

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

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.

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.

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



The most important thing in the world is family and *love*
-John Wooden

3:30 p.m.: 5th grade band introduction.
Emmanuel Lutheran Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Tuesday, Oct. 25

Roast pork, mashed potatoes with gravy, parsley buttered carrots, apple sauce, Molasses cookie, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Breakfast sandwich.
School Lunch: Tacos with toppings.
8:30 a.m.: ASVAB Testing (Grades 11 and 12 (op-

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.

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

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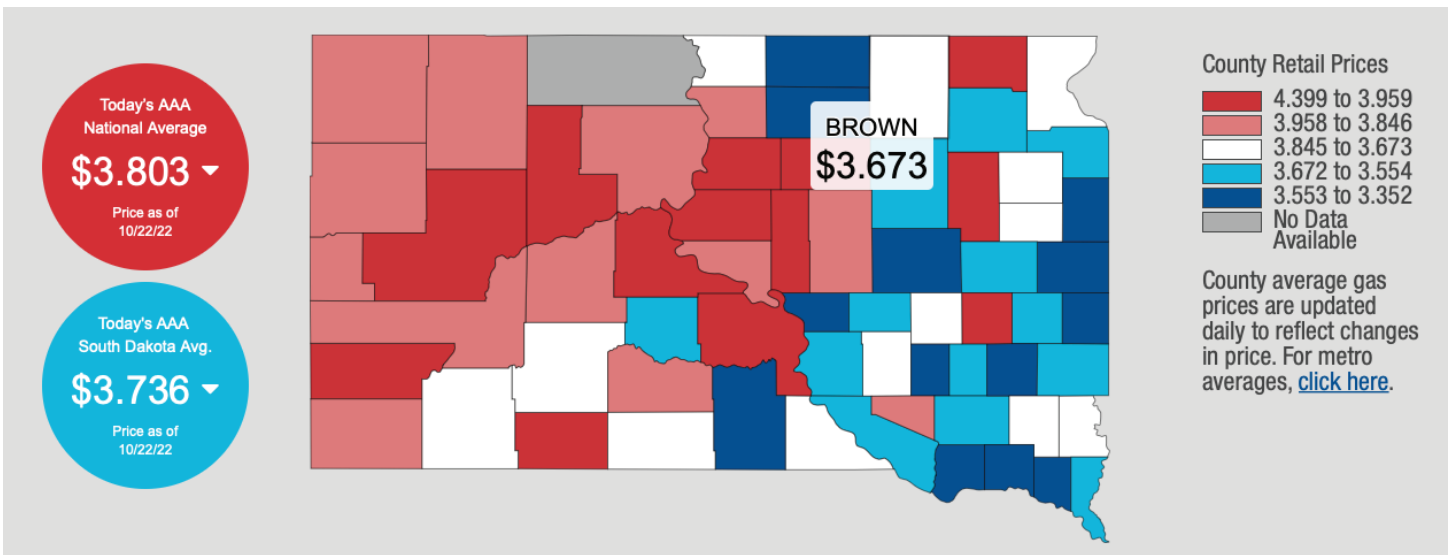
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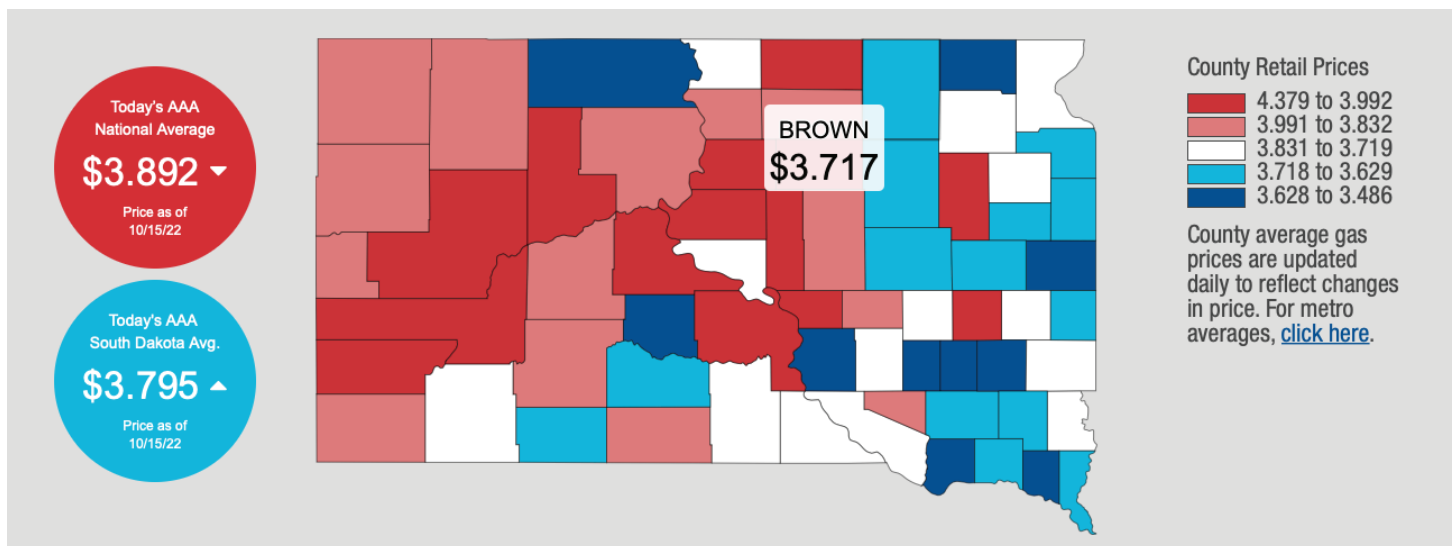
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.736	\$3.929	\$4.396	\$5.241
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.749	\$3.942	\$4.392	\$5.198
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.795	\$3.980	\$4.429	\$5.040
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.693	\$3.852	\$4.299	\$4.734
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.291	\$3.387	\$3.734	\$3.493

This Week



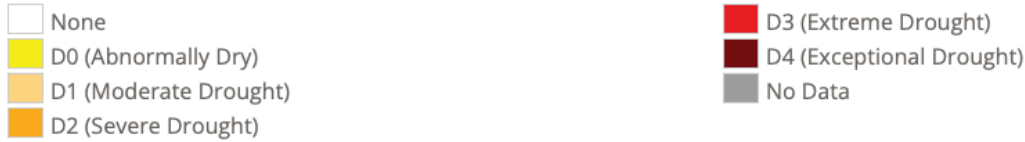
Last Week



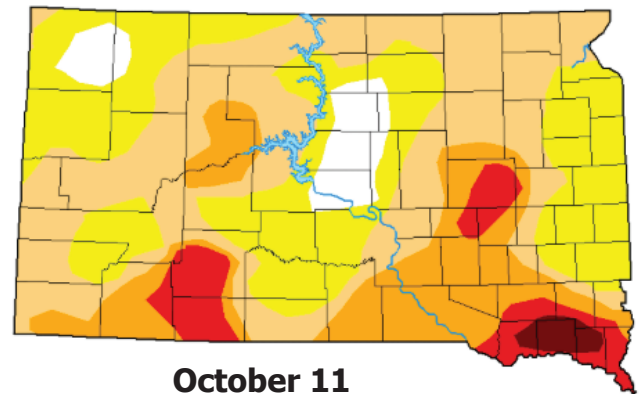
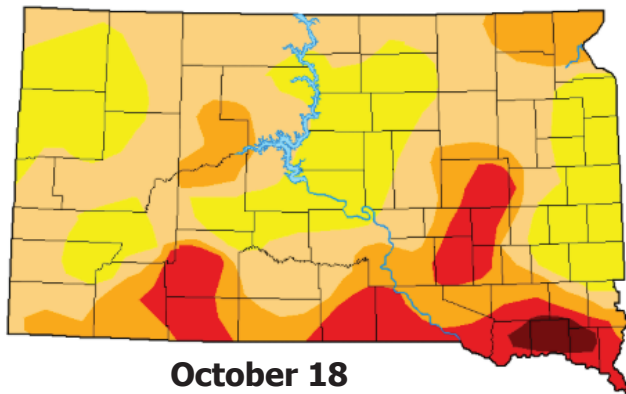
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



Despite the High Plains Region observing near to below-normal average temperatures this week, a combination of antecedent dryness, below-normal precipitation, and high winds resulted predominantly in continued degradation region-wide. The only exception was the southwestern corner of Colorado, where short and long-term drought indicators have shown continued improvement following a robust Southwest Monsoon season and a couple of additional episodes of precipitation, associated with cutoff areas of low pressure in the Southwest in recent weeks.



Smith Takes over Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass

Jeremy Smith is the new owner of Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass. (Photo by Dorene Nelson)

Jeremy Smith, a native of Claremont, SD, became the owner of Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass on September 1, 2022. He is in the process of changing the name to Smith Autobody and has new signage ordered.

"After I graduated from Britton High School, I attended Lake Area Technical College in Watertown," Smith said. "I attended Lake Area to start my career as an auto mechanic but instead I ruined one of my favorite hobbies!"

"I've always enjoyed working on my own vehicles so that is why I chose that as my career," he explained. "I soon found out it wasn't as much fun working on someone else's car nor did I enjoy working on my own that much either."

"After finishing my education at Lake Area, I started working for Curt Merkel and later for Trail Chevrolet," Smith stated. "When I switched to working as Mike Ehresmann's assistant here at Mike-N-Jo's, I did most of the painting."

"Of course, an autobody shop is more than painting the refurbished vehicle," he smiled. "My co-worker Chris Ehresmann and I do collision work, take the cars apart, repair them, and put them back together. I hire any recalibration work that needs to be done before the customer picks up his vehicle."

"Most of the work here is done manually without the aid of very many machines except for air sanders, dent pullers, etc." Smith explained. "It is hard, dirty work, but my customers say that I do a great job!"

"Having the ability to do something well is rewarding, even when the work is physically difficult and the concrete floors are very hard," he admitted. "I love to paint vehicles and am always open to learning new things."

"In addition to the strenuous work that is involved, matching paint colors when repairing a car is also very difficult," Smith stated. "Even though I prefer doing the autobody part, as the new owner, I now also have to do the bookkeeping, office work, and fight with insurance companies too!"

"My wife Missi, a third grade teacher here in Groton Elementary, helps me with the bookwork too," he said. "We have two children, Trinity, a freshman at NSU majoring in psychology and Treyton, a seventh grader who plays baseball and is on the junior varsity trap shooting team. I also coach baseball for the Claremont Honkers."

Kramer interns at Shine Hair



Ava Kramer, daughter of Dale Kramer and Michele Monson, is working as an intern at Shine Hair and Lash Boutique in Aberdeen. "My main job is preparing and setting up all of the items needed for the next client," Kramer explained.

"The clients want a clean environment when they come here for their appointments, and I make sure everything is ready before Luanne starts to work," she stated.

"I start by cleaning and washing the tables before assembling the hair or lash materials, the tweezers, scissors, and other items," Kramer listed. "Probably the most difficult job is cleaning up after hair cuts when the floor can be covered with clippings!"

"I also help the business owner Luanne Cunningham with other cleaning and organizing," she said. "A good shop must have all of the supplies on hand, ready for the customers."

"I chose to do my internship with this business since I wanted first-hand experience in a self-owned business," Kramer explained. "It is interesting to know how one person owns, runs, and maintains her shop."

"For extracurricular activities in Groton, I am a cheerleader for both boys and girls basketball," she stated.

"After high school graduation, I plan to attend Northern State University, majoring in psychology," Kramer said. "I may concentrate on criminal psychology since I would like to eventually seek a law career at the University of South Dakota."

- Dorene Nelson

Gengerke interns at Simon Ins.



Brooke Gengerke, daughter of Collin and Deb Gengerke, is an intern at Simon Insurance. "I've spent the majority of my time doing paper work and filing," Gengerke said.

"I decided to work here because my dad and grandpa are farmers who need protection for their crops," she explained. "I now understand more about the vital work that is done by all farmers."

"The owner of this business Steve Simon has to keep up-to-date on the changing rules and regulations of crop insurance," Gengerke explained. "Mailing out information so he can keep the farmers informed is part of my job here."

"The work I've been doing lately centers on the fall crops and preparing reminders about varying insurance deadlines," she stated. "I file acreage reports and help keep track of hail and rain reports in the area."

"Since I'm a farmer's daughter, I felt it was important to know more about what he does and how a farmer's job changes from season to season," Gengerke added.

"Working in the insurance office is really nice," Gengerke smiled. "My co-workers are friendly and welcoming."

"I participate in two extracurricular activities," she added. "I am a manager for the football team and play basketball."

"After I graduate from high school, I plan to attend SDSU and major in business."

- Dorene Nelson

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Redfield beats Groton Area in four sets

There was a lot of good volleyball action Friday in Groton as the Redfield Pheasants came to town and took home a 3-1 win over the Tigers.

The first set was eight times and there were three leads. The Tigers tied the set at 12 before Redfield rattled off five unanswered points. The Tigers then scored five straight of their own to tie the set at 18, but the Pheasants would pull out a 25-19 win.

The second set was tied four times before Redfield got the upper hand and pulled away with a 25-17 win.

The third set was tied twice in the early goings before Groton Area had the momentum on its side. The Tigers had an eight-point lead, 15-7. Redfield then slowly started to battle back, but the Tigers hung on for the 25-22 win.

Groton Area had the early lead in the fourth set at 4-1. Redfield would tie the set at five and six before getting the lead and pulling away for the 25-14 win.

Aspen Johnson led Groton Area with 10 kills and three blocks while Anna Fjeldheim had 10 kills, Sydney Leicht had five kills and two ace serves, Lydia Meier had three kills, Hollie Forst two kills and a block, Jerica Locke had three ace serves, Elizabeth Flihs had a kill and an ace serve and Laila Roberts had a kill.

Katie Rozell led the Pheasants with 12 kills, three blocks and an ace serve, Grace Fast had 11 kills and an ace serve, Annie Smith and Chloe Zens each had five kills, Camryn Rohlfs had two kill and two ace serves and Ashlyn Clausen had an ace serve.









The Tigers were 66 of 76 in serving with six ace serves while Redfield was 72 of 82 with seven ace serves. In attacks, the Tigers were 164 of 196 with 32 kills. Redfield was 99 of 119 with 34 kills.

Groton Area had 95 digs with Leicht having 32, Fjeldheim 18 and Carly Guthmiller 12. Redfield had 74 digs with Clausen and Zens each having 13.

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

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 25-16 and 25-8. Talli Wright had two kills, Faith Traphagen three kills and five ace serves, Chesney Weber five ace serves and two kills, Jerica Locke three ace serves and a kill, Rylee Dunker three kills and two ace serves, Jaedyn Penning seven kills and three ace serves, Emma Kutter two kills and Carly Gilbert three ace serves. The match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM.

Groton Area won the C match, 25-7 and 25-6. The junior high teams also won their matches.

#	Name	Season			Seed Pts
		W	L	PCT	PTS
1	 Redfield	16	11	.593	42.185
2	 Aberdeen Roncalli	13	9	.591	42.091
3	 Milbank	16	10	.615	41.038
4	 Webster Area	14	11	.560	40.600
5	 Groton Area	10	14	.417	39.833
6	 Sisseton	8	17	.320	38.200
7	 Tiospa Zina	8	15	.348	37.739
8	 Waubay/Summit	3	18	.143	35.143

Regions begin November 1. The seeding on the left hand side is not the final set yet as there are matches still to be played. It does look like Groton Area will be playing Webster Area.

#1 -	
1 Seed	11/1
8 Seed	TBD
#2 -	
4 Seed	11/1
5 Seed	TBD
#3 -	
2 Seed	11/1
7 Seed	TBD
#4 -	
3 Seed	11/1
6 Seed	TBD

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Holly Frost
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Lydia Meier
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Elizabeth Flieds
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Anna Fjeldheim
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Aspen Johnson
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Carly Guthmiller
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Laila Roberts
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Sydney Leicht
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

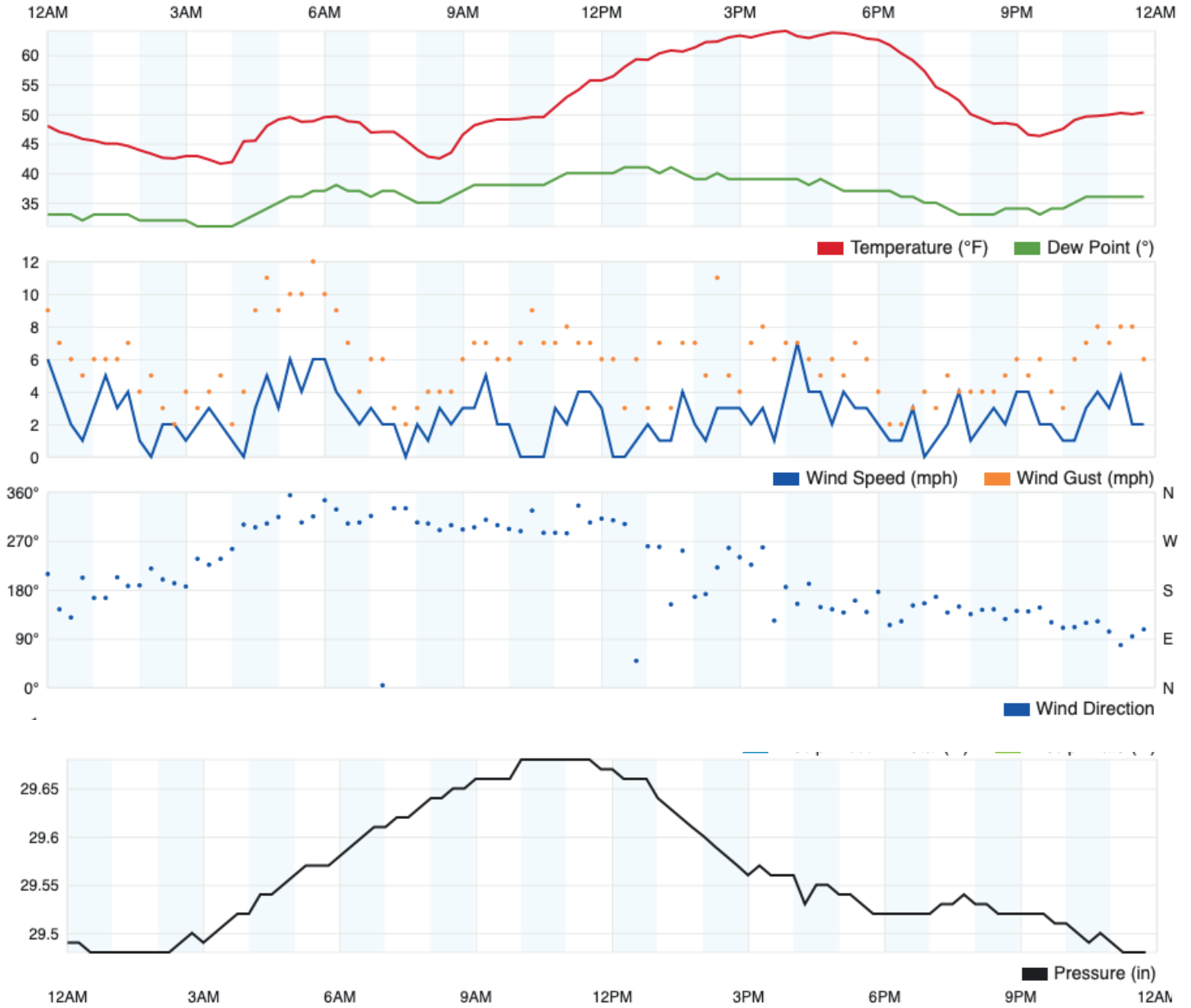


Jerica Locke
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny

High: 70 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 44 °F

Sunday



Sunny then
Mostly Sunny
and Breezy

High: 73 °F

Sunday
Night



Chance
Showers

Low: 39 °F

Monday



Chance
Showers and
Breezy

High: 45 °F



Warm and Dry Conditions Today

October 22, 2022
4:56 AM

Today will feature warm and dry conditions across the area. High temperatures in the 60s and 70s are 10 to 20 degrees above average for this time of year. The warm temps along with dry conditions will cause elevated fire weather concerns this afternoon.



Minimum RH Forecast

	10/22 Sat						Minimum
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	
Aberdeen	70	49	32	28	28	52	28
Britton	54	47	32	29	32	58	29
Eagle Butte	65	54	34	31	31	48	31
Eureka	60	50	35	31	35	61	31
Gettysburg	63	52	35	30	32	52	30
Kennebec	49	44	26	18	20	36	18
McIntosh	68	63	41	35	35	52	35
Milbank	70	54	27	22	25	43	22
Miller	58	42	26	23	24	43	23
Mobridge	60	50	31	28	29	50	28
Murdo	46	39	23	15	15	28	15
Pierre	68	49	32	24	24	41	24
Redfield	65	49	31	24	25	48	24
Sisseton	68	52	31	25	28	47	25
Watertown	63	47	26	23	29	46	23
Webster	60	45	26	26	32	52	26
Wheaton	58	49	28	25	27	46	25

Maximum Temperature Forecast

	10/22 Sat						Maximum
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	
Aberdeen	45	56	68	70	68	53	70
Britton	50	57	66	68	63	49	68
Eagle Butte	46	51	63	66	65	54	66
Eureka	47	54	64	66	62	49	66
Gettysburg	46	53	65	68	66	52	68
Kennebec	46	58	71	78	74	59	78
McIntosh	45	50	60	62	62	52	62
Milbank	43	54	70	74	69	56	74
Miller	46	57	71	74	70	55	74
Mobridge	47	54	65	69	67	53	69
Murdo	49	60	73	79	77	62	79
Pierre	45	56	69	75	73	60	75
Redfield	45	55	68	73	71	53	73
Sisseton	44	54	68	72	68	55	72
Watertown	47	56	68	71	65	54	71
Webster	48	56	67	69	63	51	69
Wheaton	45	57	68	71	67	54	71



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The combination of warm temperatures along with dry conditions will cause elevated fire weather concerns this afternoon. People are urged to exercise extreme care concerning outdoor activities that could cause grass or crop fires.

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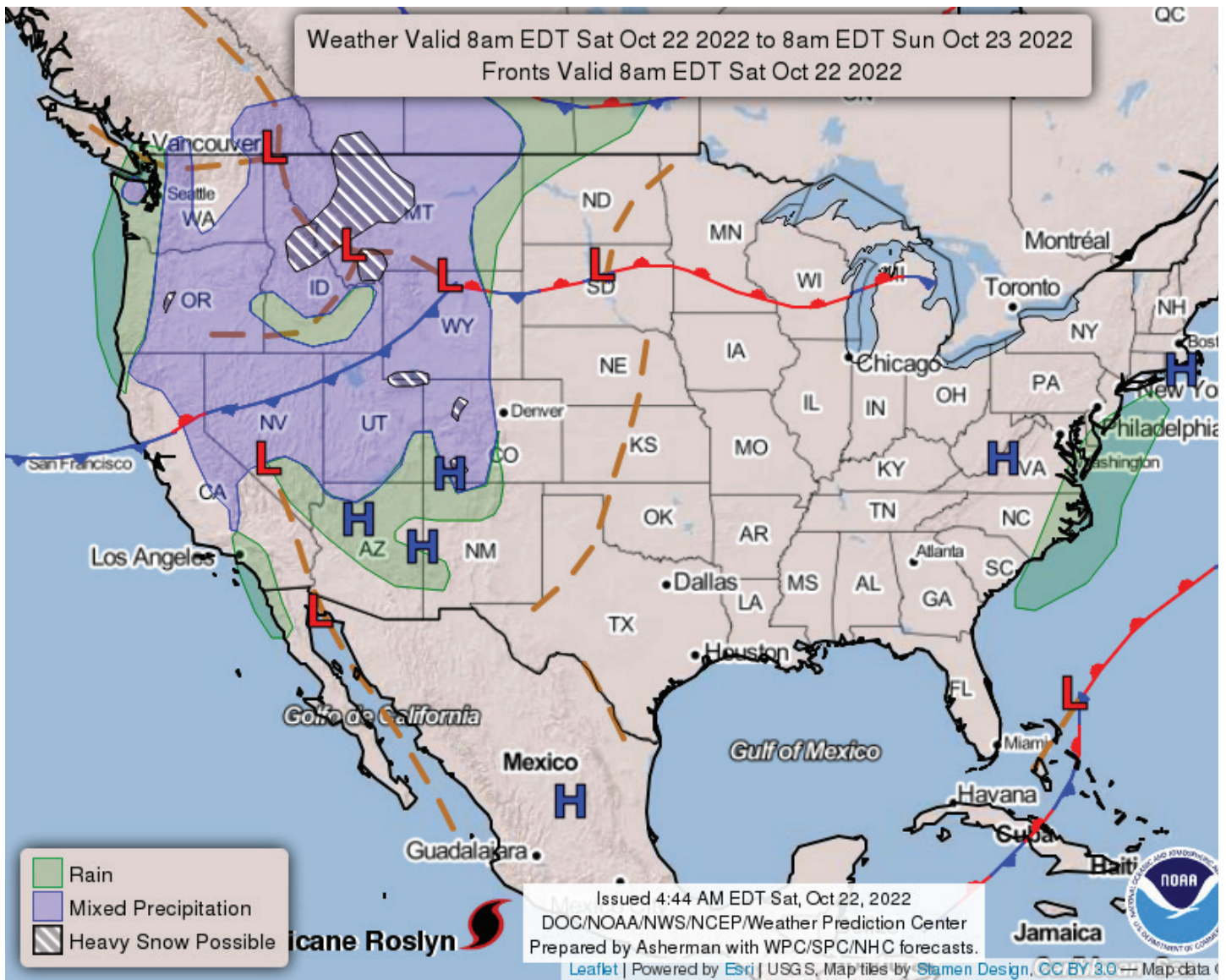
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 65 °F at 3:51 PM
Low Temp: 42 °F at 3:45 AM
Wind: 12 mph at 5:42 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 39 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 82 in 1992
Record Low: 8 in 1895
Average High: 56°F
Average Low: 31°F
Average Precip in Oct.: 1.64
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.45
Average Precip to date: 19.97
Precip Year to Date: 16.50
Sunset Tonight: 6:36:45 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:58:14 AM



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Today in Weather History

October 22, 1992: Record heat occurred on this date. Temperatures rose into the upper 70s to the mid-80s across central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota. The record highs were 79 degrees at Mobridge and Timber Lake, 80 degrees at Sisseton, 82 degrees at Aberdeen, 83 degrees at Wheaton, and 85 degrees at Pierre. Although not a record high, Kennebec rose to 87 degrees on this date in 1992.

1884: A drought which began in August, extended through September and continued until the last week October brought hardship to Northern, Central, and Eastern Alabama. The 22nd was the first day of general showers, and gentle rains fell from the 26th to the 29th.

1965 - The temperature soared to 104 degrees at San Diego, CA. Southern California was in the midst of a late October heat wave that year. Los Angeles had ten consecutive days with afternoon highs reaching 100 degrees. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1985 - A guest on the top floor of a hotel in Seattle, WA, was seriously injured while talking on the phone when lightning struck. Several persons are killed each year when the electrical charge from a lightning bolt travels via telephone wiring. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Yakutat, AK, surpassed their previous all-time yearly precipitation total of 190 inches. Monthly records were set in June with 17 inches, in September with 70 inches, and in October with more than 40 inches. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987) Twenty-two cities in the eastern U.S., most of them in the southeast states, reported record low temperatures for the date. Morning lows of 30 degrees at Athens GA, 28 degrees at Birmingham AL, and 23 degrees at Pinson AL, were the coldest of record for so early in the season. (The National Weather Summary) Showers produced heavy rain in southern California, with amounts ranging up to five inches at Blue Jay. Flash flooding resulted in two deaths, ten injuries, and more than a million dollars damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A "nor'easter" swept across the coast of New England. Winds gusted to 75 mph, and large waves and high tides caused extensive shoreline flooding. A heavy wet snow blanketed much of eastern New York State, with a foot of snow reported in Lewis County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A storm system moving out of the Gulf of Alaska brought rain to the Northern and Central Pacific Coast Region, with snow in some of the mountains of Oregon, and wind gusts to 60 mph along the Oregon coast. Six cities in Florida reported record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee with a reading of 34 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1997: Game 4 of the World Series between the Cleveland Indians and the Florida Marlins was the coldest game in World Series history. The official game-time temperature was 38 degrees at Jacobs Field in Cleveland. Wind chills as low as 18 degrees was reported during the game.

1998: Tropical Depression Thirteen formed on October 22 over the southwestern the Caribbean Sea. By the 24th, this tropical depression became Hurricane Mitch. This hurricane would rapidly intensify over the next two days, reaching Category 5 strength on the 26th. Hurricane Mitch would end up being the second deadliest hurricane in the history of the Atlantic Ocean.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THE HIGHWAY OF LIFE

My Dad worked for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad for nearly fifty years. He was responsible for maintaining over 200 miles of railroad tracks. Part of the tracks ran from the docks of the harbor on Lake Erie to a steel mill that was the largest manufacturer of pipe in America. Although the distance from the harbor to the steel mill was only a few miles, the tracks formed an intricate system of switches and tracks that had to be carefully laid out and spaced for the engines, coal cars, and iron ore cars to pass each other safely.

One evening when he returned from work, he was visibly shaken. He sat quietly and said nothing. All of the family knew that something serious had happened and we knew not to ask questions. When he was ready to talk, he would tell us the story.

Finally, he said, "We had a terrible accident in Elyria today. The men who worked there did not prepare the "bed" properly for the tracks, and they gave way today. The engine fell over on its side and killed the engineer." Someone failed to take the time to lay the foundation and build the bed strong enough for the trains to pass safely. That engineer did not have to die and leave his family. Someone failed in their duty, and it cost the engineer his life.

"The highway of the upright avoids evil, he who guards his way guards his life," wrote Solomon. The word "highway" refers to a raised roadway that is carefully groomed and maintained. We "groom" our highway when we read God's Word, pray, and seek His way.

Prayer: Father, help us to be aware of the foundations we establish. May we be sensitive to the importance of guarding each step by walking the way Your Son did. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The highway of the upright avoids evil, he who guards his way guards his life. Proverbs 16:17



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)
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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White \$48.99/year
- Colored \$79.88/year
- Colored \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly* \$31.95/year

* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

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News from the  Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Baltic def. Lennox, 25-15, 25-21, 19-25, 25-16

Beresford def. Parker, 25-14, 25-17, 25-12

Castlewood def. Oldham-Ramona/Rutland, 25-21, 25-22, 20-25, 25-22

Centerville def. Colome, 25-21, 25-15, 28-26

Clark/Willow Lake def. Britton-Hecla, 15-25, 25-21, 26-24, 25-13

Corsica/Stickney def. Scotland, 25-17, 25-20, 17-25, 25-18

Dakota Valley def. Vermillion, 26-24, 25-13, 25-16

Elk Point-Jefferson def. Madison, 25-19, 26-24, 19-25, 25-23

Faith def. Potter County, 25-21, 30-28, 23-25, 25-17

Florence/Henry def. Webster, 25-18, 25-16, 25-15

Garretson def. Colman-Egan, 25-20, 27-25, 25-14

Great Plains Lutheran def. Wilmot, 25-14, 25-21, 25-23

Hamlin def. Deuel, 25-13, 25-16, 25-10

Leola/Frederick def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-17, 25-12, 25-18

McCook Central/Montrose def. Canistota, 25-10, 25-17, 25-15

Miller def. Ethan, 25-14, 25-17, 25-15

Rapid City Central def. Brookings, 25-18, 19-25, 25-7

Rapid City Central def. Watertown, 25-23, 25-19

Rapid City Christian def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-8, 25-7, 25-12

Redfield def. Groton Area, 25-19, 25-17, 22-25

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket def. Bridgewater-Emery

Sioux Falls Washington def. Sioux Falls O'Gorman, 25-14, 25-23, 25-20

St. Thomas More def. Kadoka Area, 16-25, 27-25, 25-17, 25-15

Tea Area def. Tri-Valley, 25-11, 25-18, 25-18

Timber Lake def. Newell, 25-20, 25-20, 25-20

Warner def. Mobridge-Pollock, 25-17, 25-13, 25-7

Waubay/Summit def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-17, 21-25, 25-20, 25-17

East-West Tournament=

Brandon Valley def. Douglas, 25-17, 25-16

Brandon Valley def. Sturgis Brown, 25-16, 25-16

Brookings def. Douglas, 25-8, 25-15

Brookings def. Sturgis Brown, 25-15, 25-13

Harrisburg def. Rapid City Central, 25-17, 25-12

Harrisburg def. Spearfish, 25-19, 25-12

Rapid City Stevens def. Brandon Valley, 25-21, 25-22

Rapid City Stevens def. Brookings, 25-19, 19-25, 25-7

Rapid City Stevens def. Watertown, 25-23, 25-19

Spearfish def. Yankton, 25-22, 20-25, 25-19

Watertown def. Douglas, 25-23, 22-25, 25-14

Watertown def. Sturgis Brown, 25-9, 25-12

Yankton def. Rapid City Central, 25-21, 22-25, 25-23

New Underwood Triangular=

New Underwood def. Edgemont, 25-23, 25-23, 24-26, 16-25, 15-12

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New Underwood def. Wall, 21-25, 25-19, 25-18, 25-23
Wall def. Edgemont, 15-25, 25-17, 25-22, 26-24

PREP FOOTBALL=

Flandreau Indian 36, Marty Indian 22

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

Charities fight ND tribes' plan for online gambling rights

By JAMES MacPHERSON Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Allowing North Dakota's five American Indian tribes exclusive rights to host internet gambling and sports betting could effectively end charitable gambling in the state, officials representing charities told Gov. Doug Burgum on Friday.

The tribes want the two-term Republican governor to approve the idea under tribal-state agreements known as compacts, the first of which was signed in 1992. The current compacts expire at the end of this year and only Burgum can approve them.

The tribes argue their casinos, which typically are among their biggest employers and help fund social programs on the reservations, have been hurt by the explosion of the charities' Las Vegas-style pull tab machines, which were legalized in 2017. North Dakotans poured almost \$1.75 billion into the machines in fiscal 2022.

Representatives from North Dakota's five tribes and officials from the charitable gambling industry argued their cases during a public hearing attended by about 100 people at the state Capitol.

If approved, gamblers throughout North Dakota using mobile devices could place bets that would be funneled through computer servers on tribal land.

Rhonda Counts, an employee at the Sky Dancer Casino on the Turtle Mountain Reservation, said the casino has had to shutter some of its gambling offerings and cut jobs since e-tabs have come online.

"We are suffering," she told the governor.

She and others said allowing the tribes to host internet gambling on their reservations and take off-reservation bets would help offset losses from e-tabs.

Mike Motschenbacher, executive director of the North Dakota Gaming Alliance, told Burgum that allowing the off-reservation bets "would absolutely devastate our industry."

He said tribes already have the advantage with gamblers due to their casinos. That statement drew a rare and somewhat angry rebuke from Burgum.

"I just have to say that I don't think that data would support your assertion that the tribes have the advantage," Burgum said.

Deb McDaniel, North Dakota's top gambling regulator, said the amount of revenue going to charities this year from all gambling activity is estimated at \$75 million. She said that's more than double that from just two years ago, thanks to increased e-tab wagering.

State tax revenue from charitable gambling also has more than doubled to about \$24 million during that time, data show.

It's unclear what the financial benefits would be to the tribes — or the state — under the proposal, or how it would be regulated and taxed.

Burgum said the terms of the compacts are still being negotiated and should be finished next month.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

34-36-43-45-68, Mega Ball: 22, Megaplier: 2

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(thirty-four, thirty-six, forty-three, forty-five, sixty-eight; Mega Ball: twenty-two; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$45,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 550,000,000

Russian-installed authorities order evacuation of Kherson

By ANDREW MELDRUM and JOANNA KOZLOWSKA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian-installed authorities ordered all residents of the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson to leave “immediately” Saturday ahead of an expected advance by Ukrainian troops waging a counteroffensive to recapture one of the first urban areas Russia took after invading the country.

In a post on the Telegram messaging service, the regional pro-Kremlin administration called on civilians to use boat crossings over a major river to move deeper into Russian-held territory, citing a tense situation on the front and the threat of shelling and alleged “terror attacks” by Kyiv.

Kherson has been in Russian hands since the early days of the invasion in February. The city is the capital of a region of the same name, one of four that Russian President Vladimir Putin illegally annexed last month and then put under Russian martial law.

On Friday, Ukrainian forces bombarded Russian positions across the province, inching closer to a full assault on its capital as they targeted pro-Kremlin forces’ resupply routes across the Dnieper River.

Russian-installed officials were reported desperately trying to turn the city of Kherson — a prime objective for both sides because of its key industries and major river and sea port — into a fortress while attempting to relocate tens of thousands of residents.

The Kremlin poured as many as 2,000 draftees into the surrounding region to replenish losses and strengthen front-line units, according to the Ukrainian army’s general staff.

The Dnieper River figures prominently in the regional battle because it serves critical functions — crossings for supplies, troops and civilians; drinking water for southern Ukraine and the annexed Crimean Peninsula; and power generation from a hydroelectric station. Much of the area, including the power station and a canal feeding water to Crimea, is under Russian control.

Kherson’s Kremlin-backed authorities previously announced plans to evacuate all Russian-appointed officials and as many as 60,000 civilians across the river, in what local leader Volodymyr Saldo said would be an “organized, gradual displacement.”

Another Russian-installed official on Saturday estimated that around 25,000 people from across the region had made their way over the Dnieper. In a Telegram post, Kirill Stremousov claimed that civilians were relocating willingly.

“People are actively moving because, today, the priority is life. We do not drag anyone anywhere,” he said, in an apparent response to Ukrainian and Western concerns about potential forced transfers by Moscow.

Ukrainian officials have urged local residents to resist attempts to relocate them, with one local official alleging that Moscow wanted to take civilians hostage and use them as human shields.

Elsewhere, hundreds of thousands of people in central and western Ukraine woke up on Saturday to power outages and periodic bursts of gunfire, as Ukrainian air defense tried to shoot down drones and incoming missiles.

Russia has intensified its strikes on power stations, water supply systems and other key infrastructure across the country, the latest phase of the war as it nears the eight-month mark.

Ukraine’s air force said in a statement Saturday that Russia had launched “a massive missile attack” targeting “critical infrastructure,” adding that it had shot down 18 out of 33 cruise missiles launched from the air and sea.

Air raid sirens blared across Ukraine twice by early afternoon, sending residents scurrying into shelters.

“Several rockets” targeting the capital were shot down on Saturday morning, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said on the Telegram messaging service.

Similar reports were made by the governors of six western and central provinces, as well as the southern

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Odesa region on the Black Sea.

The presidential office said in its morning statement that five explosive-laden drones were downed in the central Cherkasy region southeast of Kyiv.

Ukraine's top diplomat said on Saturday that the day's attacks were proof that Ukraine needed new Western-reinforced air defense systems "without a minute of delay."

"Air defense saves lives," Dmytro Kuleba wrote on Twitter.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, the deputy head of Ukraine's presidential office, said on Telegram on Saturday that almost 1.4 million households lost power as a result of the strikes. He said some 672,000 homes in the western Khmelnytskyi region were affected, while a further 242,000 suffered outages in the central Cherkasy province.

Most of the western city of Khmelnytskyi, which straddles the Bug river and was home to some 275,000 people before the war, was left with no electricity, shortly after local media reported several loud explosions.

The city council urged local residents to store water, "in case it's also gone within an hour," in a social media post on Saturday.

The mayor of Lutsk, a city of 215,000 in Ukraine's far west, made a similar appeal on Telegram on Saturday. Power in Lutsk had been partially knocked out after Russian missiles slammed into local energy facilities, Ihor Polishchuk said. He later added that a civilian had suffered burns as a shockwave from the strike hit his house, and that one power station had been damaged beyond repair.

The central city of Uman, a key pilgrimage center for Hasidic Jews which counted some 100,000 residents before the war, was also plunged into darkness after a rocket hit a nearby power station, regional authorities said on Telegram.

Ukraine's state energy company responded to the strikes by announcing that rolling blackouts would be imposed in Kyiv and 10 Ukrainian regions in order to stabilize the situation.

In a Facebook post on Saturday, Ukrenergo accused Russia of attacking "energy facilities within the principal networks of the western regions of Ukraine." It claimed that the scale of destruction has been comparable to the fallout from Moscow's first coordinated attack on the Ukrainian energy grid, Oct. 10-12.

Both Ukrenergo and officials in Kyiv have been urging Ukrainians to conserve energy. Earlier this week, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on consumers to curb their power use between 7 a.m. and 11 a.m. daily, and avoid using energy-guzzling appliances such as electric heaters.

Over the past two weeks, Moscow has increased its attacks on key civilian infrastructure across Ukraine. About 40% of the country's electric power system has been severely damaged, officials said. Zelenskyy said earlier in the week that 30% of Ukraine's power stations have been destroyed since Russia launched the first wave of targeted strikes on Oct. 10.

EXPLAINER: Which states have abortion on the ballot?

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

The Supreme Court's June ruling that overturned Roe v. Wade and left the question of abortion rights up to the states has produced ballot questions in a handful of states this fall.

Three states are asking voters some variation of whether they want to establish a right to abortion, while a single state is asking if its constitution should be changed to say there is no such right to abortion or for government funding.

Kansas voters resoundingly rejected a ballot measure that would have permitted lawmakers to tighten abortion laws or outlaw the procedure outright in August — the first such test since the high court's ruling.

Let's take a closer look at what voters will be deciding when voting concludes Nov. 8:

WHAT QUESTIONS ARE ON THE BALLOT AND WHERE?

California, Michigan and Vermont are all considering questions that would amend their state constitutions to establish some form of a right to abortion.

Kentucky is asking voters whether to amend the state constitution to say it doesn't protect the right to an abortion.

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Montana is asking voters whether to require medical care and treatment for infants born alive after an attempted abortion.

WHY THESE QUESTIONS AND WHY NOW?

The ballot measures come in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's ruling in June that the U.S. Constitution doesn't confer a right to abortion and "the authority to regulate abortion must be returned to the people and their elected representatives."

Vermont Gov. Phil Scott suggested in a statement this summer that the question had taken on new urgency since the court's ruling.

"It is more important than ever to make sure the women in our state have the right to make their own decisions about their health, bodies, and their futures," he said.

Kentucky has moved to tighten restrictions to abortion since the GOP took control of the Legislature in 2016, and Montana's Republican-controlled Legislature passed the legislation referring the question to voters before the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling this summer overturning *Roe vs. Wade*.

Kentucky's Supreme Court is hearing arguments in a case over the state's near total abortion ban after the November election, but has kept that prohibition in effect while the case is pending.

Abortion is currently legal in Vermont, with no limit on when during a pregnancy it can be carried out. California and Michigan permit abortions before viability, usually defined as around 24 weeks. Montana restricts abortions after viability as well, but a court has put a hold on a measure that would bar the procedure after 20 weeks pending litigation.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF ABORTION IN THE STATES CURRENTLY?

State legislatures and courts have shifted the status of abortion laws across the United States.

Bans are in place at all states of pregnancy in a dozen states.

In Wisconsin, clinics have stopped providing abortions though there's dispute over whether a ban is in effect.

In Georgia, abortion is banned at the detection of cardiac activity — generally around six weeks and before women often know they're pregnant.

Seven states, including the District of Columbia, don't restrict abortion by gestational range at all.

East Iran city, scene of bloody crackdown, sees new protests

The Associated Press undefined

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A southeastern city in Iran that was the scene of a bloody crackdown last month awoke to new destruction on Saturday, state TV showed, after tensions erupted the day before.

Meanwhile, witnesses said antigovernment protests erupted at several universities in Tehran amid heavy security on Saturday, the latest unrest in the nationwide movement first sparked by the Sept. 16 death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in the custody of the country's morality police.

Although the protests across Iran first focused on the country's mandatory hijab, they have transformed into the greatest challenge to the Islamic Republic since the 2009 Green Movement over disputed elections. Security forces have dispersed gatherings with live ammunition and tear gas, leaving over 200 people dead, according to rights groups.

In Zahedan, a southeastern city with an ethnic Baluch population, protests after Friday prayers left the city battered. Shops gaped open to the street, their windows smashed. Sidewalks were littered with broken glass. ATMs were damaged. Cleaning crews came out, sweeping debris from vandalized stores.

Iran's deputy interior minister for security, Majid Mirahmadi, told the state-run IRNA news agency the unrest in Zahedan had subsided on Saturday.

Violence first broke out in the restive city of Zahedan on Sept. 30 — a day that activists describe as the deadliest since the nationwide protests began. Outrage spread after allegations that a Baluch teenager had been raped by a police officer, fueling deep tensions in the underdeveloped region home to minority Sunni Muslims in the Shiite theocracy.

Rights groups say dozens of people were killed in what residents refer to as "Bloody Friday," as security

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forces opened fire on the crowds. The Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights puts the death toll at more than 90. Iranian authorities have described the Zahedan violence as involving unnamed separatists, without providing details or evidence.

With anger simmering over the deadly crackdown, unrest in the city flared again Friday, according to video footage that purportedly showed crowds gathering after noon prayers in Zahedan chanting "I will kill the one who killed my brother!" The scale of the clashes remained unclear, but Iranian state TV aired footage of the aftermath, blaming 150 "rioters" for the trail of destruction.

IRNA said protesters shouted slogans, hurled stones at motorists and damaged banks and other private property. Authorities said they arrested 57 demonstrators, among the estimated thousands who have landed in jail over the protests. The provincial police commander, Ahmad Taheri, said security forces were searching for more culprits.

More unrest loomed across the country five weeks after the protests first erupted. Security was exceptionally tight on the streets of Tehran on Saturday. Riot police and members of the Basij militia, armed with batons, were out in force near Tehran University and at major intersections in the capital.

Students gathered to chant against the government at universities across the city, according to witnesses who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. Similar demonstrations took place Saturday in the cities of Tabriz, Shiraz, Yazd and Mashhad, according to videos on social media. At Yazd University of Art and Architecture in the central city, footage purportedly showed students chanting around a red-dyed pool to protest the authorities' bloody crackdown.

A teachers' union in Iran also called for a nationwide strike on Sunday and Monday in protest over the deaths and detention of students in the country, according to the association's statement on Telegram.

"We know very well that the military and security forces are invading the sanctity of schools and educational spaces," the association said. "They have taken the lives of a number of students and children in the most cruel way."

Iranian officials have repeatedly blamed the protests on foreign interference, without offering evidence. On Saturday, Iran's deputy judiciary chief, Kazem Gharibabadi, vowed Iran would file a case in Tehran court against the United States government and London-based Farsi language media outlets over their alleged role in fomenting unrest.

"Due to the direct involvement and meddling of America in the recent disturbances, it was decided to open a legal case to assess the damages and issue a verdict," Gharibabadi told judiciary news website Mizan.news.

It's unlikely such a lawsuit, like a raft of previous Iranian cases against the U.S. over years of enmity, would gain traction; there are no American assets to confiscate in the Islamic Republic.

Venezuelans expelled from US decide next steps in Mexico

By FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — In a shelter on Mexico City's east side, Venezuelan mechanic José Cuicas is waiting anxiously for an American friend to answer his request to sponsor him for one of the 24,000 visas the Biden administration says it will give to Venezuelans.

Cuicas was one of some 1,700 Venezuelans that U.S. authorities expelled to Mexico in the past week under a deal between the two nations to deny Venezuelans the right to U.S. asylum and try to keep them from coming to the border. Many of them were then bused to the capital to relieve pressure on Mexico's already saturated border cities.

The new policy came in response to a significant increase in the number of Venezuelans arriving at the border. They are now second only to Mexicans among the nationalities crossing there.

Because Cuicas was expelled Oct. 13, just before the visa plan officially launched this week, he is eligible to apply for a visa under the program. Venezuelans who apply online, find a U.S. sponsor and meet other requirements could then fly directly to the U.S. if issued a visa.

On Friday, U.S. and Mexican officials gave the first update on the program: 7,500 applications were be-

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ing processed and the first 100 Venezuelans had been approved to fly. Biden administration officials said about 150 Venezuelans were crossing the border from Mexico daily, down from about 1,200 before the policy was announced Oct. 12.

"My dream is to be there (the U.S.) to make a new life," said Cuicas, a 31-year-old who left behind his wife and two young children. Returning is not an option, he said. "There is no future, there is no work."

While Cuicas is optimistic about his chances of enrolling in the U.S. program, observers have pointed out that the number of visas offered is minuscule compared to the demand. Just in September, U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported more than 33,000 encounters with Venezuelans at the border.

For Venezuelans already en route to the U.S.-Mexico border, the announcement was a shock. For some like Cuicas there was still hope of legally entering the U.S., but for others it added new uncertainty to what was a months- or even years-long migration.

In Mexico City, groups of Venezuelans circulate between shelters, a bus terminal on the city's north side and offices of Mexico's asylum agency, where about 30 have been sleeping in the street, waiting to start their paperwork.

Darío Arévalo found himself separated from his family for the first time in his life and living in a shelter. For reasons he said he was not given, U.S. authorities in the Texas border city of El Paso allowed six members of his family to enter, but sent him back to Mexico.

The 20-year-old is learning to live alone and thinking about returning to Venezuela, a country struggling with economic and political crises that have driven more than 7 million people out of the country.

"It is the first time I'm apart from them, that I'm alone," he said. He will try to get enough money together to fly back to Venezuela, a place he hasn't lived in for four years, since his family emigrated to Pereira in neighboring Colombia.

Even though Venezuela finally came out of more than four years of hyperinflation last year, it still suffers inflation that is among the highest in the world and its economy continues to be precarious. The poor have little buying power, which has stimulated another wave of migration.

The original exodus began in 2015, as thousands fled the worst political, economic and social crisis that the oil-producing country had seen in more than a century.

Before the announcement of the deal affecting Venezuelans last week, Mexico had been willing to receive only migrants from some Central American countries expelled from the U.S.

The Biden administration is expanding an authority used during the Trump administration to block migrants arriving at the border from requesting asylum, expelling them under a public health order known as Title 42 that was used during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Outside Mexico's asylum agency offices in Mexico City, Jonathan Castellanos, 29, is one of the Venezuelans who have been sleeping on the sidewalk after being expelled from the United States. He said his mother and his three children are back in Venezuela, but he has no intention of returning.

After living for six years in Chile and Colombia, he migrated north and made it to the Texas border in late September. He was expelled last week with 95 other Venezuelans.

Castellanos said Mexican authorities have already given him a humanitarian permit that will allow him to look for a job and a place to live, joining the approximately 140,000 Venezuelans now living in Mexico.

Cuicas, in contrast, said he would not apply for asylum in Mexico because he feared it would hurt his chances of getting the U.S. visa.

Castellanos said he doesn't have time for that. "My dream is to make it to the United States, but I didn't achieve it. ... Life goes on and I can't stop," he said. "I have to move forward and find a way to work, to produce to help my children in Venezuela."

Far-right leader Giorgia Meloni sworn in as Italian premier

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Giorgia Meloni, whose political party with neo-fascist roots secured the most votes in Italy's national election last month, was sworn in Saturday as the country's first far-right premier since the end

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of World War II. She is also the first woman to serve as premier.

Meloni, 45, recited the oath of office before President Sergio Mattarella, who on Friday formally asked her to form a government.

Her Brothers of Italy party, which she co-founded in 2012, will rule in coalition with the right-wing League of Matteo Salvini and the conservative Forza Italia headed by former Premier Silvio Berlusconi, whose parties had lost popularity with voters in recent years.

Meloni signed a pledge to be faithful to Italy's post-war republic, and Mattarella counter-signed it. As head of state, the president serves as guarantor of the Italian Constitution, drafted in the years immediately after the end of World War II and the demise of fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.

The 24 ministers in Meloni's government also were sworn into office in a sumptuous room of the Quirinal Palace.

Meloni made no public comments in her first hours in office. She is expected to lay out her priorities when she pitches for support in Parliament ahead of confidence votes required of new governments next week.

The votes could indicate any cracks in the three-party coalition if any of Berlusconi or Salvini's lawmakers, perhaps disgruntled by not getting ministries they wanted for their parties, don't rally behind her.

Meloni's government replaces one led by Mario Draghi, a former European Central Bank chief who was appointed by Mattarella in 2021 to lead a pandemic national unity coalition. Meloni refused to join that coalition, insisting voters must decide the makeup of their governments.

During her campaign for the Sept. 25 election, Meloni insisted that national interests would prevail over European Union policies should there be conflict.

Salvini's right-wing League party has at times leaned euroskeptic. An admirer of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Salvini has questioned the wisdom of EU sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, arguing that they risk hurting Italian business interests more than Russian ones.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen sounded an upbeat note in a congratulatory tweet noting that Meloni was the first woman to hold the premiership.

"I count on and look forward to constructive cooperation with the new government on the challenges we face together," the EU chief said.

One immediate challenge for Meloni will be ensuring that Italy stays solidly aligned with other major nations in the West in helping Ukraine fight off the invading Russians.

In the days before she became premier, Meloni resorted to an ultimatum to her other main coalition partner, Berlusconi, over his professed sympathy for Putin and dismissive comments about Ukraine's president.

Berlusconi, in remarks to Forza Italia lawmakers, appeared to justify the Russian invasion in February to install what he called a "decent" government in the Ukrainian capital.

After making clear she demands unwavering support for Ukraine, as well as NATO and EU positions on Russia's war - "Italy with us in government will never be the weak link of the West," she said - Meloni tapped as foreign minister a longtime Berlusconi stalwart with solid pro-EU credentials. Antonio Tajani formerly was president of the European Parliament.

In his congratulatory tweet for Meloni, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made no reference to Berlusconi slamming him. "I look forward to continued fruitful cooperation to ensure peace and prosperity in Ukraine, Italy and the world!" Zelenskyy wrote.

U.S. President Joe Biden, in congratulating Meloni, praised Italy as a "vital NATO ally and close partner as our nations together address shared global challenges."

"As leaders in the G-7, I look forward to continuing to advance our support for Ukraine, hold Russia accountable for its aggression, ensure respect for human rights and democratic values, and build sustainable economic growth," Biden said.

With potential wavering in Parliament by her Russian-sympathizing allies, as well as from former Premier Giuseppe Conte, a populist opposition leader, over continued arms supplies to Ukraine, Meloni appointed one of her party co-founders, Guido Crosetto, as defense minister.

While Meloni has pitched herself as crucial to combating leftist ideology, Crosetto sounded a more conciliatory note.

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"Whoever governs represents the entire nation, sheds partisan attire and takes on that of collective responsibility," the new defense minister told reporters.

Europe's political right, eager to dominate on the continent, exulted in Meloni coming to power.

French far-right leader Marine Le Pen, referring to Meloni and Salvini, wrote on Twitter: "Throughout Europe, patriots are coming to power and with them, this Europe of nations."

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban also hailed the birth of the new Italian government as a "big day for the European Right."

In an unusual touch for a country used to male-dominated politics and power, Meloni's companion, a journalist in Berlusconi's media empire, attended Saturday's swearing-in ceremony along with the couple's 6-year-old daughter, Ginevra.

While Meloni didn't campaign openly to be Italy's first female premier, she has said her victory would clearly break through the "glass ceiling" that discourages the progress of women.

Johnson returns to UK amid rumors he will run for leader

LONDON (AP) — The lightning-fast race to replace Liz Truss as British Prime Minister got even wilder Saturday as former leader Boris Johnson jetted back to the U.K. amid speculation he will run to reclaim his former job.

Johnson was ousted by a series of ethics scandals just three months ago, but boarded a flight back to London from his vacation in the Dominican Republic, days after the dramatic resignation of his successor, Liz Truss.

He remains a divisive figure among fellow Conservative lawmakers.

Former Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab, said Saturday morning that it was "difficult to see" how Johnson could become prime minister again when he is "absorbed and distracted" by an ongoing inquiry into alleged parties at Downing Street while the rest of the country was observing COVID-19 lockdown rules, and Johnson's statements to parliament afterward. The new prime minister is supposed to be in place by Oct. 28.

Even so, Johnson has the public backing of several other former Cabinet colleagues, including former Home Secretary Priti Patel, who tweeted Saturday: "Boris has the mandate to deliver our elected manifesto and a proven track record getting the big decisions right."

Johnson needs the backing of 100 lawmakers before 2 p.m. Monday to be on the ballot paper.

Johnson's former Treasury chief, Rishi Sunak, who precipitated Johnson's ouster by resigning in protest at his former boss in July, is another likely runner. Sunak lost to Truss in a vote of Conservative Party grassroots members just over seven weeks ago, but he was strongly supported by his party's lawmakers. The BBC estimates he has already reached the required threshold of support to be formally declared a candidate.

Sunak's warning to Truss during the previous leadership race that aggressive tax cuts would devalue the pound and send interest rates soaring was proved right earlier this month, and he is being pitched as a safe pair of hands who can shore up financial markets. The Truss government was later forced to reverse almost all of the unfunded cuts that it announced.

Conservative lawmaker Helen Grant tweeted that she is backing Sunak again because of his "economic and organizational competence".

House of Commons leader Penny Mordaunt is the only candidate to publicly declare she is running to replace Truss, saying in a tweet Friday that she represents "a fresh start."

Mordaunt, a straight-talking 49-year-old Royal Navy reservist who briefly served as U.K. defense secretary in 2019, is the bookmakers' third favorite. Outside of Conservative circles she is perhaps best known for appearing on the 2014 reality TV diving show "Splash!" in which contestants learn to dive.

Johnson has so far won the support of six Cabinet ministers, including respected Defense Secretary Ben Wallace. But he was lagging behind Sunak in publicly declared support, Saturday, as was Mordaunt.

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Bookmakers make Sunak the most likely next leader.

The leadership uncertainty comes at a time of weak economic growth and as millions struggle with higher borrowing costs and rising prices for groceries, fuel and other basics. A growing wave of strikes by train and postal workers, lawyers and others has revealed mounting discontent as a recession looms.

Truss quit Thursday after a turbulent 45 days, conceding that she could not deliver on her tax-cutting economic package, which she was forced to abandon after it caused turmoil in financial markets.

Major Hurricane Roslyn heads for hit on Mexico's coast

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Hurricane Roslyn grew to Category 3 force on Saturday as it headed for a collision with Mexico's Pacific coast, likely north of the resort of Puerto Vallarta.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center said Roslyn's maximum sustained winds had increased to 120 mph (195 kph) early Saturday, and it was expected to grow still further.

The storm was centered about 200 miles (320 kilometers) south-southwest of Cabo Corrientes — the point of land jutting into the Pacific south of Puerto Vallarta — and moving northwest at 7 mph (11 kph).

The forecast called for Roslyn to begin shifting to a northward movement and then northeast, putting it on path that could take it close to Cabo Corrientes and the Puerto Vallarta region on Saturday night or early Sunday before making landfall in Nayarit state on Sunday morning.

Hurricane Orlene made landfall Oct. 3 a little farther north in roughly the same region, about 45 miles (75 kilometers) southeast of the resort of Mazatlan.

Hurricane-force winds extended out 25 miles (35 kilometers) from Roslyn's core, while tropical storm-force winds extended out to 80 miles (130 kilometers), the U.S. hurricane center said.

Mexico issued a hurricane warning covering a stretch of coast from Playa Perula south of Cabo Corrientes north to El Roblito and for the Islas Marias.

The National Water Commission said rains from Roslyn could cause mudslides and flooding. and the U.S. hurricane center warned of dangerous storm surge along the coast, as well as 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 centimeters) of rain..

Jalisco state Gov. Enrique Alfaro said on Twitter that any school activities in the region would be cancelled Saturday and he urged people to avoid touristic activities at beaches and in mountainous areas over the weekend.

China reaffirms Xi's dominance, removes No. 2 Li Keqiang

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's ruling Communist Party reaffirmed President Xi Jinping's continued dominance in running the nation Saturday, one day ahead of giving him a widely expected third five-year term as leader.

A party congress effectively removed Premier Li Keqiang from senior leadership. Li, the nation's No. 2 official, is a proponent of market-oriented reforms, which are in contrast to Xi's moves to expand state control over the economy.

The weeklong meeting, as it wrapped up Saturday, also wrote Xi's major policy initiatives on the economy and the military into the party's constitution, as well as his push to rebuild and strengthen the party's position by declaring it absolutely central to China's development and future.

Analysts were watching for signs of any weakening of or challenge to Xi's position, but none was apparent. The removal of Li, while not unexpected, signaled Xi's continuing tight hold on power in the world's second-largest economy.

"The congress calls on all party members to acquire a deep understanding of the decisive significance of establishing comrade Xi Jinping's core position on the party Central Committee and in the party as a whole and establishing the guiding role of Xi Jinping Thought," said a resolution on the constitution approved at Saturday's closing session.

"Xi Jinping Thought" refers to his ideology, which was enshrined in the party charter at the previous congress in 2017.

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In brief closing remarks, Xi said the revision to the constitution “sets out clear requirements for upholding and strengthening the party’s overall leadership.”

Li was among four of the seven members of the party’s all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee who were missing from its new 205-member Central Committee, which was formally elected at the closing session.

That means they won’t be reappointed to the Standing Committee in a leadership shuffle that will be unveiled Sunday. Xi is widely expected to retain the top spot, getting a third term as general secretary.

The three others who were dropped were Shanghai party chief Han Zheng, party advisory body head Wang Yang, and Li Zhanshu, a longtime Xi ally and the head of the largely ceremonial legislature.

Li Keqiang will remain as premier for about six more months until a new slate of government ministers is named.

If he had stayed on the Standing Committee, it would have indicated some possible pushback within the leadership against Xi, particularly on economic policy. Li had already been largely sidelined, though, as Xi has taken control of most aspects of government.

The more than 2,300 delegates to the party congress — wearing blue surgical masks under China’s strict “zero-COVID” policy — met in the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing.

Most media, including all foreign journalists, were not allowed into the first part of the meeting when the voting took place.

Former Chinese President Hu Jintao, Xi’s predecessor as party leader, was helped off the stage a little more than two hours into the 3.5-hour meeting without explanation, sparking speculation about his health.

Hu, 79, spoke briefly with Xi, whom he had been sitting next to in the front row, before walking off with an assistant holding him by the arm. Jiang Zemin, 96, who was president before Hu, did not appear at this congress.

Only 11 women were among the 205 people named to the Central Committee, or about 5% of the total. Members of minority groups made up 4%. Those percentages were roughly the same as in the last Central Committee.

At least one committee member, Wang Junzheng, the Communist Party leader in Tibet, has been sanctioned by the U.S. for human rights abuses.

Police were stationed along major roads, with bright-red-clad neighborhood watch workers at regular intervals in between, to keep an eye out for any potential disruptions.

An individual caught authorities by surprise last week by unfurling banners from an overpass in Beijing that called for Xi’s removal and attacked his government’s tough pandemic restrictions.

A report read by Xi at the opening session of the congress a week ago showed a determination to stay on the current path in the face of domestic and international challenges.

Xi has emerged during his first decade in power as one of China’s most powerful leaders in modern times, rivaling Mao Zedong, who founded the communist state in 1949 and led the country for a quarter-century.

A third five-year term as party leader would break an unofficial two-term limit that was instituted to try to prevent the excesses of Mao’s one-person rule, notably the tumultuous 1966-76 Cultural Revolution, under which Xi suffered as a youth.

Xi has put loyalists in key positions and taken personal charge of policy working groups. In contrast, factions within the party discussed ideas internally under Hu and Jiang, his two immediate predecessors, said Ho-fung Hung, a professor of political economy at Johns Hopkins University.

“Right now, you don’t really see a lot of internal party debates about these different policies and there is only one voice there,” he said.

Xi has emphasized the central role of the Communist Party, expanding state control over society as well as the economy. In his remarks, he said the party, which marked its 100th anniversary last year, is still in its prime.

“The Communist Party of China is once again embarking on a new journey on which it will face new tests,” he said.

The congress concluded by playing the communist anthem, "The Internationale."

Murdaugh uses public docs to sow doubt he killed wife, son

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Months after accusing disbarred attorney Alex Murdaugh of killing his wife and son, South Carolina investigators and prosecutors have released few details about the evidence that they believe connect him to the shootings

That's led Murdaugh's lawyers to file a flurry of court documents requesting information from the prosecution, seeking to publicly weaken the case before the January trial has begun.

The defense attorneys argue that there was unknown DNA found under Murdaugh's wife's fingernails. They also have a different suspect, Murdaugh's friend Curtis Eddie Smith, arguing that he failed a lie detector test regarding the killings. Murdaugh has already admitted to asking Smith to arrange Murdaugh's own death to defraud his life insurance company.

Those defense documents even boosted a story from Smith that prosecutors later said had no evidence to back it up — that Paul Murdaugh killed his mother, Maggie, when he caught her with a groundskeeper at the family's Colleton County hunting lodge and the groundskeeper then shot the son.

Alex Murdaugh, 54, has proclaimed his innocence ever since June 2021, when he found the bodies, each shot several times. He has said through his lawyer he "loved them more than anything in the world."

It took more than 13 months for authorities to indict Murdaugh on two counts of murder and his trial is set to begin Jan. 23 after defense attorneys asked to hold it as quickly as possible.

Even after the charges, prosecutors and investigators have released little on how they linked Murdaugh to the deaths or why a man who had no criminal history and was part of a wealthy, well-connected family that dominated the legal community in tiny Hampton County might have wanted to kill his own family members.

In the months since the deaths, Murdaugh's life has crumbled. He was fired from the law firm founded by his family for stealing money and then lost his law license. Prosecutors said he was a drug addict who helped run a money laundering and pain killer ring and stole about \$8 million from settlements for wrongful death or injury he secured for mostly poor clients.

As part of the back and forth about evidence in the upcoming murder trial, prosecutors have divulged slightly more of their case. Notably, there is a cellphone video of Murdaugh, his wife and son near dog kennels around 8:44 p.m. the night they are killed. Cellphone data indicates Murdaugh left at 9:06 p.m. and his frantic 911 call to report he found the bodies near the kennels came at 10:06 p.m.

Murdaugh's attorneys have requested a FBI report analyzing all the cellphone data, saying such records are crucial to their defense.

"There is nothing to indicate ... in the next 20 minutes, he butchers his son and wife, executes both of them in a brutal way," defense attorney Dick Harpootlian said. "He's then on the phone talking to another lawyer from his car in a very convivial way."

The defense also said they needed more complete gunshot residue reports after a few particles were found on Murdaugh. His attorney claim the particles likely landed on his clothing when he picked up a gun to protect himself after finding the bodies.

Authorities have not tested Smith's DNA and the defense said it has no findings from the source of genetic material found on the clothing of the victims.

Murdaugh's defense also wants complete notes from a blood spatter report after a small amount of his wife's blood was found on his shirt. The lawyers said the blood came when Murdaugh "frantically attended his wife's bloody corpse."

Prosecutors insisted they turned over every bit of evidence they have and what's missing is mostly incomplete reports. They said the defense was aware of that when they had a friendly conversation just before the motions were filed.

"This manner of conducting litigation says a lot about the defense's true motives," South Carolina Deputy

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Attorney General Creighton Waters wrote in his response.

It's clear from the pretrial back-and-forth that the prosecution does not have any eyewitnesses or video of how Maggie, 52, and their 22-year-old son, Paul, were killed on June 7, 2021. But prosecutors said people are frequently convicted through scientific evidence and circumstances that put them near the scene or give them a motivation for wrongdoing.

"If every murder case needed a confession and an eyewitness, it would be open season out there," Waters said in court Thursday.

In the months before his murder trial, Murdaugh's lawyers are focusing on Smith, who authorities said was supposed to shoot Murdaugh on the side of a lonely highway in September 2021.

Murdaugh allegedly planned his own killing so his surviving son could collect on a \$10 million life insurance policy. In the end, Smith said the gun fired as he and Murdaugh fought over the weapon, the bullet only grazing Murdaugh's head.

Smith's attorneys say he did not kill Maggie or Paul Murdaugh. They argue Alex Murdaugh's lawyers are looking for anyone else to blame for the killings, so they have seized on a lie detector test where Smith allegedly showed a reaction when asked if he shot the victims or was present when they were killed.

Murdaugh's lawyers said Smith knew the area around the dog kennels where the bodies were found because they were a drug drop. They also point out Smith's DNA had not been tested as of mid-October.

"I'm not saying he did it. I'm just saying it certainly sounds like he could have done it," Harpootlian said.

Prosecutors have pointed out that spike during the test could have been an emotional reaction as a result of Smith feeling guilty about the circumstances leading up to the crime, even if he had no involvement. They said Smith's DNA is being tested now and results of lie detector tests aren't admissible in court by themselves.

Murdaugh's attorneys also used court papers to make public a story Smith said he heard about Maggie Murdaugh's affair directly leading to the killings. It didn't explain how the groundskeeper avoided arrest or detection in the 16 months since.

Prosecutors in court papers called it "salacious scuttlebutt that is offensive to the memory of his victims."

"It's very telling they want to make this case about Eddie Smith," Waters said.

US to face Vietnam, Netherlands at women's soccer World Cup

AUCKLAND, New Zealand (AP) — The defending champion United States will face the Netherlands in the group stage of the women's soccer World Cup next summer, setting up an early repeat of the 2019 World Cup final.

The draw was made at a ceremony in Auckland on Saturday.

Four-time champion the United States was drawn in Group E with Vietnam, the Netherlands and a playoff winner still to be determined in a tournament expanded for the first time to 32 teams drawn into eight groups of four.

The U.S. will play all of its group matches in New Zealand in the tournament to be played at 10 stadiums in Australia and New Zealand in July and August 2023. The match against the Netherlands will be at Wellington on July 27. The U.S. beat the Dutch 2-0 in the 2019 final in France.

Second-ranked Sweden is drawn in Group G with South Africa, Italy and Argentina. Third-ranked Germany is in Group H with Morocco, Colombia and South Korea and European champion England in Group D with Denmark, China and a playoff winner.

The three playoff winners will be determined through inter-continental qualifying matches in Auckland in February.

Under the formula of the draw, the six top-ranked teams couldn't face each other in the group stage. That ensured the U.S. will not face Sweden in the group stage of a major tournament for the first time in 10 years.

The draw was conducted in the same manner as the men's World Cup: teams were divided into four "pots" of eight teams based on FIFA world rankings.

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The U.S. was placed in Pot 1 among the top-six ranked teams — Sweden, Germany, England, France and Spain — along with hosts Australia and New Zealand who qualified automatically and already had been placed into groups. New Zealand took slot 1 in Group A and Australia slot 1 in Group B.

New Zealand will play 1995 champions Norway in the opening match of the tournament at Auckland on July 20 and Australia opens later that day against first-time qualifiers Ireland.

The U.S. will play Vietnam at Auckland on July 22, then the Netherlands on July 27 and finally the playoff winner also at Auckland on Aug. 1.

Pot 2 comprised Canada, the Netherlands, Brazil, Japan, Norway, Italy, China and South Korea. Pot 3 contained Denmark, Switzerland, Ireland, Colombia, Argentina, Vietnam, Costa Rica and Jamaica.

Pot 4 was made up of Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, Morocco, Zambia and the three qualifiers which have still to be determined.

Playoff A will feature Cameroon, Thailand and Portugal, playoff B will involve Senegal, Haiti and Chile and playoff C features Chinese Taipei, Paraguay, Papua New Guinea and Panama. The winners of those playoffs will be placed into the group slots drawn on Saturday.

The rules of the draw allowed two teams from UEFA, the European confederation, to be drawn in the same group but teams from other confederations could not be drawn together.

The draw was conducted in front of an audience of more than 800 including New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Australia sports minister Anika Wells. Two-time World Cup winner Carli Lloyd of the United States, former England striker Ian Wright and Brazil World Cup-winner Gilberto Silva were among stars who assisted in the draw.

The ceremony was rich with the indigenous Maori culture of New Zealand and first nation culture of Australia.

The tournament is being held for the ninth time but for the first time in the southern hemisphere.

Former U.S. defender Alexi Lalas said he “smelled a three-peat” for the Americans, who have won the last two World Cups and will make history if it can win three in a row.

“This World Cup is not only going to be the best, it’s going to be the most competitive in our history,” said Jill Ellis, a two-time World Cup-winning coach with the United States.

Lloyd added: “It’s going to be the biggest and the best.”

Group A: New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Switzerland.

Group B: Australia, Ireland, Nigeria, Canada.

Group C: Spain, Costa Rica, Zambia, Japan.

Group D: England, Group B playoff winner, Denmark, China.

Group E: United States, Vietnam, the Netherlands, Group A playoff winner.

Group F: France, Jamaica, Brazil, Group C playoff winner.

Group G: Sweden, South Africa, Italy, Argentina.

Group H: Germany, Morocco, Colombia, South Korea.

EXPLAINER: Is Meloni a far-right firebrand or moderate?

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — As Giorgia Meloni becomes Italy’s first female premier, the world is watching closely to see whether she will emerge as a firebrand leader of a far-right party with neo-fascist roots or the more moderate right-wing politician who succeeded in capturing 26% of the vote.

Here is a look at some of the issues facing Meloni’s new government, formed of her far-right Brothers of Italy Party, along with the right-wing populist League led by Matteo Salvini and the center-right Forza Italia headed by three-time former premier and media mogul Silvio Berlusconi:

THE ENERGY CRISIS

The squeeze facing Italian industry and households will require urgent attention, as concerns grow that astronomically high bills will force business closures and household rationing.

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Italy's Confindustria business lobby has warned that thousands of businesses are at risk as industrial energy costs rose from 8 billion euros (\$7.87 billion) in 2019 to 100 billion euros this year.

Meloni has backed a European price cap on Russian gas.

Her coalition partner, League leader Matteo Salvini, has pushed for Italy to take on more debt to help households and small- and medium-size business owners that are the backbone of his party's constituency in the wealthy north.

RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

Italy's European Union partners will be watching closely to see whether Meloni's right-wing government will align with a nationalist block, including Hungary and Poland, that has repeatedly attacked EU democratic standards.

Meloni has recently signaled Poland as a key ally for Italy in a speech to a Spanish far-right rally, where she also singled out the success of the far-right in Sweden. Meloni also has hinted at a desire to limit the EU's influence.

"We need a braver Europe when it is time to ... respond to big crises and big international scenarios, and a little more humble when it comes to aspects of our daily lives that could be dealt with much better at a national level," she told the VOX party rally.

On Friday, Meloni chose as foreign minister Antonio Tajani, a pro-EU politician and former president of the European parliament.

ECONOMY AND THE SPECTER OF RECESSION

The spiking price of energy, compounded by inflation on household goods, is raising the specter of recession.

Official third quarter numbers won't be in until Oct. 31, but calculations by parliament's budget office indicates Italy's economy shrank 0.2% from July-September and a further contraction is forecast for the final quarter.

Meloni is tasked with reducing Italy's public debt, currently the second-highest in the eurozone at 150% of GDP, while maintaining budget stability.

Also, the right-wing League aims to do away with a 10-year-old pension reform that raised the retirement age. And it will be up to the new government to complete a planned sale of a majority stake in ITA Airways to a U.S.-led consortium.

Meloni's new finance minister is Giancarlo Giorgetti, one of the most moderate League leaders. He is seen as a likely guarantor of the continuity of the economic strategies of outgoing Premier Mario Draghi, in whose government he served as industry minister.

CIVIL RIGHTS AND MIGRATION

Women and minority groups in Italy, from the LGBTQ community to immigrants, fear their rights will be curtailed under a Meloni government. Days after her election, thousands marched through Rome and Milan in support of access to abortion, which many worry will be eroded under Meloni.

Meloni has said she wants to provide alternatives to abortion while promoting Italy's birth rate, among the lowest in the world.

Meloni has slammed what she calls the "LGBT lobby," and her party's program states it is against gay marriage, gay adoption and surrogate motherhood.

On Friday, she tapped ultra-conservative Catholic Eugenia Maria Roccella as minister for family, birth-rates and equal opportunities. In 2018, Roccella pledged to work against Italy's law legalizing same-sex civil unions.

Meloni is also against granting automatic citizenship to children of immigrants born in Italy, and she has harshly criticized economic migrants, calling for a naval blockade to prevent their boats from leaving northern Africa.

EUROPEAN RECOVERY FUNDS

As the EU country with the hardest-hit economy due to a draconian 2020 pandemic lockdown, Italy has access to some 220 billion euros in recovery funds from Brussels.

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Former Premier Mario Draghi secured some 70 billion euros of that total during his tenure, and the new government must ensure Italy gets the rest of the money.

Italy and its sluggish bureaucracy has traditionally failed to capture a significant amount of EU funds it has been allocated. The recovery funds are mostly aimed at helping accelerate green transition, improving digitalization, and infrastructure projects.

Meloni has raised concerns by saying that she may want to redirect funds in line with her government's priorities, without specifying how these may differ.

WILL THE COALITION HOLD?

A leaked audio tape of Berlusconi bragging about his friendship with Russian President Vladimir Putin has raised questions about Italy's allegiances.

Meloni sought to quash any concerns about Italy's position on the war in Ukraine with a strong statement underlining support for Kyiv and emphasizing there was no room for dissent on that position, even at the cost of not forming a right-wing government.

Still, the 86-year-old Berlusconi's damaging braggadocio creates concern about the longevity of her government. The former premier has shown signs of chafing under Meloni's leadership, calling her "arrogant" in notes photographed from the Senate balconies.

Many analysts believe Salvini, whose party was severely weakened in the last elections, will be the more difficult partner. He already brought down one government, led by former Premier Giuseppe Conte, in a ham-handed power grab that cost him his post as interior minister.

Salvini had lobbied for the interior ministry portfolio under Meloni, but on Friday she gave the job to a longtime ministry official, Matteo Piantedosi.

West Africa floods destroy crops, worsening hunger fears

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Ocheiga Enoch isn't expecting much of a rice harvest from north-central Nigeria after floodwaters submerged his fields and those of so many other farmers this season.

Many in Benue state — known as the country's "food basket" — now find themselves in the unusual position of looking for seedlings in preparation for next year's farming season at a time when they should be harvesting the current crop.

"The kind of suffering we are passing through now is terrible," Enoch said of the floods, now Nigeria's worst in more than a decade after killing more than 600 people and forcing 1.3 million to flee their homes.

Above-average rainfall and devastating flooding have affected 5 million people this year in 19 countries across West and Central Africa, according to a new U.N. World Food Program situation report.

In Chad, the nation's government this week declared a state of emergency after floods affected more than 1 million people there.

"This catastrophe resulting from climate change is one of the most severe the region has known for years, acting as a multiplier of misery for communities already struggling to keep their heads above water," said Chad's interim leader Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno.

The disaster has now worsened the fate of this Central African nation already going through a food crisis, said Mbaindangroa Djekornonde Adelph, an analyst in Chad.

Nigeria has recorded at least 600 deaths while authorities in neighboring Niger authorities say at least 192 people have died there as the result of storms, either from homes collapsing or from drowning in flood waters.

Already the floods have led to "a major increase in cholera cases and other preventable diseases in Nigeria," the International Rescue Committee (IRC) warned in a statement on Friday, calling for more resources to scale up its response.

Experts point to unusual rainfalls and the failure of governments to set up early warning systems to better prepare for climate extremes.

The floods in West Africa are "majorly due to government negligence to environmental related issues

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like climate change over a period of time," said Ibrahim Raji, a climate researcher focusing on the region. The situation "boils down to the government's reluctance to address environmental issues," Raji added.

Long before the floods and Russia's war in Ukraine, West Africa already was facing its worst food crisis in 10 years with more than 27 million hungry people, according to a report released by international aid organizations in April.

Chi Lael, a spokeswoman for the U.N. World Food Program in Nigeria, is concerned about the "worrying harvest season ahead."

Some farmers have lost close to 75% of everything planted this year, said Kabir Ibrahim, national president of the local farmers association.

The damage caused by the floods in Nigeria also extends to livestock in areas like Bayelsa state, where Innocent Aluu said he lost nearly 10,000 fowl in his poultry farm to the floods, most of them dying from waterborne diseases.

"I feel like running away — nobody can think straight," a devastated Aluu said by phone, estimating his losses at 30 million naira (\$68,600).

In neighboring Niger, tens of thousands have also been displaced by the floods in the Maradi and Zinder regions, with many homes and farmlands damaged.

It is a similar tale in Cameroon where flood waters have caused significant damage in the northern region, destroying crops and houses.

"The rainfall this year is exceptional," said Kousoumna Libaa, a climate specialist in Cameroon. "There have been sustained rains since the beginning of the season, since August, September and even until October now, it continues to rain."

Experts fear that the damaged farmlands will further increase food prices at a time when inflation rates are already at record highs — Nigeria and Ghana at 20.7% and 37% respectively.

In Nigeria, WFP said it is providing emergency assistance in the state of Yobe, one of the hardest-hit places. But the agency urgently needs \$129 million to support its operations in Nigeria over the next five months, its spokeswoman said.

Inflation protests across Europe threaten political turmoil

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — In Romania, protesters blew horns and banged drums to voice their dismay over the rising cost of living. People across France took to the streets to demand pay increases that keep pace with inflation. Czech demonstrators rallied against government handling of the energy crisis. British railway staff and German pilots held strikes to push for better pay as prices rise.

Across Europe, soaring inflation is behind a wave of protests and strikes that underscores growing discontent with the spiraling cost of living and threatens to unleash political turmoil. With British Prime Minister Liz Truss forced to resign less than two months into the job after her economic plans sparked chaos in financial markets and further bruised an ailing economy, the risk to political leaders became clearer as people demand action.

Europeans have seen their energy bills and food prices soar because of Russia's war in Ukraine. Despite natural gas prices falling from record summer highs and governments allocating a whopping 576 billion euros (over \$566 billion) in energy relief to households and businesses since September 2021, according to the Bruegel think tank in Brussels, it's not enough for some protesters.

Energy prices have driven inflation in the 19 countries that use the euro currency to a record 9.9%, making it harder for people to buy what they need. Some see little choice but to hit the streets.

"Today, people are obliged to use pressure tactics in order to get an increase" in pay, said Rachid Ouchem, a medic who was among more than 100,000 people that joined protest marches this week in multiple French cities.

The fallout from the war in Ukraine has sharply raised the risk of civil unrest in Europe, according to risk consultancy Verisk Maplecroft. European leaders have strongly supported Ukraine, sending the country

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weapons and pledging or being forced to wean their economies off cheap Russian oil and natural gas, but the transition hasn't been easy and threatens to erode public support.

"There's no quick fix to the energy crisis," said Torbjorn Soltvedt, an analyst at Verisk Maplecroft. "And if anything, inflation looks like it might be worse next year than it has been this year."

That means the link between economic pressure and popular opinion on the war in Ukraine "will really be tested," he said.

In France, where inflation is running at 6.2%, the lowest in the 19 eurozone countries, rail and transport workers, high school teachers and public hospital employees heeded a call Tuesday by an oil workers' union to demand salary increases and protest government intervention in strikes by refinery workers that have caused gasoline shortages.

Days later, thousands of Romanians joined a Bucharest rally to protest the cost of energy, food and other essentials that organizers said were sending millions of workers into poverty.

In the Czech Republic, huge flag-waving crowds in Prague last month demanded the pro-Western coalition government resign, criticizing its support of European Union's sanctions against Russia. They also slammed the government for not doing enough to help households and businesses squeezed by energy costs.

While another protest is scheduled in Prague next week, the actions have not translated to political change so far, with the country's ruling coalition winning a third of the seats in Parliament's upper house during an election this month.

British rail workers, nurses, port workers, lawyers and others have staged a string of strikes in recent months demanding pay raises that match inflation running at a four-decade high of 10.1%.

Trains ground to a halt during the transit actions, while recent strikes by Lufthansa pilots in Germany and other airline and airport workers across Europe seeking higher pay in line with inflation have disrupted flights.

Truss' failed economic stimulus plan, which involved sweeping tax cuts and tens of billions of pounds (dollars) in aid for household and businesses' energy bills without a clear plan to pay for them, illustrates the bind that governments are in.

They "have very little room for maneuver," Soltvedt said.

So far, the saving grace has been a milder than usual October in Europe, which means less demand for gas to heat homes, Soltvedt said.

However, "if we do end up with unexpected disruption to the supply of gas from Europe this winter, then, you know, we'll probably see an even further increase in civil unrest, risk and government instability," he said.

EXPLAINER: What would retreat from Kherson mean for Russia?

By The Associated Press undefined

Ukrainian forces pressing an offensive in the south have zeroed in on Kherson, a provincial capital that has been under Russian control since the early days of the invasion.

The possible fall of the city would deal another humiliation to Moscow after a string of battlefield defeats and other setbacks, further cornering Russian President Vladimir Putin and setting the stage for a potential escalation of the nearly 8-month-old war.

A look at the military and political importance of Kherson:

WHY IS THE CITY SUCH A PRIZE?

Kherson, which had a prewar population of 280,000, is the only regional capital to be captured by Russian forces. The city and surrounding areas fell into Moscow's hands in the opening days of the conflict as Russian troops quickly pushed their attack north from Crimea — the region illegally annexed by the Kremlin in 2014.

Its loss was a major blow to Ukraine because of its location on the Dnieper River, near the mouth of the Black Sea, and its role as a major industrial center. Ukrainian resistance fighters have challenged Russian troops for control of the city ever since, with acts of sabotage and assassinations of Moscow-appointed

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officials.

Kherson also sits at a point where Ukraine can cut off fresh water from the Dnieper to Crimea. Kyiv blocked those vital supplies after the Crimean Peninsula's annexation, and Putin mentioned the need to restore them as one reason behind his decision to invade.

During the summer, Ukrainian troops launched relentless attacks to reclaim parts of the province, also called Kherson and one of four regions that Russia illegally annexed after sham referendums last month. Ukraine has used U.S.-supplied HIMARS rocket launchers to repeatedly hit a key bridge on the Dnieper in Kherson and a large dam upstream also used as a crossing point. The strikes have forced Russia to rely on pontoons and ferries, also targeted by Ukraine.

This disrupts supply links to Kherson and the group of Russian forces on the west bank of the Dnieper and makes them vulnerable to encirclement. The shortages were exacerbated after an Oct. 8 truck bomb blew up part of the strategic Kerch Bridge linking Russia's mainland to Crimea, which has served as a major supply hub for the Russian forces in the south.

WHAT HAS BEEN RUSSIA'S RESPONSE?

Putin blamed the Kerch Bridge attack on Ukraine's military intelligence and responded by ordering a bombardment of energy infrastructure across Ukraine.

He also declared martial law in Kherson and the three other annexed regions in a bid to cement Moscow's grip.

But as Ukrainian forces stubbornly pressed its offensive to the southwest alongside the Dnieper, Russian troops have found it increasingly difficult to stem their advance.

Gen. Sergei Surovikin, the newly appointed Russian commander in Ukraine, appeared to set the stage for a possible withdrawal from Kherson, acknowledging the situation in the region was "quite difficult" for Moscow and noting that the combat situation there was still evolving.

Russian authorities, who initially dismissed talk of evacuating the city, sharply changed course this week, warning that Kherson could come under massive Ukrainian shelling and encouraging residents to leave — but only to Russian-held areas. Officials said 15,000 of an expected 60,000 had been relocated by Thursday. Officials of the Moscow-appointed regional administration also pulled back, along with other civil servants.

Moscow has warned that Ukraine might try to attack the dam at the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant about 50 kilometers (30 miles) upstream and flood broad areas, including the city of Kherson. Ukraine denies that and, in turn, accused Russia of planning to blow it up to cause catastrophic flooding before its retreat.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy alleged the dam already was mined by Russia and urged world leaders to make clear to the Kremlin that blowing it up would "mean exactly the same as the use of weapons of mass destruction."

WHAT WOULD LOSING KHERSON MEAN FOR RUSSIA?

A retreat from Kherson and other areas on the Dnieper's west bank would shatter Russian hopes to press an offensive west to Mykolaiv and Odesa to cut off Ukraine's access to the Black Sea. Such a move would deal a devastating blow to its economy. It would also allow Moscow to build a land corridor to the separatist Transnistria region of Moldova, home to a major Russian military base.

"The loss of Kherson will turn all those southern dreams by the Kremlin into dust," said Ukrainian military analyst Oleh Zhdanov. "Kherson is a key to the entire southern region, which would allow Ukraine to target key supply routes for the Russian forces. Russians will try to retain control of it using all means."

For Ukraine, capturing Kherson would set the stage for reclaiming the Russia-held part of the Zaporizhzhia region and other areas in the south, and eventually pushing back into Crimea.

"Ukraine just needs to wait until Kherson falls into its hands like a ripe apple, because the situation with supplies for the Russian group of forces keeps exacerbating by the day," Zhdanov said.

Ukraine hopes to quickly double the number of U.S.-supplied HIMARS rocket launchers that could strike targets 80 kilometers (50 miles) away with a deadly precision, he said.

Reclaiming control of Kherson would also mean Kyiv could again cut off water to Crimea.

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"After the deoccupation of Kherson, the Russians will again have problems with fresh water in Crimea," Zhdanov added.

He said Putin could up the ante if faced with losing Kherson.

"The Russians would be ready to wipe Kherson off the face of the Earth rather than give it to Ukraine," Zhdanov said.

Destroying the dam to cause massive flooding in the mostly flat area would be one way for Moscow to do that.

"The Russians want to show that a Ukrainian counteroffensive will face a tough response by the Kremlin that declared the region as part of Russia, and it's scary to even think what that response could be," Zhdanov added.

Volodymyr Fesenko, head of the Kyiv-based Penta Center independent think tank, noted that capturing all the Kherson region and other southern areas would be a prize for Russia and their loss would have painful consequences for Putin at home and abroad.

"If the Russians leave Kherson, the Kremlin will face another wave of fierce criticism of the military command and the authorities in general from ultra-patriotic circles," Fesenko said, adding that the fall of the city would further demoralize the armed forces and possibly fuel opposition to the mobilization effort.

He also said China and India, which are carefully watching Russia's action in Ukraine, will see the fall of Kherson as a sign of Kremlin weakness.

"Putin will face reputational losses not only inside the country, but also in the eyes of China, and that could be particularly dangerous for the Kremlin," Fesenko said.

GOP campaigns against the IRS, vowing to slash its funding

By KEVIN FREKING and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — IRS pleas for more funding from Congress — made over the years by one leader after another — finally paid off this summer when Democrats tucked an \$80 billion boost for the agency into their flagship climate and health care law.

Fortified with a new funding stream, the IRS is making plans to clear a massive backlog of unprocessed tax returns, upgrade technology that is decades out of date and, yes, hire more auditors.

But, as GOP candidates across the country are making clear, the battle over IRS funding has only just begun. They are making attacks on a larger IRS a central part of their midterm election pitch to voters, warning that the Democratic legislation will bankroll an army of auditors that will harass middle-class taxpayers rather than help them.

"If you pass it, they will come — after you," says an ad running in an Iowa House race that spoofs a scene in the "Field of Dreams" movie. Instead of baseball players emerging from a field of corn, it's black-suited IRS agents.

The GOP's warnings are generally alarmist and misleading. The agency is not hiring an army of 87,000 "new agents" to target low- and middle-class Americans. Many hires will be used to replace some 50,000 IRS employee retirements in coming years. Others will become customer service representatives answering taxpayer phone calls.

Some of the IRS hires will be added to the ranks of sophisticated auditing teams that spend thousands of hours poring over complicated returns, but the Biden administration has also made clear that small business or households earning \$400,000 per year or less will not see an increase in their chances of being audited.

"The purpose of the funding is to modernize a severely underfunded agency to provide the American people with the customer service they deserve," said Natasha Sarin, Treasury's Counselor for Tax Policy and Implementation.

But campaign politics has a way of becoming policy. With GOP ads against the IRS blanketing campaign airwaves, funding for the agency appears far from safe and could come under threat as soon as the next Congress is sworn in.

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House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, the speaker-in-waiting, has promised that if Republicans take the majority, passage of a bill to repeal the new IRS funding will be their first legislative act.

While such a bill stands little chance of becoming law — President Joe Biden will retain veto power even if the GOP wins control of Congress — Republicans are unlikely to abandon the issue. Their greatest leverage over IRS funding will come when Congress takes up must-pass spending bills to finance government agencies or to avoid a government default on its debt.

Douglas Holtz-Eakin, an economist and president of the American Action Forum, a center-right think tank, doubts that lawmakers will go so far as to force a government shutdown in a demand for less IRS funding.

"If it was important enough to shut the government over it, the government would be shut," Holtz-Eakin said. He noted that lawmakers passed a short-term measure last month to finance the government into December and largely skipped the IRS fight.

Still, some proponents of the additional IRS funding are concerned by the Democratic response to the GOP ads, or to be more precise, the lack thereof. Instead, Democratic groups and candidates are largely focusing their campaign ads on non-economic issues such as abortion rights.

"There's crickets, is exactly the word, a crickets response from Democrats on this issue," said Frank Clemente, executive director of Americans for Tax Fairness, a liberal-leaning advocacy group.

"This is a story about messaging," Clemente said. "... Candidates need to be talking about it. They need to be running ads on it. They need to be telling people how they're going to benefit, not just personally benefit by an improved IRS, but how rich and corporate tax cheats are going to have to pay the taxes that they owe."

The IRS is still working on the details about how it would spend the extra \$80 billion, but it has emphasized that resources would be directed at improving customer service and scrutiny at the high end of the income scale.

Among other things, the IRS says its new funding will be devoted to remedying longstanding customer service issues — like answering the phone. The problem is so pervasive that a bipartisan group of lawmakers wrote to the IRS last November to complain about phone calls being answered only 9% of the time during the 2021 filing season.

The IRS will also be tasked with coming up with how to move forward with an expanded free-file system for taxpayers.

Nina Olson, a former head of the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate, said if funds are cut, taxpayers who have been hoping for better customer service will be most negatively impacted.

"If you don't want the IRS to handle 85% of incoming calls, then cut the funding — if you want the IRS to continue to have technology that comes from the 1960s, by all means, cut its funding," Olson said.

Democrats provided the funding boost to the IRS to help pay for other health and climate priorities, such as helping millions pay their health insurance premiums over the next three years and capping insulin costs at no more than \$35 a month for Medicare beneficiaries.

Of the additional \$80 billion in IRS funding, the legislation allocated \$46 billion for enforcing tax laws. The remainder goes to other activities such as services for taxpayers, operations support and updating business systems.

Additional funding for the agency has been politically controversial since 2013, when the IRS under the Obama administration was found to have used inappropriate criteria to review tea party groups and other organizations applying for tax-exempt status.

In the ensuing years, the IRS was mostly on the losing end of congressional funding fights, even as a subsequent 2017 report found that both conservative and liberal groups were chosen for scrutiny.

In April, IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig told members of the Senate Finance Committee the agency's budget has decreased by more than 15% over the past decade when accounting for inflation and that the number of full-time employees at 79,000 in the last fiscal year was close to 1974 levels.

Vanessa Williamson, a senior fellow at the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center, said if Republicans are successful in cutting funding for the IRS, "it will seriously damage a fundamental function of the government," she said "which is really troubling."

"The reality is that government, through the IRS, plays a critically important role in the lives of Americans every day," she said. "Pretending that role doesn't exist to score political points is destructive."

GOP voters told to hold onto mail ballots until Election Day

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Republican activists who believe the 2020 election was stolen from former President Donald Trump have crafted a plan that, in their telling, will thwart cheating in this year's midterm elections.

The strategy: Vote in person on Election Day or — for voters who receive a mailed ballot — hold onto it and hand it in at a polling place or election office on Nov. 8.

The plan is based on unfounded conspiracy theories that fraudsters will manipulate voting systems to rig results for Democrats once they have seen how many Republican votes have been returned early. There has been no evidence of any such widespread fraud.

If enough voters are dissuaded from casting ballots early, it could lead to long lines on Election Day and would push back processing of those late-arriving mailed ballots. Those ballots likely would not get counted until the next day or later.

"It just slows everything down," said Noah Praetz, the former election clerk in Cook County, Illinois, who now advises local election offices on best practices and security. "In many places, if you don't get mail ballots in hand until Election Day, you are not counting them until after Election Day."

There is no evidence of widespread fraud, cheating or manipulation of voting machines in the 2020 election. Exhaustive reviews in the states disputed by Trump upheld Democrat Joe Biden's win, and legal challenges pursued by the former president and his allies were rejected by numerous judges, including ones appointed by Republicans.

That hasn't stopped conspiracy theories that have spread over the last two years, fueled by Trump, allies including MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell and a crop of Republican candidates seeking office this year. The calls to hold onto ballots until the last minute have grown louder in recent weeks, according to a review of social media accounts by The Associated Press.

"It's a lot easier to catch any fraud," Lindell, who has promoted the last-minute voting strategy on podcasts, told the AP in a recent interview. Lindell, through various events, has sought to prove that voting machines were manipulated to favor Biden in 2020.

Trump also has weighed in, saying at a recent rally that voting on Election Day was best because "it's much harder for them to cheat that way."

The strategy push by conservatives comes after the use of mailed ballots soared during the 2020 election amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The end of pandemic restrictions, Trump's attacks on mailed ballots and new voting restrictions in some Republican-led states has led to a decline in the use of mailed ballots this year, but it still remains a popular option for many voters.

Experts say a last-minute crush of ballots could end up creating delays that can be used by a bad actor to undermine confidence in the election.

"It's an opening for people to begin questioning and stoking mistrust and distrust," said Chris Piper, former commissioner of the Virginia Department of Elections.

Discouraging early voting and encouraging voters to hold onto their mailed ballots until Election Day runs counter to efforts by most campaigns. Republican and Democratic candidates alike typically want to have as many ballots in hand as possible heading into Election Day so they can focus their efforts on getting stragglers to the polls and persuading undecided voters.

The dueling approaches have resulted in a confusing array of messages for Republican voters.

In Georgia, a recent online flier by one grassroots group read: "Voting in person and on Election Day is the only way to overwhelm the system." A conservative group in the state, VoterGA, told its members to "protect" their votes by applying for an absentee ballot early and waiting to deliver it until Election Day.

The chair of the state Republican Party, David Shafer, recently tweeted on the party's official account: "Voting in-person early is just as safe as voting in-person on Election Day!"

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The cross-messaging also is hitting Republican voters in Arizona, which has high-stakes races this year for U.S. Senate, governor and secretary of state. Mail voting has been popular there among voters of both parties for years.

State Sen. Wendy Rogers, a Republican who backed a partisan review of 2020 ballots in Maricopa County, told viewers of One America News Network earlier this month that “we need to vote on the last day, the day of Election Day, so they don’t know how much to cheat by.”

But her party’s top candidates -- who also have embraced false claims about the 2020 election -- have recently tried to counter that strategy.

“If you have a mail-in ballot, I think that you should mail it in. I want people to vote,” Kari Lake, the Republican nominee for governor, told reporters this month. “And vote whatever way you want to vote, but vote.”

Lake has been among those calling for a rollback in mailed ballots and early voting, favoring instead a single day of in-person voting. Blake Masters, the Republican candidate for Senate in Arizona who also has Trump’s support, said it’s fine to vote by mail if that’s what a voter prefers.

“I want to know results on election night,” Masters told reporters earlier this month. “I’m telling people vote in person, if you can. If not, vote early and return via mail. And let’s know the result.”

It’s unclear whether the messaging for Republicans to hold onto their mailed ballots is having an effect. In two politically important states, the return rate for mailed ballots is slower than in previous elections — although it also could mean voters there remain undecided.

In Georgia, about 23% of mailed ballots have been returned with just over two weeks before Election Day compared to about 35% at about the same time in 2020 and almost 37% in 2018. As of Oct. 19 in Wisconsin, 45% of mailed ballots had been returned compared to 56% in at the same point 2020 and 2018.

Some Democrats also have advocated submitting ballots at the last minute — but based more on a political strategy than claims of fraud.

Pam Keith, an attorney, Democratic activist and former congressional candidate in Florida, said she thinks the predictability that Democrats will vote by mail gives Republicans an early hint at turnout levels. That’s why she is advocating for a surge of ballots at the last minute, catching Republicans off guard.

“By voting early, we are showing our hand,” Keith said. “We show what our turnout number is going to be. And if they know that the overwhelming majority of vote-by-mail ballots are in, then they know what they need to do to win.”

Keith’s advice strayed from that of many Democratic candidates, who have encouraged their supporters to vote early and by mail.

Texas state police fire 1st officer over Uvalde response

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Texas Department of Public Safety fired an officer Friday who was at the scene of the Uvalde school massacre and becomes the first member of the state police force to lose their job in the fallout over the hesitant response to the May attack.

The department served Sgt. Juan Maldonado with termination papers, spokeswoman Ericka Miller said. No details were offered about his role at the scene of the May 24 shooting at Robb Elementary School or the specific reason Maldonado was fired.

The firing comes five months after the mass shooting that has put state police under scrutiny over their actions on the school campus as a gunman with an AR-15-style rifle killed 19 children and two teachers.

Maldonado could not be reached for comment Friday night.

Body camera footage and media reports have shown the Department of Public Safety had a larger role at the scene than the department appeared to suggest after the shooting. State troopers were among the first wave of officers to arrive but did not immediately confront the gunman, which experts say goes against standard police procedure during mass shootings.

Instead, more than 70 minutes passed before officers finally stormed inside a fourth-grade classroom

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and killed the gunman, ending one of the deadliest school attacks in U.S. history. Nearly 400 officers in all eventually made their way to the scene, including state police, Uvalde police, school officers and U.S. Border Patrol agents.

Seven Department of Public Safety troopers were put under internal investigation this summer after a damning report by lawmakers revealed that state police has more 90 officers at the scene, more than any other agency.

Steve McCraw, the Department of Public Safety director, has called the law enforcement response an "abject failure" but put most of the blame on former Uvalde school police Chief Pete Arredondo, who was fired in August and can be seen on body cam video searching in futility for a key to the classroom door that may have been unlocked the entire time.

But the Uvalde mayor, parents of the victims and some lawmakers have accused the Department of Public Safety of trying to minimize its own failures.

State Sen. Roland Gutierrez, a Democrat whose district includes Uvalde, reacted to news of the firing by saying that accountability in the department should not end there.

"Ninety more to go, plus the DPS director," he said.

Gutierrez has sued the department in an effort to obtain documents surrounding the response to the shooting. Several media outlets, including The Associated Press, have also asked courts to compel authorities and Uvalde officials to release records under public information laws.

Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, who is up for reelection in November, has stood by McCraw and said during a September debate there needed to be "accountability for law enforcement at every level." A spokesperson for Abbott did not return messages seeking comment about the firing.

One of the state troopers put under internal investigation was Crimson Elizondo, who resigned and later was hired by Uvalde schools to work as a campus police officer. She was fired less than 24 hours after outraged parents in Uvalde found out about her hiring.

Husband of ex-Japanese princess passes New York bar exam

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The man who married a former Japanese princess has passed the New York bar exam, defying detractors back home who had criticized their romance.

Kei Komuro's name is on the list of those who passed the July New York state bar exam, which was posted Friday on The New York State Board of Law Examiners web site.

Komuro's engagement to former Princess Mako, announced in 2017, prompted a widespread public outcry, mostly on social media and in the tabloids. One reason was a financial problem of Komuro's mother, although that's since been resolved.

Komuro, 31, a graduate of Fordham University law school, has a job at a New York law firm, and has been living in New York with Mako, a museum curator. She gave up her royal status last year when she married Komuro. All Japanese princesses relinquish their royal status upon marriage, as there is only male succession in the Japanese imperial family.

Speculation has now moved to how much money Komuro might be earning as a lawyer, instead of when he might be getting fired.

Reports said Komuro's shaky standing will improve with the imperial family, the couple may move from Hell's Kitchen in Manhattan to a ritzier neighborhood, and Komuro's mom may move in with them.

Japan appears modern on the surface, but values about family and women are rooted in feudal practices. Many Japanese are also often jealous of people who study abroad or get jobs with international companies.

Local media say the couple are like Romeo and Juliet, and have used the Japanese equivalent of the phrase: "the third time is the charm." Komuro failed the bar in his two previous attempts.

It's common for people to pass after multiple attempts. Of the 9,609 candidates for the latest exam, the passing rate was 66% at 6,350 people, including Komuro.

The couple did without any fancy wedding, registered their marriage and took off to New York in November last year. They met while attending Tokyo's International Christian University a decade ago.

The Japanese tabloids had stalked the couple in New York, taking snapshots and commenting snidely about Mako's casual clothes, which struck a contrast with the usual staid formal wear of Japan's imperial family.

Other princesses have married commoners and left the palace. But the reaction to Komuro and Mako was especially frenzied, much of it focusing on whether he would be able to support his wife.

Mako, who turns 31 Sunday, is the niece of Emperor Naruhito, who also married a commoner, Masako. Masako, a Harvard graduate, suffered depression in the cloistered imperial life. Former Emperor Akihito, Naruhito's father, was the first member of the imperial family to marry a commoner.

The family holds no political power but serves as a symbol of the nation, attending ceremonial events and visiting disaster zones.

When Komuro returned from the U.S. last year to marry Mako, they were reunited for the first time in three years.

Mako said then: "He is someone I cannot do without."

Komuro echoed her devotion: "I want to live the only life I have with the person I love."

Court temporarily blocks Biden's student loan forgiveness

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — A federal appeals court late Friday issued an administrative stay temporarily blocking President Joe Biden's plan to cancel billions of dollars in federal student loans, throwing the program into limbo just days after people began applying for loan forgiveness.

The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals issued the stay while it considers a motion from six Republican-led states to block the program. The stay ordered the Biden administration not to act on the program while it considers the appeal.

It's unclear what the decision means for the 22 million borrowers who already applied for the relief. The Biden administration had promised not to clear any debt before Oct. 23 as it battled the legal challenges, but the soonest it was expected to begin erasing debt was mid-November.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre encouraged borrowers to continue to apply for the relief, saying the court's temporary order did not prevent applications or the review of applications.

"We will continue to move full speed ahead in our preparations in compliance with this order," she said in a statement. "And, the Administration will continue to fight Republican officials suing to block our efforts to provide relief to working families."

The crucial question now is whether the issue will be resolved before Jan. 1, when payments on federal student loans are expected to restart after being paused during the pandemic. Millions of Americans were expected to get their debt canceled entirely under Biden's plan, but they now face uncertainty about whether they will need to start making payments in January.

Biden has said his previous extension of the payment pause would be the final one, but economists worry that many Americans may not have regained financial footing after the upheaval of the pandemic. If borrowers who were expecting debt cancellation are asked to make payments in January, there's fear that many could fall behind on the bills and default on their loans.

A notice of appeal to the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was filed late Thursday, hours after U.S. District Judge Henry Autrey in St. Louis ruled that since the states of Nebraska, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas and South Carolina failed to establish standing, "the Court lacks jurisdiction to hear this case."

Separately, the six states also asked the district court for an injunction prohibiting the administration from implementing the debt cancellation plan until the appeals process plays out.

Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson, one of the six attorneys general leading the effort to block the debt relief program, praised the court's decision.

"We are pleased the temporary stay has been granted," Peterson said in a statement. "It's very important that the legal issues involving presidential power be analyzed by the court before transferring over \$400 billion in debt to American taxpayers."

Speaking before Friday's ruling at Delaware State University, a historically Black university where the

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majority of students receive federal Pell Grants, Biden touted the number of applicants who have applied for the loan relief in the week since his administration made its online application available.

The plan, announced in August, 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.

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 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.

The announcement immediately became a major political issue ahead of the November midterm elections.

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.

Many Democratic lawmakers facing tough reelection contests have distanced themselves from the plan.

Biden on Friday blasted Republicans who have criticized his relief program, saying "their outrage is wrong and it's hypocritical." He noted that some Republican officials had debt and pandemic relief loans forgiven.

The six states sued in September. Lawyers for the administration countered that 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 HEROES Act was enacted after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks 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 at the Oct. 12 hearing that fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic is still rippling. He said student loan defaults have skyrocketed over the past 2 1/2 years.

Other lawsuits also have sought to stop the program. 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.

Cardi B absolved in racy mixtape artwork lawsuit

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

SANTA ANA, Calif. (AP) — A jury sided with Cardi B on Friday in a copyright infringement case involving a man who claimed the Grammy-winning rapper misused his back tattoos for her sexually suggestive 2016 mixtape cover art.

The federal jury in Southern California ruled Kevin Michael Brophy did not prove Cardi B misappropriated his likeness. After the jury forewoman read the verdict, the rapper hugged her attorneys and appeared joyful.

Cardi B thanked the jurors, admitting she was "pretty nervous" before hearing the verdict.

"I wasn't sure if I was going to lose or not," she said after leaving the courthouse. She was swarmed

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by several reporters, photographers and more than 40 high schoolers who chanted her name. One fan held up a sign asking if she could take him to his homecoming dance, to which she replied "Yes, I'll see what I can do."

"I told myself if I win, I was going to cuss Mr. Brophy out. But I don't have it in my heart to cuss him out," she said. In the courtroom, Cardi B had a brief, cordial conversation with Brophy and shook his hand.

Brophy filed the lawsuit a year after the rapper's 2016 mixtape was released. He called himself a "family man with minor children" and said he was caused "distress and humiliation" by the artwork – which showed a tattooed man from behind with his head between the rapper's legs inside a limousine. The man's face cannot be seen.

"At the end of the day, I do respect you as an artist," Brophy said to Cardi B.

Brophy's lawyer, A. Barry Cappello, said photo-editing software was used to put the back tattoo, which has appeared in tattoo magazines, onto the male model featured on the mixtape cover.

But Cardi B, whose real name is Belcalis Almanzar, disputed the allegations during her testimony earlier in the week — and had such an intense exchange with Cappello that the trial was briefly halted by U.S. District Judge Cormac Carney.

Cardi B said she felt Brophy hadn't suffered any consequences as a result of the artwork. She said Brophy has harassed her legally for five years — and even at one point said she missed the "first step" of her youngest child because of the trial.

Cardi B delivered pointed answers to several of Cappello's questions. The lawyer once asked her to calm down, but she sharply pushed back at his contention that she knew about the altered image.

Their heated exchange prompted the judge to send jurors out of the Santa Ana, California, courtroom and told both sides that he was considering a mistrial. After a short break, he called the arguing "unprofessional" and "not productive" but allowed questioning to resume, then placed new restrictions for both sides.

Cardi B said an artist used only a "small portion" of the tattoos without her knowledge. She had previously said the cover art — created by Timm Gooden — was transformative fair use of Brophy's likeness.

Cappello said Gooden was paid \$50 to create a design, but was told to find another tattoo after he turned in an initial draft. He said Gooden googled "back tattoos" before he found an image and pasted it on the cover.

Cardi B's lawyer, Peter Anderson, said Brophy and the mixtape image are unrelated, noting the model did not have neck tattoos — which Brophy does.

"It's not your client's back," Cardi B said about the image, which featured a Black model. Brophy is white. The rapper pointed out that she posted a photo of the "famous Canadian model" on her social media.

"It's not him," she continued. "To me, it doesn't look like his back at all. The tattoo was modified, which is protected by the First Amendment."

Cardi B said the image hasn't hindered Brophy's employment with a popular surf and skate apparel brand or his ability to travel the world for opportunities.

"He hasn't gotten fired from his job," said the rapper, who implied that the mixtape was not a lucrative one for her. "He hasn't gotten a divorce. How has he suffered? He's still in a surf shop at this job. Please tell me how he's suffered."

Last month, Cardi B pleaded guilty to a criminal case stemming from a pair of brawls at New York City strip clubs that required her to perform 15 days of community service. Earlier this year, the rapper was awarded \$1.25 million in a defamation lawsuit against a celebrity news blogger who posted videos falsely stating she used cocaine, had contracted herpes and engaged in prostitution.

'Change has come': Mississippi unveils Emmett Till statue

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS Associated Press

GREENWOOD, Miss. (AP) — Hundreds of people applauded — and some wiped away tears — as a Mississippi community unveiled a larger-than-life statue of Emmett Till on Friday, not far from where white men kidnapped and killed the Black teenager over accusations he had flirted with a white woman in a

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country store.

"Change has come, and it will continue to happen," Madison Harper, a senior at Leflore County High School, told a racially diverse audience at the statue's dedication. "Decades ago, our parents and grandparents could not envision that a moment like today would transpire."

The 1955 lynching became a catalyst for the civil rights movement. Till's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, 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 was pulled from the Tallahatchie River in Mississippi.

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

The rhythm and blues song, "Wake Up, Everybody" played as workers pulled a tarp off the figure. Dozens of people surged forward, shooting photos and video on cellphones.

Anna-Maria Webster of Rochester, New York, had tears running down her face.

"It's beautiful to be here," said Webster, attending the ceremony on a sunny afternoon during a visit with Mississippi relatives. Speaking of Till's mother she said: "Just to imagine the torment she went through — all over a lie."

Mississippi has the highest percentage of Black residents of any state, now about 38%. Democratic U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson, whose district encompasses the Delta, noted that Mississippi had no Black elected officials when Till was killed. He said Till's death helped spur change.

"But you, know, change has a way of becoming slower and slower," said Thompson, the only Black member of Mississippi's current congressional delegation. "What we have to do in dedicating this monument to Emmett Till is recommit ourselves to the spirit of making a difference in our community."

The statue 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 Money.

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

The Rev. Wheeler Parker Jr., the last living witness to his cousin's kidnapping, wasn't able to travel from Illinois for Friday's dedication. But he told The Associated Press on Wednesday: "We just thank God someone is keeping his name out there."

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

"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 a Utah artist, Matt Glenn, was commissioned to create the statue.

Jordan said he hopes it will draw tourists to learn more about the area's history. "Hopefully, it will bring all of us together," he said.

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 took a short trip with other young people 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 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 killed Till.

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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 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 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 relocated in 2020 from 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 in Ruleville.

A historical marker outside Bryant’s Grocery has been knocked down and vandalized. Another marker near 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.

Jordan won applause when he said Friday: “If some idiot tears it down, we’re going to put it right back up.”

West and Russia clash over probe of drones in Ukraine

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United States and key Western allies accused Russia on Friday of using Iranian drones to attack civilians and power plants in Ukraine in violation of a 2015 U.N. Security Council resolution and international humanitarian law.

Russia countered by accusing Ukraine of attacking infrastructure and civilians for eight years in the eastern separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, which Russian President Vladimir Putin illegally annexed earlier this year.

The U.S., France, Germany and Britain supported Ukraine’s call for U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to send a team to investigate the origin of the drones.

Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said the drones are Russian and warned that an investigation would violate the U.N. Charter and seriously affect relations between Russia and the United Nations.

U.S. deputy ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis said that “the U.N. must investigate any violations of U.N. Security Council resolutions — and we must not allow Russia or others to impede or threaten the U.N. from carrying out its mandated responsibilities.”

The Western clash with Russia over attacks on civilians and infrastructure and the use of Iranian drones came at an open council meeting that also focused on the dire humanitarian situation in Ukraine as winter approaches. Almost 18 million people, more than 40% of Ukraine’s population, need humanitarian assistance, U.N. humanitarian coordinator Denise Brown says.

U.N. political chief Rosemary DiCarlo expressed grave concern to the council that Russian missile and drone attacks between Oct. 10 and Oct. 18 in cities and towns across Ukraine killed at least 38 Ukrainian civilians, injured at least 117 and destroyed critical energy infrastructure, including power plants.

She cited the Ukrainian government’s announcement that 30% of the country’s energy facilities have been hit, most notably in the capital Kyiv and in the Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, Kharkiv and Sumy regions.

“Combined with soaring gas and coal prices, the deprivation caused by these attacks threatens to expose millions of civilians to extreme hardship and even life-endangering conditions this winter,” she said.

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DiCarlo, the U.N. undersecretary-general for political and peacebuilding affairs, said that "under international humanitarian law, attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure are prohibited." So are "attacks against military objectives that may be expected to cause harm to civilians that would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated," she said.

Nebenzia claimed that high-precision missile strikes and Russian drones — not Iranian drones — hit a large number of military targets that included infrastructure in an effort to degrade Ukrainian military activities.

"Of course, this did not sit well with the West and they became hysterical, and this is what we're witnessing loudly and clearly today at the meeting," the Russian ambassador said.

He said the West doesn't want "to face facts" and acknowledge that civilian infrastructure was hit only in cases where drones had to change course because of Ukrainian defense actions. He said Ukrainian air defenses also hit civilian sites because they missed incoming attacks.

In a letter to the Security Council on Wednesday, Ukrainian Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya accused Iran of violating a Security Council ban on the transfer of drones capable of flying 300 kilometers (about 185 miles).

That provision was part of Resolution 2231, which endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six key 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.

U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the 2015 nuclear agreement in 2018 and negotiations between the Biden administration and Iran for the United States to rejoin the deal have stalled.

Under the resolution, a conventional arms embargo on Iran was in place until October 2020. But restrictions on missiles and related technologies run until October 2023, and Western diplomats say that includes the export and purchase of advanced military systems such as drones, which are also known as unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs.

Iranian Ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani said Wednesday that he "categorically rejected unfounded and unsubstantiated claims that Iran has transferred UAVs for the use (in) the conflict in Ukraine." He accused unnamed countries of trying to launch a disinformation campaign to "wrongly establish a link" with the U.N. resolution.

"Moreover, Iran is of the firm belief that none of its arms exports, including UAVs, to any country" violate Resolution 2231, he added.

France, Germany and Britain on Friday supported Ukraine's accusation that Iranian has supplies drones to Russia in violation of the 2015 resolution and they are being used in attacks on civilians and power plants in Ukraine. They backed Kyiv's call for a U.N. investigation.

The three European countries said in a joint letter to the 15 council members that reports in open sources suggest Iran intends to transfer more drones to Russia along with ballistic missiles.

Neither Iran nor Russia sought advance approval from the council for the transfer of Mohajer and Shahed UAVs and therefore "have violated resolution 2231," the letter said.

The U.S. sent a similar letter, saying Iranian drones were transferred to Russia in late August and requesting the U.N. Secretariat team responsible for monitoring the resolution's implementation to "conduct a technical and impartial investigation that assesses the type of UAV's involved in these transfers."

Nebenzia also sent a letter contending that DiCarlo is siding with the West on carrying out an investigation. His letter insists that "the U.N. Secretariat has no authority to conduct, or in any other form engage, in any 'investigation'" related to Resolution 2231.

Graham asks Supreme Court to intervene after election ruling

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham on Friday asked the U.S. Supreme Court to intervene after a lower court ordered him to testify before a special grand jury in Georgia investigating whether then-President Donald Trump and others illegally tried to influence the 2020 election in the state.

In a filing with the court, attorneys for Graham, a top ally of Trump's, sought to halt his possible testimony

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while he continues to appeal the order to appear before the Fulton County special grand jury.

Graham's office described the South Carolina Republican's filing as an attempt "to defend the Constitution and the institutional interest of the Senate." The lower court's ruling, Graham's office said, "would significantly impact the ability of senators to gather information in connection with doing their job."

The legal move is the latest in Graham's ongoing fight to prevent his testimony in a case that has ensnared allies and associates of the former president. Some have already made their appearances before the special grand jury, including former New York mayor and Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani — who's been told he could face criminal charges in the probe — attorneys John Eastman and Kenneth Chesebro, and former White House counsel Pat Cipollone.

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.

Graham, a four-term senator who last won reelection in 2020, was first subpoenaed in July by Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, who opened her investigation shortly after a recording of a January 2021 phone call between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad 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 wants to question Graham about two phone calls he made to Raffensperger and his staff in the weeks after the election.

During those calls, Graham asked about "reexamining certain absentee ballots cast in Georgia in order to explore the possibility of a more favorable outcome for former President Donald Trump," Willis wrote in a petition seeking to compel his testimony.

Graham also "made reference to allegations of widespread voter fraud in the November 2020 election in Georgia, consistent with public statements made by known affiliates of the Trump Campaign," she wrote. She said in a hearing last month that Graham may be able to provide insight into the extent of any coordinated efforts to influence the results.

Raffensperger said he took Graham's question about absentee ballots as a suggestion to toss out legally cast votes. Graham has dismissed that interpretation as "ridiculous." Graham has also argued that the call was protected because he was asking questions to inform his decisions on voting to certify the 2020 election and future legislation.

Graham challenged his subpoena in federal court, but a judge refused to toss it out. Graham then appealed to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, and a three-judge panel ruled Thursday in favor of Willis. Graham can appeal to the full court.

Graham's lawyers argued that the 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.

Graham is represented by former White House counsel Don McGahn, who was involved in a lengthy court fight over a congressional subpoena for his own testimony related to special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election. After years of back-and-forth, the two sides reached an agreement and McGahn answered investigators' questions in a private session.

Graham's filing Friday was directed to Justice Clarence Thomas, who handles emergency appeals from Georgia and several other Southern states. Thomas can act on his own or refer the matter to the full court.

Trump's lawyers recently submitted a Supreme Court application to Thomas asking the Supreme Court to step into a legal fight over the classified documents seized during an FBI search of Trump's Florida estate.

Thomas has previously come under scrutiny for his vote in a different Trump documents case, in which he was the only member of the court to vote against allowing the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot to obtain Trump records held by the National Archives and Records Administration.

Thomas' wife, Virginia "Ginni" Thomas, is a conservative activist and staunch Trump supporter who attended the Jan. 6 "Stop the Steal" rally on the Ellipse and wrote to Meadows in the weeks following the election encouraging him to work to overturn Biden's victory and keep Trump in office.

She also contacted lawmakers in Arizona and Wisconsin in the weeks after the election, though no evi-

dence has emerged that she contacted Georgia officials. Thomas was recently interviewed by the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection, and she stood by the false claim that the 2020 election was fraudulent, despite the fact that numerous federal and local officials, a long list of courts, top former campaign staffers and even Trump's own attorney general have all said there is no evidence of mass fraud.

Guilty plea due in Michigan school shooting that killed 4

By ED WHITE Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — A teenager accused of killing four fellow students and injuring more at a Michigan high school is expected to plead guilty to murder next week, authorities said Friday.

Ethan Crumbley had created images of violence during a classroom assignment last November but was not sent home from Oxford High School in southeastern Michigan. He pulled out a gun a few hours later and committed a mass shooting.

Authorities have pinned some responsibility on Crumbley's parents, portraying them as a dysfunctional pair who ignored their son's mental health needs and happily provided a gun as a gift just days before the attack. They also face charges.

Crumbley, 16, is due in court Monday.

"We can confirm that the shooter is expected to plead guilty to all 24 charges, including terrorism, and the prosecutor has notified the victims," said David Williams, chief assistant prosecutor in Oakland County.

A message seeking comment was left for the boy's lawyers.

Crumbley was 15 when the shooting occurred at Oxford High, roughly 30 miles (50 kilometers) north of Detroit.

His parents had been summoned to school that day to discuss the teen's ominous writings. A teacher had found a drawing with a gun pointing at the words, "The thoughts won't stop. Help me." There was an image of a bullet with the message: "Blood everywhere."

James and Jennifer Crumbley declined to take Ethan home but were told to get him into counseling within 48 hours, according to investigators.

A day earlier, a teacher saw Ethan searching for ammunition on his phone. The school contacted his mother, Jennifer Crumbley, who then told her son in a text message: "Lol. I'm not mad at you. You have to learn not to get caught," the prosecutor's office said.

Ethan Crumbley was charged as an adult with one count of terrorism causing death, four counts of first-degree murder, seven counts of attempted murder and 12 counts related to use of a gun.

A first-degree murder conviction typically brings an automatic life prison sentence in Michigan. But teenagers are entitled to a hearing where their lawyer can argue for a shorter term and an opportunity for parole.

Separately, James and Jennifer Crumbley are facing involuntary manslaughter charges — a rare case of prosecutors trying to make parents accountable for a school shooting. They are accused of making a gun accessible to Ethan and neglecting his need for mental health care.

"Put simply, they created an environment in which their son's violent tendencies flourished. They were aware their son was troubled, and then they bought him a gun," prosecutors said in a court filing.

The Crumbleys said they were unaware of Ethan's plan. They also dispute that the gun was easy to get at home.

Madisyn Baldwin, Tate Myre, Hana St. Juliana and Justin Shilling were killed, while six students and a teacher were injured.

Sheriff Mike Bouchard said a guilty plea from Ethan Crumbley would be a relief for families and witnesses.

"At least not to have to go through the pain of painstakingly seeing every bit of evidence, every bit of video and all of the things that would be horrific" at a trial, Bouchard told WDIV-TV.

In court documents, prosecutors have revealed portions of Ethan Crumbley's personal journal. He said his grades were poor and that his parents hated each other and had no money.

"This just furthers my desire to shoot up the school or do something else," the teen wrote.

All three Crumbleys are being held at the Oakland County jail, though Ethan is kept away from adults.

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Ven Johnson, an attorney who is suing the Oxford school district, declined to comment Friday on Ethan Crumbley's expected plea.

Saga of last US slave ship finds life in 'Descendant' doc

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — In the murky waters of an Alabama river, diver Kamau Sadiki said he had to pause before entering the last known slave ship to the United States, where 110 people were confined in hellish conditions.

"You feel the reverberation, the pain and suffering, and the screams and the hollering," said Sadiki, a diver who works with the Smithsonian Slave Wrecks Project. "We do this work to understand the science and archeology and collect all the data we can to help tell the story. But there's another whole dimension here that we need to connect with."

The documentary "Descendant" retells this once-submerged history, intertwining the 2019 discovery of the ship Clotilda with the stories of the descendants of the 110 people aboard. Along the way, it raises questions about the legacy of slavery and what justice would look like 162 years after the ship's voyage.

In 1860 — decades after the United States had banned the importation of slaves — the Clotilda illegally transported 110 people from what is now the west African nation of Benin to Mobile, Alabama. With Southern plantation owners demanding slaves for their cotton fields, Alabama plantation owner Timothy Meaher made a bet that he could bring a shipload of Africans across the Atlantic. The ship was later scuttled to conceal evidence of the crime.

Slavery ended five years after the arrival of the Clotilda captives. They saved money to start a community that came to be called Africatown. Some of their descendants continue to live there in the historical hamlet deeply tied to its heritage but now surrounded by heavy industry in south Alabama.

Director Margaret Brown said she hopes viewers walk away with "a little bit of history rewritten for them, and they're emotionally moved by the resilience of this community."

"This is a community that has been telling the story, to mostly pass down through generations, for 160 years to keep this history alive."

In the film, descendants discuss their family's effort to not let the Clotilda fade into history, showing home videos of relatives recounting the story to younger generations. Some read from "Barracoon," the posthumously published 1931 manuscript in which former Clotilda captive Cudjo Lewis recounted his story in an interview with author Zora Neale Hurston.

The documentary also puts a focus on environmental challenges surrounding Africatown, with subjects discussing pollution and cancer rates. In wrestling with the economic legacy of slavery, one scene shows a descendant reading Lewis' words while sitting in an antebellum mansion. While the Meaher family did not participate in the film, their name is shown dotting local landmarks. Another scene focuses on the buzz created by the discovery of the ship, raising questions about who will benefit from the discovery.

"I don't want the momentum of the story to just be focused on the ship. It's not all about that ship," descendant Joycelyn Davis says in one scene.

Brown, who is white, was born and raised in Mobile. The story of the Clotilda was kept alive by descendants, but was not taught in any history books when she was a child.

Sadiki said he hopes the story, "becomes part of every history book in this country" despite the "efforts being made to remove these sorts of stories from our consciousness."

"We really have to get past that shame and silence. What I hope the movie does is insert, not only back in our memory, but back into the curriculum of this nation, the story of the Clotilda," he said.

Jan. 6 panel subpoenas Trump, demanding historic testimony

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol formally issued an extraordinary subpoena to Donald Trump on Friday, demanding testimony from the former

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president who lawmakers say “personally orchestrated” a multi-part effort to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

The nine-member panel issued a letter to Trump’s lawyers saying he must testify, either at the Capitol or by videoconference, “beginning on or about” Nov. 14 and continuing for multiple days if necessary.

The letter also outlined a sweeping request for documents, including personal communications between Trump and members of Congress as well as extremist groups. Those are to be turned in by Nov. 4, although the committee’s deadlines are generally subject to negotiation.

“We recognize that a subpoena to a former president is a significant and historic action,” Chairman Bennie Thompson and Vice Chair Liz Cheney wrote in the letter to Trump. “We do not take this action lightly.”

The panel rooted its action in history, listing past presidents from John Quincy Adams to Gerald Ford, who testified before Congress after leaving office — and noted that even sitting presidents have responded to congressional subpoenas.

It is unclear how Trump and his legal team will respond. He could comply or negotiate with the committee, announce he will defy the subpoena or ignore it altogether. He could also go to court and try to stop it.

“We understand that, once again, flouting norms and appropriate and customary process, the Committee has publicly released a copy of its subpoena,” David Warrington, a partner with the Dhillon Law Group, which is representing Trump, said in a statement late Friday. “As with any similar matter, we will review and analyze it, and will respond as appropriate to this unprecedented action.”

The subpoena is the latest and most striking escalation in the House committee’s 15-month investigation of the deadly Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection, bringing members of the panel into direct conflict with the man they have investigated from afar through the testimony of aides, allies and associates.

In the letter, the committee wrote about the “overwhelming evidence” it has assembled, showing Trump “personally orchestrated” an effort to overturn his defeat in the 2020 election, including by spreading false allegations of widespread voter fraud, “attempting to corrupt” the Justice Department and pressuring state officials, members of Congress and his own vice president to change the results.

“In short, you were at the center of the first and only effort by any U.S. President to overturn an election and obstruct the peaceful transition of power, ultimately culminating in a bloody attack on our own Capitol and on the Congress itself,” Thompson and Cheney said.

Lawmakers say key details about what Trump was doing and saying during the siege remain unknown. According to the committee, the only person who can fill the gaps is Trump himself.

The panel — comprised of seven Democrats and two Republicans — approved the subpoena for Trump in a surprise vote last week. Every member voted in support.

The subpoena calls for testimony about Trump’s dealings with several former aides and associates who have asserted their Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination to the committee, including Roger Stone, Michael Flynn, John Eastman, Jeffrey Clark and Kelli Ward.

“These Fifth Amendment assertions — made by persons with whom you interacted — related directly to you and your conduct,” the subpoena letter reads. “They provide specific examples where your truthful testimony under oath will be important.”

The committee also made 19 requests for documents and communication — including for any messages Trump sent on the encrypted messaging app Signal “or any other means” to members of Congress and others about the stunning events of the Capitol attack.

The scope of the committee’s request is expansive — pursuing documents from Sept. 1, 2020, two months before the election, to the present on the president’s communications with the groups like the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys — as the panel looks to compile a historical record of the run-up to the Capitol attack and then the aftermath.

But there remains little legal advantage for Trump to cooperate with the committee as he already faces other civil and criminal legal battles in various jurisdictions, including over his family business in New York and the handling of presidential records at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

It’s possible his lawyers could simply run out the clock on the subpoena if they go to court to try to squash it as the committee is required to finish its work by the end of the year.

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"It seems improbable to me that this could be litigated to conclusion in the time remaining to the Committee in this Congress," Peter Keisler, who served as acting attorney general under President George W. Bush, told The Associated Press.

There is ample precedent for Congress to seek testimony from a former president. Over the past century and a half, at least six current and former presidents have testified on Capitol Hill, including John Tyler and Quincy Adams after both were subpoenaed in 1848.

This could be Trump's chance to respond directly to the committee, to tell his version of events, but it's unlikely the defeated president would take it. He has ridiculed the panel and its work, preferring to share his views on his own terms. And testifying under oath could create legal exposure in the several other investigations he is caught up in.

If Trump refuses to comply with the subpoena, the panel will have to weigh the practical and political implications of holding him in contempt of Congress.

"That's a bridge we cross if we have to get there," Rep. Adam Kinzinger, a Republican member of the committee, told ABC on Sunday. "He's made it clear he has nothing to hide, is what he says. So, he should come in."

If the full House voted to recommend a contempt charge against Trump, the Justice Department would then review the case and decide on any further steps.

Other witnesses have faced legal consequences for defying the committee, including close Trump ally Steve Bannon, who was convicted of contempt in July and was sentenced Friday to four months behind bars. But holding a former president in contempt would be another matter.

The subpoena to Trump comes as the committee is looking to wrap up its investigative work and compile a final, comprehensive report that will be published by the end of the year. Investigators have interviewed more than 1,000 witnesses, including many of Trump's top White House aides, and obtained tens of thousands of pages of documents since the committee was formed in July 2021.

But the panel is authorized only through this Congress, which ends on Jan. 3. That means members have only a few short months — amid a hectic lame-duck legislative period after the midterm elections — to refine their historical record of the worst attack on the Capitol in two centuries. Whether that will include the testimony from the 45th president of the United States remains to be seen.

The committee ended its subpoena to Trump by quoting one of his predecessors: "President (Theodore) Roosevelt explained during his congressional testimony, 'an ex-President is merely a citizen of the United States, like any other citizen, and it is his plain duty to try to help this committee or respond to its invitation.'"

Failing US nursing homes to face tougher federal penalties

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The worst-of-the-worst nursing homes will face tougher penalties if conditions don't improve at their facilities, the Biden administration announced Friday.

The intensified scrutiny on some nursing homes, where more than a million people are housed, comes nearly two years after COVID-19 exposed subpar care and extreme staffing shortages that had long festered in the facilities. Nursing home residents have been significantly more likely to die from COVID-19; as of February, more than 200,000 nursing home staffers or residents had died from the virus.

President Joe Biden had promised during his State of the Union address in February to overhaul the nation's nursing home system but some of those initiatives have yet to be implemented fully.

The new guidelines announced Friday will apply to less than 0.5% of the nation's nursing homes. The facilities are already designated as a "special focus facility" because of a previous violation and are on a watchlist of sorts that requires the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare to monitor them more regularly.

Starting Friday, those nursing homes will lose federal funding if they receive more than one dangerous violation — rule-breaking that put residents at risk for harm. They will also be monitored for a minimum of three years. CMS will also consider staffing levels at the nursing homes when adding facilities to its watchlist. Currently, 88 nursing homes are on the list.

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"Let us be clear: We are cracking down on enforcement of our nation's poorest-performing nursing homes," said Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra.

The agency is studying staffing ratios at nursing homes, with the aim of implementing requirements. The study is expected to be completed next year.

The administration also announced \$80 million worth of grants that will be given to health care organizations, trade groups or labor unions to train and hire nursing staff. Organizations have until Jan. 6 to apply for the money.

Stocks end higher on Wall Street, notching weekly gains

By DAMIAN J. TROISE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

Wall Street capped a volatile run for stocks with a broad rally Friday, contributing to sizable weekly gains for major indexes.

The S&P 500 rose 2.4% and notched its biggest weekly gain since June. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 2.5% and the Nasdaq composite ended 2.3% higher.

More than 90% of the stocks in the benchmark S&P 500 index rose. Technology stocks, retailers and health care companies powered a big share of the rally. Oracle rose 5%, Home Depot added 2.3% and Pfizer rose 4.8%.

Social media companies fell broadly after Snapchat's parent company issued a weak forecast and the Washington Post reported that Elon Musk plans to slash about three-quarters of the payroll at Twitter after he buys the company. Snap slumped 28.1% and Twitter shed 4.9%.

Markets have been unsettled in recent days, as stocks lurched from sharp gains early in the week to losses later in the week. The market appeared headed for another sell-off early Friday, then reversed course amid fresh signals from the Federal Reserve that it may consider easing up on its aggressive pace of interest rate hikes as it tries to bring down inflation.

"The hope is that they at least slow down," Jay Hatfield, CEO of Infrastructure Capital Advisors.

The Fed is expected to raise interest rates another three-quarters of a percentage point at its upcoming meeting in November. Markets have been unsettled partly because investors have been hoping that any sign of inflation easing or economic growth slowing could signal that the Fed will ease up on its rate increases, which have yet to show any signs of significantly impacting inflation.

Mary Daly, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, said Friday that she's thinking about the dangers of raising interest rates too high and doing too much damage to the economy.

While the Fed likely isn't yet ready to start dialing down the size of its rate hikes, she said, "I think the time is now to start talking about stepping down. The time is now to start planning for stepping down."

If the Fed does come out of its meeting next month with a fourth straight increase of 0.75 percentage points to its key overnight interest rate, as most investors expect, she said: "I would really recommend people don't take that away as: It's 75 forever."

A 0.75 point jump is triple the size of the Fed's usual move, and the Fed risks creating a recession if it moves too high or too quickly.

Daly's comments helped push down investors' expectations for how high the Fed will hike rates through the end of the year. Traders are now pricing in just a 45% chance that the Fed will hike rates by 0.75 percentage points next month and again by the same amount in December.

Just a day ago, they were much more confident about that, pricing in a 75% probability. Instead, traders increasingly see the Fed dialing down to a more modest increase of 0.50 percentage points in December, according to CME Group.

Daly was speaking at meeting of the University of California-Berkeley's Fisher Center for Real Estate & Urban Economics' Policy Advisory Board.

Central banks around the world have mostly been raising interest rates to fight inflation and much of the focus has been on the Fed. It has raised its key interest rate to a range of 3% to 3.25%. A little more than six months ago, that rate was near zero.

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Even if the Fed does dial down the size of its increases soon, officials at the central bank have also been adamant that they plan to leave rates alone at that high level for a while to continue to slow the economy in hopes of forcing down high inflation.

"The concern is still that bond yields are heading higher and the Fed is not signaling a pivot," said Ross Mayfield, investment strategist at Baird. "Until there is a meaningful pivot driven by a drop in inflation, it's a huge headwind to the market."

Treasury yields, which hit multiyear highs this week on expectations of more Fed rate hikes, eased Friday. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note, which affects mortgage rates, slipped to 4.22% from 4.24% late Thursday. The yield on the two-year Treasury, which tends to track investors' expectations for Federal Reserve action on interest rates, fell to 4.49% from 4.61%.

Stocks got a boost from the pullback in yields. The S&P 500 rose 86.97 points to 3,752.75. The index posted a 4.7% gain for the week.

The Dow climbed 748.97 points to close at 31,082.56, and the Nasdaq added 244.87 points to 10,859.72.

Small company stocks also gained ground. The Russell 2000 index rose 37.85 points, or 2.2%, to finish at 1,742.24.

Investors have shifted their focus, for now, to the latest round of corporate earnings as they look for more clues about how hot inflation and rising interest rates are shaping the economy. Reports from airlines, banks, railroad operators and others have so far provided mixed financial results and forecasts.

American Express fell 1.7% after setting aside hundreds of millions of dollars to cover potential losses as the economy continues to deteriorate. Railroad CSX rose 1.7% after reporting solid financial results.

Ukrainian forces bombard river crossing; Kherson a fortress

By SABRA AYRES and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian forces bombarded Russian positions in the occupied and illegally annexed southern Kherson region, targeting resupply routes across a major river while inching closer Friday to a full assault on one of the first urban areas Russia captured after invading the country.

Russian-installed officials were reported desperately trying to turn the city of Kherson, a prime objective for both sides because of its key industries and major river and sea port, into a fortress while attempting to evacuate tens of thousands of residents.

The Kremlin poured as many as 2,000 draftees into the Kherson region — one of four Moscow illegally annexed and put under Russian martial law — to replenish losses and strengthen front-line units, according to the Ukrainian army's general staff.

The Dnieper River figures prominently in the regional battle because it serves critical functions — crossings for supplies, troops and civilians; drinking water for southern Ukraine and the annexed Crimean Peninsula; and power generation from a hydroelectric station. Much of the area, including the power station and a canal feeding water to Crimea, is under Russian control.

Kremlin-installed Kherson officials said Ukrainian shelling of a Dnieper River ferry crossing killed two journalists working for a local TV station they set up under occupation. At least two other people were reported killed and 10 members of the broadcast crew and their relatives were wounded, Russia's Tass news agency reported.

Natalia Humeniuk, a spokesperson for Ukraine's southern operational command, confirmed the Ukrainian military struck the Antonivskyi Bridge near the crossing but only during an overnight curfew Russian-installed officials put in place to avoid civilian casualties.

"We do not attack civilians and settlements," Humeniuk told Ukrainian television.

Earlier Ukrainian strikes had made the Antonivskyi Bridge inoperable, prompting Russian authorities to set up ferry crossings and pontoon bridges to relocate civilians and transport supplies to Russian troops in Kherson, which sits on the Dnieper's western bank.

Russian-installed officials are trying to evacuate up to 60,000 people from Kherson for their safety and to allow the military to build fortifications. Ukraine's military reported Friday that bank employees, medical workers and teachers were relocating as the city's infrastructure wound down.

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"The situation is really difficult," the deputy head of Kherson's Kremlin-installed regional administration, Kirill Stremousov, said in a video he posted on Telegram. "Today we are preparing the city of Kherson as a fortress for defense and are ready to defend to the last. Our task is to save people, build defenses and protect the city."

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.

Another flashpoint on the Dnieper River is the Kakhovka dam, which creates a large reservoir, and associated hydroelectric power station, about 70 kms (44 miles) from Kherson city. Each side accuses the other of targeting the facilities. Russian-installed officials claim Ukrainian forces have been attacking the facilities in part to cut the water supply to Crimea.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy contends the Russians plan to blow up the dam and power station to unleash 18 million cubic meters (4.8 billion gallons) of water and flood Kherson and dozens of other areas where hundreds of thousands of people live. He told the European Council on Thursday that Russia would then blame Ukraine.

None of the claims could be independently verified.

Defying international law, Russian President Vladimir Putin annexed Ukraine's Kherson, Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions last month even though his forces don't control all the territory. Putin declared martial law in the regions as of Thursday to assert Russian authority in the face of military setbacks and strong international criticism.

In the Donetsk region, two people were killed in Russian shelling of the city of Bakhmut, said Pavlo Kyrylenko, the province's Ukrainian governor. Russian troops have been unable to advance toward the city for more than a month.

In the capital of the eastern Ukraine's recently reclaimed Kharkiv region, nine people were wounded in two Russian attacks, according to Gov. Oleh Syniehubov. In the city of Zaporizhzhia, a Russian S-300 missile strike Friday wounded three people and damaged a residential building, a school and infrastructure, Ukrainian authorities said.

"Each strike won't scare anyone. It will make us stronger," said Dniprovskiy District acting administrative chief Volodymyr Hrianytsky.

In an apparent effort to keep hostilities from spinning out of control, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin reached out to Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Friday for their first phone call since May 13. Defense officials have said the Russians had not responded to U.S. efforts to set up calls.

Russia's deployment of aircraft and troops to air bases in Belarus raised the specter of another front on Ukraine's northern border, although Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said Friday: "We're not going anywhere today ... If you do not want to fight with us, then we will not, there will be no war."

The Ukrainian army's general staff has warned that Belarus could attack to cut supply routes of Western weapons and equipment. Belarus' intervention could also divert Ukraine's resources and weaken its southern counteroffensive.

While prospects for peace appear slim, the Kremlin insisted Friday that Putin has been open to negotiations "from the very beginning" and "nothing has changed." Spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Putin "tried to initiate talks with both NATO and the United States even before the special military operation" — the Russian term for its war in Ukraine.

Peskov was responding to Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who said earlier Friday that the Russian leader appeared to be "much softer and more open to negotiations."

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Putin's war has backfired.

"President Putin thinks that these attacks will somehow break the will of Ukrainian people. Instead, he is only deepening their resolve to defend their country," Blinken told reporters on Friday.

"Moscow can knock out the lights across Ukraine, but it cannot, it will not, extinguish the Ukrainian spirit. President Putin thought he could divide the trans-Atlantic alliance; instead, he's brought us even closer together."

False election claims overwhelm local efforts to push back

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

ESTANCIA, N.M. (AP) — Republican county commissioners in this swath of ranching country in New Mexico's high desert have tried everything they can think of to persuade voters their elections are secure.

They approved hand-counting of ballots from the primary election in their rural county, encouraged the public to observe security testing of ballot machines and tasked their county manager with overseeing those efforts to make sure they ran smoothly. None of that seems enough.

Here and elsewhere, Republicans as well as Democrats are paying a price for former President Donald Trump's relentless complaints and false claims about the 2020 election he lost.

Many Torrance County voters still don't trust voting machines or election tallies, a conspiracy-fueled lack of faith that persists in rural areas across the U.S. Just weeks before consequential midterm elections, such widespread skepticism suggests that no matter the outcome, many Americans may not accept the results.

"Confidence that that vote is accurately counted and tabulated is not there," said Ryan Schwebach, a grain farmer who is chairman of the three-member, all-Republican Torrance County Board of County Commissioners.

After a backlash this summer over the county's certification of its primary results, Schwebach surveyed county residents who don't attend public meetings. They, too, told him they weren't sure they could trust election results.

"It's the overall system that comes into question," he said. "So how do you challenge that, how do you get your answers?"

The belief that voting machines are being manipulated to sway the outcome of races is being promoted by Trump and his allies, many of whom have been spreading conspiracy theories throughout the country for nearly two years.

Their messages have penetrated deeply into the Republican Party, despite no evidence of manipulation or widespread fraud in the 2020 presidential election. That finding has been supported by multiple reviews in battleground states, by judges who have rejected dozens of court cases, by Trump's own Department of Justice and top officials in his administration.

The distrust erupted in Torrance County earlier this year, as commissioners were set to certify the results from the state's June 7 primary. Torrance was among a handful of rural New Mexico counties that considered delaying certification as crowds gave voice to conspiracy theories surrounding voting equipment.

Angry residents denounced the results and the commissioners' certification at a meeting -- a vote taken after the county elections clerk reported that the local election was secure and accurate. Those in the audience hurled insults at the commissioners, calling them "cowards," "traitors" and "rubber stamp puppets."

The commissioners responded to the vitriol by taking several unprecedented steps in an attempt to restore trust in voting and ballot counting.

They ordered an independent recount of primary election results by hand and assigned the county manager to recruit veteran poll workers and volunteers for two days of eye-straining efforts to sort and tally ballot images, with additional recounts. They also had her oversee testing and certification of the county's vote tabulators.

"I'm kind of pioneering this, and I'm sure I'm not going to be perfect in it, but I can tell you that I'm trying," said Janice Barela, the county manager overseeing the recount. "How do you know if it's the hand tally that's right? How do you know if it's a tabulator that's right? ... What I'd like to see in all of this is the election process work."

It's not clear whether her efforts will satisfy local doubts about the accuracy of elections — or add to them.

Bill Mendenhall, a registered Republican nearing retirement age, said anger still smolders in the community over the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. Trump won two-thirds of the vote in Torrance County.

"I don't think it burns that hot, but it does burn," said Mendenhall, a correctional officer at the maximum-

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security Penitentiary of New Mexico. He was tending to a small herd of goats beneath an old windmill on his 18-acre ranch. "Of the people I work with, 90% of them is angry. A lot of people think that Trump was cheated."

Brady Ness, a 37-year-old manager of a car dealership who grew up on a ranch in Estancia, said he does not trust Dominion Voting Systems machines that are used to tally paper ballots across New Mexico. The machines are a frequent target of conspiracy theories, and Ness hopes to see a transition to hand counting in future elections, though current state law mandates machine tallies.

"Even if they're Democrats or people I don't like or get along with, I would trust them over machines," Ness said.

He recently left the Republican Party amid profound frustration with the state and federal governments, which he says are not serving the needs of the people.

"I wouldn't be shocked if we didn't have a general election," he said. "I think things in this country are falling apart very quickly."

At the same time, Bill Peifer, a local treasurer for the Democratic Party, warns that not everyone who questions the elections may have the same motive.

"Some of the people casting doubt I think honestly don't trust the machines," he said. "And there are others who just want to make a mess."

The dour outlook in the county of 15,000 has been propelled by the same forces at work in many other states. In New Mexico, doubts about the 2020 election were fueled by a lawsuit from Trump's campaign and a fake set of electors willing to certify him.

More recently, an assortment of local and out-of-state Trump allies have held forums throughout the state promoting conspiracy theories, including former White House strategist Steve Bannon, MyPillow chief executive Mike Lindell and the Republican nominee for secretary of state, Audrey Trujillo.

At the forefront is David Clements, a New Mexico-based former prosecutor and former college professor. At conventions, church gatherings and local forums, he advocates for eliminating electronic election equipment and exonerating many of the defendants charged in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

At a presentation last month to about 60 people at a public library in Albuquerque, Clements described voting equipment in New Mexico as intentionally vulnerable to fraud and painted many county officials as complicit.

"We're never going to stop the bleeding unless we get rid of these machines," he said. "It's a foundational issue."

Deep-seated distrust in elections has inspired independent challengers in the November general elections for the seats held by Schwebach and Commissioner Kevin McCall. Both of their opponents have stated that Joe Biden was not legitimately elected president.

McCall is seeking re-election while working long hours at his pumpkin farm, which features a haunted house for Halloween and employs more than 400 seasonal workers.

"We care," he said in a recent interview. "We put Janice on that to be the one sole job, to evaluate and provide trust in the election."

He expressed exasperation that the efforts do not seem to have paid off so far.

"If they really want to replace me, replace me," he said. "I'm not doing this for the money."

The county released results on Thursday from its hand count of primary ballots, showing discrepancies between those tallies and the machine count in June, though not enough to change individual races.

Experts say machine tabulators have been shown to be more accurate than hand counts, which are susceptible to human error. Nevertheless, the results were greeted as vindication by doubters.

"While the numbers are new information, the fact that machines are untrustworthy is not new," declared Jennette Hunt of Estancia.

Boris Johnson, ousted by scandal, eyes comeback as UK leader

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

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LONDON (AP) — Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson -- ousted by ethics scandals just three months ago -- jockeyed to make a comeback Friday as one of several contenders seeking to replace Liz Truss, whose rapid downfall threw the country's leadership into disarray at a time of severe economic challenges.

The governing Conservative Party has ordered a lightning-fast race that aims to finalize nominations Monday and install a new prime minister, its third this year, within a week.

Johnson has not publicly declared he is running, but a political ally who spoke with him told Sky News he is "up for it" and bookmakers have made him one of the favorites to win the contest.

A return by Johnson would be an astonishing recovery for a polarizing figure forced out by a welter of ethics scandals. Opponents say giving him another chance would only lead to more controversy and disappointment.

The leadership uncertainty comes at a time of weak economic growth and as millions struggle with higher borrowing costs and rising prices for groceries, fuel and other basics. A growing wave of strikes by train and postal workers, lawyers and others has revealed mounting discontent as a recession looms.

Truss quit Thursday after a turbulent 45 days, conceding that she could not deliver on her tax-cutting economic package, which she was forced to abandon after it caused turmoil in financial markets.

House of Commons leader Penny Mordaunt was the first candidate to publicly declare she is running to replace Truss, saying in a tweet Friday that she represented "a fresh start."

Mordaunt, a straight-talking 49-year-old Royal Navy reservist who briefly served as U.K. defense secretary in 2019, is bookies' third favorite. Outside of Conservative circles she is perhaps best known for appearing on the 2014 reality TV diving show "Splash!"

Leading the pack in lawmakers' support, though yet to publicly declare, is former Treasury chief Rishi Sunak, who was previously runner-up to Truss.

Sunak, 42, had repeatedly warned Conservatives that Truss' tax-cutting plans would be disastrous — as proved to be the case. The former hedge-fund manager's supporters consider him a steady hand for an ailing economy.

Popular Defense Secretary Ben Wallace, who was touted as a possible contender, ruled himself out on Friday.

The wild card is Johnson, who was forced from office in July and still faces an inquiry into whether he lied to Parliament while in office that could lead to his suspension as a lawmaker.

His allies in Parliament are working to gather support for an "I'm Backing Boris" campaign. One of them, lawmaker James Duddridge, told Sky News that the former prime minister would fly back from a Caribbean vacation to run in the leadership race and was "up for it."

Johnson, 58, is still adored by some Conservatives as a vote winner with a rare common touch who led the party to a big election victory in 2019. He is more popular with the party's grassroots than with lawmakers — and he is reviled by some for the chaos and scandal that marred his term in office.

"Having a winner in place is what the party needs to survive," Johnson ally Nadine Dorries told Sky News.

Johnson was able to shrug off lapses that would have sunk many politicians. He survived even after he was fined by police for attending one of a series of illegal parties in government buildings while the U.K. was under lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic.

He finally resigned after one scandal too many. That incident involved his appointment of a politician who had been accused of sexual misconduct, sparking an exodus of dozens of members of his government.

Former Conservative leader Michael Howard implored the party not to return to the "psychodrama" of the Johnson era.

"He's had his chance, and it didn't work," Howard said. Some Conservative legislators have even threatened to leave the party if Johnson returns as leader.

Rob Ford, professor of political science at the University of Manchester, said Conservatives who thought Johnson could solve their problems "don't live in a reality-based community."

He warned that the electorate at large has not forgotten Johnson's many scandals — and he no longer

has the appeal he once did.

"We know the public don't like him, he can't govern, he definitely can't unify his party. It will be a disaster. It will fail," Ford said.

In order to be considered, candidates will need the signatures of at least 100 of the 357 Conservative lawmakers, meaning a maximum field of three. If three meet that threshold, lawmakers will vote to knock out one and then 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.

By Friday evening Johnson had about half of the 100 supporters needed to run, according to several unofficial tallies from British media organizations. More than half of Conservative lawmakers have not publicly backed a candidate yet.

Truss quit after her brief, disastrous experiment in libertarian economics. Her proposal for aggressive tax cuts that would be paid for through government borrowing pummeled the value of the pound. Investors showed little tolerance for her plan at a time when the British economy is still grappling with its exit from the European Union, the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Her package of unfunded tax cuts 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 that obliterated her authority.

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

The Conservative Party turmoil is fueling demands for a national election. Under Britain's parliamentary system, there does not need to be one until the end of 2024, though the government has the power to call one sooner.

Currently that looks unlikely. Opinion polls say an election would spell disaster for the Conservatives, with the left-of-center Labour Party winning a large majority.

Still, opposition politicians say the recent tumult — and the decision by Truss to rip up many of the policies on which Johnson was elected — means the government lacks democratic legitimacy.

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."

Bannon gets 4 months behind bars for defying 1/6 subpoena

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Steve Bannon, a longtime ally of former President Donald Trump, was sentenced Friday to serve four months behind bars after defying a subpoena from the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols allowed Bannon to stay free pending appeal, a potentially lengthy process, and also imposed a fine of \$6,500 as part of the sentence. Bannon was convicted in July of two counts of contempt of Congress: one for refusing to sit for a deposition and the other for refusing to provide documents.

Nichols handed down the sentence after saying the law was clear that contempt of Congress is subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of at least one month behind bars. Bannon's lawyers had argued the judge could've sentenced him to probation instead. Prosecutors had asked for Bannon to be sent to jail for six months.

"In my view, Mr. Bannon has not taken responsibility for his actions," Nichols said before he imposed the sentence. "Others must be deterred from committing similar crimes."

The House panel had sought Bannon's testimony over his involvement in Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election. Bannon has yet to testify or provide any documents to the committee.

Prosecutors argued Bannon, 68, deserved the longer sentence because he had pursued a "bad faith strategy" and his public statements disparaging the committee itself made it clear he wanted to undermine

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their effort to get to the bottom of the violent attack and keep anything like it from happening again.

"He chose to hide behind fabricated claims of executive privilege and advice of counsel to thumb his nose at Congress," said prosecutor J.P. Cooney.

"Your honor, the defendant is not above the law and that is exactly what makes this case important," Cooney said. "It must be made clear to the public, to the citizens, that no one is above the law."

The defense, meanwhile, said he wasn't acting in bad faith, but trying to avoid running afoul of executive privilege objections Trump had raised when Bannon was first served with a committee subpoena last year. The onetime presidential adviser said he wanted to have a Trump lawyer in the room, but the committee wouldn't allow it.

In imposing the sentence, the judge noted that Bannon did have a lawyer, and while his advice might have been "overly aggressive" he did appear to be following it.

"Mr. Bannon did not completely ignore the fact he had received the subpoena nor did he fail to engage with the committee at all," Nichols said.

Many other former White House aides have testified with only their own counsel. Bannon had been fired from the White House in 2017 and was a private citizen when he was consulting with the then-president before the riot.

Before the judge handed down the sentence, Bannon's lawyer, David Schoen, gave an impassioned argument railing against the committee and saying Bannon had simply done as his lawyer told him to do under Trump's executive privilege objections.

"Quite frankly, Mr. Bannon should make no apology. No American should make any apology for the manner in which Mr. Bannon proceeded in this case," he said.

Schoen also defended Bannon's public remarks about the committee: "Telling the truth about this committee or speaking one's mind about this committee, it's not only acceptable in this country, it's an obligation if one believes it to be true," Schoen said.

As he walked into court on Friday, Bannon told reporters, "This illegitimate regime, their judgment day is on 8 November when the Biden administration ends." Bannon did not speak during the hearing, saying only, "My lawyers have spoken for me, your honor."

Leaving the courthouse after the sentencing, Bannon said he believed Attorney General Merrick Garland would be impeached.

When President Joe Biden, for his part, was asked about the sentence as he left the White House he said: "I never have a reaction to Steve Bannon."

Prosecutors had pushed for the maximum fine, saying Bannon refused to answer routine questions about his income and insisted he could pay whatever the judge imposed. The judge, though, found the short answers were an effort to spare court staff a lengthy effort of tracing Bannon's finances and imposed a smaller fine.

Bannon has also argued that he had offered to testify after Trump waived executive privilege. But that was after the contempt charges were filed, and prosecutors say he would only agree to give the deposition if the case was dropped.

Bannon is also facing separate money laundering, fraud and conspiracy charges in New York related to the "We Build the Wall" campaign. Bannon has pleaded not guilty.

Prosecutors say Bannon falsely promised donors that all money would go to constructing a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border, but instead was involved with transferring hundreds of thousands of dollars to third-party entities and using them to funnel payments to two other people involved in the scheme.

Review: Taylor Swift gets dark, electric on 'Midnights'

By ELISE RYAN Associated Press

Taylor Swift "Midnights," (Republic Records)

"All of me changed like midnight," Taylor Swift confesses halfway through her latest album, the aptly named and moody "Midnights." It's a moment on the electric "Midnight Rain" that finds lyricist Swift at

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her best, reminding you of her unparalleled ability to make any emotion feel universal.

The song's chorus begins: "He was sunshine, I was midnight rain." And continues: "He wanted it comfortable, I wanted that pain. He wanted a bride, I was making my own name. Chasing that fame. He stayed the same." Then, that lyric: "All of me changed like midnight." The sound feels experimental for Swift, opening with her own vocals artificially pitched down to an almost-unrecognizable tone. It's among the album's most sonically interesting, an indie-pop beat that feels reminiscent of her producer Jack Antonoff's work on Lorde's "Melodrama," but also fresh and captivating.

The song's words, by Swift and Antonoff, are steady and detailed, but not distracting — allowing you to sink into the rhythm, flowing and feeling it with her.

On the 13 tracks of "Midnights," a self-aware Swift shows off her ability to evolve again. And in typical Swift fashion, she had more surprises up her sleeve — dropping an additional seven bonus tracks and a music video for "Anti-Hero" hours after "Midnights" released.

For her 10th original album, the 32-year-old pop star approaches the themes she's grown up writing about — love, loss, childhood, fame — with a maturity that comes through in sharpened vocals and lyrics focused more on her inner-life than external persona.

"Midnight Rain" could be a thesis statement for the project she's described as songs written during "13 sleepless nights," an appropriate approach to the concept album for someone who has long had a lyrical appreciation for late nights (think "Style": "midnight, you come and pick me up, no headlights..."). Of course, she's centered her work around themes before — on "Red," an ode to the color and the emotions it stands for, "reputation," a vindictive reconfiguring of her own, and most recently on "folklore" and "evermore," quarantine albums that expressed vulnerability in ways only isolation could.

But Swift presents "Midnights" as something different: a collection of songs that don't necessarily have to go together, but fit together because she has declared them products of late night inspiration. Positioning listeners situationally — in the quiet but thoughtful darkness of night — instead of thematically, feels like a natural creative experiment for a songwriter so prolific that her albums have become synonymous with the pop culture zeitgeist.

And with that, comes a tone that is just a little darker, a little more experimental, and always electric.

Track one, "Lavender Haze," pairs a muffled club beat and high-pitched backing vocals from Antonoff with a stand-out, beckoning melody from Swift. "Maroon" is a grown-up and weathered version of "Red," a dive into lost love with rich descriptions of rust, spilled wine, red lipstick — images Swift is reconjuring with more bite.

"Labyrinth" makes clear she's carried the best of her previous pop experiments with her — the synth of "1989" and the softer alternative sounds of "folklore" — as she admits as only a songwriter can that a heartbreak "only feels this raw right now, lost in the labyrinth of my mind," on top of a track featuring Bon Iver-esque electronic trills.

Swift shines when she is able to marry her signature lyrical musings with this new arena of electronic beats. And while this isn't another album of acoustic indie sounds like "folklore," it is clear that Swift has taken a step forward in the indie-pop genre — even if it's a step in a different direction.

The album's weaker moments are the ones where that balance feels off. "Bejeweled" is a bit too candy sweet, with lyrics that feel like an updated, glittery take on "ME!" The much anticipated "Snow On The Beach," featuring Lana Del Rey, is poetic, pretty, and at times cheeky, but not as emotionally deep as the lyricists' combined power suggests it could be.

Even in those moments, "Midnights" finds Swift comfortable in her musical skin, revealing the strengths of a sharp and ever-evolving artist who can wink through always-cryptic allusions to her very public life or subtle self-owns dispersed amidst lyrical confessions (see: "Anti-Hero" and "Mastermind") and hook even the casual listener with an alluring, and maybe surprising, beat.

But like the love-soaked "Lover," and intimate "folklore" and "evermore," "Midnights" feels like both a confessional and a playground, crafted by all the versions of Taylor Swift we've gotten to know so far for a new Taylor Swift to shine. And like always, we're just along for the thrilling late-night ride.

Balenciaga fashion house cuts ties with Ye, report says

By The Associated Press undefined

PARIS (AP) — The Balenciaga fashion house has cut ties with Ye, the rapper formerly known as Kanye West, according to a news report.

The move came after several offensive comments from Ye, including antisemitic posts that earned him suspensions from Twitter and Instagram.

"Balenciaga has no longer any relationship nor any plans for future projects related to this artist," parent company Kering told Women's Wear Daily in response to a query Friday without elaborating.

The company did not respond to multiple emails and calls from The Associated Press requesting comment. A representative for Ye also did not respond to a request for comment.

Ye had collaborated in several areas with Balenciaga and its artistic director, Demna Gvasalia. The label has also had an active relationship with Kim Kardashian, Ye's ex-wife, who has appeared in their advertising campaigns and credits her former husband with introducing her to the brand.

Ye was recently blocked from posting on Twitter and Instagram over antisemitic posts that the social networks said violated their policies. He has also suggested slavery was a choice and called the COVID-19 vaccine the "mark of the beast."

After getting locked out of the social media platforms, he's offered to buy right-wing-friendly social network Parler.

During Paris Fashion Week, the rapper walked as a model in Balenciaga's ready-to-wear show — what designer Gvasalia at the time called an "iconic moment." He was then seen at Givenchy's collection wearing a Balenciaga-branded black tooth brace.

Ye was also criticized that week for wearing a "White Lives Matter" T-shirt to his Yeezy collection show in Paris and the shirt made an appearance on the runway itself. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks hate groups, White Lives Matter is a neo-Nazi group.

In recent weeks, Ye has ended Yeezy's association with Gap and has told Bloomberg that he plans to cut ties with his corporate suppliers. Adidas has placed its sneaker deal with Ye under review, and JPMorgan Chase and Ye have ended their business relationship — although the banking breakup was in the works even before Ye's antisemitic comments.

Pfizer says COVID-19 vaccine will cost \$110-\$130 per dose

By TOM MURPHY AP Health Writer

Pfizer will charge \$110 to \$130 for a dose of its COVID-19 vaccine once the U.S. government stops buying the shots, but the drugmaker says it expects many people will continue receiving it for free.

Pfizer executives said the commercial pricing for adult doses could start early next year, depending on when the government phases out its program of buying and distributing the shots.

The drugmaker said it expects that people with private health insurance or coverage through public programs like Medicare or Medicaid will pay nothing. The Affordable Care Act requires insurers to cover many recommended vaccines without charging any out-of-pocket expenses.

A spokesman said the company also has an income-based assistance program that helps eligible U.S. residents with no insurance get the shots.

The price would make the two-dose vaccine more expensive for cash-paying customers than annual flu shots. Those can range in price from around \$50 to \$95, depending on the type, according to CVS Health, which runs one of the nation's biggest drugstore chains.

A Pfizer executive said Thursday that the price reflects increased costs for switching to single-dose vials and commercial distribution. The executive, Angela Lukin, said the price was well below the thresholds "for what would be considered a highly effective vaccine."

The drugmaker said last year that it was charging the U.S. \$19.50 per dose, and that it had three tiers of pricing globally, depending on each country's financial situation. In June, the company said the U.S. government would buy an additional 105 million doses in a deal that amounted to roughly \$30 per shot.

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The government has the option to purchase more doses after that.

Pfizer's two-shot vaccine debuted in late 2020 and has been the most common preventive shot used to fight COVID-19 in the U.S.

More than 375 million doses of the original vaccine, which Pfizer developed with the German drugmaker BioNTech, have been distributed in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That doesn't count another 12 million doses of an updated booster that was approved earlier this year.

The vaccine brought in \$36.78 billion in revenue last year for Pfizer and was the drugmaker's top-selling product.

Analysts predict that it will rack up another \$32 billion this year, according to FactSet. But they also expect sales to fall rapidly after that.

More than 90% of the adult U.S. population has already received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, according to the CDC. But only about half that population has also received a booster dose.

Italy's far-right leader Meloni forms new government

By FRANCES D'EMILIO and GIADA ZAMPANO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Giorgia Meloni on Friday formed Italy's new ruling coalition, assembling the country's first far-right-led government since the end of World War II and becoming the first woman to obtain the premiership.

A presidential palace official announced that Meloni and her Cabinet would be sworn in on Saturday. Meloni's Brothers of Italy, a party with neo-fascist roots, was the top vote-getter in Italy's national election last month.

A few hours before the new government's formation was announced, Meloni, 45, a career politician, told reporters that she and her allies had unanimously asked President Sergio Mattarella to give her the mandate to govern.

Obtaining the premiership capped a remarkably quick rise for the Brothers of Italy. Meloni co-founded the party in December 2012, and it was considered a fringe movement on the right during its first years.

Meloni made no public comments before leaving the Quirinal presidential palace. Earlier in the day, she met with Mattarella along with her two main, sometimes troublesome, right-wing allies — Matteo Salvini and former Premier Silvio Berlusconi.

Mattarella expressed satisfaction that the government was formed in a "brief time" following the Sept. 25 election. After the last election, in 2018, it took three months for a new ruling coalition to come together.

Quickly giving the country a new government "was possible due to the clarity of the vote outcome and to the need to proceed swiftly, also because of the domestic and international conditions that require a government in its fullness to carry out its tasks," Mattarella told reporters.

Italy and much of the rest of Europe are struggling with soaring energy costs and the drama of Russia's war in Ukraine, which could crimp gas supplies this winter and continue increasing household and business power bills.

Berlusconi and Salvini are longtime admirers of Russian President Vladimir Putin; Meloni staunchly backs Ukraine in its defense against the Russian invasion. Those differences could produce challenges for their governing coalition.

Berlusconi, a three-time premier, had chafed at the election victory of Meloni's party. The Brothers of Italy took 26%, while Berlusconi's Forza Italia and the anti-migrant League of Salvini snagged just over 8% apiece in an election with record-low turnout.

In 2018, when Italy held its previous parliamentary election, Meloni's party took just over 4%.

Still, while her party's members are the largest force in the Italian Parliament, Meloni needs the support of both her allies to command a solid majority.

Berlusconi, who fancies himself a rare leader on the world stage, recently derided her as "arrogant" in written comments, apparently after Meloni refused to make a lawmaker who is one of the media mogul's closest advisers a government minister.

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During a meeting this week with Forza Italia's lawmakers, the former premier expressed sympathy for Putin's motivation in invading Ukraine. A recording of the conversation leaked to Italian news agency La-Presse also captured Berlusconi bragging that Putin had sent him bottles of vodka for his 86th birthday last month and that he gave the Russian leader bottles of wine while the two exchanged sweetly worded notes.

In response to Berlusconi's comments, which included derogatory remarks about Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Meloni insisted that anyone joining her government must be solidly in sync with the West in opposing Putin's war. If that meant her government couldn't be formed, Meloni said, she'd take that risk.

As a bulwark against possible wavering on Ukraine by her coalition allies, Meloni named as defense minister one of her closest advisers, Brothers of Italy co-founder Guido Crosetto.

Meloni's determination could serve her well in contending with pushback from her allies.

Italy's new premier is "a woman that managed to get to the top of a very, very, very male party in a very male dominated country," said Nathalie Tocci, director of the International Affairs Institute, a Rome-based think tank.

Meloni chose as foreign minister Antonio Tajani, a top aide to Berlusconi in Forza Italia and a former president of the European Union's parliament. His pro-EU background could reassure European partners worried about a Meloni government wavering in its international alliances.

Salvini has at times also questioned the wisdom of tough Western sanctions against Russia. A fellow lawmaker in Salvini's League party who was recently elected president of the Italian Parliament's lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, has publicly expressed doubts about continuing the sanctions.

While campaigning, Salvini advocated increasing Italy's already staggeringly high public debt to pay for energy relief assistance.

Meloni, who has resisted ballooning the debt, appointed as finance minister Giancarlo Giorgetti, considered one of the most moderate League leaders. He is seen in Italy and abroad as a likely guarantor of the continuity of the economic strategies of outgoing Premier Mario Draghi, in whose government he served as industry minister.

Salvini had lobbied hard to be appointed interior minister by Meloni — a position he held in a 2018-2019 government formed by populists. Salvini's crackdown on migrant rescue boats while in that post led to a criminal prosecution against him, with one case still pending in Sicily.

Meloni instead picked a longtime Interior Ministry official, Matteo Piantedosi, for the portfolio.

Draghi's national pandemic unity coalition collapsed in July, after Salvini, Berlusconi and populist 5-Star Movement leader Giuseppe Conte refused to back his government in a confidence vote. That prompted Mattarella to dissolve Parliament and paved the way for an election some six months early.

On Thursday, Mattarella received opposition leaders, who raised concerns that Meloni, who campaigned with a "God, homeland, family" agenda, would seek to erode abortion rights and roll back rights such as same-sex civil unions.

On Friday, Meloni tapped an ultra-conservative Catholic, Eugenia Maria Roccella, to be her minister for family, birthrates and equal opportunities.

At a 2018 event in Rome that Meloni attended, Roccella pledged to work against Italy's law legalizing same-sex civil unions and called same-sex marriage "the end of humanity." Italy doesn't allow same-sex marriage.

Capitol rioter gets prison for attacks on journalist, police

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Pennsylvania man was sentenced on Friday to nearly three years in prison for assaulting an Associated Press photographer and attacking police officers with a stun gun during the U.S. Capitol riot.

Alan Byerly apologized to his victims before U.S. District Judge Randolph Moss sentenced him to two years and 10 months in prison followed by three years of supervised release. Byerly will get credit for the more than 15 months he already has served behind bars since his arrest, according to his lawyers.

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"I didn't go to D.C. to harm anyone," Byerly told the judge.

Byerly, 55, pleaded guilty in July to assaulting AP photographer John Minchillo and then activating a stun gun as he charged at police officers who were trying to hold off the mob that formed outside the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Byerly said he was an "antagonistic jerk" when he confronted the officers. He also said he assaulted Minchillo after hearing a voice say, "That's antifa. Get him out of here."

Minchillo was wearing a lanyard with AP lettering when Byerly and other rioters attacked him on the Capitol's Lower West Terrace, according to a court filing accompanying Byerly's guilty plea. Byerly grabbed Minchillo, pushed him backward and dragged him toward a crowd, the filing says. Another AP photographer captured the assault on video.

"I should have never gotten involved, and I'm deeply sorry for my actions," Byerly said.

Prosecutors sought a sentence of at least three years and 10 months of imprisonment, followed by three years of supervised release. Defense lawyers requested a sentence below an estimated guidelines range of 37 to 46 months in prison.

Moss said he believed Byerly is genuinely remorseful for his role in the mob's "assault on democracy." The judge said it was clear that Byerly couldn't have injured anybody with the inexpensive stun gun that he brought to the Capitol, but the officers couldn't have known that given the sound that it made.

"They were clearly frightened by it," Moss said. "It undoubtedly added to the fear the officers felt that day."

Minchillo "must have been extremely frightened, as well," the judge added.

None of Byerly's victims attended his sentencing hearing.

Byerly bought the stun gun before traveling from his home in Fleetwood, Pennsylvania, to Washington, D.C., for the "Stop the Steal" rally on Jan. 6. Leaving the rally before then-President Donald Trump finished speaking, Byerly went to the west side of the Capitol and joined other rioters in using a metal Trump billboard as a battering ram against police, prosecutors said.

Later, Byerly approached police officers behind bike racks and deployed his stun gun. After officers grabbed the stun gun from Byerly's hands, he charged at them, struck and pushed them and grabbed an officer's baton, prosecutors said. One of the officers fell and landed on his hands while trying to restrain Byerly.

Defense attorneys said the model of stun gun that Byerly purchased for \$24.99 was considered to be "junk" by engineering experts.

"Furthermore, shortly after purchasing the device, Mr. Byerly had accidentally activated it on himself and thus knew that it could not cause injury or even pain," the defense lawyers wrote in a court filing.

Other rioters helped him elude capture that day, but Byerly was arrested in July 2021. He told FBI agents that he did just "one stupid thing down there and that's all it was," according to prosecutors.

"This was a reference to how he handled the reporter and nothing more," they wrote in a court filing.

Byerly, a carpenter by trade and father of four children, has remained in custody since his arrest more than 15 months ago.

Approximately 900 people have been charged with federal crimes for their conduct on Jan. 6. More than 420 of them have pleaded guilty, mostly to misdemeanor offenses. Nearly 300 have been sentenced, with roughly half of them getting terms of imprisonment ranging from seven days to 10 years, according to an AP review of court records.

More than 100 police officers were injured during the Jan. 6 riot. Over 270 defendants have been charged with assaulting, resisting or impeding officers or employees at the Capitol, according to the Justice Department. Byerly is one of several defendants charged with assaulting members of the news media or destroying their equipment at the Capitol.

World Cup fans could bring political tensions to quiet Qatar

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

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Qatar is a devoutly apolitical place, with speech and assembly heavily restricted and a large population of foreign workers who could lose their livelihoods if they cause a stir.

But that could change next month, when an estimated 1.2 million soccer fans descend on the tiny Gulf Arab nation for the World Cup. Authorities may face calls for labor rights, LGBTQ equality and other causes in the glare of an international spotlight like no other.

They might also have to contend with public drunkenness and hooliganism in a conservative, Islamic country where such behavior is deeply taboo and virtually unheard of.

Qatar has had more than a decade to prepare for the monthlong tournament, which begins on Nov. 20, and has spared no expense — thanks to natural gas reserves that make it among the world's wealthiest countries. It also has some recent experience hosting major international sporting events.

But there's nothing quite like a World Cup.

A QUIET, DESERT EMIRATE

Qatar, the first Arab or Muslim nation to host a World Cup, is a wealthy and politically stable outlier in the volatile Middle East. Citizens enjoy generous cradle-to-grave welfare paid for by its gas riches. Foreign workers make up more than two-thirds of the population of less than 3 million and account for nearly 95% of the labor force.

Qatar hosts the pan-Arab broadcaster Al-Jazeera and has supported Islamist groups across the region, but within its own borders politics is nearly nonexistent. Power is concentrated in the hands of a hereditary emir, criticism of authorities is heavily restricted, and politically oriented groups are banned.

U.S.-based Freedom House, which surveys democratic change and backsliding worldwide, classifies Qatar as "Not free."

Qatari officials have said the security forces will adopt a light touch during the World Cup, tolerating minor infractions like public intoxication and intervening in response to only violence, destruction of property and threats to public safety.

"Differing perspectives are encouraged and fans will be free to express themselves during the World Cup, as they have done during other events hosted in Qatar," a Qatari government official said on condition of anonymity in keeping with regulations.

Kristian Ulrichsen, a Gulf expert at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, said he expects Qatar to "tolerate instances of activism during the World Cup, especially if they do not relate to political or geopolitical issues."

"Qatari police have been training alongside international counterparts, including from the United Kingdom, and focusing on issues such as crowd control and policing in ways that de-escalate rather than intensify volatile situations."

SILENCED LABORERS

The World Cup has already shined a light on what rights groups describe as exploitative conditions endured by many foreign laborers, including the construction workers who built stadiums and other infrastructure.

Qatar has overhauled its labor laws in recent years, dismantling much of its traditional kafala system, which tied workers to their employers. It has also mandated a minimum monthly wage of some \$275. But activists say more needs to be done to ensure that workers are paid on time and protected from other abuses.

Foreign workers are barred from forming unions and have no political rights. At least 60 workers were arrested in August for staging a protest over unpaid wages. A Kenyan security guard who wrote anonymously about the plight of foreign workers was detained for months and fined last year before leaving the country.

Several soccer federations are pressing Qatar on labor rights, and the English Football Association said its players would meet with migrant workers who will be invited to their training camp.

LGBTQ: TOLERANCE WITHIN LIMITS

Qatari law prescribes a penalty of 1-3 years in prison for "leading, instigating or seducing a male . . . to commit sodomy." Separate laws prescribe up to seven years for anyone who "copulates" with a man or woman over the age of 16 "without compulsion, duress or ruse."

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Few expect those laws to be enforced against visiting soccer fans, but it's unclear how authorities would handle public displays of affection — taboo even for straight couples — or public advocacy for LGBTQ rights.

"Reserve the room together, sleep together -- this is something that's not in our concern," Maj. Gen. Abdulaziz Abdullah Al Ansari, a senior leader overseeing security preparations, told The Associated Press in April. But he sparked controversy in the same interview by saying rainbow flags could be taken from fans to protect them from being attacked.

"Watch the game. That's good. But don't really come in and insult the whole society because of this," he said.

Qatar has already faced criticism in public forums over its criminalization of homosexuality. Eight of the 13 European soccer teams in the World Cup have asked FIFA for permission for their captains to wear rainbow armbands as part of the "One Love" campaign.

DRINKING AND ROWDINESS

Qatar is more relaxed than some other Gulf nations when it comes to alcohol, but its sale is usually limited to luxury hotels and restaurants. Public drunkenness is taboo in the Islamic country and offenders can be jailed or deported.

During the World Cup, beer will also be sold at stadiums and fan zones, and officials say drunkenness will be tolerated as long as it doesn't threaten anyone's safety. But there could be consequences if things get out of hand or the party moves out of designated venues.

Qatar could face the, often related, issue of fan rivalries. Local security forces have little experience dealing with the hooliganism that has historically accompanied high-stakes matches in Europe.

Matches between Honduras and El Salvador famously sparked the so-called "Football War" between the countries in 1969, and a notorious collision between French and West German players at the 1982 World Cup caused a major diplomatic incident.

Russia has been banned from international soccer over its invasion of Ukraine, whose national team was eliminated in the playoffs. But tensions over that conflict — or others — cannot be ruled out.

Qatar's police won't be alone in dealing with any major disturbances.

Turkey, which has more experience with political unrest, plans to send 3,250 police officers, including special operations forces and explosives experts, to help Qatar maintain security. It will provide training to hundreds of Qatari security forces.

EU to boost Ukraine funds amid refugee exodus concerns

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union leaders on Friday gave the green light to a plan to provide Ukraine with 18 billion euros (dollars) in financial support over the next year, after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that Russia is trying to spark a refugee exodus by destroying his country's energy infrastructure.

The plan, endorsed at a summit of EU leaders in Brussels, would see the 27-nation bloc match U.S. financial support for war-ravaged Ukraine in monthly installments.

"Ukraine is telling us that they need approximately 3-4 billion euros per month to have enough resources for the basics," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. She said that figure would be met in equal part by the EU and the U.S., plus additional money from international financial institutions.

"It is very important to Ukraine to have a predictable and stable flow of income," von der Leyen told reporters. She said the EU is looking to provide about 1.5 billion euros each month, describing it as a funding amount that would be "stable and reliable."

The bloc's finance ministers have been tasked with coming up with a system for pulling together the money, which would come on top of the 9 billion euros in macro-financing support that the EU is already sending.

Von der Leyen also slammed Russia's "atrocious and deliberate" attacks on civilians and 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.

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In a speech to the leaders via video link on Thursday, Zelenskyy said that "attacks by Russian cruise missiles and Iranian combat drones have destroyed more than a third of our energy infrastructure."

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.

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

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

In a summit statement, the EU leaders affirmed that they "will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes" with continued political, military and economic support. They also said that the bloc will "step up its humanitarian response, in particular for winter preparedness."

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 also warned Belarus against helping Russia in the war. Ukraine's military leaders said 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 summit statement said.

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 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 inter-

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views 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. 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

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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 community 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 CO-

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VID-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 address whether the union regrets the positions teachers 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."

Today in History: October 22, JFK reveals missile bases

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Oct. 22, the 295th day of 2022. There are 70 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 22, 1962, in a nationally broadcast address, President John F. Kennedy revealed the presence of Soviet-built missile bases under construction in Cuba and announced a quarantine of all offensive military equipment being shipped to the Communist island nation.

On this date:

In 1836, Sam Houston was inaugurated as the first constitutionally elected president of the Republic of Texas.

In 1926, Ernest Hemingway's first novel, "The Sun Also Rises," was published by Scribner's of New York.

In 1928, Republican presidential nominee Herbert Hoover spoke of the "American system of rugged individualism" in a speech at New York's Madison Square Garden.

In 1934, bank robber Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd was shot to death by federal agents and local police at a farm near East Liverpool, Ohio.

In 1968, Apollo 7 returned safely from Earth orbit, splashing down in the Atlantic Ocean.

In 1979, the U.S. government allowed the deposed Shah of Iran to travel to New York for medical treatment — a decision that precipitated the Iran hostage crisis.

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In 1981, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization was decertified by the federal government for its strike the previous August.

In 1995, the largest gathering of world leaders in history marked the 50th anniversary of the United Nations.

In 2001, a second Washington, D.C., postal worker, Joseph P. Curseen, died of inhalation anthrax.

In 2014, a gunman shot and killed a soldier standing guard at a war memorial in Ottawa, then stormed the Canadian Parliament before he was shot and killed by the usually ceremonial sergeant-at-arms.

In 2016, the Chicago Cubs won their first pennant since 1945, beating the Los Angeles Dodgers 5-0 in Game 6 of the NL Championship Series. (The Cubs would go on to beat Cleveland in the World Series in seven games.)

In 2020, in the closing debate of the presidential campaign, President Donald Trump and Democratic challenger Joe Biden clashed over how to tame the raging coronavirus; Trump declared that the virus would "go away," while Biden countered that the nation was heading toward a "dark winter."

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama sharply challenged Mitt Romney on foreign policy in their final campaign debate, held in Boca Raton, Florida, accusing him of "wrong and reckless leadership that is all over the map"; the Republican coolly responded, "Attacking me is not an agenda" for dealing with a dangerous world. An Italian court convicted seven experts of manslaughter for failing to adequately warn residents of the risk before an earthquake struck central Italy in 2009, killing more than 300 people. (The verdicts were later overturned.) American Indian activist Russell Means, 72, died in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Five years ago: The latest allegations of sexual harassment or assault in Hollywood targeted writer and director James Toback; the Los Angeles Times reported that he had been accused of sexual harassment by 38 women. U.S.-backed fighters in Syria captured the country's largest oil field from the Islamic State group, marking a major advance against the extremists. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe scored a major victory in national elections that decisively returned his ruling coalition to power.

One year ago: The Supreme Court allowed a Texas law banning most abortions to remain in effect while agreeing to hear arguments in the case. Florida businessman Lev Parnas, who helped Rudy Giuliani's effort to dig up dirt on Joe Biden in Ukraine, was convicted in New York of campaign finance crimes. Actor Peter Scolar, best known for his role on TV's "Newhart," died in New York at 66 after a two-year battle with cancer. Jay Black, front man for the 1960s rock band Jay and the Americans, died at 82.

Today's Birthdays: Black Panthers co-founder Bobby Seale is 86. Actor Christopher Lloyd is 84. Actor Derek Jacobi is 84. Actor Tony Roberts is 83. Movie director Jan (yahn) de Bont is 79. Actor Catherine Deneuve is 79. Rock musician Eddie Brigati is 77. Former Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour is 75. Actor Jeff Goldblum is 70. Rock musician Greg Hawkes is 70. Movie director Bill Condon is 67. Actor Luis Guzman is 66. Actor-writer-producer Todd Graff is 63. Rock musician Cris Kirkwood is 62. Actor-comedian Bob Odenkirk is 60. Olympic gold medal figure skater Brian Boitano is 59. Christian singer TobyMac is 58. Singer-songwriter John Wesley Harding (Wesley Stace) is 57. Actor Valeria Golino is 56. Comedian Carlos Mencia is 55. Country singer Shelby Lynne is 54. Reggae rapper Shaggy is 54. Movie director Spike Jonze is 53. Rapper Tracey Lee is 52. Actor Saffron Burrows is 50. Actor Carmen Ejogo is 49. Former MLB player Ichiro Suzuki (EE'-cheer-oh soo-ZOO'-kee) is 49. Actor Jesse Tyler Ferguson is 47. Christian rock singer-musician Jon Foreman (Switchfoot) is 46. Actor Michael Fishman is 41. Talk show host Michael Essany is 40. MLB infielder Robinson Canó is 40. Rock musician Rickard Goransson (Carolina Liar) is 39. Rock musician Zac Hanson (Hanson) is 37. Actor Corey Hawkins is 34. Actor Jonathan Lipnicki is 32. Actor Sofia Vassilieva (vas-ihl-lee-A'-vuh) is 30. Actor Elias Harger is 15.