly applying. We may design detailed, thorough plans to reach our goals, but when we attempt to make them work with our own strength, applying our own wisdom, we will become frustrated and discouraged when they fail. It's essential to include the Lord in the praying and pre-planning stage, and then work with Him until they are fulfilled.

Prayer: Lord, we all want to succeed in everything we do. May we recognize how critical it is to always include You in everything we do, from the beginning to the end. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: In his heart, a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps. Proverbs 16:9



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

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2022-23 Community Events

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

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL=

Beresford 52, Lakota Tech 0

Brandon Valley 35, Sioux Falls Washington 33

Brookings 35, Mitchell 21

Canton 38, Chamberlain 21

Dell Rapids 22, Dakota Valley 18

Madison def. Custer, forfeit

Pierre 46, Douglas 6

Rapid City Stevens 44, Rapid City Central 6

Sioux Falls Christian 40, Lennox 0

Sioux Falls Jefferson 51, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 26

Sioux Falls Lincoln 42, Aberdeen Central 7

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 24, Harrisburg 20

Spearfish 28, Sturgis Brown 27, OT

Tea Area 39, Watertown 6

Vermillion 27, Belle Fourche 0

West Central 34, Milbank 6

Class 9A=

First Round=

Canistota 42, Alcester-Hudson 24

Castlewood 26, Timber Lake 0

Gregory 50, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 0

Harding County/Bison Co-op 38, Chester 10

Lyman 50, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 0

Philip 36, Estelline/Hendricks 0

Warner 53, Burke 0

Wolsey-Wessington 41, Deubrook 0

Class 9AA=

First Round=

Bon Homme 42, Ipswich 20

Elkton-Lake Benton 32, Kimball/White Lake 18

Freeman/ Marion/ Freeman Academy Co-op 36, Florence/Henry 30

Hamlin 41, Viborg-Hurley 8

Hanson 42, Platte-Geddes 18

Howard 48, Britton-Hecla 8

Parkston 46, Leola/Frederick 6

Wall 58, Stanley County 8

Class 9B=

First Round=

Avon 74, Faulkton 48

DeSmet 50, Colome 0

Dell Rapids St. Mary 30, Faith 20

Herreid/Selby Area 56, Lemmon/McIntosh 6

Hitchcock-Tulare 50, Jones County 0

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Irene-Wakonda 61, Corsica/Stickney 52
Kadoka Area 60, New Underwood 6
Sully Buttes 14, Potter County 12
Class 11B=
First Round=
Aberdeen Roncalli 46, Mobridge-Pollock 0
Deuel 27, St. Thomas More 10
Elk Point-Jefferson 58, Rapid City Christian 7
Hot Springs 45, Bridgewater-Emery 6
McCook Central/Montrose 34, Sioux Valley 19
Mt. Vernon 38, Tri-Valley 10
Redfield 7, Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central 6
Winner 62, Lead-Deadwood 7

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

Social media platforms brace for midterm elections mayhem

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

A Facebook search for the words "election fraud" first delivers an article claiming that workers at a Pennsylvania children's museum are brainwashing children so they'll accept stolen elections.

Facebook's second suggestion? A link to an article from a site called MAGA Underground that says Democrats are plotting to rig next month's midterms. "You should still be mad as hell about the fraud that happened in 2020," the article insists.

With less than three weeks before the polls close, misinformation about voting and elections abounds on social media despite promises by tech companies to address a problem blamed for increasing polarization and distrust.

While platforms like Twitter, TikTok, Facebook and YouTube say they've expanded their work to detect and stop harmful claims that could suppress the vote or even lead to violent confrontations, a review of some of the sites shows they're still playing catchup with 2020, when then-President Donald Trump's lies about the election he lost to Joe Biden helped fuel an insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

"You would think that they would have learned by now," said Heidi Beirich, founder of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism and a member of a group called the Real Facebook Oversight Board that has criticized the platform's efforts. "This isn't their first election. This should have been addressed before Trump lost in 2020. The damage is pretty deep at this point."

If these U.S.-based tech giants can't properly prepare for a U.S. election, how can anyone expect them to handle overseas elections, Beirich said.

Mentions of a "stolen election" and "voter fraud" have soared in recent months and are now two of the three most popular terms included in discussions of this year's election, according to an analysis of social media, online and broadcast content conducted by media intelligence firm Signal Labs on behalf of The Associated Press.

On Twitter, Signal's analysis found that tweets amplifying conspiracy theories about the upcoming election have been reposted many thousands of times, alongside posts restating debunked claims about the 2020 election.

Most major platforms have announced steps intended to curb misinformation about voting and elections, including labels, warnings and changes to systems that automatically recommend certain content. Users who consistently violate the rules can be suspended. Platforms have also created partnerships with fact-checking organizations and news outlets like the AP, which is part of Meta's fact-checking program.

"Our teams continue to monitor the midterms closely, working to quickly remove content that violates our policies," YouTube said in a statement. "We'll stay vigilant ahead of, during, and after Election Day."

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Meta, the owner of Facebook and Instagram, announced this week that it had reopened its election command center, which oversees real-time efforts to combat misinformation about elections. The company dismissed criticism that it's not doing enough and denied reports that it has cut the number of staffers focused on elections.

"We are investing a significant amount of resources, with work spanning more than 40 teams and hundreds of people," Meta said in a statement emailed to the AP.

The platform also said that starting this week, anyone who searches on Facebook using keywords related to the election, including "election fraud," will automatically see a pop-up window with links to trustworthy voting resources.

TikTok created an election center earlier this year to help voters in the U.S. learn how to register to vote and who's on their ballot. The information is offered in English, Spanish and more than 45 other languages. The platform, now a leading source of information for young voters, also adds labels to misleading content.

"Providing access to authoritative information is an important part of our overall strategy to counter election misinformation," the company said of its efforts to prepare for the midterms.

But policies intended to stop harmful misinformation about elections aren't always enforced consistently. False claims can often be buried deep in the comments section, for instance, where they nonetheless can leave an impression on other users.

A report released last month from New York University faulted Meta, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube for amplifying Trump's false statements about the 2020 election. The study cited inconsistent rules regarding misinformation as well as poor enforcement.

Concerned about the amount of misinformation about voting and elections, a number of groups have urged tech companies to do more.

"Americans deserve more than lip service and half-measures from the platforms," said Yosef Getachew, director of Common Cause's media and democracy program. "These platforms have been weaponized by enemies of democracy, both foreign and domestic."

Election misinformation is even more prevalent on smaller platforms popular with some conservatives and far-right groups like Gab, Gettr and TruthSocial, Trump's own platform. But those sites have tiny audiences compared with Facebook, YouTube or TikTok.

Beirich's group, the Real Facebook Oversight Board, crafted a list of seven recommendations for Meta intended to reduce the spread of misinformation ahead of the elections. They included changes to the platform that would promote content from legitimate news outlets over partisan sites that often spread misinformation, as well as greater attention on misinformation targeting voters in Spanish and other languages.

Meta told the AP it has expanded its fact-checking network since 2020 and now has twice as many Spanish-language fact checkers. The company also launched a Spanish-language fact-checking tip line on WhatsApp, another platform it owns.

Much of the misinformation aimed at non-English speakers seems aimed at suppressing their vote, said Brenda Victoria Castillo, CEO of the National Hispanic Media Coalition, who said that the efforts by Facebook and other platforms aren't equal to the scale of the problem posed by misinformation.

"We are being lied to and discouraged from exercising our right to vote," Castillo said. "And people in power, people like (Meta CEO) Mark Zuckerberg are doing very little while they profit from the disinformation."

Online school put US kids behind. Some adults have regrets.

By BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS and JOCELYN GECKER AP Education Writers
BOSTON (AP) — Vivian Kargbo thought her daughter's Boston school district was doing the right thing when officials kept classrooms closed for most students for more than a year.

Kargbo, a caregiver for hospice patients, didn't want to risk them getting COVID-19. And extending pandemic school closures through the spring of 2021 is what many in her community said was best to keep

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kids and adults safe.

But her daughter became depressed and stopped doing school work or paying attention to online classes. The former honor-roll student failed nearly all of her eighth grade courses.

"She's behind," said Kargbo, whose daughter is now in tenth grade. "It didn't work at all. Knowing what I know now, I would say they should have put them in school."

Preliminary test scores around the country confirm what Kargbo witnessed: The longer many students studied remotely, the less they learned. Some educators and parents are questioning decisions in cities from Boston to Chicago to Los Angeles to remain online long after clear evidence emerged that schools weren't COVID-19 super-spreaders — and months after life-saving adult vaccines became widely available.

There are fears for the futures of students who don't catch up. They run the risk of never learning to read, long a precursor for dropping out of school. They might never master simple algebra, putting science and tech fields out of reach. The pandemic decline in college attendance could continue to accelerate, crippling the U.S. economy.

In a sign of how inflammatory the debate has become, there's sharp disagreement among educators, school leaders and parents even about how to label the problems created by online school. "Learning loss" has become a lightning rod. Some fear the term might brand struggling students or cast blame on teachers, and they say it overlooks the need to save lives during a pandemic.

Regardless of what it's called, the casualties of Zoom school are real.

The scale of the problem and the challenges in addressing it were apparent in Associated Press interviews with nearly 50 school leaders, teachers, parents and health officials, who struggled to agree on a way forward.

Some public health officials and educators warned against second-guessing the school closures for a virus that killed over a million people in the U.S. More than 200,000 children lost at least one parent.

"It is very easy with hindsight to say, 'Oh, learning loss, we should have opened.' People forget how many people died," said Austin Beutner, former superintendent in Los Angeles, where students were online from mid-March 2020 until the start of hybrid instruction in April 2021.

The question isn't merely academic.

School closures continued last year because of teacher shortages and COVID-19 spread. It's conceivable another pandemic might emerge — or a different crisis.

But there's another reason for asking what lessons have been learned: the kids who have fallen behind. Some third graders struggle to sound out words. Some ninth graders have given up on school because they feel so behind they can't catch up. The future of American children hangs in the balance.

Many adults are pushing to move on, to stop talking about the impact of the pandemic — especially learning loss.

"As crazy as this sounds now, I'm afraid people are going to forget about the pandemic," said Jason Kamras, superintendent in Richmond, Virginia. "People will say, 'That was two years ago. Get over it.'"

When COVID-19 first reached the U.S., scientists didn't fully understand how it spread or whether it was harmful to children. American schools, like most around the world, understandably shuttered in March 2020.

That summer, scientists learned kids didn't face the same risks as adults, but experts couldn't decide how to operate schools safely — or whether it was even possible.

It was already clear that remote learning was devastating for many young people. But did the risks of social isolation and falling behind outweigh the risks of children, school staff and families catching the virus?

The tradeoffs differed depending on how vulnerable a community felt. Black and Latino people, who historically had less access to health care, remain nearly twice as likely to die of COVID-19 than white people. Parents in those communities often had deep-rooted doubts about whether schools could keep their children safe.

Politics was a factor, too. Districts that reopened in person tended to be in areas that voted for President Donald Trump or had largely white populations.

By winter, studies showed schools weren't contributing to increased COVID-19 spread in the community.

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Classes with masked students and distancing could be conducted safely, growing evidence said. President Joe Biden prioritized reopening schools when he took office in January 2021, and once the COVID-19 vaccine was available, some Democratic-leaning districts started to reopen.

Yet many schools stayed closed well into the spring, including in California, where the state's powerful teachers unions fought returning to classrooms, citing lack of safety protocols.

In Chicago, after a six-week standoff with the teachers union, the district started bringing students back on a hybrid schedule just before spring 2021. It wasn't until the fall that students were back in school full time.

Marla Williams initially supported Chicago Public Schools' decision to instruct students online during the fall of 2020. Williams, a single mother, has asthma, as do her two children. While she was working, she enlisted her father, a retired teacher, to supervise her children's studies.

Her father would log into his grandson's classes from his suburban home and try to monitor what was happening. But it didn't work.

Her son lost motivation and wouldn't do his assignments. Once he went back on a hybrid schedule in spring 2021, he started doing well again, Williams said.

"I wish we'd been in person earlier," she said. "Other schools seemed to be doing it successfully."

Officials were divided in Chicago. The city Department of Public Health advocated reopening schools months earlier, in the fall of 2020. The commissioner, Dr. Allison Arwady, said they felt the risk of missing education was higher than the risk of COVID-19. Others, such as the director of the Institute for Global Health at Northwestern University, advocated for staying remote.

"I think the answer on that has been settled fairly clearly, especially once we had vaccines available," Arwady said. "I'm concerned about the loss that has occurred."

From March 2020 to June 2021, the average student in Chicago lost 21 weeks of learning in reading and 20 weeks in math, equivalent to missing half a year of school, according to Georgetown University's Edunomics Lab, which analyzed data from a widely used test called MAP to estimate learning loss for every U.S. school district.

Nationally, kids whose schools met mostly online in the 2020-2021 school year performed 13 percentage points lower in math and 8 percentage points lower in reading compared with schools meeting mostly in person, according to a 2022 study by Brown University economist Emily Oster.

The setbacks have some grappling with regret.

"I can't imagine a situation where we would close schools again, unless there's a virus attacking kids," said Eric Conti, superintendent for Burlington, Massachusetts, a 3,400-student district outside Boston. His students alternated between online and in-person learning from the fall of 2020 until the next spring. "It's going to be a very high bar."

Dallas Superintendent Stephanie Elizalde initially disagreed with the Texas governor's push to reopen schools in the fall of 2020. "But it was absolutely the right thing to do," she said.

Some school officials said they lacked the expertise to decide whether it was safe to open schools.

"Schools should never have been placed in a situation where we have choice," said Tony Wold, former associate superintendent of West Contra Costa Unified School District, east of San Francisco. "With lessons learned, when you have a public health pandemic, there needs to be a single voice."

Still, many school officials said with hindsight they'd make the same decision to keep schools online well into 2021. Only two superintendents said they'd likely make a different decision if there were another pandemic that was not particularly dangerous to children.

In some communities, demographics and the historic underinvestment in schools loomed large, superintendents said. In the South, Black Americans' fear of the virus was sometimes coupled with mistrust of schools rooted in segregation. Cities from Atlanta to Nashville to Jackson, Mississippi, shuttered schools — in some cases, for nearly all of the 2020-2021 school year.

In Clayton County, Georgia, home to the state's highest percentage of Black residents, schools chief Morcease Beasley said he knew closing schools would have a devastating impact, but the fear in his com-

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munity was overwhelming.

"I knew teachers couldn't teach if they were that scared, and students couldn't learn," he said.

Rhode Island was an outlier among liberal-leaning coastal states when it ordered schools to reopen in person in the fall of 2020. "We can't do this to our kids," state education chief Angélica Infante-Green remembers thinking after watching students turn off cameras or log in from under blankets in bed. "This is not OK."

But in the predominantly Latino and Black Rhode Island community of Central Falls, more than three-quarters of students stayed home to study remotely.

To address parent distrust, officials tracked COVID-19 cases among school-aged Central Falls residents. They met with families to show them the kids catching the virus were in remote learning — and they weren't learning as much as students in school. It worked.

Among teachers, there's some dispute about online learning's impact on children. But many fear some students will be scarred for years.

"Should we have reopened earlier? Absolutely," said California teacher Sarah Curry. She initially favored school closings in her rural Central Valley district, but grew frustrated with the duration of distance learning. She taught pre-kindergarten and found it impossible to maintain attention spans online.

One of her biggest regrets: that teachers who wanted to return to classrooms had little choice in the matter.

But the nation's 3 million public school teachers are far from a monolith. Many lost loved ones to COVID-19, battled mental health challenges of their own or feared catching the virus.

Jessica Cross, who taught ninth grade math on Chicago's west side at Phoenix Military Academy, feels her school reopened too soon.

"I didn't feel entirely safe," she said. Mask rules were good in theory, but not all students wore them properly. She said safety should come before academics.

"Ultimately, I still feel that remote learning was really the only thing to do," Cross said.

A representative from the American Federation of Teachers declined in an interview to say whether the national union regrets the positions it took against reopening schools.

"If we start to play the blame game," said Fedrick Ingram, AFT's secretary-treasurer, "we get into the political fray of trying to determine if teachers did a good job or not. And I don't think that's fair."

Regrets or no, experts agree: America's kids need more from adults if they're going to be made whole.

The country needs "ideally, a reinvention of public education as we know it," Los Angeles Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said. Students need more days in school and smaller classes.

Short of extending the school year, experts say intensive tutoring is the most efficient way to help students catch up. Saturday school or doubling up on math or reading during a regular school day would also help.

Too few school districts have made those investments, Harvard economist Tom Kane said. Summer school is insufficient, Kane says — it's voluntary, and many parents don't sign up.

Adding school time for students is politically impossible in many cities. In Los Angeles, the teachers union filed a complaint after the district scheduled four optional school days for students to recoup learning. The school board in Richmond rejected a move to an all-year school calendar.

There are exceptions: Atlanta extended the school day 30 minutes for three years. Hopewell Schools in Virginia moved to year-round schooling last year.

Even the federal government's record education spending isn't enough for the scope of kids' academic setbacks, according to the American Educational Research Association. Researchers there estimate it will cost \$700 billion to offset learning loss for America's schoolchildren — more than three times the \$190 billion allocated to schools.

"We need something on the scale of the Marshall Plan for education," said Kamras, the Richmond superintendent. "Anything short of that and we're going to see this blip in outcomes become permanent for a generation of children — and that would be criminal."

Russian threats revive old nuclear fears in central Europe

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Two stories beneath a modern steel production plant on Warsaw's northern edge lies an untouched Cold War relic: a shelter containing gas masks, stretchers, first aid kits and other items meant to help civil defense leaders survive and guide rescue operations in case of nuclear attack or other disasters.

A map of Europe on a wall still shows the Soviet Union — and no independent Ukraine. Old boots and jackets give off a musty odor. A military field switchboard warns: "Attention, your enemy is listening."

Until now, nobody had seriously considered that the rooms built in the 1950s — and now maintained as a "historical curiosity" by the ArcelorMittal Warszawa plant, according to spokeswoman Ewa Karpinska — might one day be used as a shelter again. But as Russia pounds Ukraine, with shelling around a nuclear power plant and repeated Russian threats to use a nuclear weapon, the Polish government ordered an inventory this month of the 62,000 air raid shelters in the country.

The war has triggered fears across Europe, and these are especially felt in countries like Poland and Romania that border Ukraine and would be highly vulnerable in case of a radiological disaster.

After the Polish government order, firefighters visited the steel plant's shelter last week and listed it in their registry. Warsaw's leaders said the city's subway and other underground shelters could hold all its 1.8 million residents and more in the case of an attack with conventional weapons.

The ArcelorMittal Warszawa plant's Karpinska is suddenly receiving inquiries about the shelter. Following Russian President Vladimir Putin's threats to carry out a tactical nuclear attack, "everyone is worried," she said. "I believe that he will not (stage a nuclear attack), that it would be completely crazy, but nobody really believed he would start this war."

Amid fighting around Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, Poland also drew up a plan to give potassium iodide tablets to local fire stations, which would distribute them to the population if needed. There has been a rush elsewhere in Europe on potassium iodide — which protects the thyroid gland in the neck in case of radiation exposure — including in Finland where the government urged the population to buy them.

During the Cold War there were hundreds of thousands of shelters in Europe. Some dated from the buildup to World War II, while communist-era authorities also ordered that new residential and production facilities include underground shelters.

Finland, which borders Russia, along with Sweden and Denmark, have maintained their shelters in order. Finland, for instance, maintains shelters in cities and other densely populated areas capable of accommodating around two-thirds of the population. A few of them are designed to withstand detonation of a 100-kiloton nuclear bomb.

While some countries still maintain their Cold War underground shelters, after the collapse of the Soviet Union some were transformed into museums — relics of an earlier age of nuclear fears that would offer no real protection today.

Bomb shelters were a key element in the former Yugoslavia's preparedness doctrine against a nuclear attack.

The most famous of all, in a mountainous area 60 kilometers (35 miles) from Sarajevo in Bosnia, is a vast underground fortress built to protect military and political leaders. Known then only to the Yugoslav president, four generals and a handful of soldiers who guarded it, the Konjic site was turned in 2010 into a modern art gallery.

"From the military-political and geopolitical standpoint, the global environment right now is unfortunately very similar to what it was like (during the Cold War), burdened by a very heavy sense of a looming war," said Selma Hadzihuseinovic, the representative of a government agency that manages the site.

She said the bunker could be returned to service in a new war, but with nuclear weapons having become far more powerful it would not be "as useful as it was meant to be when it was built."

In Romania, an enormous former salt mine, Salina Turda, now a tourist attraction, is on a government list of potential shelters.

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Many urban dwellers also go past shelters every day without realizing it while riding subways in cities like Warsaw, Prague and Budapest.

"We measured how many people could fit in trains along the entire length of the metro, in metro stations and other underground spaces," said Michal Domaradzki, director of the security and crisis management for the city of Warsaw. "There is enough space for the entire population."

Attila Gulyas, president of the Hungarian capital's Urban Transport Workers' Union, has been involved in regular drills of the city's metro lines. He was trained to shelter thousands of people as chief of the Astoria station at Budapest's metro line 2.

"The system is still in place today, it works perfectly, it can be deployed in any emergency" Gulyas said. "Up to 220,000 people can be protected by the shelter system in the tunnels of metro lines 2 and 3."

But with Russia waging an energy war against Europe and power costs soaring, for many the chief worry is how to get through the winter.

Sorin Ionita, a commentator with the Expert Forum in Bucharest, Romania, said many consider a Russian nuclear strike improbable as it would not "bring a big military advantage to the Russians."

Still, Putin's threats add to a general sense of anxiety in a world in tumult.

Just days after the Russian invasion began, Czechs bought potassium iodide pills as a precaution of sorts against a nuclear attack. Experts say these might help in a nuclear plant disaster but not against a nuclear weapon.

Dana Drabova, the head of the State Office for Nuclear Safety said that in such a case, the anti-radiation pills would be "useless."

EU weighs Ukraine support as new refugee exodus beckons

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union leaders sought Friday to shore up their support for Ukraine after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that Russia was trying to spark a refugee exodus by destroying his war-ravaged country's energy infrastructure.

Nearly eight months into the war, Russia has increasingly targeted Ukraine's power stations, waterworks and other key infrastructure with missile and drone strikes. Meanwhile, the EU is struggling with the fallout of having to urgently wean itself off Russian gas and oil as the war fuels price hikes and market nervousness.

In a speech via video link to European leaders in Brussels on Thursday, Zelenskyy said "attacks by Russian cruise missiles and Iranian combat drones have destroyed more than a third of our energy infrastructure. Because of this, unfortunately we are no longer able to export electricity to help you maintain stability."

The president added: "Russia also provokes a new wave of migration of Ukrainians to EU countries," by attacking electricity and heating sources "so that as many Ukrainians as possible move to your countries."

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas described the targeting of civilian infrastructure as "pure terrorism."

Russia's attacks are meant to "make us afraid. It is to make us refrain from the decisions that we would otherwise make, and this is awful that it is possible to do this in the year 2022," Kallas told reporters at an EU summit in Brussels.

Her Latvian counterpart, Krisjanis Karins, said "Russia's war is becoming ever more brutal, now blatantly aimed not at the Ukrainian military but at Ukrainian citizens."

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has branded Russia's attacks on civilian infrastructure as "war crimes."

More than 4.3 million Ukrainian citizens have registered for temporary protection in the EU. Poland is hosting almost almost a third of them.

A draft of a summit statement has the EU leaders affirming they "will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes" with continued political, military and economic support.

They also say the 27-nation bloc will "step up its humanitarian response, in particular for winter preparedness." The draft text, seen by The Associated Press, is expected to be adopted later Friday, although its precise wording could change.

The EU is deeply divided over how to handle the arrival of migrants without authorization, an issue that lies at the heart of one of the bloc's biggest-ever political crises. But many countries, particularly in central and eastern Europe, so far have set aside their objections to welcome large numbers of war refugees from Ukraine.

The leaders of the EU's member countries also are set to warn Belarus against helping Russia in the war. Ukraine's military leaders warned this week that Russia is deploying aircraft and troops to Belarus and that Russian forces could attack from there to cut supply routes for Western weapons and equipment.

"The Belarusian regime must fully abide by its obligations under international law. The European Union remains ready to move quickly with further sanctions against Belarus," the draft summit statement says.

As leaders meet, Chinese hope for end to 'zero-COVID' limits

By EMILY WANG and TIAN JI Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — As China's ruling Communist Party holds a congress this week, many Beijing residents are focused on an issue not on the formal agenda: Will the end of the meeting bring an easing of China's at times draconian "zero-COVID" policies that are disrupting lives and the economy?

It appears to be wishful thinking. As the world moves to a post-pandemic lifestyle, many across China have resigned themselves to lining up several times a week for COVID-19 tests, restrictions on their travels to other regions, and the ever-present possibility of a community lockdown.

"There is nothing we can do," Zhang Yiming, 51, said this week at a park in Beijing. "If we look at the situation abroad, like the United States where over 1 million people have died, right? In China, although it is true that some aspects of our life are not convenient, such as travel and economy, it seems that there is no good solution."

People are looking to the party congress, which ends Saturday, for two reasons. The meeting, which is held every five years and sets the national agenda for the next five, can send signals of possible changes in policy direction.

Secondly, authorities always tighten controls — COVID-19 and otherwise — before and during a major event to try to eliminate disruptions or distractions, so they could relax controls when the event ends.

Any hopes for an easing, though, appear to have been dashed before the congress. The Communist Party's newspaper, the People's Daily, published a series of opinion pieces on the effectiveness of China's "zero-COVID" approach, and health officials said last week China must stick with it.

China's leader, Xi Jinping, praised the policy at the opening ceremony of the congress. He said it had prioritized and protected people's health and safety and made a "tremendous achievement in striking the balance between epidemic response and economic and social development."

After an initial outbreak in early 2020 that killed more than 4,000 people and overflowed hospitals and morgues, China was largely successful in taming the virus while other countries were overwhelmed with it — a contrast trumpeted in Communist Party propaganda.

Then came omicron in late 2021. China had to employ ever more widespread restrictions to control the faster-spreading variant, locking down entire cities and starting regular testing of practically the entire population of 1.4 billion people.

The measures have bred simmering discontent, fed by instances of harsh enforcement that in some cases had tragic consequences.

During a two-month lockdown of Shanghai last spring, videos widely shared on social media showed officials breaking down apartment doors to drag unwilling residents to quarantine facilities. Children were also separated from their parents, because one or the other was infected.

Instances of hospitals denying treatment because of pandemic rules sparked outrage, including a woman in labor who lost her baby after she wasn't allowed into a hospital during a lockdown of the city of Xi'an because she couldn't show a negative COVID-19 test result.

While public protests are relatively rare in China, some people took to the streets in Shanghai and the

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northeastern city of Dandong to protest harsh and prolonged lockdowns.

Last week, three days before the congress opened, banners were flung over an elevated roadway calling for Xi's overthrow and an end to the "zero-COVID" policy. The incident spilled over into at least one other city, where photos shared on Twitter showed similar statements posted on a bus stop in Xi'an.

Andy Chen, senior analyst at Trivium China, a Beijing-headquartered policy consultancy, said restrictions beyond the party congress should come as no surprise.

"All the conditions that have forced the government to put zero-COVID in place haven't really changed," he said, singling out the lack of an effective vaccine and the absence of sound home quarantine rules.

Even though vaccines are widely available, China's homegrown versions don't work as well as the Pfizer, Moderna and other shots developed elsewhere. China also has resisted vaccine mandates, keeping down vaccination rates. As of mid-October, 90% had received two shots, but only 57% had a booster shot.

Beijing authorities have doubled down on the hardline coronavirus policies during the congress.

Highway checkpoints into the city are heavily policed, with all entrants required to show a "green" code on a mobile phone app to prove they haven't traveled to medium or high-risk areas.

Some express commuter bus lines between Beijing and neighboring Tianjin city and Hebei province have been suspended since Oct. 12.

Anyone who has been in a city, district, or neighborhood where even one case of coronavirus has been found within seven days is banned from entering the Chinese capital.

Within the city, the daily lives of residents are dictated by their health codes. They must use an app to scan the QR code of any facility they enter to show their status and log their whereabouts.

People are not allowed into office buildings, shopping malls, restaurants and other public places without a green code and a negative coronavirus test result within 72 hours, and sometimes less. The policy means most of Beijing's 21 million-plus residents take a coronavirus test at least two to three times a week.

And there is always the risk of a sudden lockdown. Officials in hazmat suits guarded entries to gated communities this week in Fengtai district, where five neighborhoods have been categorized as high-risk. Residents were not allowed to leave their compounds, and some shops were forced to close.

While the party congress has not provided the watershed moment that some have been hoping for, it may turn out to be the point at which the government begins to lay the groundwork for a long process of loosening restrictions, said Dr. Yanzhong Huang, director of the Center for Global Health Studies at Seton Hall University and an expert on public health in China.

Some factors suggest the government will be in no rush to open up, including a broad acceptance of the policy among those who are inconvenienced but have not experienced prolonged or repeated lockdowns.

"The vast, vast majority of the population goes on with their lives, unaffected, and that's a much better policy from the government perspective to implement than, for example, forcing a vaccine mandate through the population," Chen said.

But Huang noted growing signs of social instability, especially among the middle class and urban residents.

"I think the question is whether it has reached a tipping point that people really find this is not acceptable anymore," he said. "We cannot tolerate that anymore. It remains to be seen even in the large cities, you know, how people are willing to tolerate draconian measures."

Boris Johnson eyes comeback bid as UK Tories pick new leader

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Several British lawmakers, including former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, were trying to scoop up support on Friday ahead of a short, intense contest to replace Liz Truss as the nation's leader.

Truss quit on Thursday after a turbulent 45-day term, conceding that she could not deliver on her tax-cutting economic plans.

The Conservative Party is holding a speeded-up race to replace her, which will see a new leader — who will also become prime minister — chosen within a week.

Former Treasury chief Rishi Sunak and House of Commons leader Penny Mordaunt are among the book-

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makers' favorites – along with Johnson, who was forced to resign by the party just over three months ago after becoming mired in scandals over his ethics and finances. His return would be a remarkable resurrection for a politician who is popular and polarizing in equal measure.

Johnson, who remained a lawmaker after stepping down as prime minister, has not said whether he will run, but his allies in Parliament are working to gather support.

Nominations for a new leader will close on Monday afternoon, and candidates need the signatures of 100 of the 357 Conservative lawmakers, meaning a maximum field of three. Lawmakers will vote to knock out one of those, and will hold an indicative vote on the final two. The party's 172,000 members will then get to decide between the two finalists in an online vote. The new leader is due to be selected by Oct. 28.

Sunak, who came second to Truss in a summertime leadership contest, is favored by some as a safe pair of hands who can steady the struggling economy. Mordaunt, who came third, is popular with the party grassroots.

But the wild card in the contest is Johnson, who is adored by some in the party as a proven vote-winner with a rare common touch, and reviled by others for the chaos and scandal that marred his three years in office.

Johnson ally Nadine Dorries said the party should pick him because "he is a known winner" who led the Conservatives to a big election victory in 2019.

"Having a winner in place is what the party needs to survive," she told Sky News.

But some other Conservative legislators said they would leave the party if Johnson — who faces an ongoing probe by a standards committee over whether he lied to Parliament — returned as leader.

"I cannot see any way forward in government, at any level, for somebody who is under that kind of scrutiny, and I think highly divisive," Tory legislator Roger Gale told Times Radio. "And I think that there would be people, indeed like myself, who would find ourselves in the awful position of having to resign the Conservative whip."

The party's second leadership contest this year comes after Truss became the shortest-serving prime minister in British history. She was elected leader by the Conservatives early last month after a party election to replace Johnson.

Truss' free-market economic package roiled financial markets, drove up the cost of government borrowing and home mortgages and forced emergency Bank of England intervention. Truss executed a series of U-turns and replaced her Treasury chief but faced rebellion from lawmakers in her party.

Truss admitted Thursday that "I cannot deliver the mandate on which I was elected by the Conservative Party."

The new leader will be Britain's third prime minister this year, and the Conservative turmoil is fueling demands for a national election. Under Britain's parliamentary system there does not need to be one until 2024, five years after the 2019 contest that was won by the Conservatives under Johnson.

Opposition politicians say the tumult since then — and the decision by Truss to rip up many of the policies on which Johnson was elected — means the government lacks democratic legitimacy.

Polls suggest that if an election was held now it would be a wipeout for the Conservatives, with the left-of-center Labour Party winning a large majority.

Labour leader Keir Starmer accused the Conservatives of presiding over a "revolving door of chaos."

"This is doing huge damage to our economy and the reputation of our country," he said. "We must have a chance at a fresh start. We need a general election — now."

Community with Confederate monument gets Emmett Till statue

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — A Mississippi community with an elaborate Confederate monument plans to unveil a larger-than-life statue of Emmett Till on Friday, decades after white men kidnapped and killed the Black teenager for allegedly whistling at a white woman in a country store.

The 1955 lynching became a catalyst for the civil rights movement after Till's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley,

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insisted on an open-casket funeral in Chicago so the world could see the horrors inflicted on her 14-year-old son. Jet magazine published photos of his mutilated body, which had been pulled from the Tallahatchie River in Mississippi.

The 9-foot (2.7-meter) bronze statue in Greenwood is a jaunty depiction of the living Till in slacks, a dress shirt and a tie with one hand on the brim of a hat.

The Rev. Wheeler Parker Jr., the last living witness to the kidnapping of his cousin Till from a family home, said he won't be able to travel from Illinois to attend Friday's dedication ceremony. But he told The Associated Press on Wednesday: "We just thank God someone is keeping his name out there."

The Till statue at Greenwood's Rail Spike Park is a short drive from an elaborate Confederate monument outside the Leflore County Courthouse and about 10 miles (16 kilometers) from the crumbling remains of the store, Bryant's Grocery & Meat Market in the hamlet of Money.

The unveiling of the statue coincides with the release this month of "Till," a movie focusing on Till-Mobley's private trauma over her son's death and her development into a civil rights activist.

A life-sized bronze statue of Till-Mobley is planned in the Chicago suburb of Summit. An Oct. 28 groundbreaking is set for a plaza outside Argo Community High School, where she was an honor student. The statue is scheduled to be in place by late April.

Some wrongly thought Till got what he deserved for breaking the taboo of flirting with a white woman and many people didn't want to talk about the case for decades, Parker said.

"Now there's interest in it, and that's a godsend," Parker said. "You know what his mother said: 'I hope he didn't die in vain.'"

Greenwood and Leflore County are both more than 70% Black and officials have worked for years to bring the Till statue to reality. Democratic state Sen. David Jordan of Greenwood secured \$150,000 in state funding and the community commissioned a Utah artist, Matt Glenn, to create the statue.

Jordan said he hopes it will entice tourists to visit Greenwood and learn more about the history of the area.

"So much has been said about this case," Jordan said this week. "Hopefully, it will bring all of us together."

Till and Parker had traveled from Chicago to spend the summer of 1955 with relatives in the deeply segregated Mississippi Delta. On Aug. 24, the two teens joined other young people in a short trip to the store in Money. Parker said he heard Till whistle at shopkeeper Carolyn Bryant.

Four days later, Till was abducted in the middle of the night from his uncle's home. The kidnapers tortured and shot him, weighted his body down with a cotton gin fan and dumped him into the river.

Jordan, who is Black, was a college student in September 1955 when he drove to the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner to watch the murder trial of two white men charged with killing Till — Carolyn's husband Roy Bryant and his half brother, J.W. Milam.

An all-white, all-male jury acquitted the two men, who later confessed to Look magazine that they had killed Till.

Nobody has ever been convicted in the lynching. The U.S. Justice Department has opened multiple investigations starting in 2004 after receiving inquiries about whether charges could be brought against anyone still living.

In 2007, a Mississippi prosecutor presented evidence to a grand jury of Black and white Leflore County residents after investigators spent three years re-examining the killing. The FBI exhumed Till's body to prove he, and not someone else, was buried at his gravesite in the Chicago suburb of Alsip. The grand jury declined to issue indictments.

The Justice Department reopened an investigation in 2018 after a 2017 book quoted Carolyn Bryant — now remarried and named Carolyn Bryant Donham — saying she lied when she claimed Till grabbed her, whistled and made sexual advances. Relatives have publicly denied Donham, who is in her 80s, recanted her allegations. The department closed that investigation in late 2021 without bringing charges.

This year, a group searching the Leflore County Courthouse basement found an unserved 1955 arrest warrant for "Mrs. Roy Bryant." In August, another Mississippi grand jury found insufficient evidence to

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indict Donham, causing consternation for Till relatives and activists.

Although Mississippi has dozens of Confederate monuments, some have been moved in recent years, including one that was relocated in 2020 from a prominent spot on the University of Mississippi campus to a cemetery where Confederate soldiers are buried.

The state has a few monuments to Black historical figures, including one honoring civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer.

A historical marker outside Bryant's Grocery has been knocked down and vandalized. Another marker near the site where Till's body was pulled from the Tallahatchie River has been vandalized and shot. The Till statue in Greenwood will be watched by security cameras.

"Anytime they take it down," Jordan said, "we'll just place it back up."

Greek monastery manuscripts tell new story of Ottoman rule

By COSTAS KANTOURIS Associated Press

MOUNT ATHOS, Greece (AP) — A church bell sounds, the staccato thudding of mallet on plank summons monks to afternoon prayers, deep voices are raised in communal chant. And high in the great tower of Pantokrator Monastery, a metal library door swings open.

There, deep inside the medieval fortified monastery in the Mount Athos monastic Orthodox Christian community, researchers are for the first time tapping a virtually unknown treasure — thousands of Ottoman-era manuscripts that include the oldest of their kind in the world.

The libraries of the self-governed community, established more than 1,000 years ago on northern Greece's Athos peninsula, are a repository of rare, centuries-old works in several languages including Greek, Russian and Romanian.

Many have been extensively studied, but not the Ottoman Turkish documents, products of an occupying bureaucracy that ruled northern Greece from the late 14th century — well before the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, fell to the Ottomans in 1453 — until the early 20th when the area became Greek again.

Byzantine scholar Jannis Niehoff-Panagiotidis says it's impossible to understand Mount Athos' economy and society under Ottoman rule without consulting these documents, which regulated the monks' dealings with secular authorities.

"Ottoman was the official language of state," he told The Associated Press from the library of the Pantokrator Monastery, one of 20 on the heavily wooded peninsula.

Niehoff-Panagiotidis, a professor at the Free University of Berlin, said the oldest of the roughly 25,000 Ottoman works found in the monastic libraries dates to 1374, or 1371. That's older than any known in the world, he said, adding that in Istanbul, as the Ottomans renamed Constantinople when they made the city their own capital, the oldest archives only go back to the late 15th century.

"The first documents that shed light (on the first period of Ottoman history) are saved here, on Mount Athos," he said, seated at a table piled with documents and books. Others, the more rare ones, are stored in large wooden drawers.

These include highly ornate Sultans' firmans — or decrees — deeds of ownership and court decisions.

"The overwhelming majority are legal documents," said Anastasios Nikopoulos, a jurist and scientific collaborator of the Free University of Berlin who's been working with Niehoff-Panagiotidis on the project for the past few months.

And the manuscripts tell a story at odds with the traditional understanding in Greece of Ottoman depredations in the newly-conquered areas, through the confiscation of the Mount Athos monasteries' rich real estate holdings. Instead, the new rulers took the community under their wing, preserved its autonomy and protected it from external interference.

"The Sultans' firmans we saw in the tower ... and the Ottoman state's court decisions show that the monks' small democracy was able to gain the respect of all conquering powers," Nikopoulos said. "And that is because Mount Athos was seen as a cradle of peace, culture ... where peoples and civilizations coexisted peacefully."

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Nikopoulos said that one of the first actions of Murad II, the Ottoman ruler who conquered Thessaloniki — the closest city to Mount Athos — was to draw up a legal document in 1430 protecting the community.

"That says a lot. The Ottoman sultan himself ensured that the administrative system of Mount Athos was preserved and safeguarded," he said.

Even before that, Niehoff-Panagiotidis added, a sultan issued a mandate laying down strict punishment for intruders after a band of marauding soldiers engaged in minor thieving from one of the monasteries.

"It's strange that the sultans kept Mount Athos, the last remnant of Byzantium, semi-independent and didn't touch it," he said. "They didn't even keep troops here. At the very most they would have a local representative who probably stayed at (the community's administrative center, Karyes) and sipped tea."

Another unexpected revelation, Niehoff-Panagiotidis said, was that for roughly the first two centuries of Ottoman rule no effort was made to impose Islamic law on Mount Athos or nearby parts of northern Greece.

"Mount Athos was something like a continuation of Byzantium," he said.

The community was first granted self-governance through a decree by Byzantine Emperor Basil II, in 883 AD. Throughout its history, women have been forbidden from entering, a ban that still stands. This rule is called "avaton" and the researchers believe that it concerns every form of external administrative or secular intervention that could affect Mount Athos.

Father Theophilos, a Pantokrator monk who is helping with the research, said the documents show the far-flung influence of Mount Athos.

"Their study also illuminates examples of how people can live with each other, principles that are common to all humanity, the seeds of human rights and respect for them, democracy and the principles of social coexistence," he told The Associated Press.

The research project is expected to continue for several months, even years.

"What could emerge in the long term I'll be able to say when we have catalogued and digitized all the documents," Niehoff-Panagiotidis said. "Right now, nobody knows what's hidden here. Perhaps, even older documents."

General who led Syrian bombing is new face of Russian war

By The Associated Press undefined

The general carrying out President Vladimir Putin's new military strategy in Ukraine has a reputation for brutality — for bombing civilians in Russia's campaign in Syria. He also played a role in the deaths of three protesters in Moscow during the failed coup against Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991 that hastened the demise of the Soviet Union.

Bald and fierce-looking, Gen. Sergei Surovikin was put in charge of Russian forces in Ukraine on Oct. 8 after what has so far been a faltering invasion that has seen a number of chaotic retreats and other setbacks over the nearly eight months of war.

Putin put the 56-year-old career military man in command following an apparent truck bombing of the strategic bridge to the Crimean Peninsula that embarrassed the Kremlin and created logistical problems for the Russian forces.

Russia responded with a barrage of strikes across Ukraine, which Putin said were aimed at knocking down energy infrastructure and Ukrainian military command centers. Such attacks have continued on a daily basis, pummeling power plants and other facilities with cruise missiles and waves of Iranian-made drones.

Surovikin also retains his job of air force chief, a position that could help coordinate the airstrikes with other operations.

During the most recent bombardments, some Russian war bloggers carried a statement attributed to Surovikin that signaled his intention to pursue the attacks with unrelenting vigor in an attempt to pound the Kyiv government into submission.

"I don't want to sacrifice Russian soldiers' lives in a guerrilla war against hordes of fanatics armed by NATO," the bloggers quoted his statement as saying. "We have enough technical means to force Ukraine to surrender."

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While the veracity of the statement couldn't be confirmed, it appears to reflect the same heavy-handed approach that Surovikin took in Syria where he oversaw the destruction of entire cities to flush out rebel resistance without paying much attention to the civilian population. That indiscriminate bombing drew condemnation from international human rights groups, and some media reports have dubbed him "General Armageddon."

Putin awarded Surovikin the Hero of Russia medal, the country's highest award, in 2017 and promoted him to full general.

Kremlin hawks lauded Surovikin's appointment in Ukraine. Yevgeny Prigozhin, a millionaire businessman dubbed "Putin's chef" who owns a prominent military contractor that plays a key role in the fighting in Ukraine, praised him as "the best commander in the Russian army."

But even as hard-liners expected Surovikin to ramp up strikes on Ukraine, his first public statements after his appointment sounded more like a recognition of the Russian military's vulnerabilities than blustery threats.

In remarks on Russian state television, Surovikin acknowledged that Russian forces in southern Ukraine were in a "quite difficult position" in the face of Ukrainian counteroffensive.

In carefully scripted comments that Surovikin appeared to read from a teleprompter, he said that further action in the region will depend on the evolving combat situation. Observers interpreted his statement as an attempt to prepare the public for a possible Russian pullback from the strategic southern city of Kherson in southern Ukraine.

Surovikin began his military career with the Soviet army in 1980s and, as a young lieutenant, was named an infantry platoon commander. When he later rose to air force chief, it drew a mixed reaction in the ranks because it marked the first time when the job was given to an infantry officer.

He found himself in the center of a political storm in 1991.

When members of the Communist Party's old guard staged a hard-line coup in August of that year, briefly ousting Gorbachev and sending troops into Moscow to impose a state of emergency, Surovikin commanded one of the mechanized infantry battalions that rolled into the capital.

Popular resistance mounted quickly, and in the final hours of the three-day coup, protesters blocked an armored convoy led by Surovikin and tried to set some of the vehicles ablaze. In a chaotic melee, two protesters were shot and a third was crushed to death by an armored vehicle.

The coup collapsed later that day, and Surovikin was quickly arrested. He spent seven months behind bars pending an inquiry but was eventually acquitted and even promoted to major as investigators concluded that he was only fulfilling his duties.

Another rocky moment in his career came in 1995, when Surovikin was convicted of illegal possession and trafficking of firearms while studying at a military academy. He was sentenced to a year in prison but the conviction was reversed quickly.

He rose steadily through the ranks, commanding units deployed to the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan, leading troops sent to Chechnya and serving at other posts across Russia.

He was appointed commander of Russian forces in Syria in 2017 and served a second stint there in 2019 as Moscow sought to prop up President Bashar Assad's regime and help it regain ground amid a devastating civil war.

In a 2020 report, Human Rights Watch named Surovikin, along with Putin, Assad and other figures as bearing command responsibility for violations during the 2019-20 Syrian offensive in Idlib province.

He apparently has a temper that has not endeared him to subordinates, according to Russian media. One officer under Surovikin complained to prosecutors that the general had beaten him after becoming angry over how he voted in parliamentary elections; another subordinate reportedly shot himself. Investigators found no wrongdoing in either case.

His track record in Syria could have been a factor behind his appointment in Ukraine, as Putin has moved to raise the stakes and reverse a series of humiliating defeats.

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who has repeatedly called for ramping up strikes in Ukraine, praised

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Surovikin as “a real general and a warrior, well-experienced, farsighted and forceful who places patriotism, honor and dignity above all.

“The united group of forces is now in safe hands,” the Kremlin-backed Kadyrov said, voicing confidence that he will “improve the situation.”

GOP’s Georgia challenge: Persuading Trump backers to vote

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

MARIETTA, Ga. (AP) — On a crisp fall morning, eager volunteers fanned out in the leafy suburban Atlanta neighborhood to knock on doors, trying to persuade reluctant and skeptical conservatives to register to vote in next month’s midterm elections.

It’s painstaking work anywhere, but especially pivotal in battleground Georgia, as Donald Trump’s lies of a rigged 2020 election have created a new constituency of election deniers -- some wary their votes won’t be counted in November.

Dispatching the group on the hunt for votes was an unlikely emissary — former Republican Sen. Kelly Loeffler, who initially stood by the defeated president’s effort to undo Joe Biden’s victory, but was now working, in blue jeans and a country plaid shirt, to bring election skeptics back to the polls.

“We saw it firsthand in our election,” Loeffler said about the drop-off during an interview outside the Cobb County Republican Party headquarters where the volunteers gathered on a recent Saturday.

Loeffler recounted to The Associated Press how she lost her seat to Democrat Raphael Warnock in January 2021 after more than 330,000 Republicans who voted in the 2020 presidential election failed to cast ballots in the January 2021 runoff. As Warnock now faces Republican Herschel Walker in a race that could determine the balance of power in the U.S. Senate, Loeffler is trying to prevent a repeat.

“This effort is about amplifying Georgia’s voices and taking our state back and saying that we will not be silenced,” Loeffler said, pumping up the volunteers before sending them out. “We know that when people feel like their vote counts, they’re more likely to vote.”

It’s a singular mission with uncertain prospects in November, the first national election in the aftermath of Trump’s repeated attacks the U.S. voting system and the Jan. 6 assault on the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters trying to stop the certification of Biden’s election.

And it comes as Republicans in Georgia and nationwide are trying to hold together a fragile coalition of voters — those who embrace Trump’s claim of fraud and those who reject it.

“That reflects a real tension in the Republican Party messaging,” said Lee Drutman, a senior fellow at New America, a Washington-based think tank, who specializes in democracy issues.

“It may be self-defeating to say the election is rigged if you have to actually get people out to vote.”

Voters appear eager to cast ballots this fall. 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. Yet the poll also found a large segment of Republicans, 58%, still believe Biden’s election wasn’t legitimate.

Brian Robinson, a GOP strategist, said Georgians have moved on from Trump’s claims, judging by the primary election victories this year for Brad Raffensperger, the embattled secretary of state Trump unsuccessfully asked to “find 11,780” votes, and incumbent Republican Gov. Brian Kemp, who drew Trump’s ire for standing by the state’s results.

“By almost any measure, Georgia voters have moved past the 2020 election and at this juncture have largely rejected claims that fraud marred the election outcome,” Robinson said.

But Democrats say Republicans are trying to have it both ways, courting what one strategist called MAGAs and moderates, referring to Trump’s Make America Great Again supporters. While Loeffler touts Georgia’s new election law as preventing fraud, Democrats argue the GOP-led bill was unnecessary, a reaction to Trump’s lies about 2020.

Loeffler is in many ways an imperfect messenger, one who initially denied the 2020 election results. She stood on stage at Trump rallies as he spread his claims of stolen presidential election. She called on

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Raffensperger to resign over his handling of the vote. Loeffler promised Trump rally voters she would object to the electoral count in Congress, drawing cheers from the crowd, only to abandon the effort hours after the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol,

A wealthy former businesswoman who remains close to Trump, Loeffler has invested more than \$2 million in Greater Georgia and its companion Citizens for Greater Georgia get-out-the vote effort for Republicans. She is modeling her work partly after Democrat Stacey Abrams, the gubernatorial candidate, whose voting rights efforts have catapulted her into a national figure in her rematch against Kemp.

"I said from Day One when I started this effort, we cannot allow the left to have a monopoly on voter registration in our state," Loeffler said about the group she launched after her defeat.

The diverse group of Greater Georgia volunteers broke into a hand-clap chant of "We will knock you!" — a nod to the Queen song — at a cul-de-sac in Marietta before separating into smaller groups to canvass the well-appointed middle class homes.

Trump voter Lisa Buxton said she joined Loeffler's effort because she was tired of "throwing things at my television" in the year after the former president's defeat.

Buxton said she was sad after Trump's loss and formed her own women's church group Christians Taking Action and Prayer around voting and election strategies.

"Our motto is we know what has happened. We know what's in the past. We're going forward," she said.

Asked if Biden was the legitimate president, she gave a long pause.

"He's sitting in the chair," she said. "The electoral college said he's there. So he's there. That's where I am. I'm not going to go down that rabbit hole 'cause I could jump up and down and scream a whole lot."

The challenge of reaching skeptical voters the final weekend before the deadline was clear. Georgia already has high voter registration, and volunteers were met that day mostly with residents not answering their door or having moved on — literally and politically.

Homeowner Scott Davenport said the neighborhood used to be all Republicans, but the days are long gone when he used to stake a giant Newt Gingrich sign in his lawn supporting the former House GOP speaker.

Davenport, a father of two adult daughters who works in commercial real estate, said in the Trump era he started voting for Democrats. He said the Republican Party's rhetoric around racial issues and its denial of the 2020 election results was not what he had signed up for.

"I didn't leave the Republican Party, the Republican Party left me," he said, raking leaves as the canvassers, who did not have him on their priority list, skipped his house. "For me, they've just gone too far."

NCAA on trial in concussion case of dead USC football player

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The widow of a former University of Southern California football player suing the NCAA for failing to protect her husband from repetitive head trauma is taking what could be a landmark case to a Los Angeles jury Friday.

Matthew Gee died in 2018 from permanent brain damage caused by countless blows to the head he took while playing linebacker for the 1990 Rose Bowl winning team, according to the wrongful death suit filed by Alana Gee.

Of the hundreds of wrongful death and personal injury lawsuits brought by college football players against the NCAA in the past decade, Gee's is only the second to go to trial alleging that hits to the head led to chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a degenerative brain disease. It could be the first to reach a jury.

"For years (the NCAA) has kept players like Matthew Gee and the public in the dark about an epidemic that was slowly killing college athletes," the lawsuit said. "Long after they played their last game, they are left with a series of neurological conditions that could slowly strangle their brains."

The NCAA, the governing body of college athletics in the U.S., said it wasn't responsible for Gee's death, which it blamed on heavy drinking, drugs and other health problems.

"Mr. Gee used alcohol and drugs to cope with a traumatic childhood, to fill in the loss of identity he felt after his football playing days ended, and to numb the chronic and increasing pain caused by numerous

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health issues," NCAA lawyers wrote in a filing in Los Angeles Superior Court.

The issue of concussions in sports, and football in particular, has been front and center in recent years as research has discovered more about long-term effects of repeated head trauma in problems ranging from headaches to depression and, sometimes, early onset Parkinson's or Alzheimer's disease.

A 2018 trial in Texas led to a swift settlement after several days of testimony by witnesses for the widow of Greg Ploetz, who played defense for Texas in the late 1960s.

In 2016, the NCAA agreed to settle a class-action concussion lawsuit, paying \$70 million to monitor former college athlete's medical conditions, \$5 million toward medical research and payments of up to \$5,000 toward individual players claiming injuries.

The NFL has been hit with similar suits and eventually agreed to a settlement covering 20,000 retired players providing up to \$4 million for a death involving CTE, which is found in athletes and military veterans who suffered repetitive brain injuries. It's expected to exceed \$1.4 billion in payouts over 65 years for six qualifying conditions.

After years of denials, the NFL acknowledged in 2016 that research done at Boston University's Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy Center showed a link between football and CTE, which is associated with memory loss, depression and progressive dementia.

The center has found CTE in the brains of 110 of 111 deceased former NFL players and 48 of 53 former college players, according to a study in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Hall of Famers diagnosed after death include Ken Stabler and Mike Webster and Junior Seau, a teammate of Gee's at USC.

Gee, 49, was one of five linebackers on the 1989 Trojans squad who died before turning 50. As with Seau, who killed himself in 2012, Gee's brain was examined posthumously at BU and found to have CTE.

The defense has sought to exclude any testimony about Gee's teammates and the NCAA said there was no medical evidence Gee suffered from concussions at USC.

Two ex-teammates, however, testified at depositions about blows they routinely took at a time when they were told to hit with their heads.

Mike Salmon, who went on to the NFL's San Francisco 49ers and Buffalo Bills, recalled Gee and other linebackers being "out of it" during hard-hitting practices.

"Matt hit like a truck," Salmon said. "I saw him quite a bit coming back to the huddle. You could tell ... he wasn't all there."

"It was our job to make helmet-to-helmet contact in the '80s," Gene Fruge, a former nose-tackle, testified. "There was no question about it. That was your job, to explode the man in front of you."

The NCAA, which required schools in 2010 to have a concussion protocol, said long-term effects of head injuries weren't well understood at the time Gee played.

Gee's lawsuit said the debilitating effects of concussions and other traumatic brain impacts have been known for about a century, first from studies of "punch drunk" boxers and later from findings in football and other contact sports.

"The NCAA knew of the harmful effects ... on athletes for decades, they ignored these facts and failed to institute any meaningful methods of warning and/or protecting the athletes," the lawsuit said. "For the NCAA, the continued expansion and operation of college football was simply too profitable to put at risk."

In his senior year, Gee was team captain and led USC in tackles, forced fumbles and fumbles recovered.

After graduating in 1992, Gee was cut by the Los Angeles Raiders in training camp. He married Alana, his college sweetheart, and they had three children as he ran his own insurance company in Southern California. For 20 years, he lived a "relatively normal" life, the suit said.

That changed around 2013, when he began to lose control of his emotions, the lawsuit said. He became angry, confused and depressed. He drank heavily. He told a doctor days would go by without him being able to recall what happened.

When he died on New Year's Eve 2018, the preliminary cause of death was listed as the combined toxic effects of alcohol and cocaine with other significant conditions of cardiovascular disease, cirrhosis and obesity.

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Joseph Low, a Los Angeles lawyer for clients with traumatic brain injury who is not involved in the case, said drug and alcohol abuse can become a symptom of brain injuries as those suffering try to self-medicate. Blaming Gee's death on substance abuse will not shield the NCAA from evidence showing he had CTE, which is not caused by drugs and alcohol, Low said.

"That's a distraction," Low said. "It's really a disgusting way to do character assassination. It's what you call defense strategy 101."

Bregman HR as Valdez, Astros edge Yankees 3-2, lead ALCS 2-0

By KRISTIE RIEKEN AP Sports Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Alex Bregman, Framber Valdez and the Houston Astros are off to a perfect start this postseason.

Taking the formula that won them 106 games in the regular season — strong pitching and hitting home runs — the Astros kept rolling against the New York Yankees.

Bregman connected for an early three-run homer, Valdez threw seven strong innings and the Astros edged the Yankees 3-2 Thursday night to take a 2-0 lead in the AL Championship Series.

The Astros improved to 5-0 this postseason after a sweep to begin this best-of-seven matchup.

"We got a few guys hot. We would like to get everybody hot before it's over with," Astros manager Dusty Baker said.

Yankees slugger Aaron Judge just missed a two-run homer in the eighth when his drive was caught just in front of the short wall by right fielder Kyle Tucker. The ball would've landed in the short right-field porch at Yankee Stadium, Statcast showed — with the roof open at Minute Maid Park, the wind might've knocked down Judge's bid.

"I think the roof open kind of killed us," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said, later adding, "I didn't think like he smoked it like no-doubter, but it felt like his homers to right.

A night after Justin Verlander fanned 11 in a 4-2 win in Game 1, Valdez turned in another solid pitching performance and Bregman's third-inning homer was all the offense Houston needed.

"They got a really tough pitching staff over there," Bregman said. "They're really good. So just trying to scratch and claw and battle and try and fight."

Valdez allowed just four hits, walked none and struck out nine. The only runs New York mustered were unearned, coming in the fourth after a flustered Valdez committed two errors on the same play.

But he quickly moved past the gaffe and shut down the powerful Yankees lineup the rest of the way. Valdez allowed just one baserunner after that inning on a single to Harrison Bader with two outs in the fifth and retired the last seven hitters he faced, capped by striking out the side in the seventh.

Valdez, who often talks about his maturation, said he would have been undone by his fourth-inning miscues a few years ago.

"Back in 2019 I probably would have been done with the game," he said in Spanish through a translator. "I probably would have lost all focus there at that moment. But those are all things that we work on and just continue working hard to be able to focus better and get better in the game."

Featuring a mix of pitches, Valdez got 25 swings and misses. He also helped end the Yankees' record run of 23 straight postseason games with a home run.

Bryan Abreu pitched a scoreless eighth. Ryan Pressly walked one in a scoreless ninth, striking out three for his second save of the series.

There was a slight delay before Pressly threw his first pitch after a fan got on the field and appeared to try and hug Astros second baseman Jose Altuve and take a selfie with him. Security and police officers quickly descended on the man and pulled him away from Altuve before wrestling him to the ground, handcuffing him and escorting him off the field.

The series shifts to New York for Game 3 Saturday where the Yankees will try to dig themselves out of a hole to avoid being eliminated by Houston in the ALCS for the third time in six years. Former Houston ace Gerrit Cole will start for New York.

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Houston is 7-2 overall against the Yankees this year.

Yankees starter Luis Severino plunked Martín Maldonado on the left forearm to start Houston's third before the slumping Altuve struck out. Jeremy Peña singled to center before Yordan Alvarez grounded into a forceout at second.

Bregman then knocked a fastball beyond the wall in left field for his second home run this postseason to make it 3-0. It was his 14th career home run in the playoffs to move him past Justin Turner for most homers by a third baseman in MLB history.

It was a bit windy at Minute Maid Park in a rare game where the retractable roof was open, and it was unclear how much the conditions impacted flyballs. Judge, who set an AL record with 62 home runs during the regular season, gave the Houston fans with his drive that Tucker grabbed before knocking into the wall.

The Yankees are hitting .138 in the two games against the Astros and have struck out 30 times to Houston's eight. The Astros hit three home runs in the opener.

The Astros, who swept Seattle in the AL Division Series, are winning without any help on offense from Altuve, long a postseason powerhouse.

The three-time batting champion went 0 for 4 Thursday to fall to 0 for 23 in the playoffs this year, which is the longest hitless streak to begin a postseason in MLB history. He passed Dal Maxvill, who went 0 for 22 in the 1968 World Series for the Cardinals.

"I woke up today, and my goal was to win the game, and we did it, and that's the only thing that's on my mind right now," Altuve said.

Judge got his first hit of the series with a single to get things going for the Yankees in the fourth.

Then came a nightmare of a play for Valdez where he made both a fielding and a throwing error. Giancarlo Stanton hit a chopper toward Valdez, and he grabbed it, possibly with time to start a double play, but then dropped it.

Valdez picked up the ball but fell backwards to the ground as he threw to first. His toss was offline, allowing Judge to advance to third and Stanton to reach second on the play.

Valdez remained on his back on the grass for a few seconds after seeing the ball roll past first base and put a hand to his face and shook his head before gathering himself and returning to the mound.

Anthony Rizzo followed with a groundout that scored Judge to make it 3-1.

A single by Gleyber Torres sent Stanton home to get the Yankees within 3-2. But Valdez struck out Josh Donaldson and Kyle Higashioka to limit the damage.

Severino allowed five hits and three runs with six strikeouts in 5 1/3 innings.

UP NEXT

Cole (2-0, 2.03 ERA this postseason), who helped the Astros to the 2019 World Series before signing with the Yankees, will start for New York in Game 3 Friday. Houston has yet to name its starter, but it will likely be Lance McCullers.

49ers acquire RB Christian McCaffrey from Panthers

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

SANTA CLARA, Calif. (AP) — The San Francisco 49ers have acquired star running back Christian McCaffrey from the Carolina Panthers for a haul of draft picks.

The Panthers on Thursday night announced the deal that sends McCaffrey back to the Bay Area where he starred in college at Stanford. They said it will be finalized when McCaffrey passes a physical.

The Panthers will receive picks in the second, third and fourth rounds of the 2023 draft, as well as a fifth-rounder in 2024, according to a person familiar with the terms. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the terms were not announced.

Carolina had been seeking a first-round pick, but San Francisco had already dealt their 2023 first-round pick in a deal to draft Trey Lance last year.

McCaffrey joins a talented group of playmakers in San Francisco with versatile receiver Deebo Samuel, star tight end George Kittle and receiver Brandon Aiyuk.

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But the Niners (3-3) were not as strong at running back with starter Elijah Mitchell out with a knee injury. McCaffrey provides coach Kyle Shanahan with one of the best as both a runner and receiver, adding another element to San Francisco's offense.

McCaffrey has a \$990,000 salary this year after Carolina reworked his contract, making him an easy fit under the salary cap. He is owed about \$36 million over the next three years, but none of that is guaranteed.

McCaffrey becomes the second skill position player to be traded this week by the Panthers (1-5) since coach Matt Rhule was fired on Oct. 10. Carolina sent wide receiver Robbie Anderson to the Arizona Cardinals on Monday for two future late-round draft picks.

The trade leaves the already depleted, and largely inept Panthers offense extremely thin at running back with D'Onta Foreman and Chuba Hubbard expected to compete for the starting job and Raheem Blackshear potentially in the mix for more work.

The 26-year-old McCaffrey is considered one of the most versatile running backs in the league when healthy because of his ability as a runner, receiver and blocker.

He missed 23 games over the previous two seasons due to injuries, but has played in all six games this season and is fourth in the NFL in yards from scrimmage (607) despite playing for the league's 32nd-ranked offense. He and Cleveland Browns running back Nick Chubb are the only players in the league to have five games this year with at least 100 yards from scrimmage.

McCaffrey has 7,272 yards from scrimmage — 3,980 rushing and 3,292 receiving — and has scored 50 touchdowns since coming into the league as the eighth overall draft pick in 2017.

McCaffrey's best season came in 2019 when he had 1,387 yards rushing and 1,005 yards receiving, making only the third player in NFL history to eclipse 1,000 yards in both categories. He also had 19 touchdowns that season and was named All-Pro.

McCaffrey's father, Ed, won a Super Bowl with the 49ers in the 1994 season and won two more titles in Denver with Shanahan's father, Mike, as his head coach.

Cash is king for sanctioned Russian, Venezuelan oligarchs

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — It was a deal that brought together oligarchs from some of America's top adversaries.

"The key is the cash," the oil broker wrote in a text message, offering a deep discount on Venezuelan crude shipments to an associate who claimed to be fronting for the owner of Russia's biggest aluminum company. "As soon as you are ready with cash we can work."

The communication was included in a 49-page indictment unsealed Wednesday in New York federal court charging seven individuals with conspiring to purchase sensitive U.S. military technology, smuggle oil and launder tens of millions of dollars on behalf of wealthy Russian businessmen.

The frank talk among co-defendants reads like a how-to guide on circumventing U.S. sanctions — complete with Hong Kong shell companies, bulk cash pick ups, phantom oil tankers and the use of cryptocurrency to cloak transactions that are illicit under U.S. law

It also shines a light on how wealthy insiders from Russia and its ally Venezuela, both barred from the western financial system, are making common cause to protect their massive fortunes.

At the center of the alleged conspiracy are two Russians: Yury Orekhov, who used to work for a publicly-traded aluminum company sanctioned by the U.S., and Artem Uss, the son of a wealthy governor allied with the Kremlin.

The two are partners in a Hamburg, Germany-based company trading in industrial equipment and commodities. Prosecutors allege the company was a hub for skirting U.S. sanctions first imposed against Russian elites following the 2014 invasion of Crimea. Both were arrested, in Germany and Italy respectively, on U.S. charges including conspiracy to violate sanctions, money laundering and bank fraud.

On the other end of the deal was Juan Fernando Serrano, the CEO of a commodities trading startup known as Treseus with offices in Dubai, Italy and his native Spain. His whereabouts are unknown.

In electronic communications among the men last year, each side boasted of connections to powerful

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insiders.

"This is our mother company," Orekhov wrote to Serrano, pasting a link to the aluminum company's website and a link to the owner's Wikipedia page. "He is under sanctions as well. That's why we (are) acting from this company."

Serrano, not to be outdone, responded that his partner was also sanctioned.

"He is one of the influence people in Venezuela. Super close to the Vice President," he wrote, posting a link showing search results for a Venezuelan lawyer and businessman who is currently wanted by the U.S. on money laundering and bribery charges.

Neither alleged partner was charged in the case nor are they identified by name in the indictment. Additionally, it's not clear what ties, if any, Serrano really has to the Venezuelan insider he cited.

But the description of the Russian billionaire matches that of Oleg Deripaska, who was charged last month in a separate sanctions case in New York. Some of the proceeds he allegedly funneled to the U.S. were to support a Uzbekistani track and field Olympic athlete while she gave birth to their child in the U.S.

Meanwhile, the Venezuelan is media magnate Raul Gorrin, according to someone close to U.S. law enforcement who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation. Gorrin remains in Venezuela and is on the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's most-wanted list for allegedly masterminding a scheme to siphon \$1.2 billion from PDVSA, Venezuela's state oil company.

A U.S.-based attorney for Deripaska didn't respond to requests for comment. Gorrin declined to comment but has rejected other criminal charges against him as politically motivated.

While U.S. sanctions on Venezuelan oil apply only to Americans, many foreign entities and individuals with business in the U.S. stay away from transactions involving the OPEC nation for fear of being sanctioned themselves.

For that same reason, Venezuela's oil sells at a deep discount — about 40% less than the market price, according to the indictment. But such choice terms require some unorthodox maneuvering.

For example, instead of instantly wiring funds through Western banks, payment has to take a more circuitous route.

In one transaction this year cited in the indictment — the \$33 million purchase of a tanker full of Venezuelan fuel oil — the alleged co-conspirators discussed channeling payments from a front company in Dubai, named Melissa Trade, to shell accounts in Hong Kong, Australia and England. To hide the transaction, documents were allegedly falsified to describe the cargo as "whole green peas" and "bulky paddy rice."

But as is often the case in clandestine transactions, cash appears to have been king.

"Your people can go directly to PDVSA with one of my staff and pay directly to them. There are 550,000 barrels ... to load on Monday," Serrano wrote Orekhov in a November 2021 message.

There was also discussion of dropping off millions in cash at a bank in Moscow, Evrofinance Mosnarbank, which is owned by PDVSA. It was a major conduit for trade with Russia until it too was hit with U.S. sanctions in 2019. The two defendants also contemplated a possible mirror transaction whereby cash delivered to a bank in Panama would be paid out the same day at a branch of the same unnamed institution in Caracas, Venezuela's capital.

But Orekhov's preferred method of payment appears to be Tether, a cryptocurrency that purports to be pegged to more stable currencies like the U.S. dollar.

"It's quicker than telegraphic transfer," Orekhov wrote regarding a planned purchase of 500,000 barrels of oil worth \$17 million. "That's why everyone does it now. It's convenient, it's quick."

It's not just financial transactions that are a challenge however. Delivering the crude presents its own risk because most shipping companies and insurers won't do business with Venezuela and other sanctioned entities. In recent years, the U.S. government has seized several tankers suspected of transporting Iranian fuel heading for Venezuela.

To obscure the oil's origins, Orekhov and Serrano discussed instructing the Vietnamese tanker they were using to turn off its mandatory tracking system to avoid being spotted while loading in "Disneyland" — a coded reference to Venezuela.

While the vessel isn't identified by name in the indictment, internal PDVSA shipping documents seen by

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The Associated Press show that it was the Melogy, a two-decade old tanker owned and operated by a Hanoi-based company called Thank Long Gas Co.

Ship tracking data collected by Marine Traffic shows that the Melogy went "dark" on Dec. 31, 2021, as it was drifting empty off the coast of Venezuela near neighboring Trinidad & Tobago. Almost four months later, on April 18, it resumed transmissions, its hull now fully laden and steaming toward Asia.

On June 9, the ship then transferred its cargo at sea to a floating storage ship, the Harmony Star, off the coast of Malaysia, satellite images show. That same vessel has been identified as being part of a wider oil smuggling network helping Iran, according to research by the United Against Nuclear Iran, a New York-based group the closely tracks crude shipments by sanctioned countries.

Myanmar villagers say army beheaded high school teacher

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — The decapitated body of a high school teacher was left on grotesque display at a school in central Myanmar after he was detained and killed by the military, witnesses said Thursday, marking the latest of many abuses alleged as the army tries to crush opposition to military rule.

According to witnesses' descriptions and photos taken in Taung Myint village in the rural Magway region, the headless body of 46-year-old Saw Tun Moe was left on the ground in front of the school's spiked gate and his head was impaled on top of it. The school, which has been closed since last year, was also burned.

Neither the military government nor the state-controlled media have released information about the teacher's death.

Myanmar's military has arrested tens of thousands of people and been blamed for the deaths of more than 2,300 civilians since seizing power last year from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

"We are appalled by reports that Burma's military regime arrested, publicly mutilated, and beheaded a schoolteacher in Magway Region," U.S State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Twitter. "The regime's brutal violence, including against educators, demands a strong response from the international community." The United States officially refers to Myanmar by its old name, Burma, which was changed by a previous military government.

In September, at least seven young students were killed in a helicopter attack on a school in a Buddhist monastery in the Sagaing region in north-central Myanmar. The military government denied responsibility for the attacks. The U.N. has documented 260 attacks on schools and education personnel since the army takeover, the U.N. Child Rights Committee said in June.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military's February 2021 seizure of power was met by nationwide peaceful protests and civil disobedience that security forces suppressed with deadly force. The repression led to widespread armed resistance, which has since turned into what U.N. experts have characterized as a civil war.

The army has conducted major offensives in the countryside, including burning down villages and driving hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, allowing them little or no access to humanitarian assistance.

Myanmar's military has long been accused of serious human rights violations, most notably in the western state of Rakhine. International courts are considering whether it committed genocide there in a brutal 2017 counterinsurgency campaign that caused more than 700,000 members of the Muslim Rohingya minority to flee to neighboring Bangladesh for safety.

The slain teacher, Saw Tun Moe, was a longtime educator who had participated in anti-military protests before taking charge of a high school founded by the country's pro-democracy movement in his native Thit Nyi Naung village.

The National Unity Government, an underground organization opposed to military rule that styles itself as the country's legitimate administrative body, opened a network of schools this year as an interim education system in parts of the country where it believed armed militias loyal to it were strong enough to defend themselves.

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Saw Tun Moe also taught mathematics at his village school and another nearby alternative school and was involved in the administration of Thit Nyi Naung, where he lived with his family. He previously taught at a private school in Magway, also known as Magwe, for 20 years.

The NUG's education arm mourned his death in a statement late Thursday that praised him and other fallen teachers as "revolutionary heroes" and expressed solidarity with the teachers and students who continue their resistance to the military.

His death occurred as a column of about 90 government soldiers carried out sweeps of at least a dozen area villages this month.

A villager told The Associated Press by phone that she was among about two dozen villagers including Saw Tun Moe who were hiding behind a hut in a peanut field at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday when a group of more than 80 soldiers accompanied by armed civilians arrived, shooting their guns into the air. The military arms and employs civilian auxiliaries who serve as guides and take part in raids.

The villager, who spoke on condition of anonymity because she feared being punished by the authorities, said they were caught by the troops, who seized their phones and other belongings and at an officer's command separated three men from the group, but took away only Saw Tun Moe.

"Our heads were bowed at that time and we didn't dare to look at them. Later, one of the soldiers called to him, "Come. Come fatty, follow us," and took him away. The soldiers treated him leniently, so we didn't think this would happen," the villager said.

She said Saw Tun Moe was taken to Taung Myint village, more than a kilometer (almost a mile) north of Thit Nyi Naung, and killed him there the following day.

"I learned on Monday morning that he had been killed. It is very sad to lose a good teacher who we depended on for our children's education," the villager added. She said her two children studied at his school.

A villager from Taung Myint village said he saw Saw Tun Moe's body at about 11 a.m. Monday after the soldiers had left.

"First, I called my friends, then I looked at the body more closely. I immediately knew that it was Teacher Moe. He used to visit our village as a schoolteacher in the past few months, so I recognized his face," said the villager from Taung Myint, who also asked not to be named for his own safety.

Photos taken by his friend showed the teacher's body and head. An old campaign poster with Suu Kyi's photos covered the corpse's thigh. Fingers severed from his right hand had been placed between his thighs, according to the villagers. A three-finger salute is a gesture adopted by the country's civil disobedience movement, inspired by "The Hunger Games" series.

On an outside wall of the school, which was partially burned Sunday by the soldiers, is scrawled graffiti with an ominous warning: "I will be back, you (expletive) who ran away."

'Momentous': Asian Americans laud Anna May Wong's US quarter

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

More than 60 years after Anna May Wong became the first Asian American woman to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, the pioneering actor has coined another first, quite literally.

With quarters bearing her face and manicured hand set to start shipping Monday, per the U.S. Mint, Wong will be the first Asian American to grace U.S. currency. Few could have been more stunned at the honor than her niece and namesake, Anna Wong, who learned about the American Women Quarters honor from the Mint's head legal consul.

"From there, it went into the designs and there were so many talented artists with many different renditions. I actually pulled out a quarter to look at the size to try and imagine how the images would transfer over to real life," Anna Wong wrote in an email to The Associated Press.

The elder Wong, who fought against stereotypes foisted on her by a white Hollywood, is one of five women being honored this year as part of the program. She was chosen for being "a courageous advocate who championed for increased representation and more multi-dimensional roles for Asian American actors," Mint Director Ventris Gibson said in a statement.

The other icons chosen include writer Maya Angelou; Dr. Sally Ride, an educator and the first American

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woman in space; Wilma Mankiller, the first female elected principal chief of the Cherokee Nation; and Nina Otero-Warren, a trailblazer for New Mexico's suffrage movement.

Wong's achievement has excited Asian Americans inside and outside of the entertainment industry.

Her niece, whose father was Anna May Wong's brother, will participate in an event with the Mint on Nov. 4 at Paramount Studios in Los Angeles. One of Wong's movies, "Shanghai Express," will be screened, followed by a panel discussion.

Arthur Dong, the author of "Hollywood Chinese," said the quarter feels like a validation of not just of Wong's contributions, but of all Asian Americans'. A star on the Walk of Fame is huge, but being on U.S. currency is a whole other stratosphere of renown.

"What it means is that people all across the nation — and my guess is around the world — will see her face and see her name," Dong said. "If they don't know anything about her, they will ... be curious and want to learn something about her."

Born in Los Angeles in 1905, Wong started acting during the silent film era. While her career trajectory coincided with Hollywood's first Golden Age, things were not so golden for Wong.

She got her first big role in 1922 in "The Toll of the Sea," according to Dong's book. Two years later, she played a Mongol slave in "The Thief of Bagdad." For several years, she was stuck receiving offers only for femme fatale or Asian "dragon lady" roles.

She fled to European film sets and stages, but Wong was back in the U.S. by the early 1930s and again cast as characters reliant on tropes that would hardly be tolerated today. These roles included the untrustworthy daughter of Fu Manchu in "Daughter of the Dragon" and a sex worker in "Shanghai Express."

She famously lost out on the lead to white actor Luise Rainer in 1937's "The Good Earth," based on the novel about a Chinese farming family. But in 1938, she got to play a more humanized, sympathetic Chinese American doctor in "King of Chinatown."

The juxtaposition of that film with her other roles is the focus of one day in a monthlong program, "Hollywood Chinese: The First 100 Years," that Dong is curating at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles in November.

"('King of Chinatown') was part of this multi-picture deal at Paramount that gave her more control, more say in the types of films she was going to be participating in," he said. "For a Chinese American woman to have that kind of multi-picture deal at Paramount, that was quite outstanding."

By the 1950s, Wong had moved on to television appearances. She was supposed to return to the big screen in the movie adaptation of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Flower Drum Song" but had to bow out because of illness. She died on Feb. 2, 1961, a year after receiving her star.

Bing Chen, co-founder of the nonprofit Gold House — focused on elevating representation and empowerment of Asian and Asian American content — called the new quarter "momentous." He praised Wong as a star "for generations."

But at the same time, he highlighted how anti-Asian hate incidents and the lack of representation in media still persist.

"In a slate of years when Asian women have faced extensive challenges — from being attacked to objectified on screen to being the least likely group to be promoted to corporate management — this currency reinforces what many of us have known all along: (they're) here and worthy," Chen said in a statement. "It's impossible to forget, though, as a hyphenated community, that Asian Americans constantly struggle between being successful and being seen."

Asian American advocacy groups outside of the entertainment world also praised the new quarters. Norman Chen, CEO of The Asian American Foundation, plans to seek the coins out to show to his parents.

"For them to see an Asian American woman on a coin, I think it'd be really powerful for them. It's a dramatic symbol of how we are so integral to American society yet still seen in stereotypical ways," he said. "But my parents will look at this. They will be pleasantly surprised and proud."

To sum it up, Chen said, it's a huge step: "Nothing is more American than our money."

EU leaders avoid deep rift on gas price cap at energy summit

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By SAMUEL PETREQUIN and RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union leaders struggled to find immediate practical solutions on how to deal with the energy crisis but avoided an open rift between Germany and France on Friday that would have exposed a divided bloc as it confronts Russian President Vladimir Putin over his war in Ukraine.

After daylong talks in Brussels dragged well into the night, the 27 EU leaders papered over divisions between some of the biggest member states and at least agreed to continue working on ways to impose a gas price cap in case of big price increases.

French President Emmanuel Macron highlighted his work with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to create a veneer of unity after talks that started early Thursday. He said that together with close technical advisers, "I will see Chancellor Scholz in Paris next week so that we can move forward, with our teams, on all the issues."

Scholz said the main issue was curbing "spikes" in gas trading that may last only a few hours but still send prices excessively upward. He said measures to counter that should be further examined.

"How can we avoid these spikes? There is still a lot of concrete work to be done. But we must look at ways to contain it, which certainly makes sense," Scholz said.

When the axis between Paris and Berlin is aligned, usually the rest of the EU follows.

"There is a strong and unanimously shared determination to act together, as Europeans, to achieve three goals: lowering prices, ensuring security of supply and continuing to work to reduce demand," said summit host Charles Michel, the EU Council president.

Diplomats said the execution of the proposals, including the possibility of a price cap, should be first properly assessed by energy ministers next Tuesday and might even need a new summit of leaders in the coming weeks.

"There is a lot of work ahead," said Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo. "We are pushing ourselves into uncharted territory, where we don't have experience yet."

To make sure the runaway cost of gas doesn't further tank struggling EU economies, the Commission has proposed a system to pool buying of gas and offered a compromise that would allow for a correction mechanism to kick in in exceptional circumstances.

Countries like the Netherlands and Germany were loathe to start such market intervention, but agreed to study a system that would be failproof and not allow suppliers to stop delivering and go to more lucrative markets.

"It is incredibly complex but you see that everyone wants to get the gas price further down, but in a way that we continue to get gas deliveries and that it doesn't move to Asia or Latin America. We need it here, too," said Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

In addition, the leaders are also pushing for the creation of a new LNG gas index better reflecting the market following the drastic reduction of imports of pipeline gas from Russia.

Divisions were so big at the start of the summit that agreeing on further exploration of the plan proposed by the Commission was seen as almost an achievement in itself.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said a price cap would send suppliers away. The "gas price cap is like going to a bar and telling the bartender you want to pay half price for your beer. Not going to happen," he said on Twitter.

The traditional driving duo of the EU — Germany and France — were in opposing camps, with Germany expressing doubts and holding off plans for the price cap, while most others want to push on.

Scholz said any dispute was on the method, not the goal. "Prices for gas, for oil, for coal, must sink; electricity prices must sink, and this is something that calls for a joint effort by all of us in Europe," he said.

Natural gas prices spiraled out of control over the summer as EU nations sought to outbid one another to fill up their reserves for winter. The member states have already agreed to cut demand for gas by 15% over the winter. They have also committed to filling gas-storage facilities to at least 80% of capacity by November and — as a way of reducing gas-fired power generation — to reducing peak demand for electricity by at least 5%.

The question of possible EU gas-price caps has moved steadily up the political agenda for months as the energy squeeze tightened, with 15 countries such as France and Italy pushing for such blunt intervention.

At the opening of the summit, the need for rock-solid EU unity in confronting Russia was highlighted by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who addressed the 27 national leaders by video conference from Kyiv, asking for continued help to get his nation through the winter.

Russia is increasingly relying on drone strikes against Ukraine's energy grid and civilian infrastructure and sowing panic with hits on Ukrainian cities, tactics that European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called "war crimes" and "pure terror" on Wednesday.

Diplomats are already assessing more sanctions to come. But Orban's perceived friendliness toward the Kremlin makes life tougher. Even though the previous EU sanctions targeting Russia have been approved unanimously, it has increasingly become difficult to keep Orban on board by agreeing to exemptions.

Judge dismisses effort to halt student loan forgiveness plan

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — A federal judge on Thursday dismissed an effort by six Republican-led states to block the Biden administration's plan to forgive student loan debt for tens of millions of Americans.

U.S. District Judge Henry Autrey in St. Louis wrote that because the six states — Nebraska, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas and South Carolina — failed to establish they had standing, "the Court lacks jurisdiction to hear this case."

Suzanne Gage, spokeswoman for Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson, said the states will appeal. She said in a statement that the states "continue to believe that they do in fact have standing to raise their important legal challenges."

Democratic President Joe Biden announced in August that his administration would cancel up to \$20,000 in education debt for huge numbers of borrowers. The announcement immediately became a major political issue ahead of the November midterm elections.

The states' lawsuit is among a few that have been filed. Earlier Thursday, Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett rejected an appeal from a Wisconsin taxpayers group seeking to stop the debt cancellation program.

Barrett, who oversees emergency appeals from Wisconsin and neighboring states, did not comment in turning away the appeal from the Brown County Taxpayers Association. The group wrote in its Supreme Court filing that it needed an emergency order because the administration could begin canceling outstanding student debt as soon as Sunday.

In the lawsuit brought by the states, lawyers for the administration said the Department of Education has "broad authority to manage the federal student financial aid programs." A court filing stated that the 2003 Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act, or HEROES Act, allows the secretary of education to waive or modify terms of federal student loans in times of war or national emergency.

"COVID-19 is such an emergency," the filing stated.

The Congressional Budget Office has said the program will cost about \$400 billion over the next three decades. James Campbell, an attorney for the Nebraska attorney general's office, told Autrey at an Oct. 12 hearing that the administration is acting outside its authorities in a way that will cost states millions of dollars.

The plan would cancel \$10,000 in student loan debt for those making less than \$125,000 or households with less than \$250,000 in income. Pell Grant recipients, who typically demonstrate more financial need, will get an additional \$10,000 in debt forgiven.

Conservative attorneys, Republican lawmakers and business-oriented groups have asserted that Biden overstepped his authority in taking such sweeping action without the assent of Congress. They called it an unfair government giveaway for relatively affluent people at the expense of taxpayers who didn't pursue higher education.

Chris Nuelle, spokesman for Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt, said the plan "will unfairly burden

working class families with even more economic woes.”

Many Democratic lawmakers facing tough reelection contests have distanced themselves from the plan. The HEROES Act was enacted after 9/11 to help members of the military. The Justice Department says the law allows Biden to reduce or erase student loan debt during a national emergency. Republicans argue the administration is misinterpreting the law, in part because the pandemic no longer qualifies as a national emergency.

Justice Department attorney Brian Netter told Autrey that fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic is still rippling. He said student loan defaults have skyrocketed over the past 2 1/2 years.

The cancellation applies to federal student loans used to attend undergraduate and graduate school, along with Parent Plus loans. Current college students qualify if their loans were disbursed before July 1.

The plan makes 43 million borrowers eligible for some debt forgiveness, with 20 million who could get their debt erased entirely, according to the administration.

US: Iranian troops in Crimea backing Russian drone strikes

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House said Thursday that Iranian troops are “directly engaged on the ground” in Crimea supporting Russian drone attacks on Ukraine’s power stations and other key infrastructure, claiming it has troubling evidence of Tehran’s deepening role assisting Russia as it exacts suffering on Ukrainian civilians just as the cold weather sets in.

National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters that Iran has sent a “relatively small number” of personnel to Crimea, a part of Ukraine unilaterally annexed by Russia in contravention of international law in 2014, to assist Russian troops in launching Iranian-made drones against Ukraine. Members of a branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps were dispatched to assist Russian forces in using the drones, according to the British government.

The revelation of the U.S. intelligence finding comes as the Biden administration seeks to mount international pressure on Tehran to pull back from helping Russia as it bombards soft Ukrainian civilian targets with the help of Iranian-made drones.

The Russians in recent days have increasingly turned to the Iranian-supplied drones, as well as Kalibr and Iskander cruise missiles, to carry out a barrage of attacks against Ukrainian infrastructure and non-military targets. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said this week that Russian forces have destroyed 30% of Ukraine’s power stations since Oct. 10.

“The information we have is that the Iranians have put trainers and tech support in Crimea, but it’s the Russians who are doing the piloting,” Kirby said.

He added that the Biden administration was looking at imposing new sanctions on Tehran and would look for ways to make it harder for Iran to sell such weapons to Russia.

The U.S. first revealed this summer that Russia was purchasing Iranian unmanned aerial vehicles to launch against Ukraine. Iran has denied selling its munitions to Russia.

White House officials say that international sanctions, including export controls, have left the Russians in a bind as they try to restock ammunition and precision-guided munition stocks that have been depleted during the nearly eight-month-old war. As a result, Russia has been forced to turn to Iran as well as North Korea for weaponry.

Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary, told reporters that military officials “wouldn’t be surprised” if the Russians sought more drones from Iran “given their situation.”

Zelenskyy said last week that Russia had ordered 2,400 from Iran.

U.S. officials believe that Iran may have deployed military personnel to assist the Russians in part because of the Russians’ lack of familiarity with the Iranian-made drones. Declassified U.S. intelligence findings showed that Russians faced technical problems with the drones soon after taking delivery of them in August.

“The systems themselves were suffering failures and not performing to the standards that apparently the customers expected,” Kirby said. “So the Iranians decided to move in some trainers and some technical

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support to help the Russians use them with better lethality.”

The Biden administration released further details about Iran’s involvement in assisting Russia’s war at a sensitive moment. The administration has levied new sanctions against Iran over the brutal crackdown on antigovernment protests spurred by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who died in Iranian security custody.

Morality police had detained Amini last month for not properly covering her hair with the Islamic headscarf, known as the hijab, which is mandatory for Iranian women. Amini collapsed at a police station and died three days later.

Her death and the subsequent unrest have come as the administration tries to bring Iran back into compliance with the nuclear deal that was brokered by the Obama administration and scrapped by the Trump administration.

At the United Nations this week, Ukraine accused Iran of violating a Security Council ban on the transfer of drones capable of flying 300 kilometers (180 miles). Britain, France and the U.S. strongly back Ukraine’s contention that the drones were transferred to Russia and violate a 2015 U.N. Security Council resolution that endorsed the nuclear deal between Iran and six nations — the U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany — aimed at curbing Tehran’s nuclear activities and preventing the country from developing a nuclear weapon.

Kirby said the administration has little hope for reviving the Iran nuclear deal soon.

“We’re not focused on the on the diplomacy at this point,” Kirby said. “What we are focused on is making sure that we’re holding the regime accountable for the way they’re treating peaceful protesters in their country and supporting those protesters.”

The White House spoke out about Iranian assistance to Russia as Britain on Thursday announced new sanctions on Iranian officials and businesses accused of supplying the drones.

“These cowardly drone strikes are an act of desperation,” British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said in a statement. “By enabling these strikes, these individuals and a manufacturer have caused the people of Ukraine untold suffering. We will ensure that they are held to account for their actions.”

Among the individuals hit with asset freezes and travel bans by the British were Maj. Gen. Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, chairman of the armed forces general staff overseeing the army branches supplying Russia with drones; Brig. Gen. Seyed Hojjatollah Qureishi, a key Iranian negotiator in the deal; and Brig. Gen. Saeed Aghajani, the head the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Aerospace Force UAV Command.

Shahed Aviation Industries, the Iranian manufacturer of the drones being used by Russia, was also hit by an asset freeze.

Russian, Ukrainian troops gird for major battle in Kherson

By SABRA AYRES and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian and Ukrainian troops appeared Thursday to be girding for a major battle over the strategic southern industrial port city of Kherson, in a region which Russian President Vladimir Putin has illegally annexed and subjected to martial law.

Fighting and evacuations were reported in the Kherson region as Moscow tried to pound the invaded country into submission with more missile and drone attacks on critical infrastructure.

Putin declared martial law in the Kherson, Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions on Wednesday in an attempt to assert Russian authority in the annexed areas as he faced battlefield setbacks, a troubled troop mobilization, increasing criticism at home and abroad, and international sanctions.

The unsettled status of the illegally absorbed territory was especially visible in the Kherson region’s capital, where Russian military officials have replaced Kremlin-installed civilian leaders as part of martial law that took effect Thursday to defend against a Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Kherson city, with a prewar population of about 284,000, was one of the first urban areas Russia captured when it invaded Ukraine, and it remains the largest city it holds. It is a prime target for both sides because of its key industries and major river port. Reports of sabotage and assassinations of Russian-installed

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officials in Kherson have surfaced for months, in what appeared to be one of the most active Ukrainian resistance movements in occupied territory.

Russian-installed officials have urged residents to evacuate for their safety and to allow the military to build fortifications. Officials said 15,000 residents of an expected 60,000 had been relocated from the city and surrounding areas as of Thursday.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office said Thursday that Ukrainian forces mounted 15 attacks on Russian military strongholds in the Kherson region. For its part, Russia's Defense Ministry spokesman said the Kremlin's forces repelled Ukrainian attempts to advance with tanks on the Kherson villages of Sukhanove, Nova Kamianka and Chervonyi Yar.

A Russian-installed official in the region, Vladimir Leontyev, said Thursday Ukrainian forces had launched five missile strikes against the Kakhovka dam and hydroelectric power station about 70 kms (44 miles) from Kherson city. He said on Russian TV that if the facilities were destroyed, a critical canal providing water to annexed Crimea would be cut off.

Zelenskyy countered that the Russians have mined the dam and power station, with plans to blow them up in what he called a terrorism act to unleash 18 million cubic meters (4.8 billion gallons) and flood Kherson and dozens of areas where hundreds of thousands of people live. He told the European Council Russia would then blame Ukraine.

None of the claims could be independently verified.

Russia's new military commander in Ukraine this week acknowledged the threat posed by Ukraine's counteroffensive to Kherson, and Britain's Defense Ministry interpreted that Thursday to mean, "Russian authorities are seriously considering a major withdrawal of their forces from the area west of the Dnieper River."

Putin tried Thursday to address another problem area, the partial mobilization of reservists he ordered last month and estimated it would end by the end of this month by reaching its 300,000-man target. He visited a training center in the Russian region of Ryazan to show progress in rectifying problems with training and supplies for newly mobilized troops. Russian TV showed him lying under a net on a field, wearing goggles and ear protection, and shooting a rifle. A military officer showed Putin and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu soldiers wearing bulletproof vests and helmets, with weapons. The officer displayed winter boots, clothes, cooking utensils and other supplies — all to counter images Russians have posted on social media of shabby or non-existent gear for newly mobilized troops.

In another sign of Russia's wavering mobilization, Ukrainian authorities said more than 3,000 Russians have called a hotline for soldiers who don't want to take part in the war and are asking to surrender.

In other developments:

—Russian forces attacked Ukrainian positions near Bilohorivka, a village in eastern Ukraine's Luhansk region. In the neighboring Donetsk region, fighting raged near the city of Bakhmut. Kremlin-backed separatists have controlled parts of both regions for 8½ years.

—Russia continued attacking energy infrastructure, dispatching drones and missiles to eight regions, prompting authorities to ask residents to reduce energy consumption from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and to dim city street lights. They warned of rolling blackouts continuing Friday. In Kryvyi Rih, Russian strikes damaged a power plant and another energy facility, cutting electricity to the central Ukraine city of about 600,000 residents. Kryvyi Rih is home to metallurgical factories key to Ukraine's economy. Gov. Valentin Reznichenko said the city sustained serious damage.

—Ukrainian authorities said missile and drone strikes started fires in the southern city of Mykolaiv, with four drones hitting a school. Another school in Komyshevakh, a village in Zaporizhzhia, also took four drone strikes.

—The Ukrainian army's general staff reported a heightened chance that Russian forces could attack from Belarus to cut supply routes for Western weapons and equipment. Oleksei Hromov, a general staff official, said Russia was deploying aircraft and troops in Belarus.

—The White House said Iranian troops are "directly engaged on the ground" in Crimea supporting Rus-

sian drone attacks, troubling evidence of Tehran's deepening role assisting Russia as it exacts suffering on Ukrainian civilians just as the cold weather sets in.

—Despite the Kremlin's — and Iran's — claims to the contrary, a leading Russian military expert unwittingly acknowledged that Iran has supplied Russia with weaponized drones it uses in Ukraine. Ruslan Pukhov, head of the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, a Moscow-based think tank, asked journalists before a TV interview not to question him about where the drones came from, unaware that he was live on air. "We all know that they are Iranian-made, but authorities haven't acknowledged that," Pukhov said.

—The EU on Thursday imposed sanctions on Iran's Shahed Aviation Industries, as well as three Iranian armed forces generals, for undermining Ukraine's territorial integrity by helping to supply Russia with drones.

Ex-UCLA gynecologist found guilty in LA sex abuse case

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A former gynecologist at the University of California, Los Angeles was found guilty Thursday of five counts of sexually abusing female patients, in a criminal case that came after the university system made nearly \$700 million in lawsuit payouts.

The Los Angeles jury found Dr. James Heaps, a longtime UCLA campus gynecologist, not guilty of seven of the 21 counts and were deadlocked on the remaining charges.

In the wake of the scandal that erupted in 2019 following the doctor's arrest, UCLA agreed to pay nearly \$700 million in lawsuit settlements to hundreds of Heaps' patients — a record amount by a public university amid a wave of sexual misconduct scandals by campus doctors in recent years.

Heaps, 65, had pleaded not guilty to 21 felony counts in the sexual assaults of seven women between 2009 and 2018. He has denied wrongdoing.

Heaps was indicted last year on multiple counts each of sexual battery by fraud, sexual exploitation of a patient and sexual penetration of an unconscious person by fraudulent representation.

The jury delivered a guilty verdict on three counts of sexual battery by fraud and two counts of sexual penetration of an unconscious person. He was found not guilty of seven other counts of sexual battery and penetration, as well as one count of sexual exploitation. The jury was hung on the nine remaining counts, prompting the judge to declare a mistrial for those charges.

He is scheduled to be sentenced Nov. 17.

The district attorney's office said it has not decided whether prosecutors will retry the hung counts.

"The trauma Dr. Heaps inflicted on the very people he had sworn to care for is immeasurable." Los Angeles County District Attorney George Gascón said in a statement. "While we respect the jurors' decisions on the acquitted counts, we are obviously disappointed."

Heaps' attorney did not immediately return a request for comment Thursday.

"The horrible abuse he perpetrated on cancer patients and others who trusted him as their doctor has been exposed and justice was done," attorney John Manly, who represented more than 200 women in civil cases against Heaps and UCLA, said in a statement after the verdict.

Sex abuse by doctors on college campuses has led to massive settlements at Ohio State University, Johns Hopkins University and Columbia University.

UCLA's payouts exceed a \$500 million settlement by Michigan State University in 2018 that was considered the largest by a public university. The University of Southern California, a private institution, has agreed to pay more than \$1 billion to settle thousands of cases against the school's longtime gynecologist, who still faces a criminal trial in Los Angeles.

UCLA patients said Heaps groped them, made suggestive comments or conducted unnecessarily invasive exams during his 35-year career. Women who brought the lawsuits said the university ignored their complaints and deliberately concealed abuse that happened for decades during examinations at the UCLA student health center, the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center or in Heaps' campus office.

UCLA acknowledged it received a sex abuse complaint against Heaps from a patient in December 2017 and it launched an investigation the following month that concluded she was sexually assaulted and ha-

passed, attorneys said.

Heaps, however, continued to practice until his retirement in June 2018. The university did not release its finding in the investigation until November 2019 — months after Heaps was arrested.

“UCLA Health is grateful for the patients who came forward,” the university said in a statement after the verdict. “Sexual misconduct of any kind is reprehensible and intolerable. Our overriding priority is providing the highest quality care while ensuring that patients feel safe, protected and respected.”

EPA civil rights case targets Mississippi over Jackson water

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS, MATTHEW DALY and AARON MORRISON Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — The federal government is investigating whether Mississippi state agencies discriminated against the state’s majority-Black capital city by refusing to fund improvements for its failing water system, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Thursday.

The announcement came days after leaders of two congressional committees said they were starting a joint investigation into a crisis that left most homes and businesses in Jackson without running water for several days in late August and early September.

The EPA gave The Associated Press the first confirmation that it is conducting a civil, not criminal, investigation of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality and the Mississippi State Department of Health. The federal agency could withhold money from the state if it finds wrongdoing — potentially millions of dollars. If the state agencies don’t cooperate with the investigation, the EPA could refer the case to the Department of Justice.

Heavy rainfall in late August exacerbated problems at Jackson’s main water treatment facility. Republican Gov. Tate Reeves declared an emergency Aug. 29, and the state health department and the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency have been overseeing operations and repairs at the facility since then.

About 80% of Jackson’s 150,000 residents are Black, and about a quarter of the population lives in poverty. By the time Reeves issued the emergency order, Jackson residents had already been told for a month to boil their water to kill possible contaminants. Volunteers and the National Guard had distributed millions of bottles of drinking water. Although the boil-water notice was lifted in mid-September, many residents remain skeptical about water safety.

NAACP President Derrick Johnson, who lives in Jackson with his family, called the EPA investigation a step in the right direction after years of the state withholding federal funds needed to improve the city’s water system.

“We believe we gave compelling evidence that the state of Mississippi intentionally starved the city of Jackson of the resources to maintain its water infrastructure,” Johnson told The AP on Thursday. “We want the EPA and this administration to put forth a course of action to prevent the state of Mississippi from ever doing this again.”

Johnson was named among several residents in the NAACP’s civil rights complaint against Mississippi. He said the state’s inaction and record of divestment in Jackson amounts to “systemic neglect.”

“We believe that all citizens of this country should be entitled to clean, fresh drinking water,” Johnson said. “Unfortunately, we live in a state that is still dealing in racial politics. And as a result of that, you have state leaders who seek to penalize African American residents of the city of Jackson in a very discriminatory way.”

The AP reported in September that years before Reeves became governor, he touted his own track record of fiscal conservatism by citing his opposition to spending state money for Jackson’s crumbling water and sewer infrastructure. The EPA is not investigating Reeves.

Reeves said Thursday that the state took control of Jackson’s water system because of “absolute and total incompetence” of the city’s Democratic mayor and administration. The governor’s latest remarks are an escalation of a dispute between him and Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba over whether the state or the city will decide on a private firm to operate Jackson’s water system.

“They have proven that they have no ability to manage the water system,” Reeves told reporters during

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an event at the Governor's Mansion, according to a video of the event by WLBT-TV.

Melissa Payne, a city spokesperson, said Lumumba would not respond to the governor's statements.

In a federal complaint Sept. 27, the NAACP said Mississippi officials "all but assured" a drinking water calamity by depriving Jackson of badly needed funds to upgrade its infrastructure. The organization asked the EPA to investigate the state's alleged pattern of steering money to majority-white communities with less need.

The group said the state's refusal to fund improvements in Jackson culminated in the near-total collapse of the water system in late August. Over 25 years, Jackson received funds from an important federal program only three times, the NAACP said. When Jackson tried to fund improvements itself, those efforts were repeatedly blocked by state political leaders, according to the complaint.

The NAACP wants the EPA to make sure that from now on, federal funds are distributed equitably.

Reeves said Thursday that the state has bought chemicals and hired workers for the water plant since he declared the emergency, after the city failed to do both of those things.

The NAACP filed its complaint under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which forbids recipients of federal funds from discriminating based on race or national origin. While previously the law was rarely used to pursue environmental matters, the Biden administration has increased its enforcement efforts in communities overburdened by pollution.

Recently, the EPA said it had preliminary evidence that Louisiana officials allowed air pollution to remain high and downplayed the threat to Black residents who live in the industrial section of the state commonly referred to as cancer alley. The agency has also opened up an investigation into Colorado's air permitting program and into state and local officials in Alabama over chronic wastewater problems in majority-Black Lowndes County.

Truss quits, but UK's political and economic turmoil persist

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Liz Truss quit Thursday after a tumultuous and historically brief term marred by economic policies that roiled financial markets and a rebellion in her political party that obliterated her authority.

After just 45 days in office, Truss became the third Conservative prime minister to be toppled in as many years, and she will go down as the shortest-serving leader in British history. Her resignation extends the instability that has shaken Britain since it broke off from the European Union and leaves its leadership in limbo as the country faces a cost-of-living crisis and looming recession.

"I cannot deliver the mandate on which I was elected by the Conservative Party," Truss, 47, said outside her 10 Downing Street office.

Financial markets breathed a sigh of relief, but now a divided ruling party must quickly find a leader who can unify its warring factions. Truss said she will remain in office until a replacement is chosen, which the Conservative Party said it would do by the end of next week, an extremely fast timeline for choosing the next leader of one of the world's largest economies.

Potential contenders include: former Treasury chief Rishi Sunak, who lost to Truss in the last leadership contest; House of Commons leader Penny Mordaunt; Defense Secretary Ben Wallace; and Boris Johnson, the former prime minister ousted in July over a series of ethics scandals.

The low-tax, low-regulation economic policies that got Truss elected by her party proved disastrous in the real world at a time of soaring inflation and weak growth.

Her Sept. 23 economic plan included a raft of tax cuts that investors worried Britain couldn't afford. It pummeled the value of the pound and drove up the cost of mortgages, causing economic pain for people and businesses already struggling from an economy yet to emerge from the pain of the pandemic.

That financial tumult led to the replacement of Truss' Treasury chief, multiple policy U-turns and a breakdown of discipline in the governing Conservative Party.

Truss resigned just a day after vowing to stay in power, saying she was "a fighter and not a quitter." But

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she couldn't hold on any longer after a senior minister quit her government amid a barrage of criticism and a vote in the House of Commons Wednesday descended into chaos and acrimony.

"It's time for the prime minister to go," Conservative lawmaker Miriam Cates said, echoing the sentiments of many others.

Before Truss, the shortest-serving prime minister in Britain had been George Canning, who died in office in 1827 after 119 days.

The pound rose about 1% Thursday to around \$1.13 after Truss' resignation.

Where the Conservative Party goes from here is not clear. Its myriad factions — from hard-right Brexiteers to centrist "One Nation" Tories — are at each other's throats.

"Nobody has a route plan. It's all sort of hand-to-hand fighting on a day-to-day basis," Conservative lawmaker Simon Hoare told the BBC on Thursday before Truss resigned.

Newspapers that usually support the Conservatives were vitriolic. An editorial in the Daily Mail on Thursday was headlined: "The wheels have come off the Tory clown car."

Truss' departure on Thursday sparked jubilation for the tabloid Daily Star, which had set up a livestream last week featuring a photo of the prime minister beside a head of lettuce to see which would last longer.

"This lettuce outlasted Liz Truss!" it proclaimed Thursday.

While many Britons joined the world in laughing at the lettuce joke, Bronwyn Maddox, director of international affairs think-tank Chatham House, said "there is no question that the U.K.'s standing in the world has been severely battered by this episode and by the revolving door of prime ministers."

She said Truss' successor would need to have policies "based on economic stability, but need also to include a resolution of the relationship with Europe; much of the upheaval represents the bitter aftermath of Brexit."

The Conservative Party said nominations for a new leader will close on Monday. Candidates need the signatures of 100 of the 357 Conservative lawmakers, meaning a maximum field of three. Lawmakers will knock out one of those, and will ask the party's 172,000 members to decide between the two finalists in an online vote. The new leader is due to be in place by Oct. 28.

Truss' resignation is the culmination of months of simmering discontent inside the Conservative Party, whose poll ratings have plunged.

Johnson's government came undone after he was revealed to have held a series of parties in government buildings at a time when people in Britain were barred from mingling with friends and family or even visiting dying relatives. The Conservative Party spent the summer picking a replacement as the economy worsened amid spiking energy prices triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Truss had served as Johnson's foreign secretary.

Whoever succeeds Truss will become the country's third prime minister this year. A national election doesn't have to be called until 2024, but opposition parties demanded one be held now, saying the government lacks democratic legitimacy.

Opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer accused the Conservatives of presiding over "utter chaos."

"This is doing huge damage to our economy and the reputation of our country," he said. "We must have a chance at a fresh start. We need a general election — now."

Truss' political unraveling began after she and her Treasury chief, Kwasi Kwarteng, unveiled an economic plan with 45 billion pounds (\$50 billion) in unfunded tax cuts. The notion of massive borrowing to finance tax cuts hammered the value of the pound and caused interest rates on U.K. government bonds to rise. The Bank of England was forced to intervene to prevent the crisis from spreading to the wider economy and putting pension funds at risk.

Truss soon fired Kwarteng, and his replacement, Jeremy Hunt, scrapped almost all of Truss' tax cuts, cut short her energy subsidies and abandoned her promise of no public spending cuts. He said the government will need to save billions of pounds and that there are "many difficult decisions" to be made before he sets out a medium-term fiscal plan on Oct. 31.

Speaking to lawmakers on Wednesday for the first time since the U-turn, Truss apologized and admitted she had made mistakes, but insisted she would not resign. Within hours, a senior Cabinet minister, Home

Secretary Suella Braverman, quit, blasting Truss in her resignation letter, saying she had "concerns about the direction of this government."

For many Conservative lawmakers, the final straw was a Wednesday evening vote over fracking for shale gas that produced chaotic scenes in Parliament, with party whips accused of using heavy-handed tactics to gain votes.

Chris Bryant, a lawmaker from the opposition Labour Party, said he "saw members being physically manhandled ... and being bullied." Conservative officials denied this.

Appeals court: Graham must testify in Georgia election probe

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham must testify before a special grand jury investigating whether then-President Donald Trump and others illegally tried to influence the 2020 election in Georgia, a federal appeals court said Thursday.

The ruling by a three-judge panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals paves the way for Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis to bring Graham in for questioning. She wants to ask the South Carolina Republican about phone calls he made to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in the weeks after the election.

Raffensperger said Graham asked whether he had the power to reject certain absentee ballots, something Raffensperger took as a suggestion to toss out legally cast votes. Graham has dismissed that interpretation as "ridiculous."

Graham could appeal the ruling to the full appellate court. An attorney for Graham deferred comment Thursday to a spokesperson for the senator's office, which did not immediately comment on the ruling.

Graham had challenged his subpoena, saying his position as a U.S. senator protected him from having to testify in the state investigation. He has also denied wrongdoing. In a six-page order, the judges wrote that Graham "has failed to demonstrate that this approach will violate his rights under the Speech and Debate Clause."

Willis opened the investigation early last year, shortly after a recording of a January 2021 phone call between Trump and Raffensperger was made public. In that call, Trump suggested Raffensperger could "find" the votes needed to overturn his narrow loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

Willis requested a special grand jury, saying the panel's subpoena power would allow the questioning of people who otherwise wouldn't cooperate with the investigation. She has since filed several rounds of paperwork with the court seeking to compel the testimony of close Trump advisers and associates.

Some of those associates include former White House counsel Pat Cipollone, who has testified before the special grand jury, according to a person familiar with Cipollone's testimony who spoke to The Associated Press on Thursday on condition of anonymity to discuss a private appearance. Cipollone's appearance was first reported by CNN.

Cipollone vigorously resisted efforts to undo the election and has said he did not believe there was sufficient fraud to have affected the outcome of the race won by Biden.

Graham was in the first group of people close to Trump whose testimony Willis sought to compel in a batch of petitions filed with the court in early July. He challenged his subpoena in federal court, but U.S. District Judge Leigh Martin May refused to toss out his subpoena. Graham then appealed to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Graham's lawyers argued that the U.S. Constitution's speech or debate clause, which protects members of Congress from having to answer questions about legislative activity, shields him from having to testify. He contends that the call he made to Raffensperger was protected because he was asking questions to inform his decisions on voting to certify the 2020 election and future legislation.

Lawyers on Willis' team argued that comments Graham made in news interviews at the time, as well as statements by Raffensperger, show that the senator was motivated by politics rather than by legislative factfinding.

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They also argued that the scope of the special grand jury's investigation includes a variety of other topics that have nothing to do with the Raffensperger call. They also want to ask Graham about his briefings by the Trump campaign, including whether he was briefed on the Trump-Raffensperger call, and whether he communicated or coordinated with Trump and his campaign about efforts to overturn the election results in Georgia and elsewhere.

Graham's lawyers also argued that the principle of "sovereign immunity" protects a U.S. senator from being summoned by a state prosecutor.

Even if the speech or debate clause or sovereign immunity didn't apply, Graham's lawyers argued, his status as a "high-ranking official" protects him from having to testify. That's because Willis has failed to show that his testimony is essential and that the information he would provide cannot be obtained from someone else, they argued.

In their ruling Thursday, the appellate judges ruled that Willis "can ask about non-investigatory conduct that falls within the subpoena's scope" but "may not ask about any investigatory conduct," noting that Graham could note any issues over specific areas at the time of his questioning.

Others have already made their appearances before the special grand jury. Former New York mayor and Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani, who's been told he could face criminal charges in the probe, testified in August. Attorneys John Eastman and Kenneth Chesebro have also appeared before the panel.

Paperwork has been filed seeking testimony from others, including former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, former national security adviser Michael Flynn and former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

Jury: Kevin Spacey didn't molest actor Anthony Rapp in 1986

By LARRY NEUMEISTER and TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A jury sided with Kevin Spacey on Thursday in one of the lawsuits that derailed the film star's career, finding he did not sexually abuse Anthony Rapp, then 14, while both were relatively unknown actors in Broadway plays in 1986.

The verdict in the civil trial came with lightning speed. Jurors at a federal court in New York deliberated for a little more than an hour before deciding that Rapp hadn't proven his allegations.

When the verdict was read, Spacey dropped his head, then hugged his lawyers. He didn't speak to reporters as he left the courthouse.

"We're very grateful to the jury for seeing through these false allegations," said his attorney, Jennifer Keller.

"What's next is Mr. Spacey is going to be proven that he's innocent of anything he's been accused of. That there was no truth to any of the allegations," she added, a reference to other sexual misconduct claims against the actor, including criminal charges in England.

During the trial, Rapp testified that Spacey had invited him to his apartment for a party, then approached him in a bedroom after the other guests left. He said the actor, then 26, picked him up and laid partially on top of him on a bed before he wriggled away and fled as an inebriated Spacey asked if he was sure he wanted to leave.

In his sometimes-tearful testimony, Spacey told the jury it never happened, and he would never have been attracted to someone who was 14.

The lawsuit sought \$40 million in damages.

Rapp and his lawyers also left the courthouse without speaking to reporters. In his closing statements to the jury Thursday, Rapp's lawyer, Richard Steigman, accused Spacey of lying on the witness stand.

"He lacks credibility," Steigman said. "Sometimes the simple truth is the best. The simple truth is that this happened."

Rapp, 50, and Spacey, 63, each testified over several days at the three-week trial.

Rapp's claims, and those of others, abruptly interrupted what had been a soaring career for the two-time Academy Award winning actor, who lost his job on the Netflix series "House of Cards" and saw other opportunities dry up. Rapp is a regular on TV's "Star Trek: Discovery" and was part of the original Broadway cast of "Rent."

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Spacey faced charges in Massachusetts that he groped a man at a bar — allegations that were later dropped by prosecutors.

Three months ago, he pleaded not guilty in London to charges that he sexually assaulted three men between 2004 and 2015 when he was the artistic director at the Old Vic theater in London.

A judge in Los Angeles this summer approved an arbitrator's decision to order Spacey to pay \$30.9 million to the makers of "House of Cards" for violating his contract by sexually harassing crew members.

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

At the trial, Spacey testified that he was sure the encounter with Rapp never happened, in part because he was living in a studio apartment rather than the one bedroom that Rapp cited, and he never had a gathering beyond a housewarming party.

"I knew I wouldn't have any sexual interest in Anthony Rapp or any child. That I knew," he told jurors.

During her closing arguments to the jury, Keller suggested reasons Rapp imagined the encounter with Spacey or made it up.

It was possible, she said, that Rapp invented it based on his experience performing in "Precious Sons," a play in which actor Ed Harris picks up Rapp's character and lays on top of him, mistaking him briefly for his wife before discovering it is his son.

She also suggested that Rapp later grew jealous that Spacey became a megastar while Rapp had "smaller roles in small shows" after his breakthrough performance in Broadway's "Rent."

"Fame did not follow him," Keller said. "Mr. Rapp's coach has turned into a pumpkin."

"So here we are today and Mr. Rapp is getting more attention from this trial than he has in his entire acting life," Keller said. She said Rapp is well known now because he's taken down one of Hollywood's biggest actors.

During two days of testimony, Spacey expressed regret for a 2017 statement he issued when Rapp first went public, in which he said he didn't recall the encounter, but if it happened "I owe him the sincerest apology for what would have been deeply inappropriate drunken behavior."

Dabbing his eyes with a tissue, Spacey said he'd been pressured by publicists and lawyers into issuing an empathetic statement at a time when the #MeToo movement made everyone in the industry nervous.

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

He also cried as he said he regretted revealing publicly that he was gay the same day Rapp's accusations surfaced because some interpreted his announcement as an effort to change the subject or deflect from Rapp's revelations.

Spacey had testified that he spoke at the trial about deeply personal matters, telling the jury his father was a white supremacist and neo-Nazi who berated him as gay because he liked the theater.

Spacey also gave courtroom spectators a brief taste of his acting chops when he imitated his Broadway costar at the time, Jack Lemmon. He had testified earlier that his ability at impressions aided him in his acting career.

FACT FOCUS: States, not CDC, set school vaccine requirements

By ANGELO FICHERA The Associated Press

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advisory committee on Thursday voted that the agency should update its recommended immunization schedules to add the COVID-19 vaccine, including to the schedule for children.

But in the lead-up to the vote by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, false claims spread widely that it would mean the vaccine would be required to attend school.

In reality, the CDC doesn't have the authority to set school immunization requirements, and the vote doesn't mandate the vaccine for schoolchildren. That's a decision left to the states.

Here are the facts.

CLAIM: If the CDC adds the COVID-19 vaccine to the immunization schedule for children, the shots will be mandatory to attend school.

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THE FACTS: The false claim gained momentum after it was shared by Fox News host Tucker Carlson this week.

"The CDC is about to add the Covid vaccine to the childhood immunization schedule, which would make the vax mandatory for kids to attend school," Carlson tweeted on Tuesday night. The tweet included a segment from his show in which he began by making the same claim.

Another popular tweet similarly claimed the CDC committee's vote would make the vaccine "mandatory for school registration."

But the public health agency doesn't determine school vaccine requirements.

"States have the authority to enact state laws requiring vaccination, not the CDC," said Wendy Mariner, a professor emerita of health law, ethics and human rights at Boston University. "ACIP has no authority to make law."

CDC spokesperson Kate Grusich told The Associated Press in an email that the agency "only makes recommendations for use of vaccines, while school-entry vaccination requirements are determined by state or local jurisdictions."

Grusich explained that the action was meant to streamline clinical guidance for healthcare providers by adding COVID-19 vaccines to a single list of all currently licensed, authorized and routinely recommended vaccines.

"It's important to note that there are no changes in COVID-19 vaccine policy," she said.

The immunization practices advisory committee is a body of experts that makes recommendations to the CDC about vaccines. Its recommendation to update the schedules, which included other revisions, still needs to be formally adopted by the agency and the amended schedules wouldn't take effect until 2023, Grusich said.

Fox News referred the AP to a follow-up segment by Carlson on Wednesday night, in which he revisited the topic and claimed the CDC was "lying." Carlson claimed that "more than a dozen states follow the CDC's immunization schedule to set vaccination requirements — not suggestions, requirements — for children to be educated."

"For example, the Virginia Department of Health states that 'vaccines must be administered in accordance with the CDC's schedule,'" he stated. He cited Massachusetts as another example.

But those states do not list every vaccine from the schedule in their school requirements.

Virginia, for example, does not require the annual flu vaccine in order to attend school — even though the vaccine appears on the CDC's schedule. Nor does Massachusetts.

A Virginia Department of Health spokesperson, Maria Reppas, said in an email that there "is no direct, immediate impact on COVID-19 vaccine being added to the Immunization Schedule on school required vaccines in Virginia." Reppas said changes to the school requirements would need legislative or regulatory action.

Dr. William Schaffner, a vaccine policy expert and professor of infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, said he was not aware of any states that automatically require all vaccines on the schedule for school.

"Those are recommendations that go to pediatricians and family doctors as they care for children," Schaffner said. "They're just recommendations, there are no automatic mandates that follow."

There has also been reluctance by many states to require the human papillomavirus, or HPV, vaccine, even though it appears on the childhood schedule, Schaffner said.

States can use legislation to require specific vaccines or can authorize a state agency or local health entity to require specific vaccines for certain age groups, Mariner said. She added that some states include private schools when establishing requirements, though in other cases, private schools may also voluntarily require vaccinations.

Security forces kill at least 60 as protests engulf Chad

By EDOUARD TAKADJI and KRISTA LARSON Associated Press

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N'DJAMENA, Chad (AP) — Chadian security forces opened fire on anti-government demonstrators in the country's two largest cities Thursday killing at least 60 people, the government spokesman and a morgue official said.

Authorities imposed a curfew after the violence, which came amid demonstrations in the central African nation against interim leader Mahamat Idriss Deby's two-year extension of his power.

Thursday's unrest was unprecedented in Chad, which saw little public dissent during the previous regime of Deby's father, who ruled for more than three decades until his assassination last year.

France, the African Union and others swiftly condemned the security crackdown on the demonstrators.

Samira Daoud, Amnesty International's regional director for West and Central Africa, called on the Chadian authorities "to immediately cease the excessive use of force against protesters."

"The authorities must take immediate steps to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for unlawful killings," she said.

Chadian government spokesman Aziz Mahamat Saleh said 30 people were dead in the capital, N'Djamena. Organizers of the march, though, placed the toll higher, at 40, with many wounded by bullets as well. There was no independent corroboration of the figures given by the two sides..

Another 32 protesters were killed in Chad's second-largest city, Moundou, according to an official in the city's morgue. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, said more than 60 people were wounded.

Other protests were held in the southern Chadian towns of Doba and Sarh.

These were the deadliest anti-government protests since Deby took over in the wake of his father's assassination 18 months ago. Officials said the late President Idriss Deby Itno was killed by rebels while visiting Chadian troops on the battlefield in the country's north in April 2021.

At the main reference hospital in the capital N'Djamena, overwhelmed doctors tended to scores of people with gunshot wounds. Some of the wounded were taken to Liberty Hospital by army vehicles and bore signs of having been tortured, witnesses said.

Witnesses say demonstrators began to blow whistles at 3 a.m. all over the capital of N'Djamena. Police fired tear gas at the crowds, which continued advancing and their numbers grew. It was then that security forces opened fire, leaving protesters struggling to gather the dead from the scene amid the tear gas.

Among those killed was a Chadian journalist, Narcisse Oredje, who worked for CEFOD radio and was struck by a bullet.

Amnesty International said it was not the first time that Chadian security forces have fired on civilians, citing two other incidents in 2022 and 2021.

Such public displays of dissent were unheard of during the rule of Deby's father, but several demonstrations have been held since his son became interim leader.

Mahamat Idriss Deby was declared the head of state after his father's death instead of following the Chadian constitution's line of succession. Opposition political parties at the time called the handover a coup d'état, but later agreed to accept Deby as interim leader for 18 months.

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By ANGELO FICHERA The Associated Press

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advisory committee on Thursday voted that the agency should update its recommended immunization schedules to add the COVID-19 vaccine, including to the schedule for children.

But in the lead-up to the vote by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, false claims spread widely that it would mean the vaccine would be required to attend school.

In reality, the CDC doesn't have the authority to set school immunization requirements, and the vote doesn't mandate the vaccine for schoolchildren. That's a decision left to the states.

Here are the facts.

CLAIM: If the CDC adds the COVID-19 vaccine to the immunization schedule for children, the shots will

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be mandatory to attend school.

THE FACTS: The false claim gained momentum after it was shared by Fox News host Tucker Carlson this week.

"The CDC is about to add the Covid vaccine to the childhood immunization schedule, which would make the vax mandatory for kids to attend school," Carlson tweeted on Tuesday night. The tweet included a segment from his show in which he began by making the same claim.

Another popular tweet similarly claimed the CDC committee's vote would make the vaccine "mandatory for school registration."

But the public health agency doesn't determine school vaccine requirements.

"States have the authority to enact state laws requiring vaccination, not the CDC," said Wendy Mariner, a professor emerita of health law, ethics and human rights at Boston University. "ACIP has no authority to make law."

CDC spokesperson Kate Grusich told The Associated Press in an email that the agency "only makes recommendations for use of vaccines, while school-entry vaccination requirements are determined by state or local jurisdictions."

Grusich explained that the action was meant to streamline clinical guidance for healthcare providers by adding COVID-19 vaccines to a single list of all currently licensed, authorized and routinely recommended vaccines.

"It's important to note that there are no changes in COVID-19 vaccine policy," she said.

The immunization practices advisory committee is a body of experts that makes recommendations to the CDC about vaccines. Its recommendation to update the schedules, which included other revisions, still needs to be formally adopted by the agency and the amended schedules wouldn't take effect until 2023, Grusich said.

Fox News referred the AP to a follow-up segment by Carlson on Wednesday night, in which he revisited the topic and claimed the CDC was "lying." Carlson claimed that "more than a dozen states follow the CDC's immunization schedule to set vaccination requirements — not suggestions, requirements — for children to be educated."

"For example, the Virginia Department of Health states that 'vaccines must be administered in accordance with the CDC's schedule,'" he stated. He cited Massachusetts as another example.

But those states do not list every vaccine from the schedule in their school requirements.

Virginia, for example, does not require the annual flu vaccine in order to attend school — even though the vaccine appears on the CDC's schedule. Nor does Massachusetts.

A Virginia Department of Health spokesperson, Maria Reppas, said in an email that there "is no direct, immediate impact on COVID-19 vaccine being added to the Immunization Schedule on school required vaccines in Virginia." Reppas said changes to the school requirements would need legislative or regulatory action.

Dr. William Schaffner, a vaccine policy expert and professor of infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, said he was not aware of any states that automatically require all vaccines on the schedule for school.

"Those are recommendations that go to pediatricians and family doctors as they care for children," Schaffner said. "They're just recommendations, there are no automatic mandates that follow."

There has also been reluctance by many states to require the human papillomavirus, or HPV, vaccine, even though it appears on the childhood schedule, Schaffner said.

States can use legislation to require specific vaccines or can authorize a state agency or local health entity to require specific vaccines for certain age groups, Mariner said. She added that some states include private schools when establishing requirements, though in other cases, private schools may also voluntarily require vaccinations.

Afghan couple accuse US Marine of abducting their baby

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By MARTHA MENDOZA, JULIET LINDERMAN and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press

An Afghan couple who arrived in the U.S. as refugees are suing a U.S. Marine and his wife in federal court for allegedly abducting their baby girl.

The baby had been pulled from the rubble two years earlier after her parents and five siblings were killed during a U.S. military raid. After months of treatment in a U.S. military hospital in Afghanistan, she had gone to live with a newlywed Afghan couple, identified by the International Committee of the Red Cross and Afghan authorities as her relatives.

But unbeknownst to the couple, court records say, a U.S. Marine Corps attorney on temporary assignment in Afghanistan learned of the baby while she was still in the hospital. With his wife back home in Virginia, he felt compelled to adopt the Afghan baby and praised it as an act of Christian faith.

This little girl, now 3½ years old, finds herself at the center of a high-stakes tangle of at least four court cases. The ordeal has drawn in the U.S. departments of Defense, Justice and State, which have previously argued that the attempt to spirit away a citizen of another country could significantly harm military and foreign relations. The U.S. Marines and federal officials did not comment on the record.

The Afghan family has asked the court to shield their identity out of concerns for their family back in Afghanistan, and they agreed to communicate with the AP on condition of anonymity.

While authorities were looking for her Afghan relatives, attorney Joshua Mast, represented by his brother Richard Mast, told a Virginia state circuit court judge that the baby was a "stateless war orphan," records show: They assured the judge that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani himself was planning to sign a waiver of jurisdiction within days. The state judge agreed, and granted Joshua and his wife Stephanie Mast custody, naming them as guardians on a birth certificate.

That waiver never arrived, and Ghani's aide told AP earlier this month that there was no record of any discussion about this. Further, he said such a request would have to go through the courts, which did not happen. Finally, Islamic law prohibits non-Muslims from adopting Afghan babies.

Nonetheless, with documents naming them as her guardians, the Masts turned to a federal judge in Virginia to stop the U.S. government from handing over the baby, court records show. Justice Department attorneys stepped in and said the state adoption was "invalid." The judge refused to intervene and the baby was given to her relatives.

The Afghan couple — who say they had no idea what had been happening in U.S. courts — wept with joy when they met the 7-month-old baby.

"We didn't think she would come back to her family alive," said the young Afghan man. "It was the best day of our lives."

Over the next two years, the Afghan couple say, they settled in as a family and raised the baby in the Muslim faith. The woman, who speaks three languages including English, was continuing her studies. The man was working in a medical office. They remember those early years fondly.

"She loved showing off her new clothes, and loved getting henna on her hands every week. Whenever I did makeup or brushed my hair, she wanted to do it for me," said the woman.

Though the baby remained in Afghanistan, Joshua and Stephanie Mast had given the growing toddler a Western name in a U.S. state court, according to court records. They finalized the adoption, enrolled her in the Defense Department's health care system, and even scheduled an appointment with a pediatrician.

Mast — through an interlocutor — kept in touch with the Afghan couple, offering to bring their child to the U.S. for medical care, court records say. But the couple say they told Mast that journey was too arduous.

Everything changed last summer when the U.S. began its chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan. Amid erupting violence and instability, Mast offered to get the couple, and their little girl, evacuated to the U.S., records show. They took him up on his offer.

When the exhausted Afghans arrived at the airport in Washington D.C., they allege in court filings that Mast pulled them out of the international arrivals line and led them to an inspecting officer. They were surprised when Mast presented an Afghan passport for the child, the couple said. But it was the last name printed on the document that stopped them cold: Mast.

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They didn't know it, but they would soon lose their baby. Just a few days later as the Afghan couple began their resettlement process at Fort Pickett Army National Guard base, they allege Mast confronted them, took the little girl — then 2 ½ years old — and drove off.

The Masts insist in court documents that they are her legal parents and "acted admirably" to protect her. They've asked a judge to dismiss the lawsuit, claiming the Afghan couple are "not her lawful parents." Mast's attorney cast doubt on whether the Afghans were even related to the baby.

The Afghan couple is not giving up.

"After they took her, our tears never stop," the woman told The Associated Press. "Right now, we are just dead bodies. Our hearts are broken. We have no plans for a future without her. Food has no taste and sleep gives us no rest."

Dr. Oz made reputation as a surgeon, a fortune as a salesman

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Dr. Mehmet Oz rolled onstage inside of an inflatable orb, put on a hydrating face mask and proceeded to pitch a new line of skin care products to a convention of supplement distributors at Salt Lake City's Vivint Arena in 2018. The crowd roared in applause.

The celebrity surgeon's appearance seemed like an extension of "The Dr. Oz Show" on daytime TV. But his attendance was in service of the convention's host, Usana Health Sciences, a Utah-based supplement manufacturer that has been investigated by federal authorities, sued by its own shareholders and accused of operating like a pyramid scheme.

The company was also a top advertiser on Oz's show, paying at least \$50 million to be a "trusted partner and sponsor" featured in regular segments that often blurred the line between medical advice and advertising, while also donating millions of dollars more to Oz's charity, according to records reviewed by The Associated Press.

Oz may have made his reputation as a surgeon. But he made a fortune as a salesman. Now he is trying to leverage his celebrity as the Republican nominee in a bitterly contested U.S. Senate race in Pennsylvania that could determine which party will hold power for the rest of President Joe Biden's term.

The outcome of the race could turn on whether voters view the first-time candidate as the trusted doctor he portrayed on TV or a pitchman who repeatedly promoted products of questionable medical value.

"I like Mehmet Oz, but we did a lot of bull - - - when I worked there," said Dr. Gregory Katz, a cardiologist and assistant professor at the New York University's Grossman School of Medicine.

Katz, who worked in the medical unit on Oz's show to check segments for accuracy in 2010, said Oz was a kind boss who taught him a lot about communicating complicated medical issues with patients. While many statements Oz made were factually accurate, Katz said, the way they were assembled often got the story wrong. Katz also questioned whether viewers were healthier as a result of watching or "just wasting their money on bad supplements."

Oz, who stopped operating on patients in 2018, also did not make clear to his audience just how closely he worked with the companies.

Oz's campaign declined to make him available for an interview. In a statement, his campaign said the show was "very diligent about disclosing" its "paid partners," as required by federal regulation.

"I am very proud I was able to help so many people by bringing more transparency to health and wellness," Oz said in a statement. "We won ten Emmy's and had the most successful health show in the world which has inspired millions to take charge of their health."

In a statement, Usana said any suggestion of wrongdoing was "misleading, incorrect or just false" and referred a reporter to statements that the company has made in required disclosures to the Securities and Exchange Commission. The AP has reviewed those documents.

With the gloss of Oprah Winfrey's approval, Oz was a fixture on television, hosting his show for 13 seasons. It also led to a net worth valued between \$100 million and \$315 million, according to a federal financial disclosure he filed this year, which gives dollar values in ranges but does not provide specific figures.

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Once in the business of trying to attract viewers, Oz took most of those episodes offline after announcing his campaign last November. Those who worked on the production were required to sign a nondisclosure agreement that prohibits them from discussing the show's arrangements with its advertisers, as well as "Dr. Oz and/or his business or private life," according to a copy obtained by the AP.

How much Oz personally made from his agreements with Usana or other advertisers is unclear. His financial disclosure reveals he earned \$9.3 million last year for his duties as host and senior producer, as well as his ownership stake in Oz Media LLC. The disclosure also states that he had paid agreements with Usana and its subsidiaries to work as a brand ambassador, which included making appearances on the company's behalf, meeting with company officials and creating promotional content for Usana. Neither Oz nor Usana has publicly disclosed the terms of compensation.

"We cannot comment on any figures or deliverables as this would disclose items agreed upon in a confidential business environment," Usana spokesman Dan Macuga said in a statement.

In recent years, Oz was named in lawsuits that alleged he made misleading claims on the show, which ended its run after Oz got into the Senate race. One suit was brought by a company that accused Oz of disparaging its weight loss program to boost a rival that advertised on his show. Oz's company settled out of court.

In another suit, Oz elaborated on his approach.

"Describing the ingredient as 'magic' or a 'miracle,' was my colorful way of explaining to the audience my excitement over recent research," Oz said in a 2020 court filing. "My use of this language is also consistent with one of the Merriam-Webster definitions of 'magical,' that is, something 'extremely or extraordinarily pleasant, enjoyable or exciting.' I had no intention to express any false or misleading statements by such descriptions."

In at least one case, products Oz promoted have raised health concerns. Usana settled a California case in 2018 after a watchdog group discovered they contained unsafe levels of lead.

Several of the companies he has promoted, including Usana, are structured as multilevel marketing businesses whose practices have repeatedly drawn the attention of federal regulators. Such companies offer distributors a vision of wealth and independence via paid commissions on the products they sell — and on the sales of neighbors, friends and colleagues whom they also recruit to work underneath them in the enterprise.

One company, Vemma Nutrition, settled charges of violating various prohibitions on deceptive acts or practices brought by the Federal Trade Commission.

Vemma officials did not respond to repeated requests for comment made through a new company they have established.

Oz entered into an arrangement with Usana in 2012, claiming publicly to have "meticulously" screened the company, which he praised for its "tremendous integrity."

Under the agreement, Oz showcased a different Usana product on his show each month and sold company merchandise on his website. He also regularly joined company leadership calls and agreed to make appearances at company gatherings.

The company, which is publicly traded, first drew attention from regulators in 2007 when Barry Minkow, a convicted fraudster who later worked with the FBI and the SEC to uncover financial crimes, issued a 500-page report that alleged the company was an illegal pyramid scheme.

At the time, Minkow was widely acclaimed and his research had been used to prosecute at least seven federal financial crimes cases, earning him a 2005 letter of commendation from the FBI. He later returned to crime and pleaded guilty in 2014 to an embezzlement scheme.

His 2007 report on Usana found that most of the company's revenues came from expanding the number of independent "associates" allowed to sell their products — not from sales to actual consumers. The analysis by Minkow's firm, which was widely reported on at the time, was based on insider accounts and the company's own financial disclosures.

The report found that only about 1% turned a profit when startup and operations costs were factored in, while about 87% of associates lost money. Roughly 75% quit within a year.

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The fallout was swift.

The SEC, which regulates financial markets, opened an investigation, though no action was ultimately taken against the company. Usana's accounting firm abruptly quit. Several high-level Usana officials were revealed to have misrepresented their qualifications, including a doctor on the company's medical advisory board whose medical license was suspended in Ohio and Georgia.

Suits from investors and Usana distributors followed, largely unsuccessful. Still, federal investigators continued to monitor the company.

A year after reaching a deal with Oz, Usana in 2013 disclosed another SEC investigation over trading irregularities, in which high-level officials, including founder Myron Wentz, received subpoenas, records show. No punitive action was taken by the SEC.

The Justice Department and SEC investigated the company again in 2017 for possible violations of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act — an anti-bribery law — in connection with BabyCare, a company subsidiary operating in China.

Usana said in a 2020 filing that the case was closed without enforcement action by the department and the SEC because the company disclosed the matter, cooperated with authorities and took steps to correct its conduct.

The Justice Department and the SEC declined to comment.

In 2017, Usana entered into a settlement in California after a nonprofit group found unsafe levels of lead in 75 different products and flavors of a powdered drinks, including its "Nurtrimeal" meal replacement shake. Oz featured some of the products on his show in the summer of 2015 and held a sweepstakes contest, including one that gave away 1,000 bags of the supplement.

Usana agreed to pay \$275,000 and said it would reformulate the powdered drink to contain less lead or place a warning label on products that still contained significant levels of lead that were sold in California.

Oz's campaign said it was "common practice" for the show to screen advertisers using publicly available information. In Usana's case, Oz traveled to their manufacturing facility to witness supplement production.

In his Senate race, Oz has taken steps to put those connections behind him. Oz's political advisers took over his website and removed footage from the show that had been archived there, according to two former workers on the show who insisted on anonymity to discuss their experience because they signed nondisclosure agreements.

Some segments have been documented in skeptical news stories over the years.

In one in 2015, Oz advised a woman who was concerned about her past partying to try a "liver detox supplement," adding, "I'll show you one that I like a lot."

He told her that Usana's Hepasil could "reverse a lot of things that may have happened" to her liver, as first reported by the Los Angeles Times. There is little clinical evidence to support the use of these dietary supplements, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Another segment posted on YouTube in 2018 promoted VisionEx. Oz said the product could "renourish" the eyes and fight the loss of eyesight before turning to a Usana "scientist that I trust for this issue," who appeared in the TV studio.

"You want healthy eyes everybody?" Oz later asked the audience, before announcing that everyone in attendance would get a free bottle of the supplement. The segment, unlike others from Oz's show, remains available online.

During the coronavirus pandemic, Oz promoted the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine as a potential treatment. The drug can cause heart rhythm abnormalities, severe liver inflammation, and kidney failure. It was also found to be ineffective treating the virus. Oz's financial disclosure shows he held at least \$630,000 of stock in two companies that offered the product, as first reported by CNBC.

Other companies whose products he promoted also have run into regulatory scrutiny.

Around 2005, Oz met Benson Boreyko, the founder of New Vision International and Vemma Nutrition, which were sued by the FTC. In between those legal entanglements, Oz promoted one of the Vemma's products, while Boreyko served on the board of a nonprofit that Oz founded and Vemma was a donor to.

The first FTC suit in 1998 was filed several years before Oz and Boreyko met and targeted what it called

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unsubstantiated claims by New Vision International that its product could treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. The second, in 2015, accused Vemma Nutrition of being an illegal pyramid scheme.

The companies settled in both cases, but admitted no wrongdoing.

The FTC said the Vemma settlement resulted in the company and top officials paying refunds of \$2.2 million to people who lost money.

Oz participated in various Vemma activities, including speaking at three of its annual conventions and joined marketing calls with the people who signed up to sell the products. At one convention, Vemma's promotional material said that Oz "will educate Vemma Brand Partners about nutrition in an intimate and interactive, town-hall-style event," according to statements made by the company.

Oz also promoted Vemma's products in public.

He featured one of them, Verve, an energy drink, on his show, social media and elsewhere. In a 2013 episode, he included it in his health diet recommendations as one of his "favorite fatigue-fighting snacks, it's one that gets me through the day: one handful of almonds and half a Verve energy drink."

In Esquire magazine's "Ask Dr. Oz" column in 2008, he promoted Vemma's drink product line, "liquid Vemma," as one of his two recommendations for best multivitamin for a man under 60.

Both endorsements ended up in Vemma's promotional materials.

The relationship between Oz and Boreyko extended beyond the promotion of products on his show to a nonprofit group founded by Oz in 2003 called HealthCorps, which aimed to improve health education in schools.

Boreyko became a HealthCorps board member and Vemma was listed as a donor in HealthCorps' annual reports from 2008 through 2013.

The nonprofit consumer watchdog, Truth in Advertising, reported Vemma gave more than \$1 million to HealthCorps and that Oz, in part, endorsed Verve on his show because of Vemma's contributions.

Usana also gave substantially to Oz's HealthCorps, donating at least \$8 million since 2012, according to tax statements and annual reports. In addition, former Usana CEO Dave Wentz, the son of the company's founder, gave between \$700,000 and \$1.5 million between 2016 and 2020, records show.

Like Donald Trump before him, Oz has a public persona that is a draw for some voters, including Eileen Walker, a believer in natural remedies from the Philadelphia suburb of Warminster.

"He always had people on there to back him up, that had information on why you want to take this pill or that pill, or eat this way or not eat that way," said Walker, 75, who added that she "absolutely" trusted his advice.

Oz's role as a promoter follows a long line of TV pitchmen, with one important distinction.

"American television has always been about selling stuff," said Robert Thompson, a Syracuse University professor, who pointed to the "Camel News Caravan," an NBC program from the beginning of the television era that was dripped out in Camel advertising and urged viewers to "Sit back, light up a Camel and be an eyewitness to the happenings that made history in the last 24 hours."

But, he added, Oz's show is materially different because what was going on was not obvious.

"It's overt versus covert. It was not called the 'Usana Dr. Oz Show,'" he said. "He built your trust. You visited your physician once a year. You visited Dr. Oz daily."

Afghan couple accuse US Marine of abducting their baby

By JULIET LINDERMAN, CLAIRE GALOFARO and MARTHA MENDOZA Associated Press

The young Afghan couple raced to the airport in Kabul, clutching their baby girl close amid the chaotic withdrawal of American troops last year.

The baby had been rescued two years earlier from the rubble of a U.S. military raid that killed her parents and five siblings. After months in a U.S. military hospital, she had gone to live with her cousin and his wife, this newlywed couple. Now, the family was bound for the United States for further medical treatment, with the aid of U.S. Marine Corps attorney Joshua Mast.

When the exhausted Afghans arrived at the airport in Washington, D.C., in late August 2021, Mast pulled them out of the international arrivals line and led them to an inspecting officer, according to a lawsuit they

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filed last month. They were surprised when Mast presented an Afghan passport for the child, the couple said. But it was the last name printed on the document that stopped them cold: Mast.

They didn't know it, but they would soon lose their baby.

This is a story about how one U.S. Marine became fiercely determined to bring home an Afghan war orphan, and praised it as an act of Christian faith to save her. Letters, emails and documents submitted in federal filings show that he used his status in the U.S. Armed Forces, appealed to high-ranking Trump administration officials and turned to small-town courts to adopt the baby, unbeknownst to the Afghan couple raising her 7,000 miles (11,000 kilometers) away.

The little girl, now 3 ½ years old, is at the center of a high-stakes tangle of at least four court cases. The Afghan couple, desperate to get her back, has sued Mast and his wife, Stephanie Mast. But the Masts insist they are her legal parents and "acted admirably" to protect her. They've asked a federal judge to dismiss the lawsuit.

The ordeal has drawn in the U.S. departments of Defense, Justice and State, which have argued that the attempt to spirit away a citizen of another country could significantly harm military and foreign relations. It has also meant that a child who survived a violent raid, was hospitalized for months and escaped the fall of Afghanistan has had to split her short life between two families, both of which now claim her.

Five days after the Afghans arrived in the U.S., they say Mast — custody papers in hand — took her away.

The Afghan woman collapsed onto the floor and pleaded with the Marine to give her baby back. Her husband said Mast had called him "brother" for months; so he begged him to act like one, with compassion. Instead, the Afghan family claims in court papers, Mast shoved the man and stomped his foot.

That was more than a year ago. The Afghan couple hasn't seen her since.

"After they took her, our tears never stop," the woman told The Associated Press. "Right now, we are just dead bodies. Our hearts are broken. We have no plans for a future without her. Food has no taste and sleep gives us no rest."

PULLED FROM THE RUBBLE

The story of the baby unfolds in hundreds of pages of legal filings and documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, as well as interviews with those involved, pieced together in an AP investigation.

In a federal lawsuit filed in September, the Afghan family accuses the Masts of false imprisonment, conspiracy, fraud and assault. The family has asked the court to shield their identity out of concerns for their relatives back in Afghanistan, and they communicated with the AP on the condition of remaining anonymous.

The Masts call the Afghan family's claims "outrageous, unmerited attacks" on their integrity. They argue in court filings that they have worked "to protect the child from physical, mental or emotional harm." They say the Afghan couple are "not her lawful parents," and Mast's attorney cast doubt on whether the Afghans were even related to the baby.

"Joshua and Stephanie Mast have done nothing but ensure she receives the medical care she requires, at great personal expense and sacrifice, and provide her a loving home," wrote the Masts' attorneys.

The baby's identity has been kept private, listed only as Baby L or Baby Doe. The Afghan couple had given the baby an Afghan name; the Masts gave her an American one.

Originally from Florida, Joshua Mast married Stephanie and attended Liberty University, an evangelical Christian college in Lynchburg, Virginia. He graduated in 2008 and got his law degree there in 2014.

In 2019, they were living with their sons in Palmyra, a small rural Virginia town, when Joshua Mast was sent on a temporary assignment to Afghanistan. Mast, then a captain in the U.S. Marine Corps, was a military lawyer for the federal Center for Law and Military Operations. The U.S. Marines declined to comment publicly, along with other federal officials.

That September in 2019 was one of the deadliest months of the entire U.S. occupation in Afghanistan, with more than 110 civilians killed in the first week alone.

On Sept. 6, 2019, the U.S. attacked a remote compound.

No details about this event are publicly available, but in court documents Mast claims that classified

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reports show the U.S. government "sent helicopters full of special operators to capture or kill" a foreign fighter. Mast said that rather than surrender, a man detonated a suicide vest; five of his six children in the room were killed, and their mother was shot to death while resisting arrest.

Sehla Ashai and Maya Eckstein, attorneys for the Afghan couple, dispute Mast's account. They say the baby's parents were actually farmers, unaffiliated with any terrorist group. And they described the event as a tragedy that left two innocent civilians and five of their children dead.

Both sides agree that when the dust settled, U.S. troops pulled the badly injured infant from the rubble. The baby had a fractured skull, broken leg and serious burns.

She was about 2 months old.

Mast called the baby a "victim of terrorism." His attorney said she "miraculously survived."

'DO THE RIGHT THING'

The baby was rushed to a military hospital, where she was placed in the care of the Defense Department.

The International Committee of the Red Cross told the AP that they began searching for her family with the Afghan government, often a plodding process in rural parts of the country where record-keeping is scant. At first, they didn't even know the baby's name.

Meanwhile, Mast said, he was "aggressively" advocating to get her to the U.S. Over several months, he wrote to then-Vice President Mike Pence's office, according to exhibits filed in court. He said his colleagues in the military tried to talk to President Donald Trump about the baby during a Thanksgiving visit to Bagram Airfield. Mast also said he made four requests over two weeks to then-White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, asking for help to medically evacuate the baby "to be treated in a safe environment."

The Masts were represented by Joshua's brother Richard Mast, an attorney with the conservative Christian legal group Liberty Counsel, which says it is not involved in this case. None of the Masts responded to repeated requests for interviews.

In emails to military officials, Mast alleged that Pence told the U.S. Embassy in Kabul to "make every effort" to get her to the United States. Mast signed his emails: "Live for an Audience of one, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

Pence's spokesman, Marc Short, did not respond to requests for comment.

The U.S. Embassy never heard from Pence's office, said a Department of State official, who requested anonymity because they did not have permission to speak publicly about the situation. But they did begin getting highly unusual inquiries about the possibility of sending the baby to the U.S. The diplomats were rattled by the suggestion that the U.S. could just take her away; they believed the baby belonged to Afghanistan.

"I was aware that it may not be smooth sailing ahead, but that just made me more determined to do the right thing," the State Department official said.

About six weeks after the baby was rescued, the U.S. Embassy called for a meeting, attended by representatives of the Red Cross, the Afghan government and the American military, including Mast. The State Department wanted to make sure everyone understood its position: Under international humanitarian law, the U.S. was obliged to do everything possible to reunite the baby with her next of kin.

At the meeting, Mast asked about adoption, the State Department official said. Attendees from Afghanistan's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs explained that by Afghan law and custom, they had to place the baby with her biological family. If that did not work, the Afghan Children's Court would determine a proper guardian.

The American concept of adoption doesn't even exist in Afghanistan. Under Islamic law, a child's bloodline cannot be severed and their heritage is sacred. Instead of adoption, a guardianship system called kafala allows Muslims to take in orphans and raise them as family, without relinquishing the child's name or bloodline.

American adoptions from Afghanistan are rare and only possible for Muslim-American families of Afghan descent. The State Department recognizes 14 American adoptions from Afghanistan over the past decade, none in the past two years.

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Yet two days after the embassy meeting, a letter was sent to U.S. officials in Kabul from Kimberley Motley, a near-celebrity American attorney in Afghanistan, the State Department official said. Motley wrote that she was representing an unnamed concerned American citizen who wished to adopt this baby. Motley declined to be interviewed by the AP.

Mast also continued his appeals to American politicians. The U.S. Embassy began hearing from Congressional staffers about the baby, and diplomats met with a military general, the official said.

The general in turn put a "gag order" on military personnel about the baby and said "no one was to advocate on her behalf," Mast wrote in a legal filing.

But he wasn't ready to give up.

HALFWAY AROUND THE WORLD

The Masts searched for a solution halfway around the world — in rural Fluvanna County, Virginia, where they lived.

They petitioned the local Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, describing the baby as a "stateless minor recovered off the battlefield." In early November 2019, a judge granted them legal custody. The name of this judge is not publicly available because juvenile records are sealed in Virginia.

A few days later, a certificate of foreign birth listed Joshua and Stephanie Mast as parents.

The custody order was based on the Masts' assertion that the Afghan government — specifically now-deposed President Ashraf Ghani — intended to waive jurisdiction over the child "in a matter of days," according to a hearing transcript. The waiver never arrived.

In an email to the AP, Ghani's former deputy chief of staff Suhrob Ahmad said there is "no record of this alleged statement of waiver of Afghan jurisdiction." Ahmad said he and the head of the Administrative Office of the President do not remember any such request going through the court system as required.

The U.S. Embassy heard that Mast was granted custody. Military lawyers assured them that the Marine was just preparing in case Afghanistan waived jurisdiction, but would not interfere with the search for the baby's family, according to the State Department official.

Yet all along they planned to adopt the baby, according to records obtained from the state of Virginia under a Freedom of Information Act request. Richard Mast wrote the Attorney General's office in November 2019 that the Masts "will file for adoption as soon as statutorily possible."

In the meantime, Joshua Mast enrolled the baby in the Defense Department health care system, made an appointment at a U.S. International Adoption Clinic and asked to have her evacuated.

Then came a surprise: The Red Cross said they'd found her family. She was about five months old.

In late 2019, Afghan officials told the U.S. Embassy that the baby's paternal uncle had been identified, and he decided his son and daughter-in-law were best suited to take her, according to court records. They were young, educated newlyweds with no children yet of their own, and lived in a city with access to hospitals.

The young man worked in a medical office and ran a co-ed school, which is unusual in Afghanistan. His wife graduated from high school at the top of her class, and is fluent in three languages, including English. They had married for love, unlike many Afghans in arranged marriages.

Mast expressed doubts about the newly-found uncle, describing him in court records as "an anonymous person of unknown nationality" and claiming that turning the baby over to him was "inherently dangerous." He asked the Red Cross to put him in touch, but they refused.

In emails to a U.S. military office requesting evacuation, Mast alleged that he read more than 150 pages of classified documents, and concluded the child was a "stateless minor." Mast believed she was the daughter of transient terrorists who are citizens of no country, his attorney said. He also speculated that if reunited with her family, she could be made a child soldier or a suicide bomber, sold into sex trafficking, hit in a U.S. military strike, or stoned for being a girl.

But Afghanistan did not waver: the child was a citizen of their country.

Mast's attorney sent the U.S. Embassy a "cease and desist" letter warning them not to hand the baby over, according to the State Department official. But on February 26, 2020, the Masts learned that the

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U.S. was preparing to put the baby, now nearly 8 months old, on a plane early the following morning to join her family in another Afghan city.

The Masts, represented by Richard Mast, sued the secretaries of Defense and State in a federal court in Virginia, asking for an emergency restraining order to stop them. The Masts claimed they were the baby's "lawful permanent legal guardians."

Within hours, four federal attorneys — two from the Justice Department and two from the U.S. Attorney's Office — were on the phone, and Richard Mast was in Federal Judge Norman Moon's office.

Richard Mast said the baby should not be "condemned to suffer." He complained that the Afghan government had not conducted DNA testing to confirm the family they found was truly related to the child.

But the Justice Department attorneys said they had no right to mandate how the Afghan government vets the family, and that the Red Cross — which has reunited relatives in war zones for more than a century — had confirmed it was done properly. Further, the federal government's attorneys described the Masts' custody documents from state court as "unlawful," "deeply flawed and incorrect," and "issued on a false premise that has never happened" — that Afghanistan would waive jurisdiction.

Judge Moon asked Richard Mast: "Your client is not asking to adopt the child?"

"No sir," Mast responded. "He wants to get her medical treatment in the United States."

Justice Department attorneys argued that the United States must meet its international obligations. Attorney Alexander Haas put it simply: Taking another country's citizen to the United States "would have potentially profound implications on our military and foreign affairs interests."

Judge Moon ruled against the Masts, and the baby stayed in Afghanistan.

The next day, she was united with her biological family. The Afghan couple wept with joy.

"We didn't think she would come back to her family alive," said the young Afghan man. "It was the best day of our lives. After a long time, she had a chance to have a family again."

AN EXTRA MEASURE OF TENDERNESS

As the months passed in her new home in Afghanistan, the girl loved getting henna painted on her hands and dressing up in new clothes, the Afghan couple said. She always wanted to do her new mother's makeup, or brush her hair.

"She knew about Allah, about clothes, about the names of food," the woman wrote.

The couple cared for her as if she was their own daughter, but with an extra measure of tenderness because of the unimaginable tragedy she'd already suffered.

"We never wanted her to feel she couldn't have something she wanted," said the young man.

Meanwhile, Mast continued to worry that the child was "in an objectively dangerous situation," Richard Mast wrote in court documents. The Masts asked Kimberley Motley, the attorney, to track down the family, saying he wanted to get the child medical treatment in the U.S., Motley said in court records.

Motley contacted the Afghan family in March 2020, about a week after the baby was placed in her new home. Motley is named as a defendant in their lawsuit, but her attorney, Michael Hoernlein, told the AP the claims against her are "meritless." In court documents, Motley's attorneys describe her role as professional and above-board, and asked that the claims against her be dismissed.

Motley had originally gone to Afghanistan in 2008 under an American-funded initiative to train local lawyers. She stayed, largely representing foreigners charged with crimes. She took on high-profile human rights cases, gave a TED Talk and wrote a book.

Over the course of a year, Motley called for updates about the child and occasionally asked for photos. In July, around the baby's first birthday, the couple sent Motley a snapshot of the child in swim trunks, smiling and splashing in a wading pool.

At the same time, the Masts' adoption case was still winding through the court system in Fluvanna County, Virginia. In December 2020, the state court granted the Masts a final adoption order based on the finding that the child "remains up to this point in time an orphaned, undocumented, stateless minor," according to a federal lawsuit. Fluvanna County Circuit Court Presiding Judge Richard E. Moore did not respond to repeated requests for clarity on how the cases progressed.

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International adoption lawyers were baffled.

"If you have relatives there who are saying, 'no, no, no, we want our daughter, we want our little girl,' it's over," said Irene Steffas, an adoption and immigration attorney. "There is no way the U.S. is going to get into a match with another country when it comes to a child that's a citizen of that country."

Karen Law, a Virginia attorney who specializes in international adoption, said state law requires an accredited agency to visit three times over six months and compile a report before an adoption can be finalized. The child must be present for the visits — but this baby was thousands of miles away.

On July 10, 2021, around the baby's second birthday, Motley facilitated the first phone call between the Afghan couple and Joshua Mast, with the aid of translator Ahmad Osmani, a Baptist pastor of Afghan descent. Mast told the Afghan couple that unless they sent the child to the United States for medical care, she could "be blind, brain damaged, and/or permanently physically disabled."

But the Afghan man now raising her, who had worked in the medical field, did not think her burn scars, a leg injury and mysterious allergic reactions amounted to a life-altering condition in the way Mast described. The couple declined sending the baby to the United States.

The woman was pregnant, and worried about the risk of such a long flight. They said they asked Mast: Could they take the baby to Pakistan or India for treatment instead?

The answer was no, their lawsuit says. The conversations continued for months. Osmani, the translator, vouched for the Masts and described them as kind and trustworthy, according to the lawsuit, which names him as a defendant.

Osmani did not respond to requests for comment. He asked a federal judge to throw out the lawsuit, and said he never deceived anyone. He was only a "mere translator."

His attorneys wrote: "No good deed goes unpunished."

'LIVING IN A DARK JAIL'

In late summer 2021, the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan. Mast said he contacted the family to bring the baby to the U.S. "before the country collapsed." He said he was "extremely concerned that they may not get another chance." The couple agreed.

Mast applied for special visas for the Afghan family and for relatives of Osmani, the translator, according to court records. They characterized the Afghan couple as an escort for a "U.S. military dependent" — the baby.

In an email to U.S. officials filed in court, Mast wrote that Osmani was "very instrumental to helping a U.S. Marine ... adopt an Afghan child."

Soon, the Afghan family began their days-long journey to the U.S. Joshua Mast told them to say he was their lawyer.

"If anyone asks to talk about your documents, show them this text: I am Major Joshua Mast, USMC. I am a Judge Advocate ... ," Mast texted them detailed directions for how to deal with U.S. authorities, their lawsuit says.

When the family arrived in Germany for a stopover, Joshua Mast and his wife greeted them at the air force base. It was the first time they had met in person.

In Germany, the Masts visited the Afghan family's room three times to try to get the baby to travel separately with them, "insisting that it would be easier for the toddler to enter the United States that way," the Afghan couple recalled in their lawsuit. They refused to let the girl out of their sight.

When the Afghans finally landed in the United States, they began explaining that the child was too young to have Afghan documents. That's when they claim Joshua Mast pulled out an Afghan passport.

Inside was the same photo of the child in the wading pool, but altered to change the background, add a shirt and smooth her hair. Mast told the Afghans to "keep quiet" about having his name on her passport, their lawsuit alleges, so it would be easier to get medical care.

The Afghan couple asked to be taken to Fort Pickett Army National Guard base, a location specified by Mast, according to the lawsuit. Thousands of Afghan refugees were temporarily housed there.

Soon after, they said, soldiers came to their room and told them they were moving. A strange woman

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sat in the back of the van next to a car seat, according to court records, and the baby fussed as she buckled her in.

The van pulled up to a building they didn't recognize, where a woman who called herself a social worker said the Masts were the girl's legal guardians. Confused and frightened, the child cried and the couple begged.

But it did no good. Mast took the baby to his car, where his wife was waiting, the lawsuit says.

They had lost her.

In their heavily redacted response to the lawsuit, the Masts acknowledge they "took custody" of the child; they said their adoption order was valid and they did nothing wrong.

Richard Mast is also named as a defendant in the Afghan family's lawsuit. He wrote in legal documents that his brother's adoption of the child was "selfless;" it saved both the child, and the Afghan family fighting to get her back, "from the evils of life under the Taliban."

The Afghan couple believed that their baby was stolen, and they immediately sought help at Fort Pickett to get her back.

"But the playing field was not level," their attorney, Ashai, told the AP. The couple "were forced to navigate a complex and confusing system in a foreign country in which they had just arrived, after having survived the greatest trauma of their lives."

Meanwhile, the couple says in court documents, Osmani warned them not to contact a lawyer or the authorities, and suggested that Mast might give them the baby back if they dealt directly with him.

And so they tried to maintain contact with Mast. They were also scared of him. If he could abduct their child in broad daylight, they worried he might hurt them too, their lawyers wrote in legal filings.

The Afghan woman plunged into a deep depression and, despite being nine months pregnant, stopped eating and drinking. She could not sleep. Her husband was afraid to leave her alone.

"Since we have come to America, we have not felt happiness for even one day," the Afghan man told the AP. "We feel like we are living in a dark jail."

His wife gave birth to a girl on October 1, 2021. The young mother's grief became overwhelming. A month later, she considered suicide and was taken to a clinic.

Soon the couple sought legal help; by December 2021, the Afghan couple had asked the Fluvanna judge to reverse the adoption. But those proceedings, almost one year in, have been opaque and slow.

On Feb. 27, 2022, when the Afghan baby was 2 ½ years old, the Masts traveled to the Mennonite Christian Assembly in Fredericksburg, Ohio, to share their joy during a special church service. In a video advertising the event called "Walking in Faith," the pastor apologized to congregants that it would not be online, because the Marine would share "very confidential, classified information."

"Unforeseen events gave the couple an unexpected opportunity to stand up to protect innocent life," read the program flyer. "Come hear how God's mighty hand allowed for a remarkable deliverance."

Pastor John Risner told the AP that the Masts had requested the service be confidential, and he didn't want to betray their trust by disclosing any details.

All he would say is that their story is "amazing."

NO HAPPINESS HERE

The fate of the Afghan child is now being debated in secret proceedings in a locked courtroom in the village of Palmyra, Virginia, home to about 100 people.

Earlier this month, Joshua Mast arrived at the Fluvanna County courthouse along with his wife and his brother Richard. Mast was dressed in his starched Marine uniform, holding his white and gold hat in his hand. The hearing stretched on for roughly eight hours.

The proceedings have been completely shielded from public view, mandated by presiding Judge Moore. The AP was not allowed inside the courtroom. Court clerk Tristana Treadway refused to provide even the docket number, saying she could "neither confirm nor deny" the case existed at all.

More than a dozen lawyers streamed into the courthouse, carting boxes of evidence, and each said they

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were forbidden from speaking.

Mast remains an active duty Marine, and has since been promoted to major. He now lives with his family in North Carolina. The Afghan toddler has been with them for more than a year.

In Texas, the Afghan couple continues to grieve the loss of the child. The baby the woman gave birth to shortly after arriving in the U.S. just turned 1. The young mother had planned to raise the girls as sisters. But they've never met.

"There is nothing to celebrate without her. There is no happiness here," the Afghan man said. "We are counting the moments and days until she will come home."

Sunak, Mordaunt, Johnson? Contenders who could replace Truss

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Liz Truss' resignation as British Prime Minister on Thursday triggered another leadership race — the second in just four months — for the U.K.'s fractured and demoralized Conservative Party.

Truss, who quit after just 45 days in office, said her successor will be chosen in a leadership contest to be completed by the end of next week. Graham Brady, a senior Conservative lawmaker who oversees the party's leadership challenges, said each candidate must secure 100 nominations from legislators to run and that the race will conclude by next Friday.

Former Treasury chief Rishi Sunak, ex-Cabinet minister Penny Mordaunt and Defense Secretary Ben Wallace are among those considered credible contenders for the top job. Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson may also return. Jeremy Hunt, who has been brought in as new Treasury chief to steer the economy, has ruled out running.

Whoever wins will become the fifth British prime minister in six years.

Here's a look at the potential runners and riders:

RISHI SUNAK, FORMER TREASURY CHIEF

Sunak, 42, came second to Truss in the last Conservative leadership race, gathering 60,399 votes compared to her 81,326.

He quit as Treasury chief in July, in protest against then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson's leadership. In the contest to replace Johnson, Sunak positioned himself as the candidate who tells hard truths about Britain's public finances. He argued that climbing inflation must be controlled first, and called promises by Truss and other rivals to immediately slash taxes reckless "fairy tales."

Sunak was proved right when Truss' unfunded tax-cutting economic stimulus package tanked the British pound and triggered chaos in the markets in September.

Sunak became Treasury chief in 2020 and steered Britain's slumping economy through the coronavirus pandemic. He oversaw billions of pounds in government handouts to help businesses and workers hard hit by COVID-19.

Sunak was regarded by many as the Conservatives' brightest rising star. Born to Indian parents who moved to Britain from East Africa, Sunak attended the exclusive Winchester College private school and studied at Oxford. Some see his elite education and work for the investment bank Goldman Sachs and a hedge fund as a liability because it makes him seem out of touch with ordinary voters.

In the past year he faced heavy criticism for being slow to respond to Britain's cost-of-living crisis. His reputation also took a hit after he was fined by police for attending a lockdown-flouting birthday party at Downing Street in June 2020.

Some also criticized him following revelations that his wife, Akshata Murthy, avoided paying taxes on her overseas income.

PENNY MORDAUNT, HOUSE OF COMMONS LEADER

Mordaunt, 49, came third after Sunak and Truss in the last Tory leadership race, when she ran with a campaign named "PM 4 PM." Mordaunt did not hold a senior post in Johnson's Cabinet, and she positioned herself as offering a clean break from his scandal-tainted government.

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A former international trade minister, Mordaunt is popular among Conservative lawmakers. Some believe she could be the right candidate to help heal the party's divisions. But she is largely an unknown figure to most Britons, and outside Conservative circles she remains best known for appearing on the 2014 reality TV show "Splash!"

Mordaunt played a prominent role in the pro-Brexit campaign. She was the first woman to become British defense secretary in 2019 -- though she was removed by Johnson after just three months in the post because she had backed another candidate for party leader, Jeremy Hunt.

SUELLA BRAVERMAN, EX-HOME SECRETARY

Braverman, 42, resigned as Home Secretary late Wednesday, with a scathing letter criticizing Truss' "tumultuous" premiership. Her move kicked off a chaotic night in British politics that ended in Truss' resignation hours later.

A former barrister who became England's attorney general in 2020, Braverman was the first to put her hat in the ring during this summer's leadership race to replace Johnson.

During her short tenure as Home Secretary, a top government post overseeing immigration and counterterrorism, Braverman vowed to crack down hard on asylum seekers, saying it was her "dream" to see a flight deporting those seeking refuge in Britain to Rwanda. She also wanted to pull the U.K. out of the European Convention on Human rights.

She made headlines — and was mocked by opponents — when she complained recently in Parliament that travel disruptions caused by trade union strikes were to be blamed on left-wing, "tofu-eating wokerati."

BEN WALLACE, DEFENSE SECRETARY

Wallace, a 52-year-old army veteran, is popular within the Conservative Party. He has won admirers for his straight talk, particularly among Conservative lawmakers who pressed for the U.K. to increase its defense spending.

Wallace has raised his profile as a key government voice in Britain's response to Russia's war in Ukraine. But he recently said he wanted to remain in his current job. Earlier this week, he reportedly said "I want to be the Secretary of State for Defense until I finish" when asked if he wanted the top job.

BORIS JOHNSON, FORMER PRIME MINISTER

There was intense speculation Thursday that Johnson, 58, may return and put himself forward as prime minister again — just weeks after he was forced out of office by a series of ethics scandals.

Within hours of Truss' resignation, several Conservative allies of Johnson's voiced their support for him to return.

"The only person who has a mandate from the general public is Boris Johnson," said one lawmaker, Marco Longhi. "He is the only person who can discharge the mandate from the people."

Johnson led the Conservatives to their biggest win in decades in the 2019 general election, largely on the back of his promise to "get Brexit done."

But his time in office was overshadowed by scandals over alcohol-fueled parties held at his official residence while national COVID-19 restrictions were in place. He still faces an ongoing investigation by Parliament's privileges committee into whether he lied to lawmakers about COVID-rule breaking at Downing Street.

He was forced to announce his resignation on July 7 after former allies in his Cabinet joined a mass exodus of government officials protesting his leadership.

Arizona farm gives refuge from pain, for man and beast alike

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

CORNVILLE, Ariz. (AP) — The leader has the name of her dead baby spelled out in beads on her left wrist, and standing before her is a mother so grief-choked by her young son's death that she flips on her

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side at one point in this creekside yoga class and sobs. In the next row, a woman whose daughter died by suicide goes through the poses next to a man with a tattoo of three little ducks, one for each of the children who was murdered.

Just beyond, in the fields of this sanctuary for the grieving, is a sheep whose babies were snatched by coyotes, a goat saved from slaughter and a horse that was badly mistreated carrying loads at the Grand Canyon.

Soon, the morning fog will lift and the chorus of cicadas will end the quiet. But for a moment, all is still, as if nature has paused to acknowledge this gathering of worldly suffering.

"There's a comfort in knowing," says Suzy Elghanayan, a mother whose young son died earlier this year of a seizure, "that we're all in the same place that we never wanted to be."

The world turns away from stories like theirs because it's too hard to imagine burying a child. So mourning people from around the globe journey to this patch of farmland just outside the red rocks of Sedona.

There is no talk at Selah Carefarm of ending the pain of loss, just of building the emotional muscle to handle it.

Here, the names of the dead can be spoken and the agony of loss can be shown. No one turns away.

Joanne Cacciatore was a mother of three in a customer service job when her baby died during delivery. Long after she closed the lid to the tiny pink casket, the grief consumed her. She'd sob for hours and withered to 90 lbs. She didn't want to live. All she thought about was death.

"Every cell in my body aches," she wrote in her journal a few months after the death in 1994. "I won't smile as often as my old self. Smiling hurts now. Most everything hurts some days, even breathing."

Cacciatore became consumed with understanding the abyss of heartache she inhabited. But counseling and bereavement groups were as disappointing as the body of research Cacciatore found on traumatic loss.

So, she set out on twin paths for answers: Enrolling in college for the first time, focusing her studies on grief, and starting a support group and foundation for others like her.

Today, all these years after the death that set her on this journey, those academic and therapeutic pursuits have converged on the vegan farm, which opened five years ago. As plans for Selah took shape, Cacciatore was reminded of the two dogs who stayed by her side even when the depths of her sorrow were too much for many friends. So the farm is home to dozens of animals, many rescued from abuse and neglect, that are central to many visitors' experience here.

While most who come to Selah take part in counseling sessions, Cacciatore believes visitors' experiences with the animals can be just as transformative. Across the farm, stories repeat of someone washed over by a wave of grief only to find an animal seem to offer comfort – a donkey nestling its face in a crying woman's shoulder or a horse pressing its head against a grieving heart.

"There's a resonance," Cacciatore says. "There's a symbiosis,"

The 10-acre swath of valley feels something like a bohemian enclave crossed with a kibbutz. In the day, the sprawling expanse is baked in sun, all the way back to the creek at the farm's border, where a family of otters comes to play. At night, under star-flecked skies of indigo, paths are lit by lanterns and strings of bulbs glow, and all is quiet but the gentle flow of spring water snaking through irrigation ditches.

It is an oasis, but a constantly changing one, reinvented by each new visitor leaving their imprint.

On one tree, the grieving tie strips of fabric that rain like multicolored tickertape, remnants of their loved one's favorite shirts and socks and pillowcases. Nearby, little medallions stamped with the names of the dead twinkle in the breeze. And in a grotto beneath an ash tree, the brokenhearted have clipped prayer cards to the branches, left objects including a baseball and a toy truck, and painted dozens of stones memorializing someone gone too soon.

For Andy, "My Twin Forever." For Monica, "Loved Forever." For Jade, "Forever One Day Old."

Memories of the dead are everywhere. The farm's guest house was made possible by donors, just like everything else here, and names of their lost ones are on everything from benches to butterfly gardens.

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After a few days here, many find the stories of their beloved have become so stitched into the farm's fabric it makes hallowed ground of earth on which the dead never set foot.

For Liz Castleman, it is a place she has come to feel her son Charlie's presence even more than home. A rock with a dinosaur painted on it honors him and a wooden bird soars with his name. Strawberries at the farm have even been forever rebranded as Charlieberries in recognition of his favorite fruit.

Few in Castleman's life can bear to hear about her son anymore, three years after he died before even reaching his third birthday. When she first came to the farm, part of her wondered if Cacciatore might somehow have the power to bring Charlie back. In a way, she did. She's returned five more times because here, people relish hearing of the whip-smart boy who made friends wherever he went, who'd do anything to earn a laugh, who was so outgoing in class a teacher dubbed him "Mayor of Babytown."

"All of the old safe spaces are gone. The farm, it really is the one safe space," says 46-year-old Castleman, whose son died while under anesthesia during an MRI, likely due to an underlying genetic disorder. "There's something, I don't know if it's magical, but you know that anything you say is OK and anything you feel is OK. It's just a complete bubble from the rest of the world."

Many who come here have been frustrated by communities and counselors who tell them to move on from their loss. They've been pushed to be medicated or plied with platitudes that hurt more than help. Friends tell a grieving mom that God needed an angel or ask a brokenhearted spouse why he's still wearing his wedding ring. Again and again, they're told to forget and move on.

Here, though, visitors learn the void will be with them, some way or another, forever.

"I'm picturing my life with my grief always with me and how I'm going to live life with that grief," says 58-year-old Elghanayan, struggling to imagine her years unfolding without her 20-year-old son Luca, the compassionate, rock-climbing, surfing, piano-playing aspiring scientist. "I have to figure out how to get up and breathe every day and take one step every day and pray my years go by swiftly."

If it seems counterintuitive that coming to a place where every story is sad could actually uplift, Selah's adherents point to their own experiences on the farm and the inching progress they've made.

Erik Denton, a 35-year-old repeat visitor to Selah, is certain he can't ever get over the deaths of his three children last year, but he's functioning again. He does the dishes and makes his bed. He doesn't hole up alone for days at a time. He's again able to talk about the children he loves: 3-year-old Joanna, the firecracker who climbed trees and helped friends; 2-year-old Terry, the mischief maker who seemed to think no one was watching; and 6-month-old Sierra, the silly girl who just had begun to ooh and aah.

Denton's ex-girlfriend, the children's mother, has been charged in their drownings in a bathtub and sometimes repeating the story or hearing another mourner's tragedy becomes too much for him. But mostly, Denton feels as if he can connect with people here more than anywhere else.

"Even though we're surrounded by so much pain, we're together," he says.

A sense of solidarity is inescapable at Selah. Guests eagerly trade stories of their lost loved ones. And when someone is hurting, human or animal, they can count on others being by their side.

This day, Cacciatore is shaken because Shirin, a chocolate brown sheep with a white stripe across her belly, has been growing sicker and can't be coaxed to eat, not even her favorite cookies.

Shirin was rescued after her two babies were taken by coyotes. Her udders were full for lambs no longer around to feed. She remained so shaken by it all that no one could get close to her for weeks.

As Cacciatore awaits the veterinarian, she and a frequent farm guest, 57-year-old Jill Loforte Carroll, dote on the sheep. Cacciatore tries to coax Shirin to eat some leaves and Loforte Carroll cues a recording of "La Vie en Rose" sung by her daughter Sierra before the quietly observant, shyly funny 21-year-old died by suicide seven years ago.

For a moment, it's just three mournful moms sharing a patch of field.

When the vet arrives, their fears are confirmed, and as injections to euthanize are given, Cacciatore massages the sheep, repeatedly cooing reassuring words as her tears fall to the dirt below.

"It's OK, baby girl, it's OK," she says. "You're the prettiest girl."

By the time the vet looks up with a knowing nod, seven people crouch around Shirin, splayed across the field in such anguished drama it seems fit for a Renaissance painting. On a farm shaped by death, another has arrived, but those who gathered infused it with as much beauty and comfort as they could.

"It's not our children," Cacciatore says before burying Shirin beneath a hulking persimmon tree, "but it's still hard."

This is Cacciatore's life now, one she never could have imagined before her own tragedy. She has a Ph.D. and a research professorship at Arizona State University. A book on loss, "Bearing the Unbearable," was well received. A fiercely loyal following has found solace in her work and her counseling.

"I had a little girl who was born and who died, and it changed the trajectory of my life," she says. "But I'd give it back in a minute just to have her back."

WHO Syria boss accused of corruption, fraud, abuse, AP finds

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — Staffers at the World Health Organization's Syrian office have alleged that their boss mismanaged millions of dollars, plied government officials with gifts -- including computers, gold coins and cars -- and acted frivolously as COVID-19 swept the country.

More than 100 confidential documents, messages and other materials obtained by The Associated Press show WHO officials told investigators that the agency's Syria representative, Dr. Akjemal Magtymova, engaged in abusive behavior, pressured WHO staff to sign contracts with high-ranking Syrian government politicians and consistently misspent WHO and donor funds.

Magtymova declined to respond to questions about the allegations, saying that she was "prohibited" from sharing information "due to (her) obligations as a WHO staff member." She described the accusations as "defamatory."

Complaints from at least a dozen personnel have triggered one of the biggest internal WHO probes in years, at times involving more than 20 investigators, according to staffers linked to the investigation.

WHO confirmed in a statement that it has been reviewing charges made against Magtymova and said it has also enlisted the help of external investigators.

"It has been a protracted and complex investigation, with the situation in the country and the challenges of gaining appropriate access, while ensuring the protection of staff, bringing additional complications," WHO said. The agency said progress has been made in recent months in assessing the complaints regarding Magtymova and gathering relevant information.

"In view of the security situation, confidentiality and respect for due process do not allow us to comment further on the detailed allegations," WHO said. It gave no timeline for when the investigation was expected to be completed.

WHO's Syria office had a budget of about \$115 million last year to address health issues in a country riven by war -- one in which nearly 90% of the population lives in poverty and more than half desperately need humanitarian aid. For several months, investigators have been probing allegations that Syrians were badly served and WHO staffers were ill-treated:

— Financial documents show Magtymova once threw a party costing more than \$10,000 -- a gathering held mostly to honor her own achievements at WHO's expense, staffers say, at a time when the country was struggling to obtain coronavirus vaccines.

— In December 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, she tasked the more than 100 WHO personnel in the country with learning a flash mob dance, asking officials to film themselves performing the choreographed steps for a U.N. party, according to videos and messages seen by the AP.

— Six Syria-based WHO public health experts said Magtymova called staffers "cowards" and "retarded" on multiple occasions. Even more concerning, the officials told agency investigators that Magtymova "provided favors" to senior politicians in the Syrian regime and met surreptitiously with the Russian military, potential breaches of WHO's neutrality as a U.N. organization. The staffers asked not to be named for fear of retribution; three have left WHO.

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In one complaint sent to WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in May, a Syria-based staffer wrote that Magtymova hired the incompetent relatives of government officials, including some accused of "countless human rights violations."

"Dr. Akjemal's aggressive and abusive actions are negatively impacting WHO's performance to support Syrian people," the staffer wrote, adding: "Vulnerable Syrian people are losing a lot due to favoritism, frauds and scandals instigated and supported by Dr. Akjemal, which is breaking all trust (and) pushing donors away."

Tedros did not respond to the staffer's complaint. In May, WHO's regional director in the Eastern Mediterranean appointed an acting representative in Syria to replace Magtymova after she was placed on leave. But she is still listed as the agency's Syria representative in its staff directory and continues to draw a director-level salary.

Magtymova, a Turkmenistan national, previously served in a number of roles, including as the agency's representative to Oman and as emergency coordinator in Yemen. She assumed her position in Syria in May 2020, just as COVID swept around the world.

"What we (at WHO) do is noble," she said in a statement upon her appointment. "We gain respect by competency, professionalism and the results we accomplish."

Numerous WHO staffers in Syria have told the agency's investigators that Magtymova failed to grasp the severity of the pandemic in Syria and jeopardized the lives of millions.

"During COVID-19, the situation in Syria was deplorable," one former WHO staffer said. "However, WHO was not providing adequate aid to Syrians." Medical supplies were "usually focused on Damascus only, and not covering other areas in Syria," where there was an acute shortage of medicines and equipment.

Syria's health care system has been devastated by more than a decade of war; for years, the country relied almost exclusively on international health assistance. WHO's presence in areas controlled by the government has often raised criticism that its aid is directed by Damascus, which is sanctioned by the US and the EU. Nearly 7 million people are displaced by the war inside Syria and most live in tented camps in areas beyond government control.

Staffers also questioned some of Magtymova's own behavior and directives to staff as coronavirus cases spiked worldwide -- and even as WHO's chief claimed that the entire organization was working "tirelessly" to stop COVID-19.

At least five WHO personnel complained to investigators that Magtymova violated WHO's own COVID-19 guidance. They said she did not encourage remote working, came to the office after catching COVID and held meetings unmasked. Four WHO staffers said she infected others.

In December 2020, deep in the first year of the pandemic, Magtymova instructed the Syria office to learn a flash mob dance popularized by a social media challenge for a year-end U.N. event. At the time, senior WHO officials in Geneva were advising countries to implement coronavirus measures including the suspension of any non-essential gatherings.

"Kindly note that we want you to listen to the song, train yourself for the steps and shoot you dancing over the music to be part of our global flash mob dance video," wrote WHO communications staffer Rafik Alhabbal in an email to all Syria staff. Magtymova separately sent a link to a YouTube website, which she described as "the best tutorial."

Multiple videos show staffers, some wearing WHO vests or jackets, performing "the Jerusalem challenge" dance in offices and warehouses stocked with medical supplies. Magtymova praised the "very good looking and beautiful people" in videos made in Aleppo and the port city of Latakia.

The following October, when the country was enduring one of its worst waves of COVID, Magtymova hired a choreographer and film company to produce a video of staffers performing another dance to mark U.N. Day. Photos and video show there was no social distancing during the party Magtymova held for dozens of unmasked people, which included a "cake-eating ceremony."

Magtymova posted one of the dance videos on WHO Syria's social media accounts, but it elicited so much

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criticism that her superiors ordered her to remove it. The video was "disgraceful," said Anas al-Abdah, a leading Syrian opposition politician: "The organization should have (instead) filmed the catastrophic condition of our people and demanded justice."

Magtymova, however, was unrepentant.

"My message here is to ask you not to be discouraged," she told staff. "We have an important job at hand to perform and a huge responsibility for people, we have done something really out of (the) box: we dared to shine."

Internal documents, emails and messages also raise serious concerns about how WHO's taxpayer-provided funds were used under Magtymova, with staffers alleging she routinely misspent limited donor funds meant to help the more than 12 million Syrians in dire need of health aid.

Among the incidents being probed is a party Magtymova organized last May, when she received a leadership award from Tufts University, her alma mater. Held at the exclusive Four Seasons hotel in Damascus, the party included a guest list of about 50, at a time when fewer than 1% of the Syrian population had received a single dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

A hotel invoice shows the reception's menu included Singaporean-style beef satay, fried goat cheese with truffle oil croquettes and sriracha chicken sliders, alongside a selection of seasonal mocktails. A production company was hired to film the event and make a promotional video, according to an internal WHO summary.

The evening's agenda featured remarks by the Syrian minister of health, followed by a reception and nearly two hours of live music. WHO documents show while the event was called to celebrate WHO's designation of 2021 as the Year of Health and Care Worker, the evening was devoted to Magtymova, not health workers. The cost, according to a spreadsheet: more than \$11,000.

Like many other U.N. expatriate staff in Syria, Magtymova lived at Damascus' ornately decorated Four Seasons hotel. But unlike other staffers, she chose to stay in a spacious, multi-room suite with two washrooms and a panoramic view of the city. U.N. documents suggest she stayed in the suite from October 2020 to this past May at a discounted cost of about \$450 per night, more than four times the price of rooms occupied by other U.N. staff. A hotel staffer said such suites normally cost about \$940 a night.

The hotel was sanctioned by the U.S. and U.K. because of its owner's role in financing the regime of Bashar Assad; the U.N. is estimated to have spent \$70 million there since 2014.

Other WHO officials were concerned with the agency's inability to track its support of health facilities in Syria. In correspondence from January, staffers wrote about a worrisome "spot check" made to a health project in northern Syria, noting discrepancies between what WHO paid for and what was found.

Among the issues identified: "the medicines quantities checked were not matching the invoices," the staff did not have medical training, there were missing items including wheelchairs, crutches and hearing devices, and most of the building rented to store such supplies was empty.

Dr. Ahmed Al-Mandari, WHO's regional director in the eastern Mediterranean and Magtymova's boss, also chastised her for the Syria office's failure to account for its spending.

In an email last October, he told her there were many unresolved audit and compliance issues. Al-Mandari said Magtymova had not completed several long overdue reports detailing how money was being spent in Syria that needed "urgent attention." Without those reports, donors had little evidence Syria and WHO were using their resources as intended.

Three WHO officials involved in procurement told investigators that Magtymova was involved in several questionable contracts, including a transportation deal that awarded several million dollars to a supplier with whom she had personal ties. Another staffer said to be close to Magtymova reportedly received \$20,000 in cash to buy medicines, despite the lack of any request from the Syrian government, which was normally required to trigger such a purchase.

At least five staffers also complained Magtymova used WHO funds to buy gifts for the Ministry of Health and others, including "very good servers and laptops," gold coins and expensive cars. The AP was not in a position to corroborate their allegations. Several WHO personnel said they were pressured to strike deals with senior members of the Syrian government for basic supplies like fuel at inflated prices, and were

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sidelined if they failed to do so.

The accusations regarding WHO's top representative in Syria come after multiple misconduct complaints at the U.N. health agency in recent years.

Last May, the AP reported that senior WHO management was informed of sex abuse during the 2018-2020 Ebola outbreak in Congo but did little to stop it; a panel later found more than 80 workers under WHO's direction sexually exploited women.

And in January, the AP reported that staffers at WHO's Western Pacific office said the region's director, Dr. Takeshi Kasai, used racist language to berate staff and improperly shared sensitive coronavirus vaccine information with his home country, Japan. In August, WHO removed Kasai from his post indefinitely after an initial investigation substantiated some of the claims.

Javier Guzman, director of global health at the Center for Global Development in Washington, said the latest charges regarding WHO's Magtymova were "extremely disturbing" and unlikely to be an exception.

"This is clearly a systemic problem," Guzman said. "These kinds of allegations are not just occurring in one of WHO's offices but in multiple regions."

He said though Tedros is seen by some as the world's moral conscience during COVID-19 -- he repeatedly decried vaccine inequity and called for countries to act in solidarity -- the agency's credibility was severely damaged by reports of misconduct. Guzman called for WHO to publicly release any investigation report into Magtymova and the Syria office.

WHO said investigation reports are "normally not public documents," but that "aggregated, anonymized data" are shared with its Executive Board and made publicly accessible.

'Chinese chorizo' honors fusion of two cultures in Arizona

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) — If not for the coronavirus pandemic, Feng-Feng Yeh might never have learned about a lesser-known chapter of Chinese American history in her hometown of Tucson, Arizona.

Yeh was an executive chef in New York City when the shutdown took away her job and career plans. She pulled up stakes and moved back home, turning instead to her passion for public art.

Looking for inspiration, Yeh delved into the local history of Chinese immigrants, which she'd heard only bits and pieces of all her life. On the Tucson Chinese Cultural Center website, she learned that Chinese-owned mom-and-pop grocery stores were a thriving industry in Tucson from the 1900s on.

More than businesses, they were lifelines for Mexican American communities. The stores even started preparing Mexican chorizo — the spicy, ground-pork breakfast staple. It earned the nickname "Chinese chorizo."

"I was very moved by the story of allyship between Mexican and Chinese Americans at a time when all these pivotal immigration policies were being enacted that were quite racist," Yeh said. "I thought that was something that you don't learn in school, especially in Arizona. I thought it was something that should be recognized and shared."

Chinese immigrants settling in Arizona were doing so in the shadow of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the U.S. government's first race-based immigration policy. Both Chinese and Mexican immigrants faced racism despite being instrumental to the workforce.

It's a history that older Tucson Chinese residents say they have spent years trying to make more visible.

Yeh proposed erecting an 11-foot (3.4 meters) tall sculpture of two chorizo sausage links, and recently won a grant through the Tucson Museum of Contemporary Art and the Andy Warhol Foundation. To promote the endeavor, she organized the inaugural Tucson Chinese Chorizo Festival. For the month of October, several local restaurants and food trucks have been serving weekend specials with meat and vegan chorizo.

Even many locals are unaware of Tucson's significant Chinese presence.

The 15,000-square-foot Tucson Chinese Cultural Center is a bustling hub that's part community center and part museum, and serves at least 5,000. Established in 2005, it has a multipurpose room, commercial kitchen, classrooms, and a lounge with tables for mahjong. On the walls are display boards with mini-

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profiles of long-gone Chinese grocery stores. The center also has a YouTube channel that includes a 2014 video on Chinese chorizo.

"A lot of people don't know we exist after 17 years. So, we've been trying to get the word out," said Susan Chan, the center's executive director.

Starting in 1900, Chinese-owned grocery stores prospered and became an economic force in Tucson. By the 1940s, there were 130 families running a little over 100 grocery stores in the city. The number of stores dwindled in the '70s and '80s due to an influx of supermarket chains, convenience stores, and a younger generation of Chinese Americans uninterested in the family business.

Allen Lew's father, Joe Wee Lew, opened his first of three stores, Joe's Super Market, in 1955. Lew began working in the market as a fourth grader. He still helped out until the last store closed after three decades in business.

He and his four siblings grew up serving Mexican and Native American customers. Everyone felt like they "were all a big neighborhood family." In a pre-food stamp era, many Chinese grocers would let struggling customers pay whenever.

"A lot of them get paid like once a month, every two weeks, and they ran out of money," Lew recalled. "They'll tell my Dad or the other Chinese (grocers), 'Can you give me credit?... We give them credit — no charge, no interest, no nothing.'"

Lew, 74 and a longtime board member of the center, remembers watching his father or the Hispanic butcher he employed making chorizo. They used the end pieces of "big rolls of bologna" or salami, boiled ham or other cold cuts.

"The butcher would cut off the fats and things that were part of the meat that were kind of bad. He would take that out and then you threw organ meats and all that and you make it just like hotdogs," Lew said.

For the festival, Chinese-made chorizo is being celebrated with inventive dishes trying to fuse Chinese and Mexican cultures. At Mexican restaurant BOCA, for instance, chef and James Beard Award semi-finalist Maria Mazon made vegan and regular chorizo eggrolls with a carrot and papaya slaw topped with a fried egg.

Breakfast/brunch hot spot 5 Points came up with Tamal Niangao — charred, sticky masa cakes with chorizo, green onion, Napa cabbage and chilies in a soy Maggi glaze. Jicama, cilantro and two poached eggs are then piled on.

The 500-plus pounds of meat and plant-based chorizo given to restaurants for the festival was made at a local butcher, Forbes Meat Company. Yeh devised the vegan recipe. She invited Jackie Tran, a Tucson food writer and owner of Tran's Fats food truck, to work on the pork one.

"It was definitely something that fascinated" him, said Tran, who is of Chinese and Vietnamese descent. But he definitely didn't throw in odds and ends. And he added dashes of spices like Sichuan pepper, coriander seed and Chinese five-spice powder.

For the sculpture, Yeh is partnering with Carlos Valenzuela, a Mexican and indigenous artist born in Tucson. Valenzuela will make the red mosaic tiles for the piece. His grandfather had a running account with a local Chinese grocery store. It didn't occur to him at first that his involvement was a nice full-circle development.

"I just went into it thinking, 'Wow, this is a really unique project, really an opportunity to talk about that history that hardly ever gets talked about,'" Valenzuela said.

If the idea of a balloon-animal-esque chorizo sculpture elicits a laugh, that's the way Yeh wants it.

"I think it's eye-catching for tourists to come and recognize that this town is a town that was heavily influenced by Chinese culture, which I don't think a lot of people know," said Yeh, who still needs more funds for the sculpture.

What does Lew, the son of a Chinese grocer, think about a chorizo sculpture?

"That's great," Lew said. "I was surprised because I think when you grow up and you've done something all your life here, you don't think it's a big thing. So, you don't promote it. But someone outside thinks, 'This is different. This is neat.'"

____ Terry Tang is a member of The Associated Press' Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ttangAP>

Slavery is on the ballot for voters in 5 US states

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — More than 150 years after slaves were freed in the U.S., voters in five states will soon decide whether to close loopholes that led to the proliferation of a different form of slavery — forced labor by people convicted of certain crimes.

None of the proposals would force immediate changes inside the states' prisons, though they could lead to legal challenges related to how they use prison labor, a lasting imprint of slavery's legacy on the entire United States.

The effort is part of a national push to amend the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that banned enslavement or involuntary servitude except as a form of criminal punishment. That exception has long permitted the exploitation of labor by convicted felons.

"The idea that you could ever finish the sentence 'slavery's okay when ...' has to rip out your soul, and I think it's what makes this a fight that ignores political lines and brings us together, because it feels so clear," said Bianca Tylek, executive director of Worth Rises, a criminal justice advocacy group pushing to remove the amendment's convict labor clause.

Nearly 20 states have constitutions that include language permitting slavery and involuntary servitude as criminal punishments. In 2018, Colorado was the first to remove the language from its founding frameworks by ballot measure, followed by Nebraska and Utah two years later.

This November, versions of the question go before voters in Alabama, Louisiana, Oregon, Tennessee and Vermont.

Sen. Raumesh Akbari, a Democrat from Memphis, was shocked when a fellow lawmaker told her about the slavery exception in the Tennessee Constitution and immediately began working to replace the language.

"When I found out that this exception existed, I thought, 'We have got to fix this and we've got to fix this right away,'" she said. "Our constitution should reflect the values and the beliefs of our state."

Constitutions require lengthy and technically tricky steps before they can be tweaked. Akbari first proposed changes in 2019; the GOP-dominant General Assembly then had to pass the changes by a majority vote in one two-year legislative period and then pass it again with at least two-thirds approval in the next. The amendment could then go on the ballot in the year of the next gubernatorial election.

Akbari also had to work with the state Department of Correction to ensure that inmate labor wouldn't be prohibited under her proposal.

The proposed language going before Tennessean voters more clearly distinguishes between the two: "Slavery and involuntary servitude are forever prohibited. Nothing in this section shall prohibit an inmate from working when the inmate has been duly convicted of a crime."

"We understand that those who are incarcerated cannot be forced to work without pay, but we should not create a situation where they won't be able to work at all," Akbari said.

Similar concerns over the financial impact of prison labor led California's Democratic-led Legislature to reject an amendment eliminating indentured servitude as a possible punishment for crime after Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration predicted it could require the state to pay billions of dollars at minimum wage to prison inmates.

Scrutiny over prison labor has existed for decades, but the 13th Amendment's loophole in particular encouraged former Confederate states after the Civil War to devise new ways to maintain the dynamics of slavery. They used restrictive measures, known as the "Black codes" because they nearly always targeted Black people, to criminalize benign interactions such as talking too loudly or not yielding on the sidewalk. Those targeted would end up in custody for minor actions, effectively enslaving them again.

Fast-forward to today: Many incarcerated workers make pennies on the dollar, which isn't expected to change if the proposals succeed. Inmates who refuse to work may be denied phone calls or visits with

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family, punished with solitary confinement and even be denied parole.

Alabama is asking voters to delete all racist language from its constitution and to remove and replace a section on convict labor that's similar to what Tennessee has had in its constitution.

Vermont often boasts of being the first state in the nation to ban slavery in 1777, but its constitution still allows involuntary servitude in a handful of circumstances. Its proposed change would replace the current exception clause with language saying "slavery and involuntary servitude are forever prohibited in this State."

Oregon's proposed change repeals its exception clause while adding language allowing a court or probation or parole agency to order alternatives to incarceration as part of sentencing.

Louisiana is the only state so far to have its proposed amendment draw organized opposition, over concerns that the replacement language may make matters worse. Even one of its original sponsors has second thoughts — Democratic Rep. Edmond Jordan told The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate last week that he's urging voters to reject it.

The nonprofit Council for a Better Louisiana warned that the wording could technically permit slavery again, as well as continue involuntary servitude.

Louisiana's Constitution now says: "Slavery and involuntary servitude are prohibited, except in the latter case as punishment for a crime." The amendment would change that to: "Slavery and involuntary servitude are prohibited, (but this) does not apply to the otherwise lawful administration of criminal justice."

"This amendment is an example of why it is so important to get the language right when presenting constitutional amendments to voters," the nonprofit group said in a statement urging voters to choose "No" and lawmakers to try again, pointing to Tennessee's ballot language as a possible template.

Supporters of the amendment say such criticisms are part of a campaign to keep exception clauses in place.

"If this doesn't pass, it will be used as a weapon against us," said Max Parthas, state operations director for the Abolish Slavery National Network.

The question stands as a reminder of how slavery continues to bedevil Americans, and Parthas says that's reason enough to vote yes.

"We've never seen a single day in the United States where slavery was not legal," he said. "We want to see what that looks like and I think that's worth it."

Average long-term US mortgage rates rise this week to 6.94%

By MATT OTT AP Business Reporter

WASHINGTON (AP) — Average long-term U.S. mortgage rates inched up this week ahead of another expected rate increase by the Federal Reserve when it meets early next month.

Mortgage buyer Freddie Mac reported Thursday that the average on the key 30-year rate ticked up this week to 6.94% from 6.92% last week. Last year at this time, the rate was 3.09%.

The average rate on 15-year, fixed-rate mortgages, popular among those looking to refinance their homes, jumped to 6.23% from 6.09% last week. Last week it climbed over 6% for the first time since the housing market crash of 2008. One year ago, the 15-year rate was 2.33%.

The Fed's aggressive action has stalled a housing sector that — outside of the onset of the pandemic — has been hot for years.

The National Association of Realtors said Thursday that sales of previously occupied U.S. homes fell in September for the eighth month in a row as house hunters faced sharply higher mortgage rates, bloated home prices and a tight supply of properties on the market.

Sales fell 23.8% from September last year, and are now at the slowest annual pace since September 2012, excluding the steep slowdown in sales that occurred in May 2020 near the start of the pandemic.

Freddie Mac says that for a typical mortgage, borrowers who locked in at the higher end of the rate range during the past year would pay several hundred dollars more than borrowers who signed contracts at the lower end of the range.

Late in September, the Federal Reserve bumped its benchmark borrowing rate by another three-quarters

of a point in an effort to constrain the economy and tame inflation. It was the Fed's fifth increase this year and third consecutive 0.75 percentage point increase. The Fed's next two-day policy meeting opens Nov. 1, with most economists expecting another big three-quarters of a point hike.

Despite the Fed's swift and heavy rate increases, inflation has hardly budged from 40-year highs and the labor market remains tight.

Earlier this month, the government reported that America's employers slowed their hiring in September but still added 263,000 jobs. The unemployment rate fell to 3.5%, matching a half-century low.

Another report from the government last week showed that consumer inflation remained much too high at 8.2%. Combined with the 8.5% inflation at the wholesale level, most economists expect another big increase when the Fed meets in early November.

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

Mortgage rates don't necessarily mirror the Fed's rate increases, but tend to track the yield on the 10-year Treasury note. That's influenced by a variety of factors, including investors' expectations for future inflation and global demand for U.S. Treasuries.

Despite a still-robust job market, the government estimates that the U.S. economy shrank at a 0.6% annual rate in the second quarter that ended in June, the second straight quarterly contraction.

Mysterious breeding habits of aquarium fish vex experts

By VICTORIA MILKO and MARSHALL RITZEL Associated Press

PENYABANGAN, Indonesia (AP) — It took a broken air conditioner for Tom Bowling to figure out — after nearly eight months of failure — how to breed the coveted pink-yellow tropical fish known as blotched anthias.

Bowling, an ornamental fish breeder based in Palau, had kept the fish in cool water, trying to replicate the temperatures the deep-water creatures are usually found in. But when the air conditioner broke the water temperature rose by a few degrees overnight -- with surprising results. "They started spawning — they went crazy, laying eggs everywhere," said Bowling.

Experts around the world tinker over water temperature, futz with lights, and try various mixes of microscopic food particles in hopes of happening upon the particular and peculiar set of conditions that will inspire ornamental fish to breed. Experts hope to steer the aquarium fish trade away from wild-caught fish, which are often caught with poisons that can hurt coral ecosystems.

PROPER AMBIANCE REQUIRED

Most of the millions of glittering fish that dart around saltwater aquariums in the U.S., Europe, China and elsewhere are taken from coral reefs in the Philippines, Indonesia and other tropical countries.

Trappers often stun them using chemicals like cyanide. They are then transferred to middlemen and then flown across the globe, ending up in aquariums in homes, malls, restaurants and medical offices. Experts estimate "large percentages" die on the way.

Part of the problem: only about 4% of saltwater aquarium fish can be bred in captivity, largely because many have elaborate reproductive cycles and delicate early life stages that require sometimes mysterious conditions that scientists and breeders struggle to reproduce.

For decades experts have been working to unlock the secrets of marine fish breeding. Breakthroughs don't come quickly, said Paul Andersen, head of the Coral Reef Aquarium Fisheries Campaign, which works to support sustainable coral reef aquarium fisheries.

"It requires years of investment, research and development, oftentimes to make incremental steps," he said. And then even longer, he said, to bring newly captive-bred species to market.

The Moorish idol, a black-and-yellow striped fish with a mane-like dorsal fin spine, requires lots of space. Squiggle-striped green mandarins prefer to spawn just before the sun sets, requiring very particular lighting cycles to breed in captivity. As Bowling discovered in Palau, blotched anthias require very specific

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temperatures.

"You've got to pay attention to all the parameters that will make a fish happy," said Andersen. "Some species are really gentle, delicate and sensitive to these kinds of things."

FRAGILE EARLY DAYS

After fish spawn, breeders often find themselves facing the most challenging part of the process: the larval period, which is the time just after the fish hatches, before it develops into a juvenile. The flow of water has to be just right, but they are so fragile they have to be protected from filters and even tank walls.

The first feeding is also crucial, said Andrew Rhyne, a marine biology professor at Roger Williams University in Rhode Island. During the first days many larval fish don't have eyes or mouths, instead living off their yolk.

"When they finally do form eyes or mouths it's so important to have created an environment that allows them to get a first bite of zooplankton so they can get a little stronger and continue to grow," said Rhyne. "That's kind of been the magic for all of this."

Often that first bite is a critical part of the ocean food system that harbors its own mysteries: called copepods, they are microscopic crustaceans that provide vital nutrients to larval fish and are key for breeders around the world.

At the University of Florida Tropical Aquaculture Laboratory in Ruskin — where the blue tang "Dory" fish popularized by the movie Finding Nemo was successfully bred for the first time — associate professor Matt DiMaggio and his students have been working to produce copepods. But even the copepods haven't proven to be difficult to raise.

More than 10,000 miles away from the Florida lab, on the tropical northern coast of Bali, Indonesia, renowned fish breeder Wen-Ping Su walks between large cement fish tanks, his own zooplankton recipe churning in a circular tank nearby.

Su said he has 10 different keys to success that he's been developing for nearly two decades. Those keys have enabled him to breed fish that no one else has, including striped regal angelfish and frilly black-bodied, orange-rimmed pinnatus batfish.

VALUABLE SECRETS

But asking Wen-Ping Su if he'll share details, his answer comes quickly, with his hands crossing to form an X in front of his big smile: "No."

It's the same sentiment echoed by Bowling, who pauses when asked about sharing the secrets to his most high-profile successes. "That's the part I really don't want to tell you," he laughs.

Those secrets are their livelihoods. The blotched anthias Bowling bred after the broken air conditioner are listed for \$700 on his company's website. Fish bred by Su also sell for hundreds of dollars online.

But in the past five years there are some organizations — such as Rising Tide Conservation, a non-governmental organization dedicated to developing and promoting aquaculture — that have worked to promote information sharing, said DiMaggio.

"That's helped to accelerate the number of species that we've been able to raise in during that time and the variety of species too," he said, highlighting species such as wrasses, butterflyfish and tangs.

Rhyne's research lab — which includes breeding toothy queen triggerfish and red-striped yasha gobies — has been working to share his research with breeders as well.

But Rhyne and other breeders concede that it's unlikely all aquarium fish will be raised in captivity because some are just too difficult, while others are so abundant in nature.

And breeding a fish doesn't guarantee it will make it to or do well on the market, said Rhyne. Captive bred fish cost more, and experts in the fish industry recognize that it will take time to convince consumers should pay more for them.

"How do we market aquaculture fish the way that we market organic foods, you know, and demand that premium price point?" said Andersen, from the Coral Reef Aquarium Fisheries Campaign. "The marketing is really important."

Bolsonaro struggles to sway Brazil's poor voters with aid

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

ARAÇUAÍ, Brazil (AP) — After Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro boosted welfare payments in August by 50%, many people in the Jequitinhonha Valley, one of the poorest regions of the country, felt they could once again afford some meat, keep electricity running and repair leaky roofs.

Even if it was an obvious election-year gambit, needy Brazilians are grateful for the extra 200 reais (\$38) per month -- but perhaps not enough to switch their political allegiance to the far-right leader in large numbers.

Bolsonaro has struggled to gain support among the poor, but with less than two weeks to go before a runoff vote against former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva — the leftist front-runner — he is betting the bump in welfare will pay off.

In the Jequitinhonha Valley's impoverished city of Aracuai, part of the northern Minas Gerais state that has been a bellwether for presidential races, it is hard to find a single voter who flipped their support to Bolsonaro because of the bigger welfare payments.

Before sunrise at a state-owned bank where people waited to collect their aid, many said they voted for da Silva in the first round of voting on Oct. 2 and planned to do so in the Oct. 30 runoff. Some said they knew someone who planned to switch to Bolsonaro in the runoff or were considering it.

"Some people are that easy when they're in dire straits," said 60-year-old housekeeper Luzia Martins. "But I don't sell my conscience."

In the first round of this year's presidential election, national results matched those of the state. Da Silva — known throughout Brazil as Lula — got 48% of the vote and Bolsonaro received 43%. The remainder was split among other candidates and will be up for grabs in the runoff.

At Bolsonaro's urging, Brazilian lawmakers declared a state of emergency in July, waiving a constitutional cap on spending to allow about \$7.6 billion in additional welfare benefits, plus a subsidy for cooking gas and assistance for truck and taxi drivers.

The extra government aid to nearly a quarter of Brazil's population may not sway many voters to switch sides. But political scientists say the Bolsonaro campaign is hoping it might placate a sizable number so that they abstain from voting. Abstention rates are already higher among poor voters.

In 2003, then-President da Silva brought his entire Cabinet to the Jequitinhonha Valley, saying he wanted his ministers to see extreme poverty up close. The leftist chose the region of 1 million people to launch an anti-hunger program that was incorporated in an even bigger welfare package that lifted tens of millions out of poverty, winning him and his Workers' Party loyalty for years.

But a decade later, Brazil's economy slipped into its deepest recession in a century. Then, after a few years of meager growth, the COVID-19 pandemic caused another severe downturn.

A recovery in 2022 has brought unemployment to its lowest level since 2015, but many people are subsisting on informal, occasional jobs, and soaring inflation has left families struggling to pay for food and other basic needs. Thirty-three million Brazilians were hungry in the six months through April, according to a study by several nonprofit organizations, including Oxfam.

Across Aracuai, bare-brick homes are unfinished; many are abandoned. Some people who go downtown to pick up donated food and clothing can't afford bus fare, so they make the multi-hour trek on foot.

Bolsonaro's Brazil Aid welfare program, built upon da Silva's flagship Family Aid program, has helped people get by. First-round results show it helped Bolsonaro win some votes in the Jequitinhonha Valley, said Carlos Ranulfo, a political scientist at Federal University of Minas Gerais.

In advance of this month's runoff, both Bolsonaro and da Silva have traveled around Minas, and da Silva is expected to visit Friday.

"This is a vastly pro-Lula, pro-Workers' Party stronghold, but Bolsonaro indeed made inroads with his welfare," said Sergio Vasconcelos, a former city councilor and now spokesperson for Aracuai's center-right mayor.

Political scientists say part of Bolsonaro's better-than-expected performance in the region can be traced

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to the fact that some da Silva supporters who are registered in Minas moved elsewhere for better economic opportunities and so didn't cast votes. Others are just disaffected and disconnected altogether.

Cláudio Gonçalves, 64, won't be casting a ballot. Living alone in Jequitinhonha's countryside, he has no phone, doesn't watch television and spends most of his day caring for his pets. At night, he walks an hour to the local bar to sip beer under the starry sky.

"I've heard people say this guy is better, that guy is better ... But I don't really pay attention," Gonçalves said as he gazed into the night. "This valley is as poor as when I was born."

Ranulfo, the political scientist, said he doubts abstention rates and Bolsonaro's traction with some poor voters will be enough for the far-right president to clinch victory.

Like many people in Araçuaí, Aglete Batista, 32, uses her welfare to pay outstanding debts with local grocers. Her family uses a wood stove to cook mostly noodles, rice or beans because they can't afford propane.

A Lula sticker is the sole decoration at their shack that's surrounded by dirt and mud. Adults sit on a couch outside while naked, dust-covered children play not far from a pit latrine.

The larger welfare payments from the Bolsonaro government have helped the family seal their roof so that rain no longer soaks one of their two beds, and to pay a two-month-old electricity bill to keep their rusty refrigerator and fan running to cope with the blazing heat.

"I don't like Bolsonaro, but it is obvious that this handout is key for us to survive," Batista said. "Some people here feel they need to help Bolsonaro. They are too young to remember the help and the handouts we had during the Lula years. I remember."

During a debate on Sunday both candidates said that if they are elected the higher welfare payments, which are scheduled to end in December, will become permanent.

"We will keep that extra expenditure permanently and for life," Bolsonaro said. To which Lula responded: "We will fix this country so we can have some barbecue, have some beer on the weekend."

Bolsonaro's few outspoken supporters in the Jequitinhonha Valley are enthusiastic about the welfare payments. Maria do Carmo, 64, said her vegetable stall business has benefited since residents were given more cash.

"I'm not saying these people should get free money forever; they need to work. But it is a temporary solution that helps us, too," said do Carmo, 64, whose daughter is a pro-Bolsonaro city councilor.

Analysis: The ripples of the war Russia says isn't a war

By TAMER FAKAHANY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — It's not a war, Vladimir Putin said then — and says now. It's a "special military operation." In most every sense of the term, though, Russia's war in Ukraine is precisely that.

And when a nation is at war, even if it claims it is not, the reverberations back home — the place where the conflict was first conceived — can be far-reaching.

Eight months after Russia launched a war in February expecting a lightning victory against neighboring Ukraine, an independent nation from which it already annexed Crimea in 2014, tens of thousands of people have been killed in Ukraine. Millions are displaced from their homes. A brutal winter approaches. Nuclear fears are spiking. And the Kremlin is now using killer drones to degrade Ukraine's power supply, plunging more hundreds of thousands into darkness.

Four more regions of Ukraine have been illegally annexed in the last month, though they are far from fully under Russian control, and Putin declared martial law in them on Wednesday.

Even without calling it a formal war, Putin could be laying groundwork to extend these restrictive measures throughout Russia. A clause in the decree allows measures envisaged by martial law to be imposed in any Russian region "when necessary." What's more, officials in multiple Russian regions rushed to assure the population after Putin's announcement that they're not planning to impose additional measures.

The war that isn't called a war by Moscow has also exacerbated death and tension in Russia among its own citizens. There are huge numbers of dead and wounded Russian soldiers, many ill-equipped and ill-

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commanded, sent to the front to die essentially as cannon fodder.

The Soviet Union lost 10,000 to 15,000 men in Afghanistan out of a much larger population base, says Samantha de Bendern, an associate fellow in the Russia and Eurasia Program at the international affairs think tank Chatham House. And, she told The Associated Press, even the most conservative model suggests 50,000 men dead in Ukraine. That's between three and five times greater than what the Soviet Union lost in Afghanistan in nearly 11 years.

"I can't see how a society can sustain that," de Bendern said.

The undeclared war ripples elsewhere, too.

When a leader starts losing on the battlefield and announces a "partial" mobilization of reservists, hundreds of thousands of Russian families are immediately impacted by a conflict they may or may not have supported.

Putin's decree doesn't outline any specific criteria for who should be mobilized and doesn't spell out how many people should be drafted. The contrast with highly motivated Ukrainians defending their nation could not be more stark. And when thousands of Russian men don't want to be conscripted for an undeclared war, they flee the country by air, sea and land, across borders to wherever will take them.

Antiwar and anti-mobilization protests have been ruthlessly suppressed. Not all have been sympathetic to those trying to leave Russia, and have shut their borders. Leaders of Baltic states wondered aloud: Where were their voices against the war as it raged?

Russia has been mobilizing from various republics and ethnicities who do not necessarily share the Kremlin's war aims and politics, and there have been violent incidents at training or recruiting stations. Last week, a shooting left 11 dead and 15 others wounded in the Belgorod region in southwestern Russia. The two attackers — from a former Soviet nation that Russian authorities didn't identify — fired on other soldiers during target practice and were killed by return fire.

In another incident in Siberia weeks earlier, a local commandant was shot and gravely wounded by a young man whose friend had been called up. The gunman had shouted: "No one will fight. ... We will all go home now."

In contrast to the daily bombardment Russia has rained upon Ukraine, military attacks by Kyiv on Russia itself have been significantly less deadly. The United States has been cautious about supplying Ukraine with any weaponry that could have enough range to strike inside Russia, lest it be drawn into a direct conflict. But border areas in the Belgorod, Kursk and Bryansk regions of Russia have been shelled since the start of the invasion.

Also, when a country is at war, declared or not, it has more planes in the air. That can mean heightened tension among its stretched and untested forces — and deadly crashes.

On Monday, the crash of a Russian warplane into the Sea of Azov Russian port city of Yeysk killed 15, including three who died when they jumped from a nine-story apartment building to escape a massive blaze. The Su-34 bomber came down after one of its engines caught fire during takeoff for a training mission, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

That accident, in which there was no indication of sabotage, marked the 10th reported noncombat crash of a Russian warplane since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine. Military experts note that as the number of Russian military flights increases sharply during the fighting, so do the crashes.

De Bendern, the international affairs analyst, paints a bleaker picture for Russia's future and its troops. "It's not so much the dead who come home who are the problem," she said. "It's the people who are alive who come home that's the problem — the people who are alive and who come home and say, 'Hey we're not fighting Nazis in Ukraine. We're killing innocent women and children.'"

And that's yet another problem of the war that Moscow isn't calling a war: Its painful legacy could last generations.

US heating worries mount amid growing costs, uncertainty

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

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JAY, Maine (AP) — Across the U.S., families are looking to the winter with dread as energy costs soar and fuel supplies tighten.

The Department of Energy is projecting sharp price increases for home heating compared with last winter and some worry whether heating assistance programs will be able to make up the difference for struggling families. The situation is even bleaker in Europe, with Russia's continued curtailment of natural gas pushing prices upward and causing painful shortages.

In Maine, Aaron Raymo saw the writing on the wall and began stocking up on heating oil in 5-gallon increments over the summer as costs crept upward. He filled a container with heating oil as he could afford it, usually on paydays, and used a heating assistance program to top off his 275-gallon oil tank with the arrival of colder weather.

His family is trying to avoid being forced into a difficult decision — choosing between food or heating their home.

"It's a hard one," he said. "What are you going to choose for food, or what amount of fuel oil are you going to choose to stay warm?"

A number of factors are converging to create a bleak situation: Global energy consumption has rebounded from the start of the pandemic, and supply was barely keeping pace before the war in Ukraine further reduced supplies.

The National Energy Assistance Directors Association says energy costs will be the highest in more than a decade this winter.

The Energy Department projects heating bills will jump 28% this winter for those who rely on natural gas, used by nearly half of U.S. households for heat. Heating oil is projected to be 27% higher and electricity 10% higher, the agency said.

That comes against inflation rates that accelerated last month with consumer prices growing 6.6%, the fastest such pace in four decades.

The pain will be especially acute in New England, which is heavily reliant on heating oil to keep homes warm. It's projected to cost more than \$2,300 to heat a typical home with heating oil this winter, the energy department said.

Across the country, some are urging utilities to implement a moratorium on winter shut-offs, and members of Congress already added \$1 billion in heating aid. But there will be fewer federal dollars than last year when pandemic aid flowed.

In Jay, where Raymo lives with his partner, Lucinda Tyler, and 8-year-old son, residents were already bracing for the worst before the local paper mill announced it's going to close, putting more than 200 people out of work. That has the potential to wreak havoc on the town budget, and cause higher property taxes that will further eat into residents' budgets.

Both Raymo and Tyler work full-time jobs. He works as many as 70 or 80 hours a week in an orthopedists' office and she works from home in shareholder services for a financial services company. They don't qualify for much help even though they're scraping by to keep up with repairs, buy gas and put food on the table — and heat their 100-year-old home in a state known for bitter cold weather.

"We work significant hours but it seems that it's not enough," said Tyler, who wept with relief when she learned they qualified for even a modest amount of heating assistance.

Last month, Congress added \$1 billion in funding to Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, bringing the total to at least \$4.8 billion and making additional heating aid available for the start of the winter season.

The third hottest summer on record already strained LIHEAP funding, "so I am glad that we were able to secure these new resources before the cold of winter sets in," said Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy, a Democrat from Vermont.

But that level represents an overall reduction from last year, when federal pandemic relief pushed the total energy assistance package past \$8 billion.

Some are seeking help who've never done so in the past. In Auburn, Maine, 72-year-old Mario Zullo said

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he worked all his life and never asked for help until last year when he received heating assistance last year. The program helped upgrade his heating.

"It came to us at a time when we needed it the most," Zullo said.

Mark Wolfe, executive director of NEADA, said he fears the federally funded program won't be enough because of the high cost of energy and continued instability in energy markets. It could be even worse if the winter is especially cold, he said.

"The crisis is coming," he said. "There's a lot of uncertainty and factors in play that could drive these prices higher."

In Maine, the state has the nation's oldest population and it's the most reliant on heating oil, creating a double whammy.

"People are scared. They're worried. They're frustrated," said Lisa McGee, who coordinates the heating aid program for Community Concepts Inc. in Lewiston, Maine. "There's more anxiety this year."

Today in History: October 21, Edison perfects electric light

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Oct. 21, the 294th day of 2022. There are 71 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 21, 1879, Thomas Edison perfected a workable electric light at his laboratory in Menlo Park, N.J.

On this date:

In 1797, the U.S. Navy frigate Constitution, also known as "Old Ironsides," was christened in Boston's harbor.

In 1805, a British fleet commanded by Adm. Horatio Nelson defeated a French-Spanish fleet in the Battle of Trafalgar; Nelson, however, was killed.

In 1917, legendary jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie was born in Cheraw, South Carolina.

In 1944, during World War II, U.S. troops captured the German city of Aachen (AH'-kuhn).

In 1960, Democrat John F. Kennedy and Republican Richard M. Nixon clashed in their fourth and final presidential debate in New York.

In 1966, 144 people, 116 of them children, were killed when a coal waste landslide engulfed a school and some 20 houses in Aberfan, Wales.

In 1971, President Richard Nixon nominated Lewis F. Powell and William H. Rehnquist to the U.S. Supreme Court. (Both nominees were confirmed.)

In 1976, Saul Bellow won the Nobel Prize for literature, the first American honored since John Steinbeck in 1962.

In 1985, former San Francisco Supervisor Dan White — who'd served five years in prison for killing Mayor George Moscone (mahs-KOH'-nee) and Supervisor Harvey Milk, a gay-rights advocate — was found dead in a garage, a suicide.

In 2001, Washington, D.C., postal worker Thomas L. Morris Jr. died of inhalation anthrax as officials began testing thousands of postal employees.

In 2014, North Korea abruptly freed Jeffrey Fowle, an American, nearly six months after he was arrested for leaving a Bible in a nightclub. Former Washington Post executive editor Ben Bradlee, 93, died in Washington.

In 2015, Vice President Joe Biden announced he would not be a candidate in the 2016 White House campaign, solidifying Hillary Rodham Clinton's status as the Democratic front-runner.

Ten years ago: Former senator and 1972 Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern, 90, died in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. A Wisconsin man opened fire at the Brookfield spa where his wife worked, killing her and two others and wounding four other women before turning the gun on himself. Garth Brooks was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame along with trailblazing singer Connie Smith and keyboard player Hargus "Pig" Robbins.

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Five years ago: The five living former presidents appeared together for the first time since 2013 at a concert in Texas to raise money for victims of devastating hurricanes. The Houston Astros reached the World Series for just the second time in the team's history, beating the New York Yankees 4-0 in Game 7 of the American League Championship Series. (The Astros would beat the Dodgers in seven games in the World Series.)

One year ago: A gun held by actor Alec Baldwin on a movie set in New Mexico killed cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and wounded director Joel Souza. The House voted to hold Steve Bannon, a longtime ally and aide to former President Donald Trump, in contempt of Congress after he defied a subpoena from the committee investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection. President Joe Biden, speaking at a forum hosted by CNN, said the U.S. was committed to defending Taiwan if it were to come under attack. Human remains that were found in a Florida nature preserve were identified as those of Brian Laundrie, who'd been a person of interest in the death of girlfriend Gabby Petito when the couple was on a cross-country road trip.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Joyce Randolph is 98. Rock singer Manfred Mann is 82. Musician Steve Cropper (Booker T. & the MG's) is 81. Singer Elvin Bishop is 80. TV's Judge Judy Sheindlin is 80. Actor Everett McGill is 77. Musician Lee Loughnane (LAHK'-nayn) (Chicago) is 76. Actor Dick Christie is 74. Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is 73. Actor LaTanya Richardson Jackson is 73. Musician Charlotte Caffey (The Go-Go's) is 69. Movie director Catherine Hardwicke is 67. Singer Julian Cope is 65. Rock musician Steve Lukather (Toto) is 65. Actor Ken Watanabe (wah-tah-NAH'-bee) is 63. Actor Melora Walters is 62. Rock singer-musician Nick Oliveri (Mondo Generator) is 51. Christian rock musician Charlie Lowell (Jars of Clay) is 49. Actor Jeremy Miller is 46. Country singer Matthew Ramsey (Old Dominion) is 45. Actor Will Estes is 44. Actor Michael McMillian is 44. Reality TV star Kim Kardashian (kahr-DASH'-ee-uhn) is 42. Actor Matt Dallas is 40. Actor Charlotte Sullivan is 39. Actor Aaron Tveit (tuh-VAYT') is 39. Actor Glenn Powell is 34. Country singer Kane Brown is 29.