

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Thursday, June 8

Senior Menu: Beef stew, biscuit, tossed salad, rainbow sherbet, whole wheat bread.

Legion at Redfield, 5:30 p.m. (1)

Jr. Legion at Redfield, 7:00 p.m. (1)

U12BB vs. Hannigan at Aberdeen North Complex, 5:30 p.m. (2)

U10BB R/W vs. Hannigan at Aberdeen North Complex, 5:30 p.m. (2)

U8BB Red vs. Hannigan at Aberdeen North Complex, 5:30 p.m. (2)

U8SB hosts Britton, 5:30 p.m.

U10SB hosts Britton, 6 p.m. (2)

H12SB hosts Britton, 7 p.m. (2)

Friday, June 9

Senior Menu: Chicken pasta salad, grape juice, breadstick, apple crisp.

Olive Grove: Spring Fundraiser, 7 p.m.

Jr. Legion hosts Mobridge, 5 p.m. (2)

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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"Even though you're growing up, you should never stop having fun."

-Nina Dobrev



Saturday, June 10

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

Legion hosts Milbank, 2 p.m. (2)

U12BB at Sisseton Tourney

U8 R/B Groton Tourney

U10BB W/B at Columbia, 6:30 p.m. (2)

Sunday, June 11

United Methodist: Pastor Brandon and Ashley going away party. Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

St. John Lutheran worship, 9 a.m.; Zion at 11 a.m.

Monday, June 12

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

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GROTON JR. LEGION 2023

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>TIME</u>
May 28	Clark	Groton	3:00 (1)
June 2	Lake Norden	Groton	7:00 (1)
June 6	W.I.N.	Groton	7:30 (1)
June 8	Redfield	Redfield	7:30 (1)
June 9	Mobridge	Groton	5:00 (2)
June 10	Milbank	Groton	4:00 (1)
June 12	W.I.N.	Northville	7:00 (1)
June 14	Sisseton	Sisseton	8:00 (1)
June 17	Britton	Groton	12:00 (1)
June 18	Milbank	Milbank	2:00 (2)
June 21	Hamlin	Groton	8:00 (1)
June 23	Lake Norden	Lake Norden	7:00 (1)
June 24	Britton	Britton	12:00 (1)
June 26	Hamlin	Bryant	8:00 (1)
June 27	Aberdeen Smitty's	Aberdeen	5:30 (2)
June 28	Clark	Clark	8:00 (1)
June 29	Redfield	Groton	7:30 (1)
July 5	Watertown	Groton	5:00 (2)
July 14	Aberdeen Smitty's	Groton	5:30 (2)
July 15	Harrisburg	Brookings	1:00 (1)
	Brookings	Brookings	3:00 (1)
July 24-25	Regional Tournament	TBD	TBD
Aug 4-6	State B Tournament	Lennox	TBD

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

hand over documents detailing an alleged bribery scheme involving President Joe Biden.

Joren van der Sloot, the main suspect in the 2005 disappearance of American student Natalee Holloway in Aruba, will be extradited to the U.S. from Peru to stand trial.

Casualties have been reported after an explosion tore through a mosque in northern Afghanistan during the funeral of a provincial deputy governor who was killed in an attack this week.

London-based soccer club West Ham United won their first European trophy in 58 years after beating Italian side Fiorentina in the Europa Conference League final in Prague.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Kyiv is demanding that Russia pay billions of dollars in reparations for the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam in southern Ukraine, which has left hundreds of thousands without drinking water. The resulting flood has sent toxic water rushing through agricultural fields and human settlements, mainly in the Russian-held territory. .

TALKING POINTS

"The world is changing. We face both unprecedented threats and tremendous opportunities over the next decade. How we respond will define our future as a country. Working together, we'll achieve the best for America," North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum said in a Wall Street Journal op-ed announcing his intent to run for the GOP presidential nomination in 2024.

"Indigenous people are facing some of the highest rates of poverty. We're experiencing some of the lowest education outcomes. We're experiencing some of the most over-criminalization. Not only would it just impact our community, but many of these societal issues that are facing humanity and all of America right now, those are magnified in Native American communities," NDN Collective President Nick Tilsen told Newsweek about calls to boycott Target over the company's grant supporting the Indigenous-led organization.

"I rise to commemorate the start of Pride Month by honoring the one and only queen of drag, RuPaul. An artist, a philanthropist, and a barrier breaker, RuPaul Charles has become an American phenomenon and an icon. Nobody has more charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent than RuPaul Charles," Democratic Rep. Robert Garcia of California said on the House floor.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

President Joe Biden is expected to discuss the ongoing war in Ukraine and climate issues with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak during a bilateral meeting at the White House. Later, Biden will host a Pride celebration on the South Lawn with singer Betty Who.

Vice President Kamala Harris will be in the Bahamas to co-host the U.S.-Caribbean Leaders Meeting with Bahamian Prime Minister Philip Davis.

A 55.22-carat ruby is expected to become the largest ruby to go on the auction block during Sotheby's Magnificent Jewels sale in New York.

President Joe Biden has vetoed a Republican bill that would have blocked his plan to cancel up to \$20,000 of student debt for tens of millions of people.

Some residents, including undocumented immigrants, in Texas would receive monthly checks of \$500 for 18 months as part of a new county program aimed at assisting families living in poverty.

Chairman of the House Oversight and Accountability Committee James Comer will not hold FBI Director Christopher Wray in contempt of Congress after Wray failed to

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Groton Jr. Teeners 14U Loses Lead Early in Defeat

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U fell behind early and couldn't come back in an 8-4 loss to Clark Area 14U on Wednesday. Clark Area 14U took the lead on a groundout in the first inning.

Clark Area 14U got things moving in the first inning, when Logan LaBrie grounded out, scoring one run. Clark Area 14U scored four runs in the seventh inning. The big inning for Clark Area 14U came thanks to doubles by Jakob Steen and Michael Severson and a single by Watson Grantham.

Will Hovde was the winning pitcher for Clark Area 14U. The pitcher surrendered two runs on two hits over three innings, striking out four.

Ryder Schelle took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The righthander went six and two-thirds innings, allowing eight runs on 11 hits and striking out three.

Max Bratland started the game for Clark Area 14U. The righty surrendered two runs on one hit over four innings, striking out one.

Lincoln Krause, Schelle, and TC Schuster each collected one hit to lead Groton Jr. Teeners 14U.

Clark Area 14U tallied 12 hits in the game. Ky Vandersnick, Jakob Steen, Grantham, and Severson each racked up multiple hits for Clark Area 14U.

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U Falls to Clark Area 14U

Clark Area 14U fired up the offense in the first inning, when Watson Grantham singled on a 3-0 count, scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Teeners 14U knotted the game up at two in the bottom of the first inning. Alex Abeln singled on a 1-0 count, scoring two runs.

Clark Area 14U pulled away for good with one run in the second inning. In the second Jakob Steen doubled on the first pitch of the at bat, scoring one run.

Clark Area 14U scored three runs in the fifth inning. The big inning for Clark Area 14U came thanks to a triple by Ky Vandersnick and a single by Max Bratland.

Michael Severson earned the win for Clark Area 14U. The lefty went four and two-thirds innings, allowing three runs on two hits and striking out one.

Nick Groeblichhoff took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The righthander allowed six hits and five runs over three innings, striking out two and walking one.

Gavin Kroll and Abeln each collected one hit to lead Groton Jr. Teeners 14U.

Clark Area 14U scattered ten hits in the game. Severson, Jakob Steen, Grantham, and Ky Vandersnick all had multiple hits for Clark Area 14U. Severson went 3-for-3 at the plate to lead Clark Area 14U in hits.

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Groton Transit Fundraiser

Thursday, June 15, 2023

5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Groton Community Center

***** Groton Transit Fundraiser will be held at the**

**Groton Community Center
109 N. 3rd St. - one block east of
Groton Transit *****

**Let us do the cooking for you!
Burgers, Brats, Beans, Watermelon,
Chips and the famous Mini Donuts!!**

*** Food * Fund * Door Prizes ***

FREE WILL OFFERING

*Please join us and help
support the Groton Transit!*

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GROTON JR. TEENERS 2023

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>TIME</u>
May 30	Huron	Groton	5:00 (2)
June 1	Selby	Selby	6:00 (2)
June 3	Mobridge	Mobridge	3:00 (2)
June 5	Aberdeen Smitty's	Groton	5:30 (2)
June 7	Clark	Groton	6:00 (2)
June 12	W.I.N.	Groton	5:30 (2)
June 13	Webster	Webster	5:30 (2)
June 17	Britton	Groton	10:00 (1)
June 19	Aberdeen Smitty's	Aberdeen	5:30 (2)
June 22	Webster	Groton	5:30 (2)
June 24	Britton	Britton	10:00 (1)
June 26	Huron	Huron	5:00 (2)
June 27	Clark	Clark	6:00 (2)
July 5	W.I.N.	Northville	5:30 (2)
July 7-9	Vern Jark Memorial	Aberdeen	TBD
Tournament			
July 10-12	Regional Tournament	TBD	TBD
July 21-23	State B Tournament	Corsica	TBD



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

SD election roundup: Rapid City's new mayor, Mitchell's new athletic facilities, wastewater nuisance vote

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JUNE 7, 2023 12:13 PM

South Dakotans across the state cast ballots in local government elections Tuesday, making decisions that will decide the trajectory of their cities and schools in years to come.

Elections included Rapid City's mayoral race — where South Dakota's second largest city will be led by a new mayor for the first time in eight years — plus ballot measures in Mitchell and a vote about wastewater discharge in Custer County.

Rapid City's new mayor

Jason Salamun — an Air Force veteran, former banking executive and executive pastor at a Rapid City church — won the five-way race for Rapid City's mayor with 32% of the vote, according to the Secretary of State's election results. The city will not have a runoff election.

The website flags the race results as a possible recount, since runner-up Laura B. Armstrong earned 30% of the vote — 269 votes fewer than Salamun, who earned nearly 4,900 of the 15,425 votes cast. Turnout was 31%, according to the Pennington County Auditor's Office.

Salamun's campaign prioritized safer neighborhoods, the Rapid City Journal reported. He served on the Rapid City Council from 2016 to 2019, decided against running for reelection in 2018, but won a city council race again in 2020. Salamun's term begins on July 3 at the Rapid City Council meeting.

Outgoing Mayor Steve Allender was elected in 2015 and is the second-longest continuously serving mayor in the city's history. He decided not to run for reelection this year after 40 years in public service, including serving as the city's police chief.

Mitchell approves school bond, selling park lots

Mitchell voters had a consequential ballot on Tuesday, voting on school board members and ballot questions as well as city council members and a municipal initiated measure.

Voters resoundingly approved a \$17 million bond to build new athletic facilities as part of the new Mitchell High School construction with an 82% vote, according to the Mitchell Republic.

The improvements include three new gymnasiums, a new wrestling/competitive dance room, new locker rooms and a weight room.

An initiated measure to change Mitchell city ordinance to allow the sale of city-owned park land at Lake Mitchell also passed with just over 56% of the vote, the Mitchell Republic reported. The sales will help fund water-quality improvements to the city's municipal lake, which has an algae problem and increased levels of phosphorus due in part to agricultural runoff from Firesteel Creek into the lake.

State law requires that if park land is no longer to be used for park purposes, a public vote is required to approve changing the use of that park land.

Custer County voters declare wastewater discharge in creek a nuisance

Custer County voters decided with a 56% vote to declare the discharge of treated wastewater from the city of Custer's wastewater treatment plant into French Creek or its tributaries a nuisance. 1,410 voters turned out for the decision.

The nuisance is the latest move by the Preserve French Creek group to prevent the city from relocating its discharge from Flynn Creek to French Creek. The relocation is part of the city's ongoing wastewater treatment plan upgrades, the Custer County Chronicle reports.

But the nuisance vote might not change any plans and could end up in court, county officials predict. The state has already permitted the project.

COMMENTARY

Bans on abortion and gender-affirming care are attacks on liberty

SAMANTHA CHAPMAN

Across the country, our bodies have become political battlegrounds. Politicians are passing extreme bans on abortion, restricting access to birth control and medication abortion, and keeping transgender people from accessing the care that they need.

It's happening here in South Dakota, too.

This past year has been devastating for our right and ability to make personal decisions about our own bodies and medical care. We saw the end of the protections from *Roe v. Wade*, the consequences of South Dakota's total ban on abortion without exceptions for rape, incest, or health of the pregnant person, and now a ban on gender-affirming medical care for youth.

We know that these attacks won't stop with abortion and gender-affirming care. All of our rights, to make decisions about our bodies, families and health, are at stake right now.

But liberty grants us the ability to determine our own paths in life and shape our futures. Medical decisions, who we love, and how we show up in the world should be up to us. Our ability to determine our present and future lives, after all, is fundamental to achieving the liberty guaranteed to everyone in the U.S. Constitution. There is no liberty, however, without self-determination.

One of the most sacred freedoms of self-determination is our right to our own bodies, or bodily autonomy. Both abortion and gender-affirming care are bodily autonomy issues. These issues are interconnected not only because they're both hot-button issues in the media, but also because the movement to attack transgender rights is driven by many of the same actors who worked to eliminate abortion rights in the United States. This effort has been underway for decades and relies on secrecy and conspiracy. They are using similar tactics and the two movements have a common goal: control over our bodies.

The fight for abortion access and access to gender-affirming care is linked by a simple belief — you are the rightful author of your own life story. Both abortion and gender-affirming care give us the freedom to determine our own paths in life and to defy barriers that oppress and erase women and LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit people. South Dakota elected officials who want to strip us of that freedom want to write your story for you, deciding who you are, what you do with your body, and when — or if — you start a family.

South Dakota's ban on gender-affirming care (set to take effect July 1) and the total ban on abortion are interrelated and aim to remove privacy, choice and representation for LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit people and abortion seekers, but the implications affect everyone's civil liberties and civil rights.

Limiting freedom for abortion patients and trans people worsens conditions for everyone. Last year, state Rep. Jon Hansen proposed making it more difficult to travel out of state to access abortions. Just last month, conservative members of Minnesota's Legislature sent a letter to Gov. Kristi Noem requesting South Dakota penalize travel for transgender minors into other states for gender-affirming care. If either suggestion were to become law, women and families crossing the South Dakota-Minnesota border would be subject to unreasonable stops by law enforcement and privacy violations, for the very narrow purpose of identifying potential abortion seekers or youth seeking gender-affirming care.

Any governmental intrusion into our right to bodily autonomy, inclusive of reproductive rights and the right to live as the gender you identify as, robs us of the agency we need to meaningfully drive our own narratives.

As advocacy manager for the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota, Samantha Chapman builds the ACLU's public education and advocacy programs through coalition-building, leadership development, communication and lobbying. She ensures that supporters of the ACLU of South Dakota have the tools, information, and opportunities to be effective advocates on issues like abortion rights, Indigenous justice, criminal justice reform, and LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit rights. Samantha joined the ACLU of South Dakota in December 2022 with six years of professional advocacy and health care communications experience.

Statue of renowned Nebraska author Willa Cather unveiled in U.S. Capitol

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JUNE 7, 2023 4:36 PM

WASHINGTON — Pulitzer Prize-winning author Willa Cather, who brought to life the Great Plains of Nebraska, is now honored with a statue in the U.S. Capitol, becoming the 12th woman represented in the National Statuary Hall Collection.

U.S. and Nebraska lawmakers on Wednesday unveiled the bronze figure of the woman who wrote the widely acclaimed "O Pioneers!," "My Ántonia" and the Pulitzer-winning "One of Ours," depicting the human experience in Nebraska and beyond in the years surrounding the turn of the 20th century.

"Let your fiction grow out of the land beneath your feet," this quote attributed to Cather, is an apt summation of the author's life and work," Republican U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer of Nebraska said at the morning ceremony in the Capitol's Statuary Hall. "Cather's vivid, reflective writing has become synonymous with the pioneer spirit of Nebraska."

Omaha sculptor Littleton Alston, who created the Cather statue, becomes the first Black artist to have a piece in the collection. Alston is an associate professor of sculpture at Creighton University.

"Thank you sir, for capturing this American hero's impact on this nation and on our literary canon with such dignity and honor," U.S. House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York said to Alston, who sat with his family in the front row. Jeffries is the first Black party leader in the House.

Lawmakers from both parties delivered remarks to the hundreds seated in the hall to watch as a black cloth was ceremoniously removed to reveal Cather's likeness.

Alston sculpted Cather in motion, walking through the open Nebraska prairie with a walking stick in her right hand. Cather is dressed in her field research clothing — a large, brimmed hat and a wool jacket — and holds a writing pen and paper in her left hand.

Goldenrod, the Nebraska state flower, and a Western meadowlark, the state bird, are depicted at her feet.

"I've portrayed Cather as a mature artist in her prime," Alston said in 2021 upon the approval of his final design by the Architect of the Capitol. He added: "I sought to capture Willa Cather's spirit, coupled with her achievements and aspirations, in this sculpture. I hope it will provide insight into Cather and her literature for viewers both young and old."

Cather is Nebraska's most recent addition to the U.S. Capitol, erected alongside the state's other effigy, of Chief Standing Bear, a Native American of the Ponca Tribe, installed in 2019. The two bronze figures frame the entrance to the south corridor leading from Statuary Hall to the House chamber.

"As anyone walks (to the chamber) you'll see these two today," House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said to the crowd.

"Willa's statue stands today as a monument to her incredible legacy and our people's incredible spirit," McCarthy, a California Republican, later continued. "Today we should celebrate the progress that America continues to make as a land of opportunity, but it is equally important that we follow in the footsteps of Willa's pioneers."

Each state can contribute two statues to the Capitol's collection. Standing Bear and Cather replace Nebraska's former statues — Populist lawmaker William Jennings Bryan and former Secretary of Agriculture J. Sterling Morton.

Cather's life

Cather was born in Back Creek Valley, Virginia, in 1873 and later moved with her family to Webster County, Nebraska, at the age of 9 before relocating to Red Cloud.

She attended the University of Nebraska but began her writing career in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she worked as a journalist and teacher for a decade.

In 1908, she moved to New York City, where she worked as the managing editor of McClure's Magazine before dedicating her focus to her own literary works that gained both national and international readers.

Cather, who authored 12 novels and many works of short fiction, poetry and nonfiction, was awarded

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the 1923 Pulitzer Prize for "One of Ours," the story of a Nebraska man who fights in World War I.

Cather died in 1947, age 73, in Manhattan. She is buried in Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

"Willa Cather was always a champion for Nebraska. While her writing spans settings that include the desert Southwest, 17th-century Quebec and the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, among others, many of her most well-known stories are about Nebraska and its people. I hope her representation in our U.S Capitol will encourage even more readers to discover the beauty and complexity of her writing," said Ashley Olson, executive director of the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Effects of climate change on farming, federal spending explored by U.S. Senate panel

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JUNE 7, 2023 3:03 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. senators on the Budget Committee dug into the impacts of climate change on farming during a Wednesday hearing, raising concerns about what the next few decades hold for food production and the way of life.

But Republicans and representatives of farm groups pushed back against increased government regulation. Brent Johnson, president of the Iowa Farm Bureau and a fifth-generation farmer, said farmers tend to respond better to incentives for new programs, rather than penalties.

"I think progress is always made better with carrots instead of sticks," Johnson said. "Voluntary, incentive-based programs have made a lot of positive progress in agriculture in the entire history of the industry."

Chair Sheldon Whitehouse, a Rhode Island Democrat, said the country's agriculture landscape is being upended by a series of droughts, floods, wildfires and hurricanes that have harmed farmers and contributed to rising grocery bills for consumers.

"Unpredictable weather has always been a challenge to raising crops and livestock, but farmers are seeing more frequent and extreme weather variability than ever before," Whitehouse said. "Events that used to be considered anomalies now occur with increasing regularity."

Whitehouse noted that federal programs "that protect growers and stabilize the agricultural economy move the costs of damaging weather to the federal government."

During fiscal 2022, Whitehouse said, the U.S. government paid out \$15 billion for crop insurance, including over \$11.6 billion in premium subsidies.

During three years of an emergency relief program, he said, the federal government disbursed more than \$7.4 billion to assist agriculture producers in addition to the wildfire and hurricane indemnity program.

"As climate change makes farming and raising livestock more unpredictable, that cost will continue to grow," Whitehouse said.

Farming and the environment

Iowa Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley, the ranking member on the panel, noted that "farmers' relationship with the environment is often difficult for folks" who haven't experienced the challenges of farming to understand.

"Family farms want to make sure that they leave the land better for the next generation than when it was entrusted to their care," Grassley said.

A lifelong farmer himself, Grassley said, "the first step to running a sustainable farm is for the farm at least to be able to pay the bills. Only then can a farmer implement practices that reduce emissions and improve soil health."

Martin Larsen, a fifth-generation farmer near Byron, Minnesota, told the committee that crop diversification is one of the ways he and other farmers in his region are trying to lessen the impacts of severe weather.

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Larsen said that because different crops are harvested at different times of the year, that can prevent a farmer from losing an entire harvest.

His oat crop, for example, will be harvested soon in Minnesota, while corn would likely come up in July and soybeans in August.

"Oats frankly don't care about a dry August because they're in the grain bin and they're getting processed into food. So that's one way to manage risk from a farmer's perspective," he said

From a policy perspective, Larsen said, Congress and others could work to ease the transition process for farmers, who would likely be planting crops that don't have proven yields in their region of the country.

"If we were to step outside of those proven yields into a crop we haven't grown before, such as oats or something else, we don't have that protection of a good (actual production history)," Larsen said. "So we need some kind of bridge program to get us into growing something different."

Fires, drought

New Mexico Democratic Sen. Ben Ray Luján noted during the hearing that drought and wildfires in his home state have significantly affected farmers and ranchers, especially when smaller amounts of rainfall can now turn into a significant flood.

"Right now we're seeing farmers, producers all over New Mexico that are impacted by what I just described being devastated when we're blessed with rain," Luján said. "And it's just it's terrifying to see."

Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley, a Democrat, said that just before the pandemic began, local officials in the southeast area of his state asked for help monitoring wells — a request that came as a bit of a surprise in a region he described as "allergic to any form of government involvement."

"I nearly fell out of my seat because this is a place where it would be the last thing anyone would ask for," Merkley said. "They said, 'Listen, we've always been against any form of government oversight, but we lost 3 feet of our groundwater last year on top of many, many dozens of feet of losses over previous years. And we're all going to be out of business soon if we don't monitor our groundwater use.'"

Ongoing drought from reduced rainfall and reduced snowpack, Merkley said, has been persistent, causing issues for farmers and others.

Crop insurance and other federal safety net programs that provide cash assistance to farmers who lose crops to natural disasters will have to change with the climate, according to Brandon Willis, an assistant professor in the Department of Applied Economics at Utah State University.

The goal for crop insurance, he said, is to avoid having major natural disasters that aren't covered by the federal program. That would leave farmers without any help.

"I think their job is going to become more challenging in the future," Willis said of the people who regulate and administer crop insurance. "They're going to have to be ahead of the curve, have new programs that address new situations."

Johnson of the Iowa Farm Bureau said the focus should not be on more government rules.

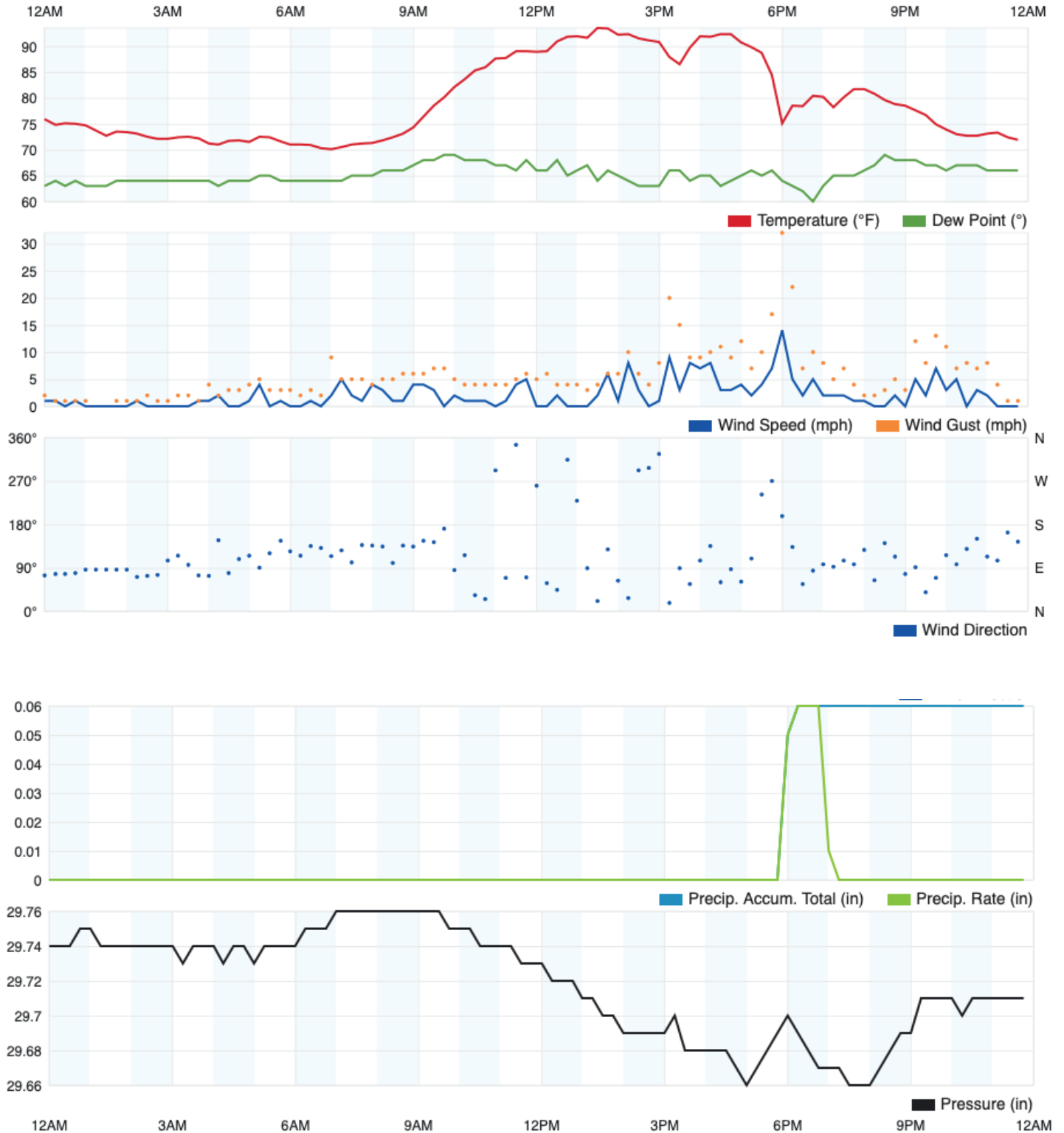
"It's natural to a farmer to want to make progress, to want to do better, to want to be more efficient," Johnson added. "And if you remove that incentive through burdensome regulations my focus changes to meeting a regulation, instead of meeting innovation, instead of finding new opportunities that maybe nobody has even thought of yet."

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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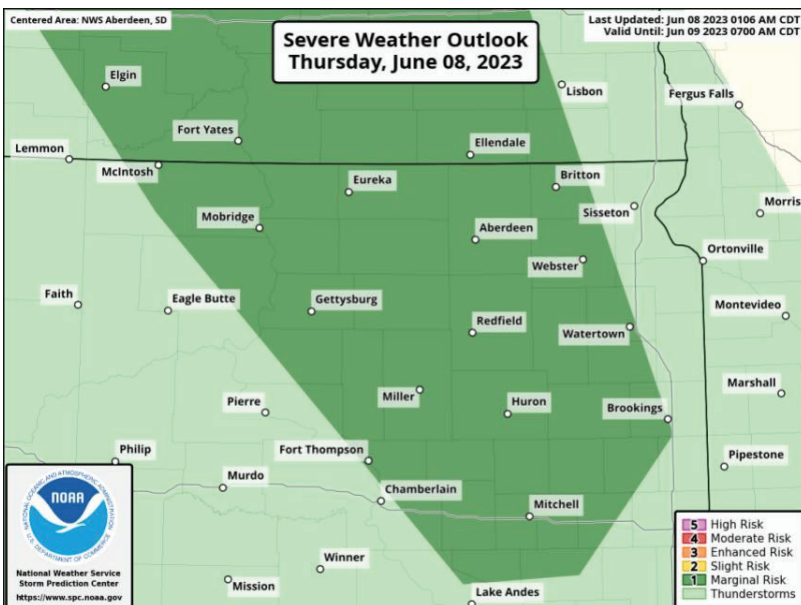
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
 30%	 30%	 50%	 40%	 20%		
Mostly Sunny then Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms and Breezy	Mostly Clear and Breezy	Sunny
High: 89 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 84 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 81 °F	Low: 54 °F	High: 78 °F



Probability of Thunder Forecast

	6/8 Thu					6/9 Fri		Maximum
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	
Aberdeen	5	15	30	25	25	25	30	32
Britton	5	15	30	15	10	20	30	31
Brookings	0	10	15	15	10	20	20	22
Chamberlain	0	15	20	30	30	30	20	32
Clark	5	15	35	25	15	15	30	33
Eagle Butte	5	10	20	30	40	40	35	40
Ellendale	5	20	35	25	30	20	30	35
Eureka	5	15	35	45	45	30	30	44
Gettysburg	5	15	25	30	25	25	30	32
Huron	0	15	20	35	35	35	25	33
Kennebec	5	10	20	25	25	20	25	26
McIntosh	5	10	25	40	40	35	30	40
Milbank	10	20	25	15	5	15	20	23
Miller	5	15	25	25	25	20	30	28
Mobridge	5	15	25	35	40	35	30	42
Murdo	5	10	15	25	30	25	20	28
Pierre	0	10	20	30	25	25	30	28
Redfield	5	15	30	25	25	20	30	29
Sisseton	10	15	20	15	5	15	25	24
Watertown	10	25	30	20	5	15	25	31
Webster	10	15	25	20	10	15	30	30
Wheaton	10	10	20	10	5	15	20	18

Threat: Isolated strong to severe wind gusts & up to quarter sized hail

Timing: This afternoon into the evening

Location: Northern/central/east central SD

Once again, isolated to scattered showers and thunderstorms expected this afternoon into the evening, associated with a frontal boundary. A few of these could become severe, producing at least 58mph wind gusts and up to quarter sized hail.

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A Nice Cool Down Expected This Weekend Before Heat Returns Next Week

June 8, 2023
4:16 AM

Maximum Temperature Forecast

	6/8	6/9	6/10	6/11	6/12	6/13	6/14	6/15	Maximum
	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	
Aberdeen	90	84	81	79	83	88	90	89	90
Britton	85	82	78	76	80	85	88	87	88
Brookings	84	83	80	77	79	84	87		87
Chamberlain	92	90	80	80	83	87	89		92
Clark	84	81	77	74	77	83	85	86	86
Eagle Butte	89	85	76	74	78	83	84	84	89
Ellendale	87	82	78	73	81	86	88	87	88
Eureka	89	83	78	77	80	85	88	87	89
Gettysburg	90	84	77	76	79	84	85	85	90
Huron	91	84	83	81	84	88	90		91
Kennebec	92	89	77	77	80	84	87	87	92
McIntosh	88	81	74	74	78	82	83	83	88
Milbank	81	83	81	77	81	86	89	89	89
Miller	89	85	78	76	80	85	87	87	89
Mobridge	92	86	80	79	82	87	89	87	92
Murdo	91	89	75	75	78	83	85	85	91
Pierre	96	92	77	81	83	88	90	90	96
Redfield	90	84	81	78	81	87	89	89	90
Sisseton	84	84	81	74	78	84	90	89	90
Watertown	84	82	75	75	79	85	87	87	87
Webster	83	81	77	74	77	83	85	85	85
Wheaton	82	84	81	77	82	88	90	89	90



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Behind a frontal passage, cooler air moves in which will decrease our temperatures for the weekend. Heat returns as we head into next week.

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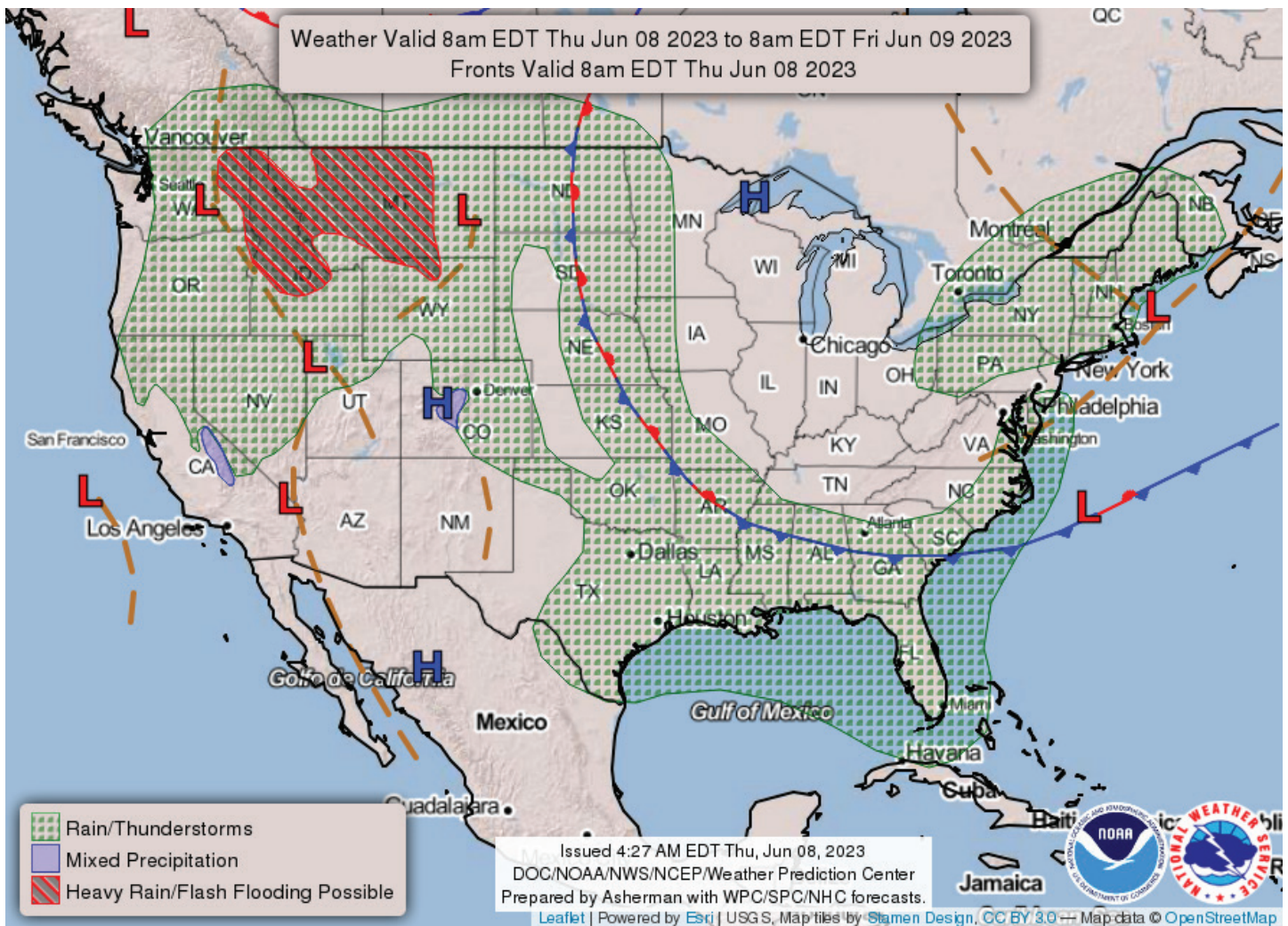
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 94 °F at 1:26 PM
Low Temp: 70 °F at 7:00 AM
Wind: 32 mph at 5:59 PM
Precip: : 0.06

Day length: 15 hours, 38 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 98 in 2000
Record Low: 32 in 1938
Average High: 78
Average Low: 53
Average Precip in June.: 0.90
Precip to date in June.: 0.10
Average Precip to date: 8.15
Precip Year to Date: 8.01
Sunset Tonight: 9:20:31 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:42:10 AM



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Today in Weather History

June 8, 2004: Over eight inches of rain fell near Okreek in rural Todd County causing nearly \$200,000 in damage to local roads. Lightning destroyed the Okreek Community Center.

1951: A tornado was captured on motion pictures for the first time in the USA.

1953 - The worst tornado of record for the state of Michigan killed 116 persons. Flint MI was hardest hit. The tornado, half a mile in width, destroyed 200 homes on Coldwater Road killing entire families. (The Weather Channel)

1966 - A tornado ripped right through the heart of the capitol city of Topeka KS killing sixteen persons and causing 100 million dollars damage. The tornado, which struck during the evening, cut a swath of near total destruction eight miles long and four blocks wide. It was the most destructive tornado of record up until that time. (David Ludlum)

1974 - Severe thunderstorms spawned at least twenty-three tornadoes in Oklahoma during the afternoon and evening hours. One of the tornadoes struck the town Drumright killing sixteen persons and injuring 150 others. A tornado struck the National Weather Service office in Oklahoma City, and two tornadoes hit the city of Tulsa. Thunderstorms in Tulsa also produced as much as ten inches of rain. Total damage from the storms was around thirty million dollars. It was the worst natural disaster of record for Tulsa. (Storm Data)

1987 - Thunderstorms in the northeastern U.S. produced large hail and damaging winds in Vermont injuring two persons. Thunderstorms in Ohio produced wind gusts to 75 mph near Akron, and deluged Pittsfield with two inches of rain in thirty minutes. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Overnight thunderstorms in Iowa produced 5.20 inches of rain at Coon Rapids. Thunderstorms in the Florida Keys drenched Tavernier with 7.16 inches of rain in 24 hours. Eleven cities in the central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather over the Central Gulf Coast Region during the day and evening. Severe thunderstorms spawned 17 tornadoes, including one which injured ten persons and caused a million dollars damage at Orange Beach, AL. Thunderstorm winds gusting to 90 mph killed three persons and injured four others at Mobile AL. Thunderstorms also deluged Walnut Hill and Avalon Beach, FL, with eight inches of rain. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2001: Tropical Storm Allison hits Houston, Texas, for the second time in three days. Louisiana and southern Texas were inundated with rain. Baton Rouge received 18 inches over just a couple of days. Some portions of Texas racked up 36 inches by June 11.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

TELL ME, WHAT DO YOU DO?

An employee was suddenly taken very ill at work and was rushed to the hospital. He was well-liked by everyone for his constant humor and happy disposition. The first one to visit him at the hospital was his boss.

Standing by the side of his bed and holding his hand, his boss encouraged him by saying, "John, please don't worry about a thing. Just get well. We'll all get together and do your work - as soon as we can figure out what you've been doing."

It seems as though every organization has an employee named "John." He's over here, over there, everywhere but where he is supposed to be, not doing what he has been hired to do. He's busy doing nothing while others take up the slack.

Paul said to "Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than people." We are obligated to work responsibly as if Jesus were our employer. Even when we find our work unsatisfying or unfulfilling at times, we must always remember that God put us where we are to do what He wants us to do and that His will and purpose for our lives is what matters most. He will reward us for what we do and how well we do it. We work to glorify Him.

Prayer: Lord, when our work becomes difficult and boring and tedious and we want to quit or perform poorly, reminds us that we do what we do to honor You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free. Ephesians 6:7-8



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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2023 Community Events

- 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)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/08/2023 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)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 06/17/2023 Groton Triathlon
- 07/04/2023 Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.06.23

6 12 23 29 57 4

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$240,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 14 Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.07.23

9 12 21 22 26 9

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$3,700,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 14 Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.07.23

1 5 18 43 47 13

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 44 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.07.23

1 19 20 22 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$90,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 14 Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.07.23

29 44 55 62 66 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 13 Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.07.23

16 21 29 53 66 2

Power Play: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$308,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 13 Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

'Keep them alive': More states legalize fentanyl test strips to combat surging opioid deaths

By SAMANTHA HENDRICKSON Associated Press/Report For America

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — At Cleveland's Urban Kutz Barbershop, customers can flip through magazines as they wait, or help themselves to drug screening tests left out in a box on a table with a somber message: "Your drugs could contain fentanyl. Please take free test strips."

Owner Waverly Willis has given out strips for years at his barbershop, hoping to protect others from unwittingly being exposed to the highly potent synthetic opioid ravaging the U.S. and often secretly laced into other illegal drugs.

"When I put them out, they just fly out the door," said Willis, who proudly hands out about 30 strips a week as part of The Urban Barber Association, a Cleveland organization that provides health education to the community via local barbershops.

Nearly 18 years into his own sobriety from drugs, Willis isn't shy about making the strips available. He figures he'd be dead if fentanyl were so widely prevalent when he was using.

Fentanyl has driven overdose deaths in the U.S. since 2016, and that isn't changing as the cheaper and deadlier synthetic opioid continues to be cut into the drug supply. Approximately 75,000 of the nearly 110,000 overdose deaths of 2022 could be linked to fentanyl, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Legalizing test strips could bring those numbers down, advocates say, saving lives by helping more people understand just how deadly their drugs could be.

Until this spring, use of the strips was technically illegal in Ohio. It has joined at least 20 other states whose lawmakers formally decriminalized the strips since Rhode Island became the first in 2018. Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Kentucky and Mississippi also followed suit this year.

The CDC recommends fentanyl test strips as a low-cost means of helping prevent drug overdoses. They can detect fentanyl in cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin and many other drugs — whether in pills, powders or injectables.

Yet these small paper strips are still considered illegal in some states, outlawed under drug paraphernalia laws dating to the 1970s era war on drugs — long before fentanyl began seeping into the nation's drug supply. Every state but Alaska had an anti-paraphernalia law on the books by the mid-1980s, making materials used for testing and analyzing illicit substances illegal.

Increasingly, the strips are now being seen as a potentially life-saving.

Newark, Ohio, resident Rodney Olinger has used methamphetamines for eight years. The 45-year-old gets four to five fentanyl test strips weekly from the Newark Homeless Outreach, and calls them a "blessing." He credits the strips with helping ensure he and his fiancée, who also uses, stay alive.

"It's very scary," Olinger said of fentanyl. "Just a little bit could kill you."

While the strips may not prevent drug use overall, they allow testers to take a pause if a strip comes back positive, possibly encouraging them to reconsider drug use and seek help, said Sheila Vakharia with the national nonprofit Drug Policy Alliance, which seeks to shape U.S. drug policy.

"You never know if a fentanyl test strip can keep someone alive long enough so they can make that decision for themselves," she said.

The CDC says any drug that dissolves in water can be tested. The strip is dipped in the solution for about 15 seconds, set out a few minutes, and is positive for fentanyl if a single pink line appears. Two pink lines is a negative result.

The strips can often be obtained from advocacy groups, local and state health departments, or purchased online.

Where strips are illegal, the push to change the law continues.

In Kansas, lawmakers debated until April whether to legalize the strips. But there was never any debate

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for Kansas mother Brandy Harris, who lost her 21-year-old son Sebastain Sheahan to a fentanyl overdose in April 2022. Addicted since age 13, he was first prescribed opioids after being hit by a truck.

Friends and family knew Sheahan as “big-hearted” and “goofy” with a soft spot for abused animals. He was open about his addiction issues and had been clean three years before he died after a relapse.

Harris believes her son would still be alive if he’d had test strips showing what he was ingesting. “I do believe that if these were available, that at least one person would be saved,” Harris said. “And that is the main goal -- at least one person.”

Kansas’ governor recently signed a bipartisan bill decriminalizing the strips starting July 1.

Montana and other states are considering similar legislation. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas recently dropped opposition to decriminalizing the strips, citing a “better understanding” of how they prevent opioid deaths.

And in Pennsylvania, Republican state Rep. Jim Struzzi lost his brother to a drug overdose in 2014 and lobbied colleagues for years to destigmatize the strips.

“Fentanyl isn’t going to ask you if you’re a Democrat or a Republican before it kills you,” said Struzzi, who sponsored state legislation making test strips legal in January.

The shift in how political leaders view the strips has advocacy groups, health departments and outreach programs optimistic. Increased legalization opens doors for more funding, including for strips themselves and for public education campaigns.

The SOAR Initiative, a Columbus, Ohio-based nonprofit fighting overdose deaths, distributes about 5,000 strips each month, according to executive director Jessica Warner.

SOAR sends out the strips via mail to anonymous recipients, both individuals and larger distributors. Handing them out never brought legal consequences in Ohio even before.

In fact, prosecution for possessing the strips doesn’t appear to be occurring anywhere in the U.S., according to Jonathan Woodruff of the Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association, which tracks drug laws nationwide. He said drug paraphernalia possession is a minor offense in most states and law enforcement may now be more attuned to the strips’ life-saving benefits.

Northeast of Boston, police Lt. Sarko Gergerian of the Winthrop Police Department has boxes of them stacked in his office.

Legalized in Massachusetts in 2018, the strips go into “survival kits” that his department, as part of the Community and Law Enforcement Assisted Recovery Program, gives to those struggling with substance use — as well as to recovery coaches and social workers for distribution.

Gergerian calls it a “win” when a life is saved — not the arrest of someone struggling with addiction.

“Could you imagine if your kid was addicted to a substance and they weren’t ready to give it up?” Gergerian posed. “We need to keep them alive. Anything else is immoral.”

Kantele Franko in Columbus, Ohio, and John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas, contributed to this report.

Samantha Hendrickson is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

As winter warms, farmers in southern US find ways to adapt

By MELINA WALLING Associated Press

When Pam Knox walked into the peach orchard at the University of Georgia horticulture farm this spring, there was nothing on the trees except leaves and a couple of brown fruits — the result of one of the state’s warmest winters ever followed by two nights of freezing weather in March.

“It’s just really odd, because over the course of one night, they lost their entire crop and their entire production here,” said Knox, an agricultural climatologist with the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension, which shares research and expertise with farmers and others. Commercial peach farmers in the

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state lost as much as 95% of their yield, she estimated.

Georgia, with its iconic peaches, isn't the only place in the south where farmers have had to deal with changing conditions. Houston, Tupelo and Atlanta all had one of their top five warmest winters on record this year, according to the National Centers for Environmental Information. Farmers are contending with those warming winters by using new or improved agricultural techniques, trying out new crop varieties and even growing crops that were previously less common in their regions.

"Winter is the season in Georgia that is warming the most quickly," Knox said, affirming a trend that includes most of the United States. "We don't have any reason to think that that trend is going to change, so we will continue to expect more warmer winters."

Cody Mills, an extension agent and Chickasaw County coordinator at Mississippi State University, said a warmer and wetter winter delayed some farmers from planting corn and some soybeans because they had to wait for drier weather. A couple weeks might not seem like a long time, he said, but that can set back cutting and harvesting later.

Cattle ranchers have been affected, too. Mills said that the pathogens associated with a wet winter – as well as the mud – took a toll on some cows. Wetter, warmer weather creates better conditions for the pathogens and parasites that cause cows to develop conditions like foot rot, pinkeye and diarrhea, said Russ Daly, an extension veterinarian with South Dakota State University.

In Texas, the warm weather presented more of a mixed bag for cattle farmers, said David Anderson, a professor and extension economist at Texas A&M University. He said drought conditions have meant higher hay costs, but farmers have needed less of it since cows eat less in hotter weather.

Farmers have always adapted to changing weather. Now they're adapting to climate change.

For example, some fruit growers in Georgia are planting earlier-blooming peach varieties that don't require as much cold weather, Knox said. But it's not an easy calculation, because some of those earlier varieties may also be more susceptible to frost.

Farmers may also diversify their crops. Knox said some farmers in recent years have begun trying citrus and olives that are more often grown in climates with milder winters than Georgia's.

In Mississippi, some farmers have turned to corn varieties with a shorter growing season, Mills said. And researchers are working to improve vaccines against livestock conditions that can be made worse by a warming environment.

Taking good care of animals regardless of the changing conditions is paramount, said Brandi Karisch, an extension beef cattle specialist for Mississippi State University.

"'We've always done it that way' is usually the death of a business, and you can see the same thing in the cattle world," Karisch said. "We have to adapt to what the animals are telling us that they need and what we're seeing from a climate and a system standpoint."

As they work to ensure the health of their crops and animals, farmers also "have to make sure that they make money, and you're not going to invest in a crop that's not going to succeed," Knox said. But she doesn't see the end of Georgia peaches anytime soon. Instead, she sees farmers considering which peach varieties they'll be able to grow going forward and what other crops they can add to the mix.

"I think the farmers see the temperatures get(ting) warmer as an opportunity to increase the diversity of what they can grow," Knox said. "They're trying to figure out ways to respond to that and to take advantage of it."

Follow Melina Walling on Twitter at @MelinaWalling

Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

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Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined
Madison Daily Leader. June 1, 2023.

Editorial: More mental health staffing needs facilities

Several entities, including the state of South Dakota, nonprofit health-care systems and private businesses, are either currently expanding mental health services in the state or plan to do so in upcoming years.

No one seems to doubt the need for increased mental health services, especially in areas like substance abuse or violent behavior. Most calls for reform of the criminal justice system include some element of more mental health services. Many newspaper stories have been written about the importance of providing health services to criminals, homeless persons, veterans with post-traumatic stress issues from their military service and more.

But it's an uphill battle. All over the state – over the whole nation, for that matter – there is a shortage of mental health professionals. Increased pay has helped a little, but there aren't enough students studying the field in college to fill the gap. There is a push for new scholarship programs to encourage more students to start pursuing the field.

Building the workforce is only one element of the growth, as the facilities need to be expanded and improved also. There certainly needs to be more space for counseling and housing. There is also a need for new designs of that space, primarily to improve safety for the staff. When mentally ill patients turn violent, the staff must have the tools and the proper facility features to stay safe.

The good news is that new facilities are on the way. Community Counseling in Madison doubled its size a few years back. The Lewis & Clark Behavioral Center in Yankton just broke ground on a new \$26 million facility. The Link, a mental health and addiction triage center in Sioux Falls, marked its one-year anniversary recently. Hospitals in the state have added new wings for behavioral health and modified existing facilities to better serve those who need mental health services.

We're a long way from building capacity for the mental health needs of today. But progress in both staffing and facilities is a good indication that the future will be better.

END

After years of threats, a feud ends with a Black mom dead and her white neighbor arrested

By CURT ANDERSON and FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

OCALA, Fla. (AP) — A woman accused of shooting and killing a mother in front of her kids last week in a shocking end to an ongoing feud between neighbors has been arrested.

Susan Louise Lorincz, 58, who is white, was charged with manslaughter with a firearm, culpable negligence, battery and two counts of assault in the death of Ajike Owens, a Black mother of four, Sheriff Billy Woods said in a statement.

Authorities came under pressure Tuesday to arrest and charge Lorincz, who fired the gun and killed Owens in a case that has put Florida's divisive stand your ground law back into the spotlight.

In a video posted on Facebook late Tuesday night, the sheriff said this was not a stand your ground case but "simply a killing."

"Now many of you were struggling to understand why there was not an immediate arrest," the sheriff said. "The laws here in the state of Florida are clear. Now I may not like them. I may not agree with them. But however, those laws I will follow."

The video shared by the sheriff's office shows two detectives and a deputy leading Lorincz down a hallway with her hands behind her back.

Jail records show she was booked, but did not list a lawyer who could speak on her behalf. Lorincz did not attend the first court hearing on Wednesday since she's undergoing medical testing, sheriff's officials said in a statement.

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During a news conference at New St. John Missionary Baptist Church on Wednesday afternoon, the victim's family, friends and community leaders joined civil rights attorney Ben Crump in thanking the sheriff for making the arrest, while calling for justice for Owens.

"This is not a difficult case," Crump said. He called on the state attorney's office to "zealously prosecute" the shooter.

Crump, along with Owens's mother and multiple neighbors noted during the news conference that the "feud" the sheriff spoke of was between Lorincz and neighborhood children, who often played in a lot outside her home. Neighbors said Lorincz frequently called the children vile names and antagonized them.

That was the case on Friday night, they said. Sheriff's deputies responded to a trespassing call and found Owens with gunshot wounds.

The neighborhood of single-story duplexes and quadruplexes is in the rolling hills outside of Ocala. The area is known for its thoroughbred horse farms, which surround the working-class neighborhood.

Lorincz told investigators that she acted in self-defense, and that Owens, 35, had been trying to break down her door before she fired the gun, the sheriff said. She also told them that Owens had come after her in the past, and had previously attacked her.

Sheriff Woods said the investigation, which included eyewitness statements, established that Lorincz's actions were not justifiable under Florida law.

Earlier the sheriff had said that because of the stand your ground law he couldn't make an arrest unless he could prove the shooter did not act in self-defense.

According to the sheriff's account, Owens was shot moments after going to Lorincz's apartment because she had yelled at Owens' children as they played outside. He said Lorincz had thrown a pair of skates that hit one of the children.

The sheriff's office hasn't confirmed there were slurs uttered or said whether race was a factor in the shooting.

Owens' mother, Pamela Dias, said Wednesday that her two young grandsons, ages 12 and 9, are dealing with feelings of guilt — because they were with their mom outside Lorincz's house that evening, and saw her get shot.

"Our 12-year-old blames himself for the death of his mother because he couldn't save her. He couldn't give her CPR," Dias said.

Hours before Tuesday's arrest, some three dozen protesters, most of them Black, gathered outside the Marion County Judicial Center, demanding the shooter's arrest. The chief prosecutor, State Attorney William Gladson, met with them and urged patience while the investigation continued.

"If we are going to make a case we need as much time and as much evidence as possible," Gladson said. "I don't want to compromise any criminal investigation."

In a statement late Tuesday, Crump said while Owens' family is "relieved" that an arrest has been made, they remain concerned it has taken this long because "archaic laws like Stand Your Ground exist" Crump also represented the family of Trayvon Martin who was fatally shot by George Zimmerman in central Florida in 2012.

Lauren Smith, 40, lives across the street from where the shooting happened. She was on her porch that day and saw one of Owens' young sons pacing, and yelling, "They shot my mama, they shot my mama."

She ran toward the house, and started chest compressions until a rescue crew arrived. She said there wasn't an altercation and that Owens didn't have a weapon.

"She was angry all the time that the children were playing out there," Smith said. "She would say nasty things to them. Just nasty." Smith, who is white, described the neighborhood as family friendly.

The sheriff said that since January 2021, deputies responded at least a half-dozen calls in connection with what police described as feuding between Owens and Lorincz.

"There was a lot of aggressiveness from both of them, back and forth," the sheriff said Lorincz told investigators. "Whether it be banging on the doors, banging on the walls and threats being made. And then at that moment is when Ms. Owens was shot through the door."

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Stand your ground cases are deemed justifiable five times more frequently when a white shooter kills a Black victim, according to Angela Ferrell-Zabala, executive director of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America.

In 2017, Florida lawmakers shifted the burden of proof from a person claiming self-defense to prosecutors. Before the change in law, prosecutors could charge someone with a shooting, and then defense attorneys would have to present an affirmative defense for why their client shouldn't be convicted. Now authorities must rule out self-defense before bringing charges.

Stand your ground and "castle doctrine" cases — which allow residents to defend themselves either by law or court precedent when threatened — have sparked outrage amid a spate of shootings across the country.

In April, 84-year-old Andrew Lester, a white man, shot and injured 16-year-old Ralph Yarl, a Black teenager who rang his doorbell in Kansas City. Yarl mistakenly went to the wrong house to pick up his younger siblings. Lester faces criminal charges. At trial, he may argue that he thought someone was trying to break into his house.

Missouri and Florida are among about 30 states that have stand your ground laws.

The most well-known examples of the stand your ground argument came up in the trial of George Zimmerman, who fatally shot Trayvon Martin in 2012.

Owens' mother said she will now raise her four young grandchildren.

"I pray that God gives me the strength, the wisdom and the ability to raise these children as our daughter would have us to do," Dias said, of receiving childcare help from family and friends. "I thank God that I don't have to do it alone."

Frisaro reported from Fort Lauderdale.

Zelenskyy visits area flooded by destroyed dam as five reported dead in Russian-occupied city

By VASILISA STEPANENKO and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

KHERSON, Ukraine (AP) — Five residents of a Russian-occupied city next to a breached dam have died in massive flooding triggered by the catastrophe, its Kremlin-appointed mayor said Thursday, the first official report of deaths from one of the largest environmental crises since Russia's invasion of Ukraine more than 15 months ago.

Vladimir Leontyev, the Russian-appointed mayor of Nova Kakhovka, told Russian state TV that two other people who had gone missing after Tuesday's dam breach had been found, and efforts were underway to evacuate them.

Officials say more than 6,000 people have been evacuated from dozens of inundated cities, towns and villages on both the Russian and Ukrainian-controlled sides of the Dnieper river, which has become part of the front line between the fighting forces.

The collapse of the Kakhovka hydroelectric dam and emptying of its reservoir on the river have added to the misery that the region has suffered for more than a year from artillery and missile attacks. Rescue workers fanned out to get drinking water to beleaguered locals, warning that contaminated water could cause illness.

Thousands of people have been left homeless, cropland has been ruined, access to electricity and mobile phone networks has been limited or cut off entirely, and land mines have been displaced by the surging waters, officials say.

On the Ukrainian-controlled western bank, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived Thursday to evaluate the response to damage caused by the dam breach, including efforts to evacuate civilians and provide them with drinking water and other support.

After visiting an aid distribution point and a medical facility, Zelenskyy ordered Ukrainian officials to provide a "fair valuation" of flood damages and develop a scheme to compensate residents whose property

was damaged or whose businesses had to relocate, his office said in an online update.

In areas that they administer, Russian-appointed authorities said nearly two dozen people have been hospitalized, 4,280 people have been evacuated and some 14,000 buildings have been flooded.

Russian officials say the destruction of the dam, which created a giant reservoir of water used for irrigation and drinking water, will eventually halt fresh water supplies to Russian-controlled Crimea, even though the peninsula has enough fresh water for now — with its reservoirs 80% full.

Ukrainian authorities cut off fresh water supplies to Crimea after Moscow's illegal annexation of the peninsula in 2014, and Russian President Vladimir Putin cited the need to restore them among the main reasons for his decision to invade Ukraine.

Regional Governor Oleksandr Prokudin said the average level of flooding Thursday morning in the region was more than 5.6 meters (18 feet) and roughly 600 square kilometers (231 square miles) of the region were submerged — more than two-thirds of that on the Russian-controlled eastern bank.

He said nearly 2,000 people had been evacuated from Ukraine-controlled areas, and the operations were continuing despite constant shelling from Russian forces across the river.

"People are tired ... (they) have no desire to flee to other regions of Ukraine," Prokudin said.

The true scale of the disaster is yet to emerge in an affected area that was home to more than 60,000 people.

French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted that the destruction of the dam was an "attack" and an "atrocious act," without saying who is to blame. Paris said it was rushing aid including water purifiers, 500,000 water purification tablets and hygiene kits to help people displaced by the disaster.

Ukrainian officials have accused Russia of purposely destroying the dam, which is located in an area controlled by Russian forces.

President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, a key ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, backed the Russian claim that Ukraine blew up the dam to distract attention from what it described as a botched Ukrainian attempt to launch a counteroffensive.

"They needed to cover up the three days of their 'counteroffensive' in which they lost nearly 200 armored vehicles and more than 2,000 troops," he said during Thursday's meeting with officials. "And so it's all about Kakhovka and no one is talking about that. It's quite obvious."

Keaten reported from Kyiv, Ukraine. Joanna Kozłowska in London and Hanna Arhirova in Warsaw, Poland, contributed to this report.

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine: <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

AP Exclusive: Drone images of collapsed dam show ruined structure, devastation and no signs of life

KHERSON, Ukraine (AP) — Exclusive drone footage of the collapsed Ukrainian dam and surrounding villages under Russian occupation show the ruined structure falling into the flooded river and hundreds of submerged homes, greenhouses and even a church — and no sign of life.

An Associated Press team flew a drone over the devastation on Wednesday, a day after the destruction of the Kakhovka dam on the Dnieper River. The buildings that remain visible above the rushing waters did not show damage typical of a bomb dropped from above, such as scorch marks or shrapnel scars.

Russia accused Ukraine of bombarding the structure, which was under Moscow's control, while Ukraine alleged that Russia blew it up from within.

The collapse of the dam in an area that Moscow has controlled for over a year and the emptying of its reservoir has irrevocably changed the landscape downstream, and shifted the dynamic of the 15-month-old war.

In the images captured by the AP, most of the dam was submerged by the rushing water. Two nearby villages under occupation, Dniproyny and Korsunka, were also underwater up to the rooftops of homes

and a bright blue church.

The rounded shape of dozens of greenhouses was visible over the waterline. The images were devoid of people, but AP journalists could hear the screaming howls of dogs trapped by the flooding.

The nearby town of Nova Kakhovka, also under occupation, was less touched by the flooding but equally devoid of people and animals. Its Ferris wheel was stopped and water lapped up a main street.

Ukraine has warned since last October that the hydroelectric dam was mined by Russian forces, and accused them of touching off an explosion that has turned the downstream areas into a waterlogged wasteland. Russia said Ukraine hit the dam with a missile. Experts have said the structure was in disrepair, which could also have led to its collapse.

There were no signs typical of a missile attack in the few remaining buildings.

The Dnieper River forms part of the front line in the war, and many people had already fled the area because of the fighting. Ukraine holds the western bank, while Russia controls the low-lying eastern side, which is more vulnerable to flooding.

Anna Lodygina, a Nova Kakhovka resident who fled last autumn, said the flooding has paralyzed the occupied town, with markets closed, and limited electricity and mobile reception. The Russian soldiers occupying her family home, just 500 meters (yards) from the river, fled after the dam collapsed and neighbors have told her water now reaches the upper floor of the two-story building.

Friends and neighbors told her the Russians pulled out themselves, but extended no help to residents, so people took matters into their own hands, finding shelter a neighborhood farther from the river.

According to Lodygina, the historic part of the city is submerged. "Its state now is unknown," she said.

On the Ukrainian-controlled side, a Red Cross worker fielded calls from people begging for rescue from the other bank but could do little for them.

"Our telephone is burning up from calls and our phone number is not well known. Just yesterday we got at least 30 calls from occupied territories," said Mykola Tarenenko, chief of the Kherson Red Cross quick response team. "People are asking us to evacuate them because no evacuation was organized."

Pope in 'good general condition' after surgery to remove intestinal scar tissue, repair hernia

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis' was in "good general condition" Thursday, alert and breathing on his own following a three-hour operation to remove intestinal scar tissue and repair a hernia in his abdominal wall, the Vatican said.

The 86-year-old Francis rested "extensively" during a peaceful night and was spending his first day after the surgery observing the "necessary post-operative rest," the Vatican said in a statement.

"The pope is informed of the messages of closeness and affection that have come in the last few hours and expresses his gratitude, while asking for continued prayers for him," the statement said.

Francis was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital Wednesday for his second major abdominal operation in two years, following a 2021 procedure to remove part of his colon. Doctors revealed that in addition to that 2021 operation, Francis had undergone previous abdominal surgeries sometime before 2013 in his native Argentina, which had also caused intestinal scarring.

During the operation Wednesday, doctors removed adhesions, or internal scarring, on the intestine that had caused a partial blockage. To repair a hernia that had formed over a previous scar, a prosthetic mesh was also placed in the abdominal wall.

Dr. Sergio Alfieri, director of abdominal and endocrine sciences who performed the surgery, said the operation was a success and that Francis was suffering from no other pathologies, that the tissue removed was benign and that after he recovers, he should be fine.

A feared protrusion, or bulging of the intestine through the hernia tear, was apparently not found.

Alfieri, who also removed part of Francis' colon in 2021, told an evening press conference that the pope was awake, alert and even joking.

"When will we do the third one?" he quoted Francis as saying.

The pontiff was expected to remain in the 10th floor papal suite at Gemelli for several days, and all papal audiences were canceled through June 18.

The operation was scheduled after Francis had complained about increasing bouts of pain and intestinal blockages. After going to Gemelli on Tuesday for checks, Francis was admitted Wednesday following his general audience and underwent the procedure a short time later.

The surgery was likely scheduled now to give Francis plenty of time to recover before embarking on planned travel later this summer: an Aug. 2-6 trip to Portugal for World Youth Day, and an Aug. 31-Sept. 4 trip to Mongolia and a Sept. 23 day trip to Marseille, France.

"It appears they operated on him in a timely fashion with no compromise to his intestine," said Dr. Walter Longo, chief of colon and rectal surgery at Yale University School of Medicine, who did not participate in the surgery and commented after consulting the Vatican statement on the procedure.

Francis remained in charge of the Vatican and the 1.3-billion strong Catholic Church, even while unconscious and in the hospital, according to canon law.

In July 2021, Francis spent 10 days at Gemelli to remove 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his large intestine. In an interview with The Associated Press in January, Francis said the diverticulosis, or bulges in his intestinal wall, that prompted that surgery had returned.

After that surgery, Francis lamented that he hadn't responded well to the general anesthetic. That reaction in part explained his refusal to have surgery to repair strained knee ligaments that have forced him to use a wheelchair and walker for over a year.

However, Alfieri said Francis had no clinically adverse reactions to the anesthesia in 2021 or Wednesday.

"Clearly no one likes to be operated on and put to sleep because the moment we're put under, we lose consciousness," he said. "But there was no physiological problem two years ago or today."

Dr. Manish Chand, a professor of surgery at University College London who specializes in colorectal surgery, said the greatest issue going forward will be pain management and making sure the wound heals properly.

"In the first six weeks after this type of surgery, you're at risk of getting a recurrence again," he said. To avoid that, patients are advised not to do anything strenuous.

Knife attacker injures several people, including children, in French Alpine town

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — An attacker with a knife stabbed several young children and at least one adult, leaving some with life-threatening injuries, in a bucolic lakeside park in a town in the French Alps on Thursday before he was arrested, authorities said.

French President Emmanuel Macron said "children and an adult are between life and death." He described the assault in the Alpine town of Annecy as an "attack of absolute cowardice."

"The nation is in shock," he tweeted.

Police detained the attacker, said Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. Police said the attacker was a man in his thirties.

Witnesses said some of the children appeared very young. A man who spoke to broadcaster BFMTV said he saw first-aiders working on "little bodies, 3 or 4 years old, perhaps."

A local lawmaker, Antoine Armand, said the children were attacked on a playground. Speaking to BFMTV from the National Assembly building in Paris, he said the victims included "very young" children and that they were "savagely attacked." The attack took place close to a primary school, he said.

National police and an Interior Ministry official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak about the developing situation both said that four children were among the wounded.

Police said two of the children suffered life-threatening injuries and that the other two were lightly injured.

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Police said one adult also suffered life-threatening wounds.

Both police and the Interior Ministry official cautioned that the number of wounded could evolve because the full details weren't yet clear.

In Paris, lawmakers interrupted a debate to hold a moment of silence for the victims.

The assembly president, Yaël Braun-Pivet, said: "There are some very young children who are in critical condition and I invite you to respect a minute of silence for them, for their families, and so that, we hope, the consequences of this very grave attack do not lead to the nation grieving."

Smoky haze blanketing US, Canada could last for days as wildfires rage, winds won't budge

By JENNIFER PELTZ, ROB GILLIES and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — On air quality maps, purple signifies the worst of it. In reality, it's a thick, hazardous haze that's disrupting daily life for millions of people across the U.S. and Canada, blotting out skylines and turning skies orange.

And with weather systems expected to hardly budge, the smoky blanket billowing from wildfires in Quebec and Nova Scotia and sending plumes of fine particulate matter as far away as North Carolina should persist into Thursday and possibly the weekend.

That means at least another day, or more, of a dystopian-style detour that's chased players from ballfields, actors from Broadway stages, delayed thousands of flights and sparked a resurgence in mask wearing and remote work — all while raising concerns about the health effects of prolonged exposure to such bad air.

The weather system that's driving the great Canadian-American smoke out — a low-pressure system over Maine and Nova Scotia — "will probably be hanging around at least for the next few days," U.S. National Weather Service meteorologist Bryan Ramsey said.

"Conditions are likely to remain unhealthy, at least until the wind direction changes or the fires get put out," Ramsey said. "Since the fires are raging — they're really large — they're probably going to continue for weeks. But it's really just going to be all about the wind shift."

Across the eastern U.S., officials warned residents to stay inside and limit or avoid outdoor activities again Thursday, extending "Code Red" air quality alerts in some places for a third-straight day as forecasts showed winds continuing to push smoke-filled air south.

In Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser ordered schools to cancel outdoor recess, sports and field trips Thursday. In suburban Philadelphia, officials set up an emergency shelter so people living outside can take refuge from the haze.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said the state was making a million N95 masks — the kind prevalent at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic — available at state facilities, including 400,000 in New York City. She also urged residents to stay put.

"You don't need to go out and take a walk. You don't need to push the baby in the stroller," Hochul said Wednesday night. "This is not a safe time to do that."

The message may be getting through. So far, officials said Wednesday, New York City has yet to see an uptick in 911 calls related to respiratory issues and cardiac arrests.

More than 400 blazes burning across Canada have left 20,000 people displaced. The U.S. has sent more than 600 firefighters and equipment to Canada. Other countries are also helping.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau spoke to President Joe Biden by phone on Wednesday. Trudeau's office said he thanked Biden for his support and that both leaders "acknowledged the need to work together to address the devastating impacts of climate change."

Canadian officials say this is shaping up to be the country's worst wildfire season ever. It started early on drier-than-usual ground and accelerated quickly. Smoke from the blazes has been lapping into the U.S. since last month but intensified with recent fires in Quebec, where about 100 were considered out of control Wednesday.

"I can taste the air," Dr. Ken Strumpf said in a Facebook post from Syracuse, New York, where the sky

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took on the colorful nickname of the local university: Orange.

The smoke was so thick in Canada's capital, Ottawa, that office towers just across the Ottawa River were barely visible. In Toronto, Yili Ma said her hiking group canceled a planned hike this week, and she was forgoing the restaurant patios that are a beloved summer tradition in a nation known for hard winters.

"I put my mask away for over a year, and now I'm putting on my mask since yesterday," Ma lamented.

Eastern Quebec got some rain Wednesday, but Montreal-based Environment Canada meteorologist Simon Legault said no significant rain is expected for days in the remote areas of central Quebec where the wildfires are more intense.

In the U.S., federal officials paused some flights bound Wednesday for New York's LaGuardia Airport and slowed planes to Newark and Philadelphia because smoke was limiting visibility.

Major League Baseball's Yankees and Phillies had their games postponed. On Broadway, "Hamilton" and "Camelot" canceled Wednesday performances and "Prima Facie" star Jodie Comer left a matinee after 10 minutes because of difficulty breathing. The show restarted with an understudy, show publicists said.

It was not to be at Central Park's outdoor stage, either. Shakespeare in the Park canceled its Thursday and Friday performances of "Hamlet," saying 'tis not nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of wretched air.

Gillies reported from Toronto.

Stock market today: Global shares trade mixed following technology selloff on Wall Street

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Global shares were trading mixed Thursday after heavy selling of big-name tech stocks pushed benchmarks lower on Wall Street.

Stocks rose in Paris, Frankfurt, Shanghai and Hong Kong but fell in Tokyo, London and Sydney. U.S. futures were flat and oil prices declined.

The European economy contracted slightly at the end of last year and beginning of 2023, according to revised figures released Thursday that underline the impact of the loss of Russian natural gas and high inflation on consumer spending. That means the eurozone endured two consecutive quarters of declining output, which is one definition of recession often used in political and economic discussions, dubbed a "technical" recession.

The economic growth figure for the 20 countries that use the euro currency was revised down from zero to minus 0.1% for the fourth quarter of 2022. The number for the first three months of this year also was downgraded from scant 0.1% growth to minus 0.1%.

France's CAC 40 gained 0.3% in early trading to 7,224.07, while Germany's DAX added 0.2% to 15,993.05. Britain's FTSE 100 slipped 0.2% to 7,612.19. The futures for the Dow Jones Industrial Average and S&P 500 were nearly unchanged.

In Asian trading, Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 sank 0.9% to 31,641.27. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 shed 0.3% to 7,099.70. South Korea's Kospi slipped 0.2% to 2,610.85. Hong Kong's Hang Seng edged up 0.3% to 19,299.18. The Shanghai Composite gained 0.5% to 3,213.59. Taiwan's Taix lost 1.1%, while India's Sensex gave up 0.4%.

The Japanese government revised its estimate for growth in the January-March quarter sharply higher, to 2.7%. That was above what analysts had expected. The economy has been recovering since restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic were lifted. The nation has seen a return of tourists, as well as other economic activity.

The focus is now on when Japan's central bank may move away from the easy monetary policy it's stuck to for years. In the past year, the U.S. Federal Reserve and the world's other central banks have been raising interest rates. Japan's benchmark rate is minus 0.1%.

the numbers had worked.

The club deflected blame, though, saying that Messi decided to go to the United States because he preferred a less-demanding league so he could prioritize time with his family.

"President (Joan) Laporta understood and respected Messi's decision to want to compete in a league with fewer demands, further away from the spotlight and the pressure he has been subject to in recent years," the club said in a statement after Messi's announcement.

But Laporta again couldn't offer much to Messi even after restructuring the team's finances. He had used some of the team's future assets to revamp the current squad with players such as Robert Lewandowski, Raphinha and Jules Koundé, leaving little salary cap space to fit Messi. There wasn't going to be much room left even after the departures of former Messi teammates Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba.

Laporta had said he would do everything possible to bring Messi back even though he acknowledged it wasn't going to be easy. There was still hope on Monday when Messi's father, Jorge, who is also his agent, was in Barcelona and said his son had the team as his first choice. On that same day, though, the club was informed that Messi was going to join Inter Miami.

Barcelona won the league title this season for the first time since 2019, but it still struggled in the Champions League and the Europa League. The team's first title since Messi's departure had been the Spanish Super Cup in January, when it defeated rival Real Madrid in the final in Saudi Arabia.

Barcelona wished Messi "the best of luck in his new professional phase" and said it will work "to promote a proper tribute from Barça fans to honor a footballer who has been, is, and always will be beloved by Barça."

Messi arrived at Barcelona's youth squads at the age of 13 and played in 17 successful seasons with the main team, helping the Catalan club win 35 titles, including four Champions Leagues, 10 Spanish leagues and seven Copa del Reys. He won a record six Ballon d'Or awards with Barcelona as the world's top player, and remains the team's all-time leading scorer with 672 goals in 778 appearances.

Messi pledged to one day come back to Barcelona, just like he did in his tearful farewell speech two years ago.

Next time, though, it probably won't be on the field with the famed No. 10 jersey on his back.

Tales Azzoni on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/tazzoni>

More AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/hub/soccer> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

South Korean inquiry to look into 237 more foreign adoptions suspected to have laundered origins

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission said Thursday it will investigate 237 more cases of South Korean adoptees who suspect their family origins were manipulated to facilitate their adoptions in Europe and the United States.

The new cases in the commission's expanded inquiry into South Korea's foreign adoption boom involve adoptees in 11 nations including the United States, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden who were adopted from 1960 to 1990. More than 370 adoptees from Europe, North America and Australia filed applications last year demanding their cases be investigated.

When the commission said it would investigate the first 34 cases in December, it said the records of many adoptees sent to the West had clearly been manipulated and falsely described them as orphans or faked their identities by borrowing the details of a third person.

The commission said most of the applicants claim their adoptions were based on falsified records that laundered their status or origin to ensure their adoptability and expedite custody transfers across borders. Some applicants asked the commission to look into abuse they say they experienced at South Korean

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orphanages or under the care of their foreign adoptive parents.

The commission's potential findings could allow adoptees to take legal actions against agencies or the government, which would otherwise be difficult because South Korean civil courts put the burden of proof entirely on plaintiffs, who often lack information and resources.

Of the 271 cases accepted by the commission so far, 141 are those of Danish adoptees, including members of the Danish Korean Rights Group co-led by adoptee activist Peter Møller, which submitted the initial 51 applications in August last year. Other cases accepted by the commission include those of 28 U.S. adoptees and 21 from Swedish adoptees, officials said.

The commission, which is reviewing the applications in the order they were submitted, is likely to investigate the remaining 101 cases, too, according to officials.

About 200,000 South Koreans, mostly girls, were adopted to the West in the past six decades, creating what's believed to be the world's largest diaspora of adoptees.

Most were placed with white parents in the United States and Europe during the 1970s and '80s. South Korea was then ruled by a succession of military dictatorships, which were focused on economic growth and saw adoptions as a tool to reduce the number of mouths to feed, erase the "social problem" of unwed mothers and deepen ties with the democratic West.

The military governments implemented special laws aimed at promoting foreign adoptions that in practice allowed adoption agencies to bypass proper child relinquishment practices as they sent thousands of children to the West year after year during the adoptions' heyday.

Most adoptees were registered by agencies as abandoned orphans found abandoned on the streets, although they frequently had relatives who could be easily identified or found. That practice often makes their roots difficult or impossible to trace.

It wasn't until 2013 that South Korea's government required foreign adoptions to go through family courts, ending a decadeslong policy that allowed agencies to dictate child relinquishments and international transfers of custodies.

Flashpoint in Israel: Divide between religious and secular Jews heats up under Netanyahu's rule

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

HARISH, Israel (AP) — The sound of children and music echoed down a narrow basement hallway in Israel as they scrambled in a pool of balls, climbed on a jungle gym, munched popcorn and laughed.

The atmosphere changed suddenly on that Saturday last month, as at least a dozen religious men appeared and blocked the entrance, accusing the indoor playground of desecrating the Jewish sabbath by opening for business. Angry parents confronted them, scuffles broke out and in an instant, the center in this mixed city had become a flashpoint symbol of a larger battle between secular and religious Jews in Israel.

"I think it represents what's going on in the country," said Tzipi Brayer Sharabi, a 38-year-old mother who says she was attacked and thrown to the ground during the May 20 incident. "I want my kids to live how they choose to live. I don't want somebody to tell them how they should eat, how they should dress, what they should do on Shabbat."

Similar incidents have long upset the tenuous balance between the communities. But with ultra-Orthodox parties now wielding unprecedented power in Israel's new government — and playing a key role in a contentious plan to overhaul the legal system — they are aggravating concerns among secular Israelis that the character and future of their country is under threat.

Thanks to its supercharged political clout, the haredi community has gained massive budgets that critics say will entrench its isolated way of life and weaken Israel's economic prospects as the ultra-Orthodox population balloons.

"We have two kids. They have 10 kids. They're going to be the majority here, eventually," said Brayer Sharabi, a secular Israeli whose elbow was broken in the scuffle. "What's going to happen to this place

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once they have the majority?"

Israel's ultra-Orthodox, known as haredim, make up 13% of the country's 9.7 million population. The cloistered community has long been at odds with the secular majority, clashing over military conscription, their integration into the workforce and the basic tenets that guide their lives. Haredi Jews in Israel also are growing faster than any other group, at about 4% annually.

The many differences between religious and secular Jews have chafed the country throughout its 75 years. Under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, the sense has sharpened among secular Israelis that their lifestyle may have an expiration date.

Netanyahu, meanwhile, brushes off such criticism, saying the ultra-Orthodox are Israeli citizens who deserve funding and that he is working to integrate them into the workforce.

The ultra-Orthodox mostly live in separate towns and city neighborhoods, and unlike most secular Jews, most are not conscripted in the military under a decades-old system of exemptions that allows them to study religious texts instead. Many continue religious study well into adulthood and do not work, living off government stipends and grating on the nerves of the country's tax-paying middle class.

Ultra-Orthodox schools widely do not teach a core curriculum of math or English. Experts say this gives them few skills to enter the work world, creating a recipe for poverty and increased dependence on government assistance as the population grows.

The ultra-Orthodox say their children nonetheless deserve robust state funding for education, and that their otherwise insular communities protect a centuries-old way of life. Their leaders also say they contribute to the economy by paying significant sums of sales tax on consumer purchases for their large families.

Yinon Azulai, a lawmaker with the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, last month in a parliament speech denounced what he called "the wild incitement raging these days and running in the streets of baseless hatred for the ultra-Orthodox community" after a popular TV host called the community "blood suckers."

"I don't intend to apologize for being haredi," he said on the Knesset floor.

Gilad Malach, director of the ultra-Orthodox in Israel Program at the Israel Democracy Institute, a think tank, said that the large budget was part of a broader trend showing the community is not integrating with the country's larger society.

"The last few years we have more and more signs that this process is not strong enough," he said. "People ask themselves, what is the direction that (the) Israeli state goes?"

Dan Ben-David, an economist who has long criticized what he says is preferential treatment for the ultra-Orthodox, said the generous subsidies and political power provide a glimpse of Israel's future.

"Not a day goes by where we're not inundated with a clear picture of what's life going to be like" under an ultra-Orthodox majority, said Ben-David, president of Tel Aviv University's Shoshana Institute for Socioeconomic Research. "The level of tension is much higher."

The tens of millions of dollars in financial handouts passed in the recent budget last month have enraged secular Israelis.

Weekly protests against the legal overhaul have sometimes adopted anti-religious themes, especially ahead of a court-ordered July 31 deadline for Netanyahu to submit a new law to address the issue of ultra-Orthodox enlistment. It is not clear whether a proposed bill would pass legal muster. It does not seek to draft more ultra-Orthodox men into the military, but instead would cajole them into joining the workforce earlier.

The mayhem at the play center in Harish, a mixed secular and religious town, made news reports as other signs of unease simmered.

In May, when singer Noa Kirel won third place in the Eurovision Song Contest, Israelis widely celebrated. But a powerful ultra-Orthodox member of Netanyahu's coalition, Moshe Gafni, brought up her name and referenced her revealing performance costume during a budget debate.

"I would also donate some clothes to her, so she can have some," Gafni, the Finance Committee chairman, said. Kirel was quoted in Israeli media saying that everyone is entitled to their opinion.

Last month, outrage and threats of a boycott ensued when photos appeared on social media of purple

stickers covering the faces of women on drugstore products at a leading pharmacy in the haredi city of Bnei Brak. Some ultra-Orthodox consider images of women to be immodest, and haredi media often erase the images of women from news photos. The pharmacy later stopped covering up women's photos.

Ultra-Orthodox Jews boycotted a bakery after one of its executives, a former government minister, supported the protests against the judiciary overhaul.

Just a few years ago, Harish had been promoted as a model of coexistence between its secular and religious residents. Now that seems like wishful thinking as a country long used to conflict with its outside neighbors finds itself grappling with unprecedented internal divisions.

"It's between Jews, that's the irony," said Brayer Sharabi's husband, Avshalom, 39, in an interview outside the play center. "What's happening now, feels new."

Associated Press writer Ilan Ben Zion contributed from Jerusalem.

Authorities to reveal results of investigation into how Colorado's worst wildfire started

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Authorities say they have wrapped up their investigation into what started the most destructive wildfire in Colorado history and will announce their findings on Thursday.

The blaze destroyed nearly 1,100 homes as heavy winds pushed it across the heavily populated suburbs between Denver and Boulder on Dec. 30, 2021. Two people were found dead in what is known as the Marshall Fire.

The inferno erupted following months of drought amid a winter nearly devoid of snow and fed on bone-dry grassland surrounding fast-growing development in the area near the Rocky Mountain foothills. Winds gusted up to 100 mph (160 kph) in places.

The fire that destroyed swaths of houses in the cities of Superior and Louisville, neighboring towns about 20 miles (32 kilometers) northwest of Denver, is blamed for the death of a 69-year-old man who lived near where investigators believed the fire started. The remains of a 91-year-old woman, who was last seen trying to rescue her dogs from her home in Superior, were also found.

Thousands of residents were at home the day before New Year's Eve and used the suburban area's extensive road network to escape amid smoke, flames and blowing embers, which spread the fire in the wind. Shifting winds caused the skies to turn from clear to smoky and then back again in an area filled with middle and upper-middle class subdivisions surrounded by shopping centers, parks and schools.

As smoke filled the parking lot of a Costco warehouse store and debris whirled around, a sheriff's deputy ordered people inside to leave their carts, evacuate the sprawling building and head toward Denver, away from the fire. Within hours, it destroyed 1,084 homes and seven commercial buildings, and damaged nearly 200 structures. An estimate in 2022 put the damage at at least \$513 million.

Experts say similar events will become more common as climate change warms the planet and suburbs grow in fire-prone areas.

The fire, which spanned 9.4 square miles (24 square kilometers), ranks as the most destructive in state history in terms of homes and other structures destroyed and damaged. The second-most destructive fire erupted in 2013 outside Colorado Springs, destroying 489 homes and killing two.

Authorities have not previously released any details about what started the fire. Early on, then Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle said investigators had narrowed their search for the origin of the fire to an area south of Boulder, where a passer-by captured video of a burning shed. Since then, the sheriff's office has only said that it was investigating old coal mines that smoldered underground, power lines and human activity as among the possible causes for the fire.

The area includes an abandoned coal field where two underground fires, fueled by coal deposits, have slowly burned over the years.

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Authorities said early on that the area they were looking at included property occupied by members of The Twelve Tribes — a Christian religious community thought to have 2,000 to 3,000 members worldwide — but said it was not the only focus of the probe.

A lawsuit filed against Colorado's largest utility, Minneapolis-based Xcel Energy, alleged that sparks from a power line started the blaze. It says witnesses saw a fire igniting near a power line in the area identified by investigators, with one witness videoing sparks flying from a malfunctioning power line and igniting a fire on the ground.

Xcel has said its investigation found that the company's equipment in the area of the fire was properly maintained and inspected.

The Republican presidential field is largely set. Here are takeaways on where the contest stands.

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After a trio of new announcements this week, the Republican Party's 2024 presidential field is all but set.

A handful of stragglers may jump in later, but as of now there are at least 10 high-profile Republican candidates officially seeking their party's nomination. And with the announcement phase of the primary campaign largely over, several leading Republican contenders will gather in North Carolina this weekend to begin a more aggressive sorting period.

It will be a long road to the GOP's national convention in Milwaukee next summer when Republican delegates across the country gather to finalize their nominee to run against President Joe Biden. Surprises are guaranteed. Fortunes will change. But as of now, every Republican White House hopeful is looking up at former President Donald Trump, who is the undisputed frontrunner in the crowded contest.

Here are some takeaways on where the Republican contest stands:

IT'S A LARGE FIELD AFTER ALL

Trump launched his campaign nearly seven months ago in an effort to scare off potential challengers. It didn't work.

As of now, the former president is running in a field that features no fewer than nine high-profile challengers. They include Mike Pence, a former vice president; four current or former governors: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson; Nikki Haley, the former ambassador to the United Nations and also a former South Carolina governor; U.S. Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina; biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy; and conservative talk show host Larry Elder, an unsuccessful candidate for California governor.

While big, the 2024 field could have been much bigger. The party's 2016 class featured 17 candidates that filled two debate stages.

Several Republicans who had taken steps to prepare for a run in 2024 ultimately bowed out. They include former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton.

Meanwhile, a handful of higher-profile Republicans are still considering a run, including former Energy Secretary Rick Perry, Miami Mayor Francis Suarez and Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

IT'S TRUMP AND EVERYONE ELSE

Make no mistake: This is Trump's race to lose.

The former president is dominating early primary polls, despite his extraordinary legal troubles, his continued lies about the 2020 election that fueled the Jan. 6 insurrection, and serious concerns among GOP officials about his ability to win the general election. Trump nonetheless maintains a strong grip on a significant portion of the Republican base that has yet to fall in love with an alternative.

DeSantis is Trump's strongest rival on paper, but the Florida governor has yet to outline a clear path to victory. The Florida governor is trying to out-Trump Trump by taking a harder line on immigration, abortion and other policies that tear at the nation's divides, while embracing the former president's combative

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"While a higher growth reading may provide some room to consider a policy exit from the Bank of Japan, the central bank's stance could remain unmoved for now, with recent comments from the Governor Kazuo Ueda pointing to more wait-and-see," Yeap Jun Rong, a market analyst at IG said in a report.

Wednesday on Wall Street, the S&P 500 fell 0.4% though the majority of stocks within the index rose. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 0.3% and the tech-heavy Nasdaq composite fell 1.3%.

Microsoft, Amazon, Nvidia and Alphabet all sank at least 3% and were the heaviest weights on the S&P 500. Because they're some of Wall Street's most valuable stocks, their movements pack extra punch on the index.

Wall Street is questioning which will come first: a recession or inflation falling enough to get the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates? Most traders expect the Fed to leave rates steady next week. That would mark the first policy meeting in more than a year where it hasn't hiked its benchmark rate, which is at its highest level since 2007. But the Fed may resume raising rates in July.

The goal of higher interest rates is to squelch high inflation by slowing the entire economy and hurting prices for stocks, bonds and other investments. Pressure from high rates are squeezing the U.S. banking and manufacturing industries, though the job market has remained solid.

In energy trading Thursday, benchmark U.S. crude lost 16 cents to \$72.37 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It gained 79 cents to \$72.53 on Wednesday. Brent crude, the international standard, declined 16 cents to \$76.79 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar fell to 139.80 Japanese yen from 140.10 yen. The euro cost \$1.0729, up from \$1.0698.

Yuri Kageyama is on Twitter <https://twitter.com/yurikageyama>

No homecoming for Messi as Barcelona again fails to do enough to lure him back

By TALES AZZONI AP Sports Writer

MADRID (AP) — Once again, Barcelona couldn't do enough to entice Lionel Messi.

Nearly two years after the club was forced to let Messi go against his will because of its financial struggles, Barcelona again missed out on a chance to bring the World Cup winner back.

The 35-year-old Messi announced Wednesday he would not return to Spain and instead said he was going to join Inter Miami in Major League Soccer.

There had been hopes of a reunion between the Argentina great and the Spanish club where he thrived for nearly two decades before leaving to join Paris Saint-Germain, but in the end there was only more disappointment for both sides.

Again, Barcelona's finances kept the club from luring Messi back.

The Argentine apparently wanted to return but didn't want to go through the ordeal of not knowing whether the Catalan club would be able to sign him. He said he was told the club would have to either sell other players or lower salaries, and he didn't want that to happen.

"I really wanted to come back. I was very excited to be able to return," Messi told Spanish media. "But after having experienced what I experienced and the exit I had, I did not want to be in the same situation again, waiting to see what was going to happen."

Barcelona was mired in debt when Messi left in 2021. The club couldn't make the numbers work back then as Messi was forced to wait in hopes of having his contract renewed. This time, Messi said he wasn't going to wait on others.

"I wanted to make my own decision, thinking about me and my family," Messi said.

It wasn't all about the money for Messi, who chose Inter Miami despite reportedly having a much more lucrative offer from Saudi Arabia. He said he wanted to "get out of the spotlight a bit" and focus more on his family after a "difficult time" with PSG, but made it clear that he would have returned to Barcelona if

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style and mannerisms.

Meanwhile, Trump's team is thrilled about the sheer quantity of candidates in the race, which create a math problem that benefits Trump. It looks like 2016 all over again, when Trump won the New Hampshire primary with only 35% of the vote because the other candidates chopped up the rest of the vote.

Trump's Republican critics warned against this exact scenario over the last year, but for now, they seem incapable of stopping it.

NO CLEAR STRATEGY TO TAKE DOWN TRUMP

Math aside, Trump's Republican rivals have yet to figure out a consistent strategy to take him down. That's not to say they haven't begun to try.

Pence told Iowa voters this week that Trump "demanded I choose between him and the Constitution," a reference to Trump's oft-repeated — and false — insistence that Pence had the authority to overturn the 2020 election. Pence called Trump's words "reckless" and said the former president endangered his family.

DeSantis, like others, has dropped many indirect jabs at Trump, focused largely on the former president's inability to serve more than one term and the GOP's "culture of losing" under his leadership since 2016. DeSantis' team also thinks they have an opportunity to out-flank Trump from the right on conservative priorities like abortion and immigration.

DeSantis shrugged off Trump's large polling advantage when asked this week in Arizona: "You don't do a poll a year out and say that's how the election runs out," he said.

Christie may be the most vocal Trump critic in the race, although he hasn't held office in more than five years.

"I'm going out there to take out Donald Trump," the former New Jersey governor told New Hampshire voters this week. "But here's why: I want to win, and I don't want him to win. ... There is one lane to the Republican nomination and he's in front of it."

Expect to see anti-Trump strategies continue to evolve this weekend in North Carolina.

A DIVERSE FIELD

The 2024 Republican field equals the GOP's 2016 class as the most racially diverse in the party's long history.

At least four candidates of color are seeking the presidency this year: Scott and Elder are Black, while Haley and Ramaswamy are of Indian descent. For Haley and Scott in particular, race plays a central role in their pitch to voters, although all four deny the existence of systemic racism and largely oppose federal policies designed to help people based on the color of their skin.

Republican officials are hopeful that the diverse field will help the party continue its modest progress with Black voters and Latinos. Both groups still overwhelmingly support Democrats, but even small cracks in the Democratic coalition could be significant in 2024.

There is just one woman in Republican field. But there is strong diversity in the ages of the candidates: Trump is the oldest at 76, while Ramaswamy is the youngest at 37. DeSantis is just 44, while Haley and Scott are in their 50s. The rest of the candidates are in their 60s and 70s.

RIGHT ON POLICY

With few exceptions, the Republican field has embraced hardline conservative policies on issues like abortion, immigration, gun violence and LGBTQ rights.

All of the candidates oppose abortion rights to some extent, although there are differences in the degree of their opposition and their rhetoric on the procedure. Pence and Scott have openly endorsed national abortion bans, while Trump and DeSantis have avoided taking a firm position on a federal ban so far. That said, DeSantis this spring signed into Florida law a ban on abortions at six weeks of pregnancy, one of the nation's most restrictive policies.

The entire Republican field also opposes new limits on gun ownership, including an assault weapons ban. Most blame the nation's gun violence epidemic on mental health issues. DeSantis this spring enacted a new law that allows Florida residents to carry concealed firearms without a permit.

The Republican field has also embraced the party's recent focus on the LGBTQ community.

Haley mocked and misgendered transgender women on the campaign trail in recent weeks. Trump and

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DeSantis have decried gender-affirming surgeries for minors as child abuse. And Scott co-sponsored a Senate bill that would cut funding for elementary or middle schools that change a student's pronouns without first obtaining parental consent.

There appears to be some disagreement on Social Security and Medicare, however.

DeSantis, as a member of Congress, voted for a resolution that would have raised the age to qualify for Medicare and Social Security to 70. He seems to have moved away from that position since becoming the Florida governor. But Trump has seized on his rival's past position, while vowing to preserve the popular programs.

UNCERTAINTY LOOMS

The Republican field may be settling, but major surprises in the months ahead are virtually guaranteed.

Trump's legal problems may loom largest. The former president is already facing 34 felony counts of falsifying business records related to hush-money payments made during the 2016 campaign to bury allegations that he had extramarital sexual encounters. Federal prosecutors are also currently using grand juries in Washington and Florida as part of their investigation into the possible mishandling of classified documents. And prosecutors in Georgia are investigating whether Trump broke the law while trying to overturn his 2020 election loss.

At the same time, DeSantis has only begun to be vetted on the national stage. Opponents in both parties are pouring through his background for any sign of damaging information. Republican colleagues openly question his interpersonal skills. And he's quick to mix it up with the media in unscripted moments on the campaign trail.

Meanwhile, major uncertainty hangs over upcoming presidential debates, which are scheduled to begin in late August. Trump, who holds a big lead in early polls, has raised the possibility of skipping the debates altogether. DeSantis has lashed out at mainstream media outlets that would play a role in hosting the televised events. And it's unclear whether lower-tier candidates could meet the relatively modest polling and fundraising thresholds.

Main suspect in 2005 disappearance of Natalee Holloway due to be extradited to US

LIMA, Peru (AP) — The main suspect in the 2005 disappearance of U.S. student Natalee Holloway is expected to be handed over to U.S. officials in Peru and flown to the United States on Thursday, roughly a month after both countries agreed on his extradition.

Joran van der Sloot is wanted in the U.S. on one count each of extortion and wire fraud, the only charges to have ever linked the Dutch citizen to Holloway's disappearance on the Caribbean island of Aruba.

His extradition moved forward after a Peruvian judge on Tuesday affirmed the government's decision to temporarily transfer custody to U.S. authorities.

Van der Sloot has been serving a 28-year sentence for the murder of a Peruvian woman. Authorities over the weekend moved him from a maximum-security prison in the Andes to a detention facility in the capital, Lima, from which he was due to be taken to the airport at some point Thursday.

It was not immediately clear when he would make his first court appearance in the U.S.

Holloway, who lived in suburban Birmingham, Alabama, was 18 when she vanished during a trip with classmates to Aruba. She was last seen leaving a bar with van der Sloot, who was a student at an international school on the island.

Van der Sloot was identified as a suspect and detained weeks later, along with two Surinamese brothers.

Holloway's body was never found, and no charges were filed in the case. A judge later declared Holloway dead.

The federal charges filed in Alabama against van der Sloot stem from an accusation that he tried to extort the Holloway family in 2010, promising to lead them to her body in exchange for hundreds of thousands of dollars. A grand jury indicted him that year on one count each of wire fraud and extortion.

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Holloway's mysterious disappearance sparked years of news coverage and countless true-crime podcasts. Van der Sloot in 2012 pleaded guilty in Peru to murdering 21-year-old Stephany Flores, a business student from a prominent Peruvian family. She was killed in 2010 five years to the day after Holloway's disappearance.

A 2001 treaty between Peru and the U.S. allows a suspect to be temporarily extradited to face trial in the other country. Van der Sloot's attorney, Máximo Altez, initially indicated his client would not challenge his extradition but that changed Monday when he filed a writ of habeas corpus. A judge ruled against van der Sloot the following day.

The time that van der Sloot ends up spending in the U.S. "will be extended until the conclusion of the criminal proceedings," including the appeal process should there be one, according to a resolution published in Peru's federal register. The resolution also states that U.S. authorities agreed to return van der Sloot to the custody of Peru afterward.

Jokic and Murray both have triple-doubles, Nuggets beat Heat 109-94 for 2-1 lead

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — Never had two players from the same team had 30-point triple-doubles in the same game. Never in the regular season. Never in the playoffs. Certainly never in the NBA Finals.

Until now.

Nikola Jokic and Jamal Murray made history Wednesday night — and have the Denver Nuggets two wins away from making some real history as well.

Jokic and Murray became the first teammates in NBA Finals history to both record triple-doubles, and the Nuggets reclaimed the lead in the series by beating the Miami Heat 109-94 in Game 3.

"By far, their greatest performance as a duo in their seven years together," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said, after his team moved two wins away from Denver's first title.

Jokic finished with 32 points, 21 rebounds and 10 assists — the first such game in NBA Finals history, or at least the first since assists were tracked. Murray had 34 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists, getting the rebound he needed with 9 seconds remaining.

The Nuggets outrebounded the Heat 58-33, and took a 2-1 lead. Game 4 is Friday in Miami.

"I'm just glad that we won the game," Jokic said. "It was a big one for us because they won in our arena. We just didn't want to go down 2-1."

Jimmy Butler scored 28 points for Miami, and Bam Adebayo finished with 22 points and 17 rebounds. Caleb Martin added 10 points.

"We've got to come out with more energy and effort and that's correctable," Butler said. "That's on us as a group."

Jokic and Murray combined for 24 field goals; Miami had 34. Jokic and Murray combined for 31 rebounds; Miami had 33. Jokic and Murray combined for 20 assists; Miami had exactly that many.

Somehow, some way, the Heat know they need to find an answer before Friday.

"It's not an easy task to do," Butler said. "But if we want to win, we're going to have to figure it out."

Miami has been the comeback kings of these playoffs — seven rallies in games after trailing by at least 12 points. The Heat were down by 14 going into the fourth, and Malone reminded his club of Miami's penchant for comebacks.

"First two games, they won the fourth quarter," Malone said. "Tonight, we win the fourth quarter, we win the game."

His team listened.

The lead eventually reached 21, the outcome never seriously in doubt, and Jokic looking very much like he's back in cruise control. The Heat got within nine on a 3-pointer by Duncan Robinson with 1:22 left, but there was no epic finish for Miami. Murray and Jokic had the Nuggets too far ahead to get caught.

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"You have to expect there to be elite talent in the finals," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "And both those guys are elite-level talent."

Officially, Jokic is now the seventh player to have two triple-doubles in the same finals. Magic Johnson and LeBron James each did it in three different finals. Draymond Green, Wilt Chamberlain, Larry Bird and Butler all had one title series with two triple-doubles.

It was Jokic's 10th triple-double of these playoffs, extending his single-season record, and he was unbothered by whatever Miami threw his way. He finished 12 for 21 from the floor, 7 for 8 from the line, playing 44 minutes.

"We were more locked in, more focused," Jokic said.

Christian Braun was tremendous off the bench for the Nuggets, scoring 15 points on 7-for-8 shooting in 19 minutes. Aaron Gordon added 11 for Denver.

And afterward, they both marveled at what their stars did in Game 3.

"It's greatness, man. It's greatness," Gordon said. "That's a dynamic duo right there."

Added Braun: "I would say that it's what they do every game."

Miami never led in the second half. A dunk by Adebayo put the Heat up 44-42 with 3:18 left in the half, before a 3-pointer by Murray represented the seventh and final lead change of the night. It was 53-48 at halftime, before Denver pushed the lead to double digits for the first time early in the third and wound up leading by as many as 19 later in that period.

The Heat stole home court by winning Game 2 in Denver, a game where Murray had a chance to force overtime with a 3-point try that missed at the end. The Nuggets now have the lead again, and there was no Game 2 hangover on Wednesday.

"Not just me," Murray said. "Everybody bounced back."

TIP-INS

Nuggets: Denver used Reggie Jackson in the first quarter, going nine deep in the opening 12 minutes for the first time since Game 2 of the West finals. ... Denver hadn't lost two consecutive games to Miami since March 14 and Nov. 30, 2016. Jokic played in both of those games, Murray in the second one early in his rookie season.

Heat: It was the first finals game in Miami since 2014. The Heat didn't have any "home" games in the 2020 finals, which were held in the NBA's restart bubble near Orlando. ... Wednesday was the 11th anniversary of LeBron James' 45-point, 15-rebound, five-assist game at Boston in Game 6 of the East finals — staving off elimination. The Heat won Game 7 and went on to beat Oklahoma City for James' first title.

HASLEM RECORD

Miami's Udonis Haslem — in his 20th and final season — set a record. He became the oldest player to appear in the NBA Finals, breaking the mark of 42 years, 58 days set by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar on June 13, 1989.

Haslem turns 43 on Friday. He played the final 29.8 seconds.

RARE COMPANY

Jokic had 10 points, seven rebounds and three assists in the first quarter. The only other players in the last 25 years to have that in any quarter of a finals game were Stephen Curry (12-7-5) for Golden State in the third quarter against Cleveland on June 4, 2017, and Shaquille O'Neal (12-7-3) for the Los Angeles Lakers in the second quarter against Philadelphia on June 8, 2001.

CELEB WATCH

Former Heat player and NBA champion Mike Miller — now an agent — was at the game, along with one of his clients, Rookie of the Year Paolo Banchero of the Orlando Magic. Banchero tweeted "game ain't even started yet i'm in here star struck."

DJ Khaled was in attendance, along with soccer greats Neymar and Paul Pogba (on the day Lionel Messi committed to play for Inter Miami), Shakira, Magic Johnson, J. Cole (who played a role in getting Caleb Martin to the Heat) and Dwyane Wade — who starred for Miami's title teams in 2006, 2012 and 2013.

Lionel Messi picks MLS's Inter Miami in a move that stuns soccer after exit from Paris Saint-Germain

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Sports Writer

MIAMI (AP) — Lionel Messi has pulled off his latest stunning feat: He is headed to Major League Soccer and joining Inter Miami.

After months — years, even — of speculation, Messi on Wednesday finally revealed his decision to join a Miami franchise that has been led by another global soccer icon, David Beckham, since its inception but has yet to make any real splashes on the field.

That likely will soon change. One of Inter Miami's owners, Jorge Mas, tweeted out a photo of a darkly silhouetted Messi jersey shortly before the Argentinian great revealed his decision in interviews with Spanish news outlets Mundo Deportivo and Sport.

It was widely believed that Messi eventually would choose to play for Al-Hilal in Saudi Arabia, following longtime rival Cristiano Ronaldo to a nation where some clubs now are funded by the state's sovereign wealth fund. Going back to Barcelona, a storied franchise where he spent most of his career, was another possibility.

But in the end, he made the call that surprised many. Messi is joining MLS. He said in the interviews Wednesday that some final details still need to be worked out, but that he has made the call to "continue my path" in Miami.

"After winning the World Cup and not being able to return to Barcelona, it was my turn to go to the league of the United States to live football in another way," Messi said.

He didn't take the money. He didn't choose the memories. He picked Miami instead. Messi's next matches are likely to be exhibitions with Argentina against Australia on June 15 at Beijing and at Indonesia in Jakarta four days later — and then his Inter Miami debut figures to be sometime in July.

"We are pleased that Lionel Messi has stated that he intends to join Inter Miami and Major League Soccer this summer," read a statement from MLS. "Although work remains to finalize a formal agreement, we look forward to welcoming one of the greatest soccer players of all time to our league."

The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner — the trophy given annually to the world's best player — makes his move after two years with Paris Saint-Germain. At 35, Messi has nothing left to prove in the game and filled the only significant unchecked box on his resume back in December by leading Argentina to the World Cup title.

Messi has more than 800 goals in his career for club and country, making him one of the greatest scorers in the sport's history. In more than 17 years of representing Argentina on the international stage, he has scored 102 goals against 38 different national team opponents — 16 of those goals coming on U.S. soil. He scored twice in last year's World Cup final against France, a match that ended 3-3 with Argentina prevailing 4-2 on penalty kicks.

He has been to the absolute mountaintop of the game. He is a four-time Champions League winner and his 129 goals in the top club competition are second to Ronaldo's 140. Messi has won 10 La Liga titles and two Ligue 1 championships, seven Copa del Reys and three Club World Cups plus a Copa América and Olympic gold medal for Argentina.

And now he comes to MLS, and a team that is struggling — last place in the Eastern Conference, just a few days removed from the firing of coach Phil Neville (who was hand-picked by Beckham two years ago).

Messi's decision to play in the U.S. might be the biggest boost ever for American soccer on the pro stage. Some of the game's biggest names — Pelé, Franz Beckenbauer, Thierry Henry and Beckham himself — have come to the U.S. toward the end of their careers, but landing a player still no worse than near the pinnacle of his game and just a few months removed from hoisting a World Cup is simply huge.

"This is obviously the biggest signing that they've brought in," said Nashville defender Walker Zimmerman, a U.S. national team regular. "It's kind of reminiscent of Beckham when he came originally. You saw how the league has kind of changed in the 15 years since he arrived, and hopefully 15 years from now

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we're seeing all the growth from this addition to the league. I think it's a great thing.

"I think it'll be great for the sport in this country, especially ahead of the 2026 World Cup. And I'm excited to play against him."

It took months of negotiations with MLS, the Miami ownership, Adidas and even Apple getting involved in a creative pitch to bring Messi to Miami's pitch. Apple — which is a broadcast partner of MLS — announced Tuesday that it will show a still-untitled four-part documentary series "featuring exclusive behind-the-scenes access to global superstar Lionel Messi. ... In his own words, Messi tells the definitive story of his incredible career with the Argentina national football team, providing an intimate and unprecedented look at his quest for a legacy-defining World Cup victory."

And now, his story will have a Miami chapter. His move comes in a week when the NBA's Miami Heat and NHL's Florida Panthers are both at home in their respective title series — and the Heat, during Game 3 of the NBA Finals on Wednesday night, flashed a graphic on their scoreboard welcoming Messi to Miami.

The Heat trailed by 21 points at the time. A few people cheered anyway.

Inter Miami needed six years from inception to playing its first match, and its first four seasons have been less than stellar.

Messi is joining a team that sits last in the Eastern Conference and just fired its coach. It has made the playoffs in two of its first three seasons but has yet to finish a season with a winning record or even a positive goal differential.

Still, there have been hints for months that Miami remained very much in the Messi sweepstakes. Messi met with Inter Miami co-owner Beckham this spring, and that was shared publicly almost to ensure that everyone knew the sides were still talking. Messi and his family also own several pieces of luxury real estate in South Florida, and — almost as if to suggest something big was coming — the MLS club told fans the only way they could get tickets for the second half of this season was to purchase a season-ticket package.

He's an enormous draw everywhere on the globe, including Miami. Two days after Argentina won the World Cup, Miami Heat guard Kyle Lowry sat on his team's bench for a game unable to play because of injury. He wore a Messi jersey that night.

Inter Miami still plays home matches in a temporary home in Fort Lauderdale, about 45 minutes north of the site in Miami where the team wants to build a permanent complex.

And even in an area where the population has a serious Latin flavor, and where more people might actually call the sport fútbol than soccer, Inter Miami has struggled to generate the same attention as do the area's primary pro teams — basketball's Heat, baseball's Miami Marlins, football's Miami Dolphins and hockey's Panthers.

Messi could change that in an instant. In a flash, he becomes the biggest name in MLS and makes everything Miami does newsworthy. Barcelona released a statement saying Jorge Messi, the player's father, told the club president Joan Laporta of the decision to go to Miami and wished him well.

"President Laporta understood and respected Messi's decision to want to compete in a league with fewer demands, further away from the spotlight and the pressure he has been subject to in recent years," the statement from Barcelona said.

His decision ends what has been a wild saga. Barcelona made Messi a superstar, but the financial issues that forced the team to letting him go two years ago still remain an issue.

"I heard that they'd have to sell players or lower players' salaries and the truth is, I didn't want to go through that," Messi said Wednesday.

There are no financial issues with Saudi Arabia, and speculation that he would end up there intensified when Messi made an unauthorized trip to the kingdom. PSG suspended him and some fans turned on him, serenading him with jeers toward the end of his season with the French club.

Everyone knew he wouldn't be back with PSG. Few likely thought he was heading to Miami. But here he is, a move to Miami by a superstar that might even be more shocking than LeBron James arriving to join the Heat 13 years ago.

AP Sports Writer Ronald Blum in New York contributed to this report.

More AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/hub/soccer> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

GOP conservatives shutter House to protest McCarthy-Biden debt deal, setting up next budget brawl

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — In fallout from the debt ceiling deal, Speaker Kevin McCarthy is suddenly confronting a new threat to his power as angry hard-right conservatives bring the House chamber to a halt, reviving their displeasure over the compromise struck with President Joe Biden and demanding deeper spending cuts ahead.

Barely a dozen Republicans, mainly members of the House Freedom Caucus, shuttered House business for a second day Wednesday in protest of McCarthy's leadership. Routine votes could not be taken, and a pair of pro-gas stove bills important to GOP activists stalled out. Some lawmakers asked if they could simply go home — and eventually they could. By evening, the rest of week's schedule was called off.

McCarthy brushed off the disruption as healthy political debate, part of his "risk taker" way of being a leader — not too different, he said, from the 15-vote spectacle it took in January for him to finally convince his colleagues to elect him as speaker. With a paper-thin GOP majority, any few Republicans have outsized sway.

But the aftermath of the debt ceiling deal is coming into focus: The hard-right flank that helped put the speaker in power five months ago is not done with McCarthy yet.

"I enjoy this conflict," the speaker bantered Wednesday at the Capitol, saying he feels like Goldilocks being pushed from all sides. "Conflict makes you stronger if you deal with it."

At its core, the standoff between the House conservatives and the speaker revolves around the budget levels McCarthy agreed to in the debt-ceiling bill with Biden that the right flank of his conference strenuously opposed. The agreement restricted spending, but not as much as the Freedom Caucus and others demanded. Unable to stop the debt bill's passage last week, the conservatives are now digging in and preparing for a longer fight to prevent it from taking hold.

It's all setting the stage for a potentially disastrous showdown ahead, when Congress will need to pass spending bills to fund the government at the levels set by the McCarthy-Biden debt package, or risk a shutdown in federal government operations when the new fiscal year starts Oct. 1.

The test will likely come even sooner, this summer, when the Biden administration is expected to ask Congress to approve supplemental funding for Ukraine to fight the war against Russia. It's an issue that splits the Republicans between those who want to cut budgets and those insisting on a strong military.

Aligning with the defense hawks, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell raised his own concerns Wednesday about the cap on military spending: "I'm not sure at this point how to fix it, but it's a problem, a serious problem."

While the conservatives have aired a long list of grievances, the debt deal looms largest.

The McCarthy-Biden compromise set overall federal budget caps — holding spending flat for 2024, and with a 1% growth for 2025 — and Congress still needs to pass appropriations bills to fund the various federal agencies at the agreed-to amounts. That's typically done by Oct. 1. After Biden signed the debt deal into law last weekend, lawmakers have been fast at work on the agency-spending bills ahead of votes this summer to meet the deadline.

Not only did the conservatives object to the deal with Biden as insufficient, they claim it violated the terms of an agreement they had reached with McCarthy to roll back spending even further, to 2022 levels, to make him speaker.

"There was an agreement in January," Rep. Ken Buck, R-Colo., told reporters after he left the speaker's office Wednesday morning. "And it was violated in the debt-ceiling bill."

McCarthy insists the agreement he made during the speakers race to roll back spending to 2022 was

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not a guaranteed outcome, only a goal. Besides, the debt deal has a provision that would automatically return spending to the 2022 level if Congress fails to put in place all the funding bills by January.

"We never promised we're going to be all at '22 levels —I said we would strive to get to the '22 level or the equivalent amount," McCarthy said Wednesday. "We've met all that criteria."

McCarthy also said he's not opposed to more funding for Ukraine, but he wants to see exactly what's needed rather than simply agree to undoing the spending caps that he negotiated with Biden and that were just signed into law.

Democrats watching the fallout from the debt-ceiling deal are mindful of the challenges ahead.

"I think it's going to be tough," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee.

"You've got a whole bunch of people who want to cut back," she said of the Republicans. "Potentially they could hold up appropriations."

If Congress fails to pass the spending bills by fall it risks a federal government shutdown — an outcome conservatives have forced multiple times before, starting in the Clinton era when then-Speaker Newt Gingrich led the House into a budget standoff, and again in 2013 when conservatives shut down the government as they tried to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

The longest federal shutdown in history was during the Trump era when Congress refused his demands for money to build the border wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

For now, McCarthy and his leadership team need to just figure out how to bring the House chamber back into session.

"This is insane," said Republican Rep. Steve Womack of Arkansas. "This is not the way a governing majority is expected to behave, and frankly, I think there will be a political cost to it."

The bills on tap this week were not the most pressing on the agenda, but are popular among Republicans and carry important political messages even if they have no chance of becoming law.

Among them is a pair of bills related to gas stoves, including one that would prohibit the use of federal funds to regulate gas stoves as a hazardous product.

House action came to a sudden halt midday Tuesday when the band of conservatives refused to support a routine procedural vote to set the rules schedule for the day's debate. It was the first time in some 20 years a routine rules vote was defeated.

Associated Press writers Kevin Freking, Stephen Groves, Mary Clare Jalonick and Farnoush Amiri contributed to this report.

Ben Crump demands justice for Ajike Owens, the latest time he's supported a grieving Black family

By AARON MORRISON and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Ben Crump, the Rev. Al Sharpton says, is "Black America's attorney general."

In less than a decade, the Florida-based attorney has become the voice for the families of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and Tyre Nichols -- Black people whose deaths at the hands of police and vigilantes sparked a movement.

He has won multimillion-dollar settlements in police brutality cases. He's pushed cities to ban no-knock warrants. He has told a congressional committee that reform is needed because "it's become painfully obvious we have two systems of justice; one for white Americans and one for Black Americans."

And he's stood with Black farmers taking on an agribusiness giant, and families exposed to lead-contaminated water in Flint, Michigan.

This week, he's standing with the family of Ajike Owens, a Black woman fatally shot after going to the Ocala, Florida, apartment of her white neighbor, who earlier had yelled at and allegedly assaulted Owens' children as they played nearby. He called on the state attorney's office to "zealously prosecute" the shooter.

"He's a real believer in what he's doing. He has taken the attacks. He has taken the cases that others

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wouldn't take," Sharpton said, adding, "People can go to him. The reason I trust him is because he has never misled me. Good or bad, he'll tell me the truth about a client."

These days, he seems to be everywhere. A Florida law school now bears his name. Last year, Netflix released "Civil," a documentary about his civil rights work. And in the year prior, TIME named him to its 100 Most Influential People list.

In April of 2021, he joined with George Floyd's family in celebrating the conviction of ex-cop Derek Chauvin. Then he was among the mourners at the funeral for Daunte Wright, who was shot during a traffic stop in suburban Minneapolis in the week leading up to Chauvin's verdict — a juxtaposition he finds incredible.

"If ever there was a time for police to be on their best behavior, if ever there was a time for them to use the greatest standard of care, if ever there was a time for them to de-escalate, it was during this trial, which I believe was one of the most consequential police (and) civil rights cases in our history," Crump told The Associated Press in 2021.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Associated Press initially published a version of this profile of Ben Crump on May 2, 2021.

Critics see him as an opportunist who never fails to show up amid another tragedy. But those who know Crump say he's been fighting for fairness long before his name was in headlines.

"Where there's injustice, that's where he wants to be," said Ronald Haley, a Louisiana attorney, who's among a wide network of lawyers Crump works with on lawsuits. "He understands he's needed everywhere, but he also understands he can't be everywhere."

Crump, 51, is a tireless worker who mixes Southern charm, a talent for attracting media attention to his cases and a firm belief that racism afflicts the nation, and the courts are the place to take it on.

He has an uncanny way of making his clients feel like kin, they say.

"He has never missed a Thanksgiving to check in on me, he calls on Christmas," said Allisa Findley, who first met Crump three days after her brother, Botham Jean, was fatally shot in his apartment by a white Dallas police officer who mistook the Black man's apartment for her own.

"Even the little things, he makes time for it, when there are no cameras rolling," she said. "He does feel like family. I consider Ben family."

Terrence Floyd, a younger brother of George Floyd, said Crump's attention and care for his family over the last year has bonded them beyond the attorney-client relationship.

"It feels like it's more family-based than business," he said. "After a while, I went from calling him 'Mr. Crump' to calling him 'Unc,' like he was one of my uncles."

Crump keeps up a dizzying schedule that takes him all over, but he makes sure he's home for Sunday services at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. He lives in Tallahassee with his wife and their 8-year-old daughter, Brooklyn; he also helped raise two cousins and became their legal guardian.

"I look at my daughter," Crump said, "I look in her eyes, and then I look in the eyes of my nieces and nephews, and my little cousins — all these little Black and brown children. You see so much hope, so much optimism in their eyes. We've got to give them a better world."

He added: "What I'm trying to do, as much as I can, even sometimes singlehandedly, is increase the value of Black life."

Crump's path to becoming a lawyer and advocate began while growing up in Lumberton, North Carolina, where he was the oldest of nine siblings and step-siblings.

In his book "Open Season: Legalized Genocide of Colored People," he described learning in elementary school that a white classmate's weekly allowance was as much as what his mother made in a week working two jobs at a shoe factory and a hotel laundry.

"I wanted to understand why people on the white side of the tracks had it so good and Black people on our side of the tracks had it so bad," he wrote.

He often recounts how he learned about the world by reading the newspaper to his grandmother and

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how his mother taught him the story of famed civil rights lawyer Thurgood Marshall, who became his hero. "He has always gravitated toward leadership and being the answer to injustice," said Sean Pittman, an attorney who has been his friend for 30 years, since they met at Florida State University. There, Crump was president of the Black Student Union and led protests to bring attention to how the school recruited and treated Black students.

But his rise from personal injury attorney to a voice of Black America began in 2013 when he represented the family of Trayvon Martin, a teenager killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer in Florida. He then took on the case for the family of Michael Brown who was fatally shot by a white officer near St. Louis.

Crump organized marches and brought media attention to both of their deaths — each happening during the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement.

He has gone on to win financial settlements in about 200 police brutality cases. In March of 2021, the city of Minneapolis agreed to pay \$27 million to settle a civil lawsuit from George Floyd's family, which Crump at the time said is the largest pretrial civil rights lawsuit settlement ever.

"I keep hoping and believing, if we can make them pay multimillions of dollars every time they shoot a Black person in the back, that there will be less Black people shot in the back," Crump said. "That's my theory, but it remains unanswered because they keep killing us."

In recent years, Crump waded into the TV and film world. He had a brief role in the 2017 film "Marshall," which tells of the early life of his hero, who became the first Black U.S. Supreme Court justice.

His higher profile has brought more scrutiny and turned him into a frequent target. Conservative author Candace Owens in April accused Crump of trying to profit from police shootings and encouraging violent protests.

"Keeping racial issues alive has become a business in America," she told Fox News Channel's Laura Ingraham. "It's Al Sharpton yesterday, Jesse Jackson tomorrow, Ben Crump today."

It doesn't really bother Crump: "You can't care what the enemies of equality think of you," he said. "It would be the height of arrogance to think that everybody is going to love you. It's not a popularity contest."

It's fitting that he is now mentioned among the giants of civil rights, said John Bowman, who has known him since Michael Brown's killing and has served as president of the St. Louis County NAACP.

"I can't get in his head and say he charted out this course, and said, 'I'm going to be the next strongest voice for injustice,'" Bowman said. "I do know that when the call was made, he didn't shy away or step back from it."

But Crump says he eventually would like to step back from it all.

"I literally pray for the day when I can close down the police brutality division of my law firm," he said, "because I am so tired of seeing Black people killed by the police unjustifiably. I'd like to tell my staff that we no longer have to fight in the courts, or be counselors to so many grieving mothers and fathers."

Morrison reported from New York City. Seewer reported from Toledo, Ohio.

Morrison is a member of AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow him on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/aaronmorrison>. Also, follow Seewer on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/jseewerap>.

Pence opens presidential bid with denunciation of Trump over Jan. 6 insurrection and abortion

By JILL COLVIN and THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

ANKENY, Iowa (AP) — Former Vice President Mike Pence opened his bid for the Republican nomination for president Wednesday with a firm denunciation of former President Donald Trump, accusing his two-time running mate of abandoning conservative principles and being guilty of dereliction of duty on Jan. 6, 2021.

On that perilous day, Pence said, as Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol after the president falsely insisted his vice president could overturn the election results, Trump "demanded I choose between him and our Constitution. Now voters will be faced with the same choice."

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Pence is the first vice president in modern history to challenge the president under whom he served. While he spent much of his speech, delivered at a community college in a suburb of Des Moines, criticizing Democratic President Joe Biden and the direction he has taken the country, he also addressed Jan. 6 head-on, saying Trump had disqualified himself when he declared falsely that Pence had the power to keep him in office.

Trump's statements about mass voting fraud led a mob of his supporters to storm the U.S. Capitol, sending Pence and his family scrambling for safety as some in the crowd chanted, "Hang Mike Pence!"

"I believe anyone that puts themselves over the Constitution should never be president of the United States, and anyone who asks someone else to put them over the Constitution should never be president of the United States again," the former vice president said.

Pence has spent much of the past two-and-a-half-years grappling with fallout from that day as he has tried to chart a political future in a party that remains deeply loyal to Trump and is filled with many who still believe Trump's lies that the 2020 election was stolen and that Pence somehow could reject the results.

While Pence has criticized Trump as he has worked to forge an identity of his own outside the former president's shadow, he has generally done so obliquely, reflecting Trump's continued popularity in the party. But Wednesday, as Pence made his pitch to voters for the first time as a declared candidate, he did not hold his tongue.

He accused the former president of abandoning the conservative values he ran on, including on abortion.

Pence, who supports a national ban on the procedure, said: "After leading the most pro-life administration in American history, Donald Trump and others in this race are retreating from the cause of the unborn. The sanctity of life has been our party's calling for half a century — long before Donald Trump was a part of it. Now he treats it as an inconvenience, even blaming our election losses in 2022 on overturning *Roe v. Wade*."

Trump has declined to say what limits he supports nationally and has blamed some midterm candidates' strong rhetoric for their losses last November.

Pence also bemoaned the current politics of "grudges and grievances," saying the country needs leaders who know the difference between the "politics of outrage and standing firm."

"We will restore a threshold of civility in public life," he pledged.

Nonetheless, in an interview with Fox News after his speech, Pence said he will "absolutely support the Republican nominee," even if it's Trump. And during a CNN town hall Wednesday night, Pence said he does not believe Trump should be indicted in the Mar-a-Lago documents case — even if federal prosecutors have evidence he committed a crime.

"I would just hope that there would be a way for them to move forward without the dramatic and drastic and divisive step of indicting (the) former president of the United States," he said. He also refused to say whether, if elected, he would pardon Trump, if Trump were convicted.

Trump offered no response to Pence's opening speech, but his supporters shot back.

"The question most GOP voters are asking themselves about Pence's candidacy is 'Why?'" said Karoline Leavitt, a spokeswoman for a Trump-backing super PAC.

With Pence's entry into the race, on his 64th birthday, the GOP field is largely set. It includes Trump, who's leading in early polls, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who remains in second, former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie.

Pence's campaign will test the party's appetite for a socially conservative and deeply religious candidate who has criticized the populist tide that has swept through his party under Trump. Pence, in many ways, represents a throwback to a party from days past. Unlike Trump and DeSantis, he argues cuts to Social Security and Medicare must be on the table and has blasted those who have questioned why the U.S. should continue to send aid to Ukraine to counter Russian aggression.

Pence and his advisers see Iowa — the state that will cast the first votes of the GOP nominating calendar — as key to his pathway to the nomination. Its caucusgoers include a large portion of evangelical Christian voters, whom they see as a natural constituency for Pence, a social conservative who often talks

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about his faith.

But Pence faces steep challenges. Despite being one of the best-known Republican candidates in the crowded field, he is viewed skeptically by voters on both the left and the right. Trump critics consider him complicit in the former president's most indefensible actions, while many Trump loyalists have maligned him as a traitor, partly to blame for denying the president a second term.

A CNN poll conducted last month found 45% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents said they would not support Pence under any circumstance. And in Iowa, a March Des Moines Register/Media-com Iowa Poll found Pence with higher unfavorable ratings than all the other candidates it asked about, including Trump and DeSantis.

But Pence, who has visited Iowa more than a dozen times since leaving office, has been warmly welcomed by voters during his trips.

His Wednesday audience included a number of Iowa Republican officials, including former Iowa Rep. Greg Ganske, whose time in Congress overlapped briefly with Pence's.

"I'm here because we're friends," said Ganske, who represented the Des Moines area in the House. Still, he said he hadn't figured out who he was going to support in the caucuses. "We have a lot of good candidates," he said.

John Steuterman, a 44-year-old insurance executive, said he was drawn to Pence's experience in the White House and was "tired of the negativity" another Trump term would bring.

"Mike Pence is a decent man," he said. But asked whether he was locked in for Pence in the leadoff caucuses, Steuterman said, "I'm not married to the idea, but I'm going to watch and listen and I'm going to follow this guy."

It was the same for Dave Bubeck, who lives in Grimes and praised Pence as "a super professional guy," "statesmanlike," and "a man of high character" — with the capacity to serve as president. "But I think there's other good candidates," too, he said, adding he would "wait and see how it all shakes out."

Asked why he wasn't sold on Pence, Bubeck said: "Maybe he's a little too nice. ... I don't know if he's tough enough for what we need right now. That would be my hesitancy."

Pence's decision to focus on Jan. 6 reflects his advisers' strategy that the Capitol attack has to be confronted directly.

His argument resonated with Ruth Ehler, a retired teacher from West Des Moines who attended the speech.

"The Constitution is the document of our country and I stood by him on Jan. 6 when he followed the Constitution. If that's where he feels he differs from our past president, it's a great point for him to make," Ehler said.

And yet, Ehler could not say whether she was leaning toward supporting Pence in the caucuses.

Kilauea, one of the world's most active volcanoes, begins erupting after 3-month pause

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Kilauea, one of the most active volcanoes in the world, began erupting on Wednesday after a three-month pause, displaying spectacular fountains of mesmerizing, glowing lava that's a safe distance from people and structures in a national park on the Big Island.

A glow was detected in webcam images from Kilauea's summit early in the morning, indicating that an eruption was occurring within the Halemaumau crater in the summit caldera, the U.S. Geological Survey's Hawaiian Volcano Observatory said.

The images show fissures at the base of the crater generating lava flows on the crater floor's surface, the observatory said.

Before issuing the eruption notice, the observatory said increased earthquake activity and changes in the patterns of ground deformation at the summit started Tuesday night, indicating the movement of magma in the subsurface.

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"We're not seeing any signs of activity out on the rift zones right now," said Mike Zoeller, a geologist with the observatory. "There's no reason to expect this to transition into a rift eruption that would threaten any communities here on the island with lava flows or anything like that."

All activity was within a closed area of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

"The lava this morning is all confined within ... the summit caldera. So plenty of room for it still to produce more without threatening any homes or infrastructure," said park spokesperson Jessica Ferracane. "So that's the way we like our eruptions here."

She said park officials are bracing for crowds to arrive because visitors can see the eruption from many overlooks.

"Kilauea overlook was spectacular this morning," she said of the vast lava lake. "It was molten red lava. There's several areas of pretty robust fountaining. It's just really, really pretty."

The lava lake, covering the crater floor over lava that remained from previous eruptions, measured about 371 acres (150 hectares) at about 6 a.m., Zoeller said. It measured about 4,300 feet (1,300 meters) wide.

Word was getting out and parking lots were starting to fill up at the park, Ferracane said, adding that she expected long lines getting into the park by evening.

Since the park is open 24 hours a day, visitors can beat the crowds by visiting between 9 p.m. and sunrise, Ferracane said.

She reminded visitors to stay out of closed areas and remain on marked trails for safety reasons, including avoiding gases from the eruption.

Residents of Pahala, 20 miles (30 kilometers) downwind of Kilauea's summit, reported a very light dusting of gritty fine ash and "Pele's hair" — glass particles that form when lava erupts from a fissure and rapidly cools — named for the Hawaiian goddess of volcanoes, the observatory said.

Two small earthquakes jolted Janice Wei awake. As a volunteer photographer for the park who lives in the nearby town of Volcano, she was able to see fountains she estimated to be 150 feet (46 meters) high at around 4:30 a.m.

She said she saw about 15 fountains, which were dying down by mid-morning.

Fountain heights decreased to 13 feet to 30 feet (4 meters to 9 meters) in the afternoon, according to the observatory.

The red bursts could be seen on the USGS livestream Wednesday afternoon.

The volcano's alert level was raised to warning status and the aviation color code went to red as scientists evaluate the eruption and associated hazards.

Kilauea, Hawaii's second largest volcano, erupted from September 2021 until last December. For about two weeks in December, Hawaii's biggest volcano, Mauna Loa, also was erupting on Hawaii's Big Island.

After a short pause, Kilauea began erupting again in January. That eruption lasted for 61 days, ending in March.

This eruption is looking very similar, Zoeller said: "This eruption is following a very similar playbook to the last three that we've seen here since 2020."

A 2018 Kilauea eruption destroyed more than 700 homes.

Before the major 2018 eruption, Kilauea had been erupting since 1983, and streams of lava occasionally covered farms and homes. During that time, the lava sometimes reached the ocean, causing dramatic interactions with the water.

Thiessen reported from Anchorage, Alaska.

House Republicans pull back contempt charge against FBI director Wray over Biden doc

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Republican chairman of the House Oversight Committee on Wednesday called off a vote on a contempt of Congress charge against FBI Director Christopher Wray, accepting a last-

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minute offer by the bureau to allow the full committee access to a confidential document of an unverified tip about President Joe Biden.

Rep. James Comer said in a statement that the committee is removing a contempt resolution against Wray from Thursday's schedule after receiving an accommodation that would give the full committee access to the document.

"Allowing all Oversight Committee members to review this record is an important step toward conducting oversight of the FBI and holding it accountable to the American people," the Kentucky Republican said.

The action that played out over the last month against Wray reflects a larger breakdown between Republicans and the FBI that has only intensified this year, with some conservatives talking openly about trying to defund the bureau.

It's a rift that first opened during the Russia investigation of then-President Donald Trump and has only widened amid the FBI's wide-ranging criminal investigation into the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol, which some Republicans view as overly zealous and politicized.

The FBI made the last-ditch effort to ward off the contempt vote Wednesday, offering to give every lawmaker on the oversight committee access to a redacted version of a confidential document that alleges a bribery scheme involving then-Vice President Joe Biden and a foreign national. That's according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to discuss it publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

It was unclear until late Wednesday if Comer would accept the offer even as House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said that would suffice.

Rep. Jamie Raskin, the top Democrat on oversight committee, said in a statement Wednesday that he's happy Comer accepted the "good faith" offer from the FBI but warned his colleague across the aisle of the precedent his actions leading up to this could set.

"Holding someone in contempt of Congress is among the most serious actions our Committee can take and it should not be weaponized to undermine the FBI," Raskin said.

The FBI has called the contempt vote unwarranted considering the bureau had "continuously demonstrated its commitment to accommodate the committee's request," while protecting the safety of sources and the integrity of ongoing investigations.

But Comer had consistently said for the past month that the only way for the FBI to comply with the subpoena is to provide an unredacted copy of the document. It's unclear what made him change course at the last minute.

FBI officials have already shown a redacted version of the several-page form to Comer and Raskin during a 90-minute briefing Monday. The bureau described that briefing as an "extraordinary accommodation" where both men were able to take notes on the document and ask questions.

The whole contempt fight over the document moved at an unusually rapid speed for the House. Committees often battle for months with an agency or a witness before resorting to contempt proceedings, often haggling over an "accommodation" that is considered compliance with a subpoena. Republicans moved far faster, arriving at contempt a little over a month after issuing the subpoena to Wray on May 3.

It would have been the first time Republicans had used the contempt power against a federal official since taking control of the House in January, but would be far from a rare occurrence in the House.

Democrats wielded the power of contempt memorably in the last Congress as part of the committee investigation into the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. Steve Bannon, a longtime ally of former President Donald Trump, was convicted by a jury on contempt charges last year after a referral from the House Jan. 6 committee. Another former Trump official, Peter Navarro, is awaiting trial on a contempt charge as well. He has pleaded not guilty.

The Biden document at the center of the new dispute was written up by a longtime FBI source whom both Republicans and Democrats have described as credible. In it, the source details an unverified tip received in 2020 about the business dealings of Biden and his son, Hunter Biden, in Ukraine. Hunter Biden worked on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company.

Flooding from dam break strands hundreds and leaves thousands with no drinking water in Ukraine

By VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

KHERSON, Ukraine (AP) — Authorities rushed to rescue hundreds of people stranded on rooftops and supply drinking water to areas flooded by a collapsed dam in southern Ukraine on Wednesday, in a growing humanitarian and ecological disaster along a river that forms part of the front line in the 15-month war.

The collapse of the Kakhovka hydroelectric dam and emptying of its reservoir on the Dnieper River added to the misery the region has suffered for more than a year from artillery and missile attacks.

With humanitarian and ecological disasters still unfolding, it's already clear that tens of thousands of people have been deprived of drinking water, many are homeless, crops are ruined, land mines have been displaced, and the stage is set for long-term electricity shortages.

Some residents of Russia-occupied areas hit by high water complained that help was slow in arriving, with some stranded on roofs and streets passable only by boat in scenes more like natural disasters than wars. Others refused to leave.

The first report of casualties from the disaster emerged, with a mayor reporting three dead. At least 4,000 people have been evacuated from both the Russian and Ukrainian-controlled sides of the river, officials said, with the true scale of the disaster yet to emerge in an affected area that was home to more than 60,000 people. Russia-appointed authorities in the occupied parts of the Kherson region reported 15,000 flooded homes.

The dam and reservoir, essential for fresh water and irrigation for southern Ukraine, lies in the Kherson region that Moscow illegally annexed in September and has occupied for the past year. The reservoir is also critical for water supplies to the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed in 2014.

Ukraine holds the Dnieper's western bank, while Russia controls the low-lying eastern side, which is more vulnerable to flooding.

The high water could wash away this season's crops, while the depleted Kakhovka reservoir would deny adequate irrigation for years. The reservoir's loss also complicates any efforts to rebuild and restart the destroyed hydroelectric power station and ensure cooling water for any future attempts to restart the shut-down Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

A day after the dam's collapse, the cause remained unclear, with both sides blaming each other. Some experts cited wartime damage and neglect, although others argued that Russia might have destroyed it for military reasons. Either way, concluded analyst Michael Kofman, "Russia is responsible, either by virtue of action or by virtue of the fact that it controlled the dam."

"It's going to lead to lasting damage to agriculture, provision of drinkable water. And it's going to wipe out entire communities," Kofman — who is with the Center for Naval Analyses, a U.S. research group — told "PBS NewsHour."

Many residents had fled the region because of the fighting, but clear estimates of those remaining weren't available.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with officials on how to provide drinking water to residents, as well as assess damage to wetlands, farms and other property from what he called "a crime of ecocide" and "a man-made strike on the environment, after which nature will have to recover for decades."

Speaking in English in a video posted on YouTube, Zelenskyy said it was impossible to predict how much of the chemicals and oil products stored in flooded areas will end up in rivers and the sea.

Ukraine's agriculture ministry warned, "The fields in the south of Ukraine next year can turn into deserts."

In the Moscow-controlled city of Oleshky, Lera, 19, told The Associated Press the first floor of her home was flooded.

"Everything around us is floating. People are standing on rooftops and asking for help, but no one is evacuating them," said Lera, who declined to give her last name for fear of reprisals.

Most Russian troops fled Oleshky shortly after the dam incident, Lera said, although a military checkpoint

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remains, and boats with people trying to leave have come under fire from soldiers. Her claim couldn't be independently verified.

Mayor Yevhen Ryschuk, who left the city after the Russians took control last year, reported three dead and said hundreds of residents need to be evacuated from their roofs. He said 90% of Oleshky is flooded and facing a humanitarian crisis without electricity, potable water and food, as well as possible ground-water contamination.

Animals weren't spared, with some pets trapped. Officials said the Kazkova Dibrova Zoo in Nova Kakhovka was under water and that "only swans and ducks could escape." Mayor Vladimir Leontyev said that the flooding killed thousands of animals in a nature preserve.

Hundreds of animals trapped in Oleshky require urgent rescue, volunteers helping a local shelter told the AP.

Civilians in the city of Kherson clutched personal belongings as they waded through knee-deep water or rode rubber rafts. Video showed rescuers carrying people to safety, and what looked like the triangular roof of a building floating downstream.

Aerial footage showed flooded streets in the Russia-controlled city of Nova Kakhovka on the eastern side of the Dnieper, where Leontyev said that seven people were missing, although believed to be alive.

In his first public comments on the disaster, Russian President Vladimir Putin repeated Moscow's line that Ukraine is to blame for destroying the Kakhovka dam.

In a call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Putin alleged that Kyiv authorities had escalated "war crimes, openly using terrorist methods and staging acts of sabotage on Russian territory," the Kremlin said in its account of the call.

It was unclear how the dam disaster would affect the war and Ukraine's counteroffensive against Russian troops. Artillery booms served as background to rescue efforts as people scrambled to leave the danger zone.

Kofman, the analyst, said he didn't think the dam collapse "will substantially affect Ukrainian military prospects when it comes to their offensive this summer."

"When you look at the situation along the Dnieper River — on the one hand, the flooding is going to damage the defenses that the Russian military built alongside the riverbank," he told PBS. "On the other hand, it's going to make a Ukrainian cross-river operation exceedingly difficult."

Addressing blame, the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank, said Russia has "a greater and clearer interest in flooding the lower Dnieper despite the damage to their own prepared defensive positions."

With some indications emerging that Ukraine might already have begun its long-anticipated counteroffensive, the ISW said Russian forces may think breaching the dam could cover a possible retreat and delay Ukraine's campaign.

Experts noted that the 1950s-era dam, about 70 kilometers (44 miles) to the east of the city of Kherson, was believed to be in disrepair and vulnerable to collapse because water was already brimming over when the wall gave way. It hadn't been producing power since November, according to officials.

The U.K. Defense Ministry said the Kakhovka reservoir was at record high levels before the breach and that the dam "is likely to deteriorate further over the next few days, causing additional flooding."

The scale of the damage to the dam was unknown, but officials hoped to rebuild the complex once the Russians leave, said Ihor Syrota, general director of the Ukrainian national hydroelectric company Ukrhydroenergo. Workers, meanwhile, are holding water in other upstream reservoirs to compensate in part for the loss of the dam, he said.

Wheat and corn prices spiked Tuesday on fears over Ukraine's ability to ship grain to developing nations where people are struggling with hunger and high food prices. Prices stabilized Wednesday.

Illia Novikov in Kyiv, Hanna Arhirova in Warsaw, Poland, and Yuras Karmanau in Tallinn, Estonia, contributed to this report.

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

Air pollution cloaks eastern US for a second day. Here's why there is so much smoke

By KATHY McCORMACK and MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

Intense smoke blanketed the northeastern United States for a second day Wednesday, turning the air a yellowish gray and prompting warnings for people to stay inside and keep windows closed. The smoke was flowing from dozens of wildfires in several Canadian provinces.

Much of the air was in the "unhealthy or worse categories in areas from the mid-Atlantic through the Northeast and parts of the Upper Great Lakes," according to an advisory issued by the Environmental Protection Agency Wednesday night.

U.S. authorities issued air quality alerts in multiple regions and smoke was expected to persist for days.

Conditions were especially bad in parts of central New York, where the airborne soot was at hazardous levels. In New York City, officials on Wednesday said everyone should stay indoors. The conditions arrived late Tuesday afternoon, obscuring views of New Jersey across the Hudson River.

Here's a closer look at what's happening and what's in the smoke:

GENESIS OF THE SMOKE

Unusually hot, dry weather that wouldn't stop gave rise to the wildfires.

"The month of May was just off the charts — record warm in much of Canada," said Eric James, a modeling expert with the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Science at the University of Colorado, who is also with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

A warming planet will produce hotter and longer heat waves, making for bigger, smokier fires, according to Joel Thornton, professor and chair of the department of atmospheric sciences at the University of Washington.

The Quebec-area fires are big and relatively close, about 500 to 600 miles (roughly 800 to 970 kilometers) from Rhode Island and they followed wildfires in Nova Scotia.

"I don't remember fires of this scale in the last 10 years," James said of the Quebec blazes.

Smoke from fires in western Canada have been drifting into the United States for weeks. But it's recent fires in Quebec that have produced the dangerous east coast haze.

WHY IS SMOKE REACHING SO FAR AWAY?

Strong winds high up in the atmosphere can transport smoke long distances and it's common for large, violent fires to create unhealthy conditions hundreds of miles away from where forests are burning.

But the right mix of circumstances had to align for the smoke to blanket major U.S. cities: A dry, hot spring set the stage. Then weather did the rest, said Bob Henson, meteorologist with Yale Climate Change Connections.

In Canada, air is circulating counterclockwise around a low pressure system near Nova Scotia. That sends air south over the fires in Quebec. There the air picks up smoke, and then turns east over New York state, carrying smoke to the eastern seaboard.

"It's a simple matter of trajectory," Henson said. "The smoke goes where the wind takes it."

This wind pattern isn't particularly rare. But the confluence of events is.

"The timing of this weather patterns is unfortunately overlapping with a situation that was ripe for large fires," Thornton said.

Weather patterns change and the worst conditions should only last a day or two. Some smoke, however, could linger for a week or more, according to James.

WHAT IS SMOKE ACTUALLY?

Although smoke seems familiar, it is actually made up of a complex mix of shapes, from round to corkscrew-shaped under the microscope.

"It's not just one sort of chemical," said Rima Habre, an expert in air quality and exposure science at

the University of Southern California. "It could have gases and carbons and toxic metals." As it travels, Habre said, it also changes and can contain ozone.

Much of what we see in the air and measure is small particles, or PM 2.5. These are so small they can get deep into the lungs, where oxygen enters your circulation.

"Mostly we worry about inflammation in the lungs," Habre said, from these high levels of pollution. But with climate change amping up fires, increasingly, she said, she is worried about broader numbers of people being exposed to less extreme smoke for weeks or months.

"Most healthy adults and children will recover quickly from smoke exposure and will not have long-lasting health effects," according to the EPA advisory. But that is less true for a large category of people, including children whose lungs are still developing, older adults, and people with lung diseases, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Stay inside, keeping your doors, windows and fireplaces shut, is the advice. Air conditioning on the re-circulation setting can help filter out some particles, and air filters can remove many more.

Phillis reported from St. Louis. Associated Press reporters Katie Foody in Chicago, and David B. Caruso, Deepti Hajela and Ingrid Lobet in New York contributed to this story.

Justice Dept. moves closer toward possible indictment of Trump in classified documents investigation

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal grand jury investigating Donald Trump in Florida heard from at least one additional witness Wednesday amid signs that the Justice Department was moving toward a possible indictment over the former president's mishandling of classified documents.

In the last week, his lawyers have met with Justice Department officials to argue against an indictment; Trump has issued social media posts in which he suggested he anticipated that he might be charged; and a former top aide appeared before a grand jury in Miami — an indication, legal experts said, that prosecutors had settled on Florida rather than Washington as an appropriate venue for charges.

In addition, several media reports Wednesday evening said prosecutors had recently issued the Trump legal team a target letter, which is often but not always a precursor to criminal charges. The Justice Department defines a target as someone whom prosecutors have substantial evidence linking to a crime.

"I think the signal is increasingly that the charges against the former president will be in Florida," said Brandon Van Grack, a former Justice Department prosecutor and a key lawyer on an earlier special counsel team that investigated ties between Russia and the 2016 Trump campaign.

Lawyers for Trump did not return calls seeking comment. The Associated Press has not independently confirmed the existence of a target letter. A Trump spokesman would not confirm or deny receiving a letter and a Justice Department spokeswoman declined to comment.

Earlier in the day, Taylor Budowich, who had served as a spokesman for Trump after his presidency and now runs a pro-Trump super PAC, testified before the grand jury. He confirmed his appearance on Twitter, writing, "Today, in what can only be described as a bogus and deeply troubling effort to use the power of government to 'get' Trump, I fulfilled a legal obligation to testify in front a federal grand jury and I answered every question honestly."

A variety of witnesses, including lawyers for Trump, close aides to the former president and officials with the Trump Organization, have appeared over the past year before the grand jury in Washington as part of a Justice Department special counsel investigation into Trump over the retention of hundreds of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago and potential obstruction of the government's efforts to reclaim the records.

But the existence of a separate grand jury in Florida adds a wrinkle to an investigation that has been largely shrouded in mystery and has been thought to be in its end stages. It suggests that prosecutors may be moving toward bringing criminal charges in Florida, where the documents were taken after Trump left the White House and where multiple acts of alleged obstruction have occurred, instead of in Washington.

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Though the bulk of the investigative work has been done in Washington, prosecutors could simply read key testimony to the Florida grand jury or have a summary witness summarize all the key evidence, Van Grack said.

Trump's lawyers met at the Justice Department on Monday with officials including special counsel Jack Smith, part of an effort by the legal team to raise concerns about what they say is prosecutorial misconduct and to try to argue against a potential indictment. After that meeting, Trump posted on his Truth Social platform in capital letters: "How can DOJ possibly charge me, who did nothing wrong," when no other presidents have been charged.

He also called into a radio show, where he confirmed the meeting with his lawyers and said: "Well, I can just say this: They did go in and they saw 'em and they said very unfair. No other president has ever been charged with anything like this."

On Wednesday, he issued a new social media post saying, "No one has told me I'm being indicted, and I shouldn't be because I've done NOTHING wrong, but I have assumed for years that I am a Target of the WEAPONIZED DOJ & FBI."

The investigation has focused not only on the possession of classified documents, including at the top-secret level, but also on the refusal of Trump to return the records when asked, and on possible obstruction.

The FBI last year issued a subpoena for classified records at the property, and after coming to suspect that Trump and his representatives had not returned all the documents, returned with a search warrant and recovered an additional 100 with classification markings.

Beyond the Mar-a-Lago investigation, another probe in Washington also conducted by Smith centers on efforts by Trump and his allies to undo the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Associated Press writer Jill Colvin in Des Moines, Iowa, contributed to this report.

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

More on Donald Trump-related investigations: <https://apnews.com/hub/donald-trump>

Millions breathing hazardous air as smoke from Canadian wildfires streams south over US

By JENNIFER PELTZ and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Smoke from Canadian wildfires poured into the U.S. East Coast and Midwest on Wednesday, covering the capitals of both nations in an unhealthy haze, holding up flights at major airports, postponing Major League Baseball games and prompting people to fish out pandemic-era face masks.

Canadian officials asked other countries for additional help fighting more than 400 blazes nationwide that already have displaced 20,000 people. Air with hazardous levels of pollution extended into the New York metropolitan area, central New York state and parts of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Massive tongues of unhealthy air extended as far as North Carolina and Indiana, affecting millions of people.

"I can taste the air," Dr. Ken Strumpf said in a Facebook post from Syracuse, New York, which was enveloped in an amber pall. The smoke, he later said by phone, even made him a bit dizzy.

The air quality index, a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency metric for air pollution, exceeded a staggering 400 at times in Syracuse, New York City and Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley. A level of 50 or under is considered good; anything over 300 is considered "hazardous," when even healthy people are advised to curtail outdoor physical activity.

In Baltimore, Debbie Funk sported a blue surgical mask as she and husband, Jack Hughes, took their daily walk around Fort McHenry, a national monument overlooking the Patapsco River. The air hung thick over the water, obscuring the horizon.

"I walked outside this morning, and it was like a waft of smoke," said Funk.

Canadian officials say this is shaping up to be the nation's worst wildfire season ever. It started early on drier-than-usual ground and accelerated very quickly, exhausting firefighting resources across the country,

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fire and environmental officials said.

Smoke from the blazes in various parts of the country has been lapping into the U.S. since last month but intensified with recent fires in Quebec, where about 100 were considered out of control Wednesday — which, unsettlingly, was national Clean Air Day in Canada.

The smoke was so thick in downtown Ottawa, Canada's capital, that office towers just across the Ottawa River were barely visible. In Toronto, Yili Ma said her hiking plans were canceled and she was forgoing restaurant patios, a beloved Canadian summer tradition.

"I put my mask away for over a year, and now I'm putting on my mask since yesterday," the 31-year-old lamented.

Quebec Premier François Legault said the province currently has the capacity to fight about 40 fires — and the usual reinforcements from other provinces have been strained by conflagrations in Nova Scotia and elsewhere.

Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre spokesperson Jennifer Kamau said more than 950 firefighters and other personnel have arrived from the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and more are due soon.

In Washington, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said President Joe Biden has sent more than 600 firefighters and equipment to Canada. His administration has contacted some U.S. governors and local officials about providing assistance, she said.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Twitter that he spoke by phone with Biden and "thanked him for all the help Americans are providing as we continue to fight these devastating wildfires."

The largest town in Northern Quebec — Chibougamau, population about 7,500 — was evacuated Tuesday, and Legault said the roughly 4,000 residents of the northern Cree town of Mistissini would likely have to leave Wednesday. But later in the day, Mistissini Chief Michael Petawabano said his community remains safe and asked residents to wait for instructions from Cree officials.

Eastern Quebec got some rain Wednesday, but Montreal-based Environment Canada meteorologist Simon Legault said no significant rain is expected for days in the remote areas of central Quebec where the wildfires are more intense.

U.S. National Weather Service meteorologist Zach Taylor said the current weather pattern in the central and eastern U.S. is essentially funneling in the smoke. Some rain should help clear the air somewhat in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic this weekend or early next week, though more thorough relief will come from containing or extinguishing the fires, he said.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said 1 million N95 masks would be available at state facilities. New York City closed beaches, and Mayor Eric Adams told residents to stay indoors as much as possible as smoke smudged out the skyline. Zoos in the Bronx and Central Park closed early and brought their animals inside.

The Federal Aviation Administration paused some flights bound for LaGuardia Airport and slowed planes to Newark Liberty and Philadelphia because the smoke was limiting visibility. It also contributed to delayed arrivals at Dulles International Airport outside Washington, where a heavy haze shrouded the Washington Monument and forced the cancellation of outdoor tours.

Major League Baseball put off games in New York and Philadelphia, and even an indoor WNBA game in Brooklyn was called off.

On Broadway, "Killing Eve" star Jodie Comer had difficulty breathing and left the matinee of "Prima Facie" after 10 minutes; the show restarted with an understudy, show publicists said. "Hamilton" and "Camelot" canceled Wednesday evening performances, with "Hamilton" publicists saying the deteriorating air quality "made it impossible for a number of our artists to perform." In Central Park, the popular outdoor Shakespeare in the Park performances were put off through Friday.

Schools in multiple states canceled sports and other outdoor activities, shifting recess inside. Live horse racing was canceled Wednesday and Thursday at Delaware Park in Wilmington. Organizers of Global Running Day, a virtual 5K, advised participants to adjust their plans according to air quality.

New Jersey closed state offices early, and some political demonstrations in spots from Manhattan to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, were moved indoors or postponed. Striking Hollywood writers were pulled off picket lines in the New York metropolitan area.

The smoke exacerbated health problems for people such as Vicki Burnett, 67, who has asthma and has had serious bouts with bronchitis.

After taking her dogs out Wednesday morning in Farmington Hills, Michigan, Burnett said, "I came in and started coughing and hopped back into bed."

Still, she stressed that she's concerned for Canadians, not just herself.

"It's unfortunate, and I'm having some problems for it, but there should be help for them," she said.

Gillies reported from Toronto. Contributing were Associated Press journalists Randall Chase in Dover, Delaware; Michael Hill in Albany, New York; David Koenig in Dallas; Aamer Madhani in Washington; Brooke Schultz in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania; Mark Scolforo in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Lea Skene in Baltimore; Carolyn Thompson in Buffalo, New York; Ron Todt in Philadelphia; Corey Williams in West Bloomfield, Michigan; and Ron Blum, Mark Kennedy, Jake Offenhartz, Karen Matthews and Julie Walker in New York.

This story has corrected the attribution of material about forecast for rain in Quebec to Montreal-based Environment Canada meteorologist Simon Legault, not Quebec Premier François Legault.

More than 1,400 migrants are rescued from overcrowded boats off southern Italy by coast guard

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — More than 1,400 migrants have been rescued from overcrowded vessels, including a sailboat, in four separate operations in the Mediterranean Sea off southern Italy, the Italian coast guard said Wednesday.

There were 47 migrants, including two children in immediate need of medical care, aboard the sailboat in distress off the region of Calabria, in the "toe" of the Italian peninsula, a coast guard statement said. They were rescued by a coast guard motorboat early Tuesday.

The statement said the rescues began late Monday night and ended in the early hours of Wednesday in the Ionian Sea off Calabria's east coast. One coast guard vessel took on around 590 migrants from aboard a fishing boat, and then later brought on around 650 migrants from another fishing boat, the statement said.

A coast guard motorboat and an Italian border police ship came to the assistance of a fourth vessel, with 130 migrants aboard.

Authorities didn't immediately give details on the nationalities of the passengers or routes taken by the migrant vessels. But generally, many boats with migrants sighted off the Ionian Sea set out from Turkey's coast, where smugglers launch crowded and unseaworthy boats.

Earlier this year, a migrant boat navigating on that route slammed into a sandbank just off a Calabrian beach town and broke apart. At least 94 migrants perished and 80 others survived.

That shipwreck is under criminal investigation, including the role of several members of Italy's border police corps, which operates vessels off the country's long coastline. Four suspected smugglers have been arrested.

In addition, prosecutors want to know if rescue efforts could have been launched hours earlier. Italian border police boats reportedly turned back to port because of rough seas, and by the time a coast guard vessel, better equipped to navigate in poor sea conditions, reached the area, bodies were already in the water. In that case, the migrant boat had been spotted hours earlier by a surveillance aircraft operated by Frontex, the European Union's border monitoring force.

Wednesday's statement by the coast guard said that crew on a Frontex surveillance plane had spotted a fishing boat with the 590 migrants aboard. A Frontex patrol boat and a Frontex support vessel were among the assets involved in the rescue operations for the two fishing boats, according to the coast guard.

Alarm Phone, a nongovernmental organization that frequently receives satellite calls from migrant vessels in distress and relays the information to maritime authorities in Italy and Malta, was among the organiza-

tions signaling the need for rescue for the 130 people aboard the fourth boat.

Follow AP's coverage of global migration at <https://apnews.com/hub/migration>

Against the odds, world's most endangered porpoise resists extinction in Mexico's Gulf of California

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Against all odds, the remaining handful of Mexico's endangered vaquita porpoises are holding on in their only habitat in the Gulf of California, according to a new research expedition report released Wednesday.

Experts on the expedition estimate they saw from 10 to 13 of the tiny, shy, elusive porpoises during nearly two weeks of sailing in the gulf last month.

That is a similar number to those seen in the last such expedition in 2021. Because they are so small and elusive, many of the sightings through powerful binoculars are categorized as probable or likely. The animals also emit "clicks" that can be heard through acoustic monitoring devices.

Experts from Mexico, the conservation group Sea Shepherd and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said they sighted at least one and probably two calves, as immature vaquitas are known, raising hopes for the survival of the world's most endangered marine mammal.

They said there may be more vaquitas out there, since the voyage covered only part of the creature's habitat in the gulf, also known as the Sea of Cortez. It lives nowhere else, and the species cannot be captured, held or bred in captivity.

But it is far too soon to celebrate. Illegal gillnets have trapped and killed vaquitas for decades; the population has declined from nearly 600 vaquitas in 1997.

Fishermen set the nets to catch totoaba, a fish whose swim bladder is considered a delicacy in China and can fetch thousands of dollars per pound (kilogram).

While the Mexican government has made some efforts to stop the net fishing — like sinking concrete blocks with hooks to snag nets — the fishermen still appear to have the upper hand, entering the protected area to fish on a daily basis and even sabotaging monitoring efforts.

According to the report, "fishermen have begun removing the acoustic devices (CPODs) used to record vaquita clicks. The data recorded on each device is lost, and it is expensive to replace the stolen CPODs."

"Unless enforcement of the fishing ban is effective and the theft of equipment is stopped, acoustic monitoring cannot collect data as it has in the past," the report stated.

Researcher Barbara Taylor called on Mexico to sink more concrete blocks to snag nets, because some of the vaquitas were seen outside the protected area.

The expedition took place May 10-26, and crisscrossed a corner of the gulf where the few remaining vaquitas had last been seen.

Alex Olivera, the Mexico representative for the Center for Biological Diversity, said "this is encouraging news and it shows that vaquita are survivors. But we still need urgent conservation efforts to save these tiny porpoises from extinction."

Olivera, who was not part of the expedition, estimated that "even in a gillnet-free habitat, it will take about 50 years for the population to return to where it was 15 years ago," adding "we need Mexico to urgently comply with existing regulations to prevent the vaquita from disappearing forever."

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration has largely declined to spend money to compensate fishermen for staying out of the vaquita refuge and stop using gillnets, or monitor their presence or the areas they launch from.

Sea Shepherd has been working in the Gulf alongside the Mexican Navy to discourage illegal fishing in the area known as the 'zero tolerance' zone, and no fishing is supposedly allowed there. However, illegal fishing boats are regularly seen there, and so Mexico has been unable to completely stop them.

Pritam Singh, Sea Shepherd's chairman, said that patrols with the Mexican Navy has reduced the number of hours that fishing boats spend in the restricted zone by 79% in 2022, compared to the previous year.

The last vaquita sighting expedition in 2021 yielded probable sightings of 5 to 13 vaquitas, a decline from the previous survey in 2019.

Illegal fishing itself has impeded population calculations in the past.

According to a report by experts published in 2022, both the 2019 and 2021 surveys "were hindered by the presence of many illegal fishing boats with gillnets in the water. Some areas could not be surveyed at all on some days due to the density of illegal fishing."

The government's protection efforts have been uneven, at best, and also often face violent opposition from local fishermen.

Gunman who opened fire after Virginia high school graduation targeted graduate, Richmond police say

By SARAH RANKIN and DENISE LAVOIE Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — A gunman who opened fire minutes after a high school graduation in Richmond, Virginia, targeted an 18-year-old graduate he had a long-running dispute with, police said Wednesday.

Shawn Jackson, 18, and his father, Lorenzo Smith, 36, were both killed Tuesday in the gunfire, which sent hundreds fleeing in panic outside the state capital's Altria Theater after the graduation ceremony for Huguenot High School. Five other people were wounded by gunfire, and at least 12 more suffered other injuries or were treated for anxiety due to the mayhem, according to police.

Richmond Interim Police Chief Rick Edwards said the shooting suspect, Amari Pollard, 19, knew Jackson and the two had been embroiled in a dispute for more than a year. Edwards said the nature of the dispute is still being investigated.

"This was targeted at one individual. ... That's what we know at this time," Edwards said during a news conference Wednesday.

Pollard was arraigned Wednesday morning on two counts of second-degree murder, said Colette McEachin, Richmond's top prosecutor. Pollard said he intends to hire an attorney, so the court continued the case until a hearing later this month, McEachin wrote in an email. Pollard was ordered held without bond. Court records did not immediately list an attorney who could speak on his behalf.

Jackson had just received his diploma at the graduation ceremony and had walked to a nearby park with his father to reunite with the rest of their family when the shooting started, said Tameeka Jackson-Smith, Jackson's mother and Smith's wife. She said Smith was Jackson's father, while Edwards later referred to Smith as his stepfather.

Jackson-Smith told The Associated Press that her and Smith's 9-year-old daughter was hit by a car in the chaos that erupted afterward. The girl was treated for leg injuries and released from the hospital, Jackson-Smith said.

Jackson-Smith said the family had watched the graduation, then got separated in a large crowd after they walked outside. "He was so happy — oh my God — because he got to graduate. He worked hard," she said of her son.

She said she was walking toward her husband and son when she saw a man run up behind them and start shooting.

"He was just running and shooting. I had my daughter beside me and I saw her get hit by a car. My niece almost got hit by a car. I was trying to grab them," she said.

Edwards said police believe Pollard attended the graduation, then went outside, where he had some kind of "interaction" with Jackson, and then then went to his car to retrieve a handgun. Other guns were also retrieved from the scene, Edwards said.

Edwards said authorities plan to trace the handgun. He said it was not immediately clear how it had been obtained by Pollard because at age 19, he would not have been able to buy a handgun himself from a licensed dealer.

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A federal judge in Virginia ruled last month that a federal law banning licensed federal firearms dealers from selling handguns to young adults under 21 violates the Second Amendment and is unconstitutional. The Justice Department has filed a motion asking the judge to put any injunction he may order on hold until the government decides whether to appeal his ruling and until any appeal is decided.

No officers were injured in the incident or discharged their weapons, according to Edwards.

Richmond Public Schools Superintendent Jason Kamras said he did not personally know Jackson but had shaken his hand and wished him congratulations at the ceremony about 20 minutes before he died.

"I can't shake the image of him receiving CPR on the ground," still in his graduation gown, Kamras said.

Jackson-Smith said her son enjoyed rap music and making music videos, and played football, basketball and baseball. "Any sport that he touched he was great at," she said.

She said her husband, who was also called "Renzo," was an Army veteran and a truck driver.

"My husband was so sweet," she said. "He was a caregiver, he was just everything that you could wish for in a person."

The five people wounded by gunfire had injuries not considered life-threatening, Edwards said.

The superintendent said all remaining high school graduations will be rescheduled for next week and will be held at schools instead of at the theater. There will be enhanced security, he said.

All Richmond Public Schools were to close Thursday and Friday, and school-related events were canceled, the district announced. District employees were still asked to report to work, however, and students and families can go to schools to drop off or pick up items or get meals.

Edwards said police are asking people who were near the shooting to call a tip line and send the FBI videos or other images they have on their phones.

CNN ousts CEO Chris Licht after a brief, tumultuous tenure

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The chief executive CNN pushed out of a job on Wednesday faced mounting problems in his first year leading the struggling network: viewership and profits were declining, programming blunders were growing and the network's journalists were losing confidence by the day.

Chris Licht's very bad year culminated in a damning magazine profile last week, and just a few days later his tumultuous 13-month tenure was over.

Licht, 51, was informed of his ouster Wednesday morning, and it was announced to the staff at the daily editorial meeting -- the same place where Licht had said two days earlier that he would "fight like hell" to earn the trust of those around him.

The executive who hired and fired Licht — David Zaslav, the CEO of CNN parent company Warner Bros. Discovery — accepted some of the blame for the network's turmoil over the past year, and he appointed a four-person interim leadership team. Zaslav promised CNN staff a thorough search for Licht's replacement.

"This really caps a tumultuous year for CNN that has seen shrinking profits, programming mistakes and really low employee morale," CNN media reporter Oliver Darcy said on his own network Wednesday.

Licht had a mandate to focus on news and try to and make CNN more palatable to both sides of the country's political divide; Republicans had become increasingly suspicious of the network following repeated attacks by former President Donald Trump.

But some at the network saw the way that change was communicated as a repudiation of their past work. A live town hall interview with Trump last month drew widespread criticism, with the former president overwhelming moderator Kaitlan Collins with several misstatements, as a pro-Trump live audience cheered him on.

Earlier in the year, Licht revamped the network's morning show, but that proved unsuccessful and led to the firing of longtime personality Don Lemon. Efforts to build a new prime-time lineup moved slowly, with Collins only recently appointed to fill at 9 p.m. hour that had been without a permanent host since Chris Cuomo was fired in December 2021.

Licht oversaw layoffs last year following Zaslav's decision to shutter the CNN+ streaming service only

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weeks after it had started. There were other cutbacks: shows hosted by Lisa Ling and Stanley Tucci were axed, along with the "Reliable Sources" media program and its host, Brian Stelter.

Licht, who had produced MSNBC's "Morning Joe," CBS' morning news show and Stephen Colbert's late-night show, was appointed by Zaslav just over a year ago to replace an internally popular predecessor, Jeff Zucker. Zucker was fired for not revealing a consensual relationship with a fellow CNN executive.

Ultimately, the promotion from a show producer to leading an international news organization proved too steep a challenge.

Zaslav said in a memo to CNN staff members that the job "was never going to be easy, especially at a time of great disruption and transformation.

"Chris poured his heart and soul into it," he said. "He has a deep love for journalism and this business and that has been evident throughout his tenure. Unfortunately, things did not work out the way we had hoped — and ultimately that's on me."

Licht did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

A lengthy profile of Licht in Atlantic magazine that came out on Friday, titled "Inside the Meltdown at CNN," proved embarrassing and likely sealed his fate. Author Tim Alberta discussed how Licht's effort to reach viewers turned off by CNN's hostility to Trump had failed and damaged his standing with CNN journalists.

"Licht's theory of CNN — what had gone wrong, how to fix it, and why doing so could lift the entire industry — made a lot of sense," Alberta wrote. "The execution of that theory? Another story. Every move he made, big programming decisions and small tactical maneuvers alike, seemed to backfire."

In the piece, Licht talked about how some of CNN's COVID coverage had been high-strung and lost touch with the country, a criticism that angered many in the newsroom.

Ultimately, Alberta could not get Zaslav to agree to an on-the-record assessment of Licht's tenure, an ominous sign.

Some of CNN's chief anchors — Jake Tapper, Anderson Cooper and Erin Burnett — had privately expressed their reservations about Licht's leadership, according to a Wall Street Journal article that was posted Tuesday evening.

Meanwhile, viewers were disappearing, a decline exacerbated by the quickening trend of consumers cutting the cord from traditional cable. CNN's prime-time viewership of 494,000 in May was down 16% from April and was less than half of its closest news rival, MSNBC. It was down 25% from the average of 660,000 in May 2022.

CNN's profits have also been sinking. The network generated \$892 million in profit in 2022, down from \$1.08 billion in 2020, according to S&P Global Market Intelligence.

Zaslav appointed four current CNN executives — Amy Entelis, Virginia Moseley, Eric Sherling and David Leavy — to run the network while a search for a replacement is conducted. Leavy, a top Zaslav aide from Warner Bros. Discovery, was appointed chief operating officer last week to help shore up CNN's management.

"We are in good hands, allowing us to take the time we need to run a thoughtful and thorough search for a new leader," Zaslav said in the memo.

CNN also let go of two public relations executives on Wednesday — Kris Coratti Kelly and Matt Dornic.

This story has been updated to correct that CNN generated \$892 million in profit in 2022, not \$892,000.

DeSantis defends flying migrants to California as he meets with sheriffs near border

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

SIERRA VISTA, Ariz. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis on Wednesday defended his state's decision to fly migrants from the U.S.-Mexico border to California, arguing that the state had essentially invited the migrants with its welcoming policies toward immigrants.

DeSantis, a Republican presidential candidate, spoke at a meeting with sheriffs near Arizona's border

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with Mexico, pledging to get control of the border and flexing his muscles on a signature issue for Donald Trump, his chief rival for the 2024 nomination.

"I think the border should be closed. I don't think we should have any of this," DeSantis said. "But if there's a policy to have an open border, then I think the sanctuary jurisdictions should be the ones that have to bear that."

DeSantis' administration said this week that the three dozen migrants whom the state recently flew from El Paso, Texas, to Sacramento at taxpayer expense all went willingly, disputing allegations that the individuals were coerced to travel under false pretenses. California officials are investigating whether any violations of criminal or civil law occurred.

For DeSantis, the focus on immigration is a chance to boost his credibility on a top issue for GOP primary voters. He sees political upside in picking a high-profile fight with liberal California and its Democratic governor, Gavin Newsom, who has become a bogeyman for many on the right.

It's also an opportunity for DeSantis to confront an issue that has been central to the appeal of Trump, who promised to build a border wall and make Mexico pay for it. By the end of his administration, the wall had not been finished and U.S. taxpayers were on the hook for the billions of dollars it cost.

This is not the first time DeSantis has chartered planes to transfer migrants across the country. Last fall, Florida flew 49 Venezuelans to the upscale Massachusetts island of Martha's Vineyard.

California declared itself a "sanctuary" for immigrants after Trump was elected president, extending protections to people living in the country illegally and allowing them to apply for some state benefits. DeSantis said those policies serve as a magnet for people looking for a better life and make it harder to crack down on illegal immigration.

"The sanctuary jurisdictions are part of the reason we have this problem because they have endorsed and agitated for these types of open border policies," DeSantis said.

DeSantis did not respond to Newsom, who raised the possibility of kidnapping charges and called DeSantis a "small, pathetic man."

Immigration is a national problem that border states shouldn't have to shoulder on their own, DeSantis said, adding that the federal government should give states more authority to enforce immigration law on their own. Beyond the migrant flights, he touted Florida's other efforts to confront illegal immigration beyond its borders, including sending National Guard soldiers and state law enforcement officers to Texas and interdicting migrant boats off Florida's coast.

DeSantis said Florida taxpayers are on board with his use of state funds to move migrants from Texas to California, saying it was an issue in the campaign in which he was overwhelmingly reelected last year. DeSantis in May signed a law allocating \$12 million that can be used for migrant flights.

Two weeks after kicking off his presidential campaign, DeSantis is in a distant second place behind Trump. He did not mention his rival by name, taking aim instead at President Joe Biden's border policies, which he blamed for the proliferation of drugs.

The Florida governor met with sheriffs from around the country at a community college in the southeastern Arizona town of Sierra Vista, a conservative enclave that's home to many Border Patrol officers and sits next to the Fort Huachuca Army base. Later, his aides said he planned to visit the border but did not allow journalists to come.

Trump's super PAC noted that DeSantis praised his rival's immigration policies on Twitter two years ago and pointed to the former president's own immigration plans. Trump has revived his pledge to end birth-right citizenship and his push to use the U.S. military to attack foreign drug cartels. He also has pushed the death penalty for drug dealers.

In Arizona, DeSantis pledged to crack down on "bogus asylum claims" from people who want to move to the U.S. for economic reasons. He said he is "sympathetic" to people legitimately facing political persecution, but the U.S. could deny asylum claims from people who traveled through other safe countries to get here.

Utah district's Bible ban spurs protest by parents, Republicans

By SAM METZ Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Republican lawmakers rallied with more than one hundred Bible-toting parents and children at Utah's Capitol on Wednesday to protest a school district's decision to remove the Bible from middle and elementary school libraries in the wake of a GOP-backed "sensitive materials" law passed two years ago.

Concerned parents and children holding signs that read "The Bible is the original textbook" and "Remove porn, not the Bible," said they were outraged after the Davis School District announced that a review committee concluded the Bible was too "violent or vulgar" for young children. The committee ruled that it did not qualify as obscene or pornographic under the sensitive materials law, but used its own discretion to remove it from libraries below the high school level.

Karlee Vincent, a Davis County mother of three kids carrying children's Bibles to the demonstration, said districts could weigh banning certain titles with controversial material, but not religious texts like the Bible. "We love the Bible. We love God. And we need God in our nation," she said.

The anonymously made challenge to the Bible appears to have been submitted as a statement to undermine the two-year-old law, noting the sacred text contains instances of incest, prostitution and rape. It derided the review procedures as a "bad faith process" and attacked groups that have pushed to remove certain titles from schools, including Parents United and its Utah-based affiliate.

The Bible removal is the highest-profile effort to remove a book from a school in Utah since the Legislature passed a law requiring school districts to create new pathways for residents to challenge "sensitive materials" and used a statute-based definition on pornography to define them. It has put a crossroads in front of proponents of scrutinizing materials available in schools. The pushback has also emboldened book-banning critics, who argue anger at removing the Bible illustrates arbitrary and political double standards and the issues inherent to removing books that have certain content.

"If folks are outraged about the Bible being banned, they should be outraged about all the books that are being censored," Kasey Meehan, who directs the Freedom to Read program at the writers' organization PEN America, said last week.

Utah Parents United President Nichole Mason said she worried the spotlight the Bible ban turned on Utah distracted from conversations about obscene materials that remain in school libraries. Defending Utah's sensitive materials law, Mason noted that the committee determined the Bible didn't qualify as pornographic under state statute. She doubled down on her stance that Utah should give parents more say in what's in their kids' schools.

"God Bless America that we can challenge any book out there!" Mason said.

State Rep. Ken Ivory, the sensitive materials law's Republican sponsor, rebuffed the idea that his law paved the way for the Bible to be banned. Though he defended the review process after the sacred text's removal, he said on Wednesday that the Davis School District had overstepped its role by removing the Bible from middle and elementary schools because of criteria not in state law.

He said criticism of the review process that led to the banning of the Bible didn't relinquish the need for oversight from parents and administrators about materials in schools.

"Should we have age appropriate limits for children in school? Almost universally anyone of good faith says 'Yes.' The question is then: What should those limits be?" he said.

Ivory urged the Legislature to change the law so book removal decisions have to be overseen by elected officials at open public meetings, not the kind of committee that decided to remove the Bible from middle and elementary schools in the Davis School District.

Utah is among a longer list of Republican-led states that have in recent years expanded residents' ability to challenge books and curriculum in schools and libraries. Lobbied by an ascendant parents' rights movement, lawmakers from Florida to Wyoming have increasingly scrutinized what books are available, touching off outrage about content related to race, sex and gender in particular. New state laws have given parents additional power to challenge books and opened librarians up to potential criminal charges

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if they provide minors content deemed "harmful."

Neither Ivory nor parents took issue with efforts to remove other books, including the race- and LGBTQ-related titles that account for the majority of book challenges.

Many parents and people of faith at Wednesday's protest said they had heard little of book banning efforts until news about the Bible's removal broke last week. They defended the Bible's role as a foundational text, saying it shouldn't be compared to other books that parents have challenged. They said the committee's decision affirmed long-simmering distrust against public schools and those who make decisions governing them.

"I hope it will be part of our schools, not only to give information to our minds but character to our hearts — and the greatest character of all is Jesus Christ," Tad Callister, the former Sunday School General President for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, said of the Bible and Book of Mormon as an audience applauded.

Hypocrisy isn't new in sports, it's just more obvious in PGA Tour-LIV Golf merger

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

Major League Baseball was once so concerned about gambling it banned Hall of Famers Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays just for working as casino greeters. Now MLB itself and almost all of its teams have official casino sponsors.

The NCAA railed for decades that paying players would destroy college sports, all while raking in billions off of their unpaid labor. Now schools boast of booster collectives that help recruit top talent to their teams.

So when the PGA Tour overcame its indignation and agreed to merge with LIV Golf — despite the human rights abuses of its Saudi Arabian backers — the flip-flop followed a long-established tradition in sports of flexible attitudes that often hurtle into full-blown hypocrisy.

"Phil Mickelson initially said, 'Oh, my God. It's frightening some of the things have occurred.' But for the right amount of money, he decided he's going to join the LIV Tour. And this does seem to be much the same thing," said Matthew Mitten, a sports law professor at Marquette University. "Sports are an outlet for people. The question is: How far will we go?"

As the top pro circuit in the world, the PGA Tour attracted the best golfers and all that came with them: bankable TV deals, luxury goods sponsorships and the attention of fans who want to see the most skilled athletes playing for the most prestigious prizes. That was all threatened when LIV Golf — backed by the Saudi Public Investment Fund -- began offering nine-figure sums to lure stars like Mickelson and Dustin Johnson to a new tour that featured team play and 54-hole events.

To fend off the challenge, PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan harped on the source of the money, telling his players last year, "Have you ever had to apologize for being a member of the PGA Tour?"

The answer, as of Tuesday, is yes.

"I recognize that people are going to call me a hypocrite," Monahan told reporters after getting an earful from players who had just learned they were about to be partners with the regime they had been denouncing. "I accept those criticisms. But circumstances do change."

What changed for Monahan, like so many other sports pooh-bahs before him, was the opportunity to wet the tour's beak in Saudi billions.

What didn't change: It was never about anything else.

"One defense to going for the money is that sports shouldn't be about politics. But the leagues can't have it both ways," said Jodi Balsam, who teaches sports law at Brooklyn and NYU law schools.

"It shows a certain amount of inconsistency, and perhaps even hypocrisy," said Balsam, who noted that baseball moved its 2021 All-Star Game out of Atlanta in response to a Georgia voting law but continues to do business in other, more troublesome places, including China. "None of their decision-making that supposedly is responsive to the ideological environment is actually principled. It's all pandering."

Not lost among the ironies: LIV was suing the PGA Tour, accusing it of using its monopoly to crush po-

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tential competitors. On Tuesday, LIV had an epiphany about the need for competition and combined with the PGA Tour in what Balsam called "a golf monolith" that will control players and every other aspect of tournament play, from sponsors to players to fans.

"There's nowhere else to play," she said. "This will create a colossus that will be able to dictate the terms of how they do business with all their relationships upstream and downstream. A golf monarchy is going to have significant control over how we enjoy the game."

And golf isn't the only sport playing it both ways.

— The women's professional tennis tour pulled out of China two years ago over concerns about Grand Slam doubles champion Peng Shuai, who dropped out of public view after saying in a social media post that a high-ranking government official raped her. The tour announced in April it would return this season with at least six events in China — backing off two of its key demands: a chance to meet with Peng, and a thorough, transparent investigation of her sexual assault accusations.

— Other leagues have also stumbled as they tried to balance China's 1 billion-strong market with its human rights violations, among them the suppression of religious rights and democratic movements. Nor have Chinese abuses scared off the Olympics, which returned to Beijing for a second time last year amid claims that the treatment of the Uyghur ethnic minority amounts to genocide.

— The IOC has likewise struggled to look serious in dealing with Russia — first for a years-long doping scheme, and then for its invasion of Ukraine. The decided upon measure: Let some athletes participate, but ban the flag and anthem.

--The most recent World Cup was held in Qatar, which has little soccer tradition and a record of human rights abuses it hoped to cleanse with what has come to be known as "sportswashing" — using major sporting events to distract the international community from its more unsavory behaviors. (What the World Cup did for Qatar and the 2022 Olympics did for China, LIV Golf was supposed to do for Saudi Arabia.)

— Contact sports face a different dilemma: With increasing data about the dangers of concussions, leagues have to balance the violence that can be a draw for fans with the risk to their players' brains. "There is no higher priority than player safety," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said — before the league added a 17th game to the schedule and ramped up the Thursday night schedule that forces players back onto the field on short rest.

"I am leery of all companies that take strong moral stands," said Marc Isenberg, an athlete advocate and former Division III basketball player who has written about college sports and its ills and teaches a course at the University of Southern California on athletes' newfound right to earn money off of their name, image and likeness. "And (I) try not to be shocked when they're exposed as amoral profit-maximizers."

Isenberg works with players to fend off unscrupulous agents and other predatory business arrangements. But the problem is sometimes the NCAA itself, which spent a century portraying its players as "student-athletes" to keep them from marketing their skills like any painter in the art school or flutist in the band.

Despite its protests, college sports have thrived since a (unanimous) U.S. Supreme Court ruling that struck down some of the more stifling NCAA restrictions. Another Supreme Court decision allowed all states to legalize sports betting; it turns out, with the riches of "gaming" sponsorships and a new way to attract viewers, U.S. pro leagues came around on this one-time taboo, with the NFL and NHL even putting teams in Las Vegas.

The Oakland-Los Angeles-Oakland-Las Vegas Raiders' move to the gambling capital of the United States — if not the world — typifies what is one of the most frustrating forms of sports hypocrisy to fans: Their favorite teams gush with love for their hometown, until a ballpark or arena begins to show some wear.

Other cities are trotted out as suitors until, ideally, the state or local government subsidizes a new stadium. If not, someone else will.

Baseball's Oakland Athletics are working both sides even now, less than a decade after Commissioner Rob Manfred said: "I am committed to Oakland as a major league site."

"I think that if we were to leave Oakland, I think 10 years from now we would be more likely than not looking backwards saying we made a mistake," he said in 2016.

But since then, A's owner John Fisher has stripped the roster; the payroll of under \$58 million is the lowest

in baseball. With the team's future in flux, neither ownership nor the local governments have been willing to invest in the crumbling Oakland Coliseum, which has been beset by feral cat feces, moth infestations and backups of raw sewage.

Through Monday, the team had a record of 12-50, which puts them on a pace for a modern day record-shattering 131 losses — the most since the Cleveland Spiders were disbanded in 1899. Fans have responded in kind: Only 8,675 on average have come to see the team that put down roots in Oakland more than a half-century ago.

And many fans believe that is the point: The worse the ballpark looks and the lower attendance drops, the better Fisher's case for a new home. In April, he signed a deal — with Manfred's blessing -- to move the team.

To Las Vegas.

Contributing to this story were AP Tennis Writer Howard Fendrich, AP Golf Writer Doug Ferguson, AP Baseball Writer Janie McCauley and AP National Writer Eddie Pells.

Newer heart transplant method could allow more patients a chance at lifesaving surgery

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most transplanted hearts are from donors who are brain dead, but new research shows a different approach can be just as successful and boost the number of available organs.

It's called donation after circulatory death, a method long used to recover kidneys and other organs but not more fragile hearts. Duke Health researchers said Wednesday that using those long-shunned hearts could allow possibly thousands more patients a chance at a lifesaving transplant — expanding the number of donor hearts by 30%.

"Honestly if we could snap our fingers and just get people to use this, I think it probably would go up even more than that," said transplant surgeon Dr. Jacob Schroder of Duke University School of Medicine, who led the research. "This really should be standard of care."

The usual method of organ donation occurs when doctors, through careful testing, determine someone has no brain function after a catastrophic injury — meaning they're brain-dead. The body is left on a ventilator that keeps the heart beating and organs oxygenated until they're recovered and put on ice.

In contrast, donation after circulatory death occurs when someone has a nonsurvivable brain injury but, because all brain function hasn't yet ceased, the family decides to withdraw life support and the heart stops. That means organs go without oxygen for a while before they can be recovered — and surgeons, worried the heart would be damaged, left it behind.

What's changed: Now doctors can remove those hearts and put them in a machine that "reanimates" them, pumping through blood and nutrients as they're transported — and demonstrating if they work OK before the planned transplant.

Wednesday's study, conducted at multiple hospitals around the country, involved 180 transplant recipients, half who received DCD hearts and half given hearts from brain-dead donors that were transported on ice.

Survival six months later was about the same — 94% for the recipients of cardiac-death donations and 90% for those who got the usual hearts, the researchers reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The findings are exciting and show "the potential to increase fairness and equity in heart transplantation, allowing more persons with heart failure to have access to this lifesaving therapy," transplant cardiologist Dr. Nancy Sweitzer of Washington University in St. Louis, who wasn't involved with the study, wrote in an accompanying editorial.

Last year, 4,111 heart transplants were performed in the U.S., a record number but not nearly enough to meet the need. Hundreds of thousands of people suffer from advanced heart failure but many never are offered a transplant and still others die waiting for one.

Researchers in Australia and the U.K. first began trying DCD heart transplants about seven years ago.

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Duke pioneered the U.S. experiments in late 2019, one of about 20 U.S. hospitals now offering this method. Last year, there were 345 such heart transplants in the U.S., and 227 so far this year, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing.

In the Duke-led study, nearly 90% of the DCD hearts recovered wound up being transplanted, signaling that it's worthwhile for more hospitals to start using the newer method.

Sweitzer noted that many would-be donors have severe brain injuries but don't meet the criteria for brain death, meaning a lot of potentially usable hearts never get donated. But she also cautioned that there's still more to learn, noting that the very sickest patients on the waiting list were less likely to receive DCD hearts in the study.

Schroder said most who received DCD hearts already had implanted heart pumps that made the transplant more difficult to perform, even if they weren't ranked as high on the waiting list.

The study was funded by TransMedics, which makes the heart storage system.

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Ex-Florida State football player acquitted in fatal shooting

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — A South Florida jury agreed Wednesday that a former Florida State football player acted in self-defense when he fatally shot one man and injured another several hours after he scuffled with his girlfriend.

Travis Rudolph, 27, was found not guilty of one count of first-degree murder and three counts of attempted murder by a Palm Beach County jury, the Palm Beach Post reported. The 12-member panel also chose not to convict Rudolph on lesser offenses, including second-degree murder and manslaughter.

Rudolph was first arrested in April 2021 after four men went to his home several hours after he fought with his girlfriend, investigators said. At some point, Rudolph armed himself with a semi-automatic rifle and opened fire on them as they drove away, killing Sebastien Jean-Jacques and wounding Tyler Robinson.

Rudolph testified that the men were armed and shooting back at him. Investigators said they never found evidence of the fleeing men returning fire.

Rudolph was Florida State's leading receiver in 2015 and 2016. He left the team early to enter the NFL draft in 2017. He eventually signed with the New York Giants and then the Miami Dolphins. He also spent time with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers of the Canadian Football League. The team released him after his arrest.

He gained national attention in 2016 when a video of him eating lunch with an autistic student during a team visit at a Tallahassee middle school went viral. Rudolph's father died a year later after a gun accidentally discharged at a West Palm Beach strip club.

Justice Jackson reports flowers from Oprah, designer clothing as Thomas delays filing disclosure

By MARK SHERMAN and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson disclosed Wednesday that she received a \$1,200 congratulatory floral display from Oprah Winfrey and \$6,580 in designer clothing for a magazine photo shoot in her first months as the first Black woman on the Supreme Court.

The details of gifts given to Jackson were among the reports provided by most members of the court in their annual filings, which give a partial window onto their finances. The reports were released Wednesday.

But the report that was most anticipated — that of Justice Clarence Thomas, who has been under scrutiny for his receipt of undisclosed gifts from a Republican donor — was not among the filings. Thomas, along with Justice Samuel Alito, sought an extension for up to 90 days.

Thomas' receipt of gifts, valued at several hundred thousand dollars, from the Republican donor Harlan

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Crow has prompted calls for ethics reform on the nation's highest court. It was not clear why either man needed more time.

Once a year the justices join with other federal judges in providing a look at their finances. They are supposed to disclose paid travel, outside income, investments, significant gifts and the source of their spouses' income.

Among the reports Wednesday, Justice Sonia Sotomayor said she received nearly \$150,000 in royalties for two children's books last year and another \$12,000 in payments for possible stage and video versions of "Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You." The book, intended for kids age 4 to 8, introduces readers to children who face what Sotomayor, who was diagnosed with diabetes as a child, calls "life challenges." Sotomayor, the court's first Latina justice, has been paid more than \$3 million in advances and royalties for her books, including her memoir, "My Beloved World."

Less than two months after Jackson joined the court in late June, she was featured in a Vogue story first posted online that took note of her historic role. In one accompanying photo taken by Annie Leibovitz, Jackson is wearing a blue coat and dark dress by Oscar de la Renta. A second Leibovitz photo shows Jackson in a brown Aliette jacket.

The report did not specify the size or composition of the pricey gift of flowers from Winfrey.

The justices are being paid \$285,400 this year, except for Chief Justice John Roberts, who earns \$298,500.

Other justices reporting outside income were Amy Coney Barrett, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, who all brought in nearly \$30,000 for law school teaching assignments. Barrett taught at Notre Dame, her former employer and alma mater, while Gorsuch and Kavanaugh were at George Mason University.

The heightened focus on ethics at the high court stems from a series of reports revealing that Thomas has for years received undisclosed expensive gifts, including international travel, from Crow, a wealthy businessman and benefactor of conservative causes. Crow also purchased the house in Georgia where Thomas's mother continues to live and paid for two years of private school tuition for a child raised by Thomas and his wife, Ginni.

Supreme Court justices do not have a binding code of ethics and have resisted the idea that they adopt one or have one imposed on them by Congress. All nine justices recently signed a statement of ethics that Roberts provided to the Senate Judiciary Committee. Roberts recently acknowledged that the justices can do more to address ethical concerns.

New reporting guidelines adopted by the federal judiciary in March make clear that transportation provided to judges should be disclosed in all instances. Food, lodging or entertainment received as "personal hospitality of any individual" does not need to be reported if it is at the personal residence of that individual or their family.

What kind of surgery did Pope Francis have, and why?

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — Pope Francis emerged from a three-hour abdominal surgery at a Rome hospital on Wednesday evening, with no known complications, the Vatican said. The procedure was necessary to repair a painful hernia the pontiff developed, linked to a 2021 operation to remove a significant portion of his large intestine.

Here's a look at what we know about the operation and what potential complications doctors will be watching for in the 86-year-old pontiff.

WHAT KIND OF SURGERY DID THE POPE HAVE?

Pope Francis had a laparotomy, a surgery that involves opening up the abdomen, and doctors also inserted some prosthetic mesh to strengthen his colon.

"The surgery and general anesthesia were carried out without complications," the Vatican said in a statement. Authorities said Francis was alert and responsive and that he had "responded well."

Doctors not linked to the pope's care said hernias were a known risk after previous operations and typically only become problematic when patients develop a bulge in their abdomen and experience significant

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pain. In such cases, surgery is needed to repair the hernia, which may involve some of the patient's bowel. The Vatican said Francis had been in increasing pain.

Dr. Walter Longo, chief of colon and rectal surgery at Yale University School of Medicine, said leaving the pope's hernia untreated could lead to severe bowel problems.

"When you're older and not in great shape, you can get a hernia through the (surgical) incision," he said. That could result in twisted intestines that cut off the blood supply to the bowel, ultimately leading to gangrene, if not addressed.

"They have to fix it, there's no other option," Longo said.

Dr. Manish Chand, a British colorectal surgeon, said the addition of a mesh prosthesis should significantly reduce the chances that the Pope would need further surgeries.

"The mesh is there to reinforce that area so this problem doesn't happen again in the future," Chand explained.

WHAT OTHER COMPLICATIONS ARE POSSIBLE?

Francis had 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his large intestine removed two years ago. He was hospitalized earlier this year for bronchitis, and lost part of one lung decades ago.

The Vatican said the pope's operation Wednesday took three hours, considerably longer than the standard 60 to 90 minutes doctors say the operation usually takes.

Spending more time under anesthesia, coupled with being on a ventilator for so long — in someone who has lost part of one lung as a young man — could put the pontiff at risk of breathing complications or a longer-than-expected recovery time.

Doctors noted that patients older than 80 are often more susceptible to complications after general anesthesia and said the team treating the pope at Rome's Gemelli hospital would be monitoring him for problems such as stroke, heart issues, kidney failure and pneumonia.

"When you operate on older people and they're frail and fragile, they're not as peppy as they once were," Longo said. "But if he gets through the operation and does fine, he should be OK."

Dr. Robin Phillips, an emeritus professor of colorectal surgery at Imperial College London, said abdominal surgery can also compromise lung function.

"I suspect they are doing it now because they are worried it might become more complicated and result in an emergency operation which would carry an even bigger risk than leaving it alone or operating now," Phillips said.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE THE POPE TO RECOVER?

In a best-case scenario, probably at least six weeks. Chand described the procedure as "straightforward" and said most patients are discharged from the hospital within about a week.

How long it takes the pope to resume his normal duties will depend on his doctors' ability to manage his pain. The chances of a recurrence are also highest within the first six weeks, Chand said.

Longo, of Yale University, said the pope's age and frailty might mean a longer recovery time and that he might not be fit to travel for one to two months. The pope has used a wheelchair and walker for more than a year and has a busy August on his schedule, with trips planned to Portugal and Mongolia.

Dr. Sergio Alfieri, who performed the pope's procedure on Wednesday, said the internal scarring causing Francis abdominal pain in recent months was removed. The Vatican said the pope would remain at the hospital for "several days."

Dr. P. Ravi Kiran, chief of colorectal surgery at Columbia University, said it would take a few days for Francis' bowels to start working again and for him to recover from the effects of anesthesia.

Kiran recommended the pope stick to a healthy diet with lots of fiber but did not anticipate any major changes to the pontiff's lifestyle following his surgery.

"Any weakness in his abdominal wall ... (,) provided it's fixed securely, shouldn't be a problem," Kiran said. "I'm really wishing the pope a speedy recovery."

Platonic co-parenting offers an alternate model for family building

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Nick Farrow wanted what a lot of people do: a child, and a parenting partner. At 45, after a long-term romance didn't work out, he decided to take matters into his own hands, entering into a platonic open arrangement that has flourished for nine years, since daughter Milly was born.

Whether it's with friends, known sperm donors or co-parenting connections made on so-called mating sites, more families are coming together platonically, without the pain of divorce or the added stress and expense of going it alone.

Choosing to parent together platonically while living separately or under the same roof is an idea that's been around for years among LGBTQ+ people. It has gained ground more recently among heterosexuals, and interest skyrocketed during the pandemic.

Farrow and his parenting partner live about 15 miles apart, he in the English seaside town of Brighton. Their daughter, conceived through insemination, shuttles between the two. Not unlike divorced couples with kids, the two come together for Milly's birthdays, and they sometimes alternate Christmases and other special occasions.

Explaining their arrangement to loved ones was a process.

"When the time came, we got everybody to meet everybody," Farrow said of family and friends. "We invited them to ask all the difficult, awkward questions. There was the feeling that what we were doing was a bit odd, that it could be risky, that it could be dangerous. It really, really helped to get everybody on board."

Farrow met his parenting partner on Modamily, one of a handful of sites and apps aimed at family building, as opposed to the hookup culture and endless swiping of dating services.

Since 2011, about 100,000 people from around the world have registered on Modamily. At least 1,000 babies have been born through partnerships created there, said founder and CEO Ivan Fatovic. About half involved known sperm donors from a database of nearly 10,000 that the site maintains, he said.

"We're seeing people look at all the different alternate ways of starting a family because they've been thinking about it for many years," Fatovic said. "Whatever they've been doing up to this point wasn't working so they start thinking outside the box."

There's no one scenario that defines elective co-parenting. Most, but definitely not all, platonic co-parents live separately. Some who seek out Modamily or similar services are in search of sperm donors they can meet personally, with or without the potential to share their lives once a baby is born.

Other parenting partnerships come together out of need for financial and care support in raising children. Still others involve two friends who want children without romance. And there are those like Farrow, unlucky in love with a burning desire to parent, but not alone.

Last year, TV commentator Van Jones welcomed a baby girl with a longtime female friend. He was already the father of two boys with his ex-wife, Jana Carter. Jones declined an interview request through a spokesman.

And there's Jones's CNN colleague, Anderson Cooper. He's the father of two boys born via surrogacy after he and boyfriend Benjamin Maisani downshifted to close friends. Cooper and Maisani are now parenting together.

The idea of co-parenting is, of course, nothing new among divorced couples, but more divorced women are leaning on each other to make it through.

About six years ago, 39-year-old Ashley Simpo and her son moved in with a friend and her two kids to share expenses and parenting duties in Brooklyn, New York. High rents and low salaries were crushing them both.

"I think that the alternative for both of us would have been homelessness or moving back in with parents and relocating. For parents, that means ripping your kids out of their schools," she said.

Their "mommune" of five lasted about six months, until their finances stabilized and they amicably ended the arrangement.

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"It really opened my eyes in terms of how mothers support each other. I had never really tapped into a mother ship or an intentional community network," said Simpo, who had been divorced about two years at the time. "It was really healing for me."

Platonic co-parenting arrangements require thoughtful structure. That can get difficult when multiple parents are involved — after divorce, for instance, or when friendships change.

Many sign parenting agreements with the help of lawyers or family coaches to crystallize rules and lay out what is non-negotiable. There's religion, but also what happens if either co-parent begins dating or gets married? And there's the day-to-day, like how finances are handled and what disciplinary approach will be taken.

"In platonic co-parenting relationships, I think people forget to plan for all of those little nuances," said Alysha Price, who owns a firm offering parenting coaches. "It's not always going to be stars and rainbows and happy days."

In London, Patrick Harrison co-founded PollenTree.com in 2012 as a resource for people interested in platonic co-parenting. It grew quickly and now serves the U.S. as well. Users are split between people looking to meet and choose sperm donors without the option of co-parenting, and those "really focused on creating their own kind of alternative family," Harrison said.

"People are looking at family life and thinking, 'I want some of that, too.' People have this kind of misconception that it's all very alternative, but it's deeply not. A lot of our members are really conventional. They want kids. They just want kids," Harrison said.

The pandemic sent Pollen Tree's numbers soaring. Just before lockdowns began, Harrison said, the site had about 40 signups a day. The number shot up to 100 on some days in 2020 and 2021. Things have stabilized for now among its 100,000 members. Costs are in the \$30 range monthly.

Tracy Smith, 43, is an immigration attorney in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She found Modamily in 2020 and has been trying to find a platonic arrangement with a stranger.

"I've always wanted to become a mother. I've always wanted my own biological child," she said. "But I've really not had great luck in relationships. I'd been on the dating apps for 13 years."

Smith has spoken to male friends about platonically parenting together.

"I haven't found anybody who's willing to take that leap. I mean, it's a big commitment. The No. 1 choice is a romantic relationship that leads to a baby. But I mean, I'm 43 and dating is tough. It's exhausting."

Find Leanne Italie on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/litalie>

With Saudi-PGA deal, once-shunned crown prince makes dramatic move to extend kingdom's influence

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After years of isolation over his human rights abuses, Saudi Arabia's crown prince is elevating his standing in the United States in part by diving into American sports, business and culture. And no example has been as striking as his bold entry into professional golf — the favorite sport of presidents and millions of other Americans.

Tuesday's surprise announcement of a commercial merger between Saudi Arabia's \$650 billion sovereign wealth fund, the PGA Tour and the European tour in the short run looks to end a messy legal battle between Saudi Arabia's LIV Golf and the PGA.

But for the Saudis, it's much more than a major business deal. It's the latest and perhaps most dramatic move by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to wield his kingdom's oil wealth in reshaping his country's economy and advancing Saudi influence regionally and around the world, while muting critics. Prince Mohammed has assumed much of the duties and leadership of his aged father, King Salman.

The commercial merger followed the kingdom's purchase of the Newcastle United soccer team and staging of Formula One races and multiple other sports events.

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On Wednesday, Saudi Arabia's most prominent U.S. supporter celebrated.

Former president and current leading Republican presidential contender Donald Trump, whose golf courses and family have been a top beneficiary of Saudi investment, boasted that last year he had predicted a merger between Saudi upstart LIV golf and the PGA. Trump had warned pro golfers at the time they would lose millions if they stayed loyal to the "very disloyal PGA."

A "big, beautiful, and glamorous deal," Trump tweeted at the Saudi-U.S. golf announcement. Trump's golf courses were snubbed by the PGA Tour after his followers' violent Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol, while rival Saudi golf tour LIV patronized Trump courses, for undisclosed sums.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham, who in 2018 had promised a "tsunami" of opposition against the crown prince over Saudi Arabia's killing of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi, tweeted the PGA-LIV tour merger was "beyond exciting." He noted it could benefit the golf industry in his state of South Carolina.

Saudi exiles in the U.S. expressed disappointment. In the hours before the golf deal was announced, they had hosted a sparsely attended press call to try to bring attention back to the Saudi rights advocates, American citizens and family members still being held in Saudi prisons or banned from traveling.

"I think what the Saudi government has been noticing so far is that using money for sportswashing is working out for them," said Abdullah al Oudh, whose father, a popular cleric, has been in prison in Saudi Arabia since publicly expressing hope that the crown prince would end a now-mended rift with another Gulf state, Qatar.

"They have used it once, twice, three times ... to just whitewash their crimes. And it's been working for them so far," al Oudh said.

It all has marked a stunning turnaround in the global standing of Prince Mohammed, who became almost globally despised after the 2018 killing of Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist who had written of the crown prince's brutal ways.

The crown prince's aides and other Saudi officials killed Khashoggi after luring him to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. The U.S. intelligence community concluded the crown prince had authorized the plot.

Then-presidential candidate Joe Biden pledged to make the crown prince a "pariah." It's a phrase that has been repeated in almost every Western article about the two since.

World leaders for a time shunned Prince Mohammed, leaving him standing awkwardly alone at summits as other leaders shook hands and smiled for photos. Global businesses briefly boycotted Saudi conferences.

Coming on top of Saudi Arabia's invasion of neighboring Yemen, its failed blockade of neighboring Qatar, its brief detention of Lebanon's leader, and intensified detention and torture of rivals, journalists and rights advocates, the Khashoggi killing stained Prince Mohammed's reputation, indelibly.

In the five years since, however, the crown prince has made his way out of isolation.

For starters, there has been no known repeat of high-profile killings like that of Khashoggi, whose apparent strangulation and subsequent dismemberment with a bone saw was recorded by Turkish surveillance.

The kingdom released the best-known of the Saudi women jailed under Prince Mohammed for asking for women's right to drive. That's even though many other lesser-known Saudis, including U.S. citizens or residents, remain in prison or under travel bans for peacefully advocating for more representative government or for commenting on Saudi government policy.

Meanwhile, oil production cuts by Saudi Arabia reminded Washington of Saudi Arabia's key strategic attraction. Biden came calling last July and did an awkward fist bump with the crown prince, as his administration sought to repair relations and get oil flowing more freely again.

Shrewd Saudi diplomacy has played a part as well. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited the crown prince, and Iran reopened its embassy in Saudi Arabia, the same day as Saudi Arabia's stunning breakthrough in U.S. sports. It made the day a showcase of the ambitious crown prince's return to the global fold, even if no state dinners are likely for him at the Biden White House.

Tensions with the U.S. remain over Saudi Arabia's continued repression of Saudi dissent at home and abroad, the kingdom's throttling back on oil production, its relations with Russia, and its resumed ties with Iran, in a deal for which China claimed credit.

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The golf deal announced Tuesday gives the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, and its chairman the crown prince, significant say in the direction of the sport in the U.S. Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the governor of the fund, told interviewers he planned to make the game a sport for the everyman and expand its following globally.

It was unclear how Saudi Arabia's escalated investment in U.S. sport would affect the kingdom's sovereign immunity, which is a longstanding practice of international law that shields foreign leaders from other countries' courts. The PGA Tour had insisted in U.S. courts that U.S. commercial exemptions to sovereign immunity meant that the Saudi national wealth fund and Saudi Arabia's leaders were vulnerable to U.S. legal action and public scrutiny of its business deals.

It's also unclear if the golf deal and Saudi Arabia's other investments in the U.S. have won over enough of its critics in Congress, including those objecting to Saudi Arabia's much-desired arms purchases from the U.S.

"So weird," Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat and lasting critic of the crown prince's rights abuses, tweeted after the golf announcements. "PGA officials were in my office just months ago talking about how the Saudis' human rights record should disqualify them from having a stake in a major American sport. I guess maybe their concerns weren't really about human rights?"

For Saudi Arabia, the move could be an economic boost as well. The crown prince, known as MBS, has focused investments from the sovereign wealth fund on sports and some emerging industries, not always successfully.

"This all has to go to the very singular focus and goal of MBS to diversify the country's economic platform" away from oil exports, said Jonathan Panikoff, director of the Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative at the Atlantic Council's Middle East Program. That includes with entertainment and tourism for foreign visitors, which the prince also has pushed.

"And then if a byproduct is that it also creates a better reputation and decreases reputational risk, I'm sure they're happy about it," Panikoff said.

Voices from the violent civil rights era see attacks on voting rights as part of ongoing struggle

By GARY FIELDS Associated Press

They are part of a small, vanishing group who lived at the epicenter of the struggle for voting rights six decades ago, an era driven by segregation, violence and the yearning for equality that eventually led to laws bringing the U.S. closer to its promise of democracy for all its citizens.

As the country awaits a Supreme Court decision on whether one of those laws, the Voting Rights Act, will be reinforced or further eroded, they reflect on the times and their struggles, and why they are certain it all was worth it. Ten years ago this month, the court halted what many consider the heart of that landmark law — the ability of the Justice Department to enforce it in states and counties with a history of voter suppression. The justices now will decide how strongly to protect minority groups when they challenge political boundaries drawn through states' redistricting.

The stories from those on the front lines of history recount tragedy, racism, oppression and ultimately hope in seeing a president sign into law a measure designed to ensure equal access to the ballot and fair representation in the halls of political power — from city councils to statehouses to Congress.

Stephen Schwerner lost a brother, murdered in Mississippi trying to register Black people to vote. Nearly 60 years after the Voting Rights Act was signed, he remains immensely proud of his brother, Mickey Schwerner, but with a great sense of loss: "I don't think anybody in our family has ever gotten over it."

Andrew Young walked with Martin Luther King Jr., on the long road to equality and was with him when he died in Memphis in 1968. Seeing the continued attempts to chip away at voting rights, he knows there are more battles to be fought: "I never thought that the United States or anybody else would be perfect, but I thought we would be constantly getting better."

Luci Johnson was a teenager when she witnessed "one of the most historic occasions of the 20th century"

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— her father, former President Lyndon Johnson, signing the law ensuring access to the ballot for people of color. If she could convey a message to Supreme Court justices as they consider another challenge to the Voting Rights Act, it would be for them to remember “what a privilege they all have with access to the voting booth. I would tell them to do all that they can to make liberty and justice a right for all Americans.”

Joel Finkelstein was a young lawyer helping draft the document that became the Voting Rights Act of 1965, overwhelmed to be an accidental witness at the signing and yet unaware of the measure’s magnitude. He remains hopeful, even as voting rights have been eroded over the past decade: “Somehow this country digs out of these messes with people who you never would expect would be there. Go look at 1860. We got Abraham Lincoln, a country lawyer, self-educated out of Illinois, and he became our greatest president, one of the wisest men we would ever have hold public office.”

Norman Hill moved from the protests over civil rights to the organization and political clout of the labor movement, where he helped build a groundswell for voting rights. Now in his ninth decade, Hill said the fight must continue, “not just today, not just tomorrow but as long as we live and breathe.”

Della Simpson Maynor was a teenager who pushed herself to the front of a protest in the small town of Marion, Alabama, and was terrified when police clubbed a pastor who was kneeling to pray. Police later struck her with a club as she tried to get away, and she would hear the gunshot from a state trooper that fatally wounded a young church deacon, Jimmie Lee Jackson. His death prompted a march starting in Selma, which would lead to one of the most violent days of the Civil Rights Movement, Bloody Sunday, when police beat protesters trying to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge: “Without Bloody Sunday, there would have been no voting rights. But without Jimmie Lee Jackson, there would have been no Bloody Sunday.”

Their voices echo across the past six decades, in searing debates over race, equal treatment and what it means to be an American citizen. The debate will be renewed in the weeks ahead when the Supreme Court issues its ruling in yet another case involving the Voting Rights Act, this time over Black political representation in Alabama.

The Associated Press coverage of race and voting receives support from the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation. See more about AP’s democracy initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Why Republicans are clashing with the FBI over a confidential Biden document

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The yearslong feud between congressional Republicans and the FBI is reaching a new level of rancor as lawmakers prepare a resolution to hold bureau director Christopher Wray in contempt of Congress.

Rep. James Comer, the Republican chairman of the House Oversight Committee, has scheduled a committee vote for Thursday morning on the contempt resolution against Wray. He says the FBI has failed to comply with a lawful subpoena for an FBI record that documents an unverified tip about President Joe Biden.

The resolution to hold Wray in contempt — which would have to be approved by the full House — is just the latest broadside from Republicans against the FBI. They accuse the bureau of harboring bias against conservatives dating back to Donald Trump’s presidency and allege the bureau is now stonewalling legitimate congressional oversight.

Release of the document in question, FBI officials have warned, would jeopardize the safety of the confidential human source who received the unverified tip.

What to know about the clash between Republicans and the FBI:

THE SUBPOENA

Comer issued a subpoena to Wray on May 3 after GOP Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa received a whistleblower complaint. They said they were told the bureau has a document that “describes an alleged criminal

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scheme" involving Biden and a foreign national "relating to the exchange of money for policy decisions" when Biden was vice president.

"It has been alleged that the document includes a precise description of how the alleged criminal scheme was employed as well as its purpose," Comer and Grassley wrote in a letter to Wray.

Both men have said they do not know if information is true, but insist the allegations warrant further investigation. The White House has accused Republicans of "floating anonymous innuendo."

WHAT IS THE DOCUMENT IN QUESTION?

The document Republicans are focused on is what is known as an FD-1023 form, which is used by federal agents to record tips and information they receive from confidential human sources. The FBI says such documents can contain uncorroborated and incomplete information, and that the record of a tip does not validate the information.

The Biden document was written up by a longtime FBI source that both Republicans and Democrats have described as credible. In it, the source details an unverified tip received in 2020 about the business dealings of Biden and his son, Hunter Biden, in Ukraine. Hunter Biden worked on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company.

At the time, then-Attorney General William Barr told reporters that he was being cautious about information coming out of Ukraine. The House impeached then-President Donald Trump in 2020 over his push for the Ukrainian government to investigate the Bidens.

WHY DO REPUBLICANS WANT THE RECORD?

House Republicans have used their power in the majority to aggressively investigate Joe Biden and the business dealings of Hunter Biden, including examining foreign payments and other aspects of the family's finances. Since January, Comer has obtained thousands of pages of financial records from Biden family members through subpoenas to the Treasury Department and various financial institutions.

In the contempt resolution against Wray, the Oversight Committee says foreign payments to members of the Biden family could have implications for national security. It said it needs the FBI record as it considers whether legislation is needed to fix "deficiencies" in the financial disclosure requirements that apply to presidents, vice presidents and their families.

The committee is also demanding the FBI record be provided without redactions. The form that Comer has seen contained "a significant amount of highly relevant information to the Committee's investigation" that was blacked out, the committee said, including the names of individuals who could be called in as witnesses.

WHY IS THE FBI REFUSING TO TURN OVER THE DOCUMENT?

The bureau has pushed back Comer's threats to hold Wray in contempt and warned of grave risk to confidential human sources and the law enforcement process if the FBI record were released to the public.

"Protecting the identities and information provided by confidential human sources from unnecessary disclosure or undue influence is therefore critical not only because of safety concerns but also to avoid chilling their candor or willingness to continue reporting to the FBI," Christopher Dunham, an acting FBI assistant director, wrote to Comer last month.

In an attempt to comply with the subpoena, FBI officials came to the Capitol on Monday to brief Comer and Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin, the top Democrat on the panel, about the document. The briefing, which the bureau described as an "extraordinary accommodation," lasted more than an hour and was conducted privately in a secure space because FBI officials said the "several-page" form contains sensitive information.

Both Raskin and Comer received a slightly redacted copy of the FD-1023 document during the briefing and were allowed to take notes on the substance of the form, though they weren't allowed to keep it.

Frank Montoya, a former FBI supervisor who specialized in counterintelligence, said he worried that giving information about law enforcement sources to Congress could set a dangerous precedent and damage

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the FBI's work.

"Who's going to want to come in and tell you things if your identity can't be protected," especially in high-profile investigations, he said.

Beyond that, Montoya said, distributing to Congress information that could theoretically be relevant in an ongoing investigation risks impeding it. "If I'm working on a case and you're posting all my information online or in the newspapers or on the evening news...to make a political point — any chance I have of making that case" is at risk, Montoya said.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Comer said that the FBI briefing about the record was no substitute for providing a copy to the committee without redactions. He said he will move forward Thursday with holding Wray in contempt of Congress.

"The investigation is not dead," Comer told reporters. "This is only the beginning."

The first step in the contempt process will be holding a committee vote to send the resolution to the House floor. If the House approves that resolution and holds Wray in contempt, it would be up to the Justice Department — where Wray works — to decide whether to prosecute him.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy told reporters he would bring the contempt resolution against Wray to the floor as soon as next week.

Successful prosecutions for contempt of Congress are rare, though not unheard of. Steve Bannon, a longtime ally of former President Donald Trump, was convicted by a jury on contempt charges last year after a referral from the House Jan. 6 committee.

There's also precedent for contempt charges against senior Justice Department figures. House Republicans approved a contempt charge against then-Attorney General Eric Holder in 2012, though the U.S. attorney's office in Washington declined to bring a case.

The FBI says the contempt vote is "unwarranted" considering the bureau had "continuously demonstrated its commitment to accommodate the committee's request," while protecting the safety of sources and the integrity of ongoing investigations.

The White House dismissed Comer's contempt push as "another fact-free stunt" intended to "damage the President politically and get himself media attention."

The story behind Juneteenth and how it became a federal holiday

Americans will soon celebrate Juneteenth, marking the day when the last enslaved people in the United States learned they were free.

For generations, Black Americans have recognized the end of one of the darkest chapters in U.S. history with joy, in the form of parades, street festivals, musical performances or cookouts.

The U.S. government was slow to embrace the occasion — it was only in 2021 that President Joe Biden signed a bill passed by Congress to set aside Juneteenth, or June 19th, as a federal holiday.

And just as many people learn what Juneteenth is all about, the holiday's traditions are facing new pressures — political rhetoric condemning efforts to teach Americans about the nation's racial history, companies using the holiday as a marketing event, people partying without understanding why.

Here is a look at the origins of Juneteenth, how it became a federal holiday and more about its history.

HOW DID JUNETEENTH START?

The celebrations began with enslaved people in Galveston, Texas. Although President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves in 1863, it could not be enforced in many places in the South until the Civil War ended in 1865. Even then, some white people who had profited from their unpaid labor were reluctant to share the news.

Laura Smalley, freed from a plantation near Bellville, Texas, remembered in a 1941 interview that the man she referred to as "old master" came home from fighting in the Civil War and didn't tell the people he enslaved what had happened.

"Old master didn't tell, you know, they was free," Smalley said. "I think now they say they worked them,

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six months after that. Six months. And turn them loose on the 19th of June. That's why, you know, we celebrate that day."

News that the war had ended and they were free finally reached Galveston when Union Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger and his troops arrived in the Gulf Coast city on June 19, 1865, more than two months after Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant in Virginia.

Granger delivered General Order No. 3, which said: "The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor."

The now-free people in Galveston started celebrating Juneteenth the next year, an observance that has continued and spread around the world. Events include concerts, parades and readings of the Emancipation Proclamation.

WHAT DOES 'JUNETEENTH' MEAN?

It's a blend of the words June and nineteenth. The holiday has also been called Juneteenth Independence Day, Freedom Day, second Independence Day and Emancipation Day.

It began with church picnics and speeches, and spread as Black Texans moved elsewhere.

Most U.S. states now hold celebrations honoring Juneteenth as a holiday or a day of recognition, like Flag Day. Juneteenth is a paid holiday for state employees in Texas, New York, Virginia and Washington, and hundreds of companies give workers the day off.

Opal Lee, a former teacher and activist, is largely credited for rallying others behind a campaign to make Juneteenth a federal holiday. The 96-year-old had vivid memories of celebrating Juneteenth in East Texas as a child with music, food and games. In 2016, the "little old lady in tennis shoes" walked through her home city of Fort Worth, Texas and then in other cities before arriving in Washington, D.C. Soon, celebrities and politicians were lending their support.

Lee was one of the people standing next to Biden when he signed Juneteenth into law.

HOW HAVE JUNETEENTH CELEBRATIONS EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?

The national reckoning over race ignited by the 2020 murder of George Floyd by police helped set the stage for Juneteenth to become the first new federal holiday since 1983, when Martin Luther King Jr. Day was created.

The bill was sponsored by Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., and had 60 co-sponsors, a show of bipartisan support as lawmakers struggled to overcome divisions that are still simmering three years later.

Now there is a movement to use the holiday as an opportunity for activism and education, with community service projects aimed at addressing racial disparities and educational panels on topics such health care inequities and the need for parks and green spaces.

Like most holidays, Juneteenth has also seen its fair share of commercialism. Retailers, museums and other venues have capitalized on it by selling Juneteenth-themed T-shirts, party ware and ice cream. Some of the marketing has misfired, provoking a social media backlash.

Supporters of the holiday have also worked to make sure Juneteenth celebrators don't forget why the day exists.

"In 1776 the country was freed from the British, but the people were not all free," Dee Evans, national director of communications of the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation, said in 2019. "June 19, 1865, was actually when the people and the entire country was actually free."

There's also sentiment to use the day to remember the sacrifices that were made for freedom in the United States — especially in these racially and politically charged days.

Said Para LaNell Agboga, museum site coordinator at the George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center in Austin, Texas: "Our freedoms are fragile, and it doesn't take much for things to go backward."

'Vanderpump' star Lala Kent on Scandoval, ex Randall Emmett and building 'a freaking empire'

By ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

Lala Kent would like to thank her "Vanderpump Rules" co-stars Tom Sandoval and Raquel Leviss. Since their secret monthslong affair — dubbed "Scandoval" — went public in early March, the Bravo reality show's heat meter has skyrocketed.

First, a primer: "Vanderpump Rules" follows former and current staff of LA restaurants owned by former "Real Housewives of Beverly Hills" star Lisa Vanderpump. Sandoval cheated on fellow "VPR" castmate Ariana Madix — the pair had been together for nine years, co-own a home and, this season, Sandoval was filmed making plans to fertilize Madix's eggs. Madix and Leviss were close friends. By this 10th season, seemingly everyone in the tight-knit, drama-ridden cast had dated, dumped, cheated on, befriended or feuded with each other (and sometimes all of the above).

Since Scandoval broke, it's been breathless fodder for social media and mainstream media alike, with viewers combing through episodes to find hints of the affair (they're there). But the cast members have also capitalized on the drama, with dozens of TV interviews, their own podcasts, endorsement deals and merch sales. Madix, Vanderpump and Kent even attended the White House Correspondents' Association dinner ("A lot of them said, 'We have a separate group chat only for (the show),' " Kent says of the politicians who approached the trio).

In an April interview with Howie Mandel, Sandoval complained about his co-stars profiting off his breakup. Kent, though, has some appreciation for him.

"Since Scandoval, (Tom's) given me so much to work with and I will be forever grateful. I feel like when life hands you something, you've got to find the silver lining. We're having a moment. We have to monetize every second," Kent, clad in her own merch, said recently over Zoom from her office in Los Angeles.

Sandoval didn't cheat on Kent, but she's not a stranger to betrayal of this kind. She left her former fiancé, controversial Hollywood producer Randall Emmett, in late 2021 after allegations surfaced that he had cheated on her throughout their relationship. Kent and Emmett are now embroiled in a custody dispute over their daughter Ocean, now 2.

Emmett's own problems have snowballed. Known for his "geezer teasers" — low-budget action films starring iconic actors of yesteryear like Bruce Willis — he's been accused of business misconduct and mistreatment of staff. He's also the subject of a new Hulu documentary, "The Randall Scandal: Love, Loathing, and Vanderpump," produced with the LA Times and ABC News. Kent did not sit for an interview for the documentary (her mother and brother did), but it heavily features clips of her recounting her story elsewhere.

"I had my own situation that was as dark as it gets," Kent told the AP. "When I start fixating on all the time that I feel I wasted because I'm obviously still upset about everything, I just think of Ocean."

Emmett has denied all allegations against him.

Ahead of the final episode of the three-part "VPR" reunion, which airs Wednesday, Kent spoke with the AP about building her brand, friendship, sobriety and the time she worked with Al Pacino. Answers have been condensed for brevity and clarity.

AP: What have your conversations with Ariana Madix been like since her breakup?

KENT: At the very beginning I felt like maybe I was a little too abrupt for her. She needed to take time to process. ... But we do have conversations about how once you're with someone and you don't even realize they're holding you back until you get rid of them and see what your life turns into. So we have we've had moments where we like to reminisce and laugh about that, and it's great that I can make fun of him now in front of her and she thinks I'm funny instead of wanting to, you know, slit my throat (laughs).

AP: You've said Tom and Raquel's affair is triggering for you because you were engaged to be married to Randall Emmett and had a newborn with him when you learned he had allegedly cheated. How did your reaction differ from Ariana's?

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KENT: My guard was immediately up and I was ready for war. You know, it was like "There's no conversation to be had. This is where I burn your house down to the ground." There's a part of me that wishes I did have a little bit of Ariana's mentality, where she could sit down and have a productive conversation with Sandoval and still slice him every which way, which we all saw in the finale episode.

AP: The "Vanderpump" show really had a resurgence this season, thanks in large part to Scandoval, but Seasons Eight and Nine were kind of lacking. Were you all worried the show was winding down?

KENT: I think every season, especially after Season Eight, when we tried to introduce a new cast is like, "Have we maybe lost it?" Season Nine, we got by the skin of our teeth and people didn't really take to it. Season 10 we really got by the skin of our teeth and it was absolutely incredible. So every season I go into it like, "I'm going to enjoy this moment because it will not last forever."

AP: Do you worry how next season will be since at this point hardly anyone wants anything to do with Tom and Raquel? How will scenes happen?

KENT: I think about that all the time. Before, even though certain people didn't like each other, there was always one bridge or another connecting the group. Right now, we are very, very separated so I don't know how it will look like. I'll show up and give them Lala, no matter what situation you put me in. I'm just going to be me.

AP: You've been upfront about your sobriety. Do any of these stressors with your ex or even the drama on the show make you worry about maintaining that?

KENT: I was already strong in my sobriety. Thank God I became stronger when all of this happened. I know that those days are looming. I'm not saying that I will never have the urge to pick up a drink, I'm only human. I can only be grateful for today when I complete another day of not picking up a drink. But I'm telling you, I wouldn't be doing anything that I'm doing right now if I were drinking.

AP: You recently signed with talent agency CAA, host a popular podcast, have a beauty, skincare and baby clothes line. What else do you want to accomplish?

KENT: The biggest thing is, I want to turn my brand into a freaking empire. I know that I can do that. I am very inspired by Bethenny Frankel. I watched her since the first season of "The Real Housewives of New York," sitting in a supermarket, hawking (baked goods) and everyone rejecting it to where she is now. Then to see how she is as a mother and with her charity B Strong, I just feel like she's got it really figured out.

AP: You've also acted. You were in the 2021 movie "American Traitor: The Trial of Axis Sally" (co-produced by Emmett) and had scenes with Al Pacino. What was that like?

KENT: That was a surreal experience and we had the best time. He (Pacino) said to me, "I'm having a lot of fun with you. Let's do this scene a few different ways." And I was like, "I'm dreaming right now. How is this my life?" But I'm funny about it because I thought I was really being put in movies because I was a good actress, and then I learned many women who I was on set with were actually hooking up with my fiance. I was like, "Wow, I did not get in this movie because I'm a good actress." That is a moment that I look back on and I talk to my mom who reassures me a lot. I'm like, "Do you think that (Pacino) said that to me because he meant it?" and my mom talks me off the ledge.

Senators call on TikTok CEO to explain 'inaccurate' statements about how company manages US data

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Two U.S. senators are asking TikTok to explain what they called "misleading or inaccurate" responses about how it stores and provides access to U.S. user data after recent news reports raised questions about how the Chinese-owned social media platform handles some sensitive information.

In a letter sent Tuesday to TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew, U.S. Sens. Richard Blumenthal and Marsha Blackburn cited a report from Forbes that said TikTok had stored financial information of U.S. content creators who get paid by the company — including their Social Security numbers and tax IDs — on China-based servers.

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The senators also cited another report from The New York Times, published in late May, that said TikTok employees regularly shared user information, such as driver's licenses information of some American users, on an internal messaging app called Lark that employees from TikTok's Beijing-based parent company, ByteDance, could easily access.

Forbes first reported Wednesday on the letter.

TikTok spokesperson Alex Haurek said, "We are reviewing the letter. We remain confident in the accuracy of our testimony and responses to Congress."

TikTok has said servers that contain U.S. user data have been physically stored in Virginia and Singapore, where its headquartered. But who can access that data - and from where - is an ongoing question.

Chew, the company's CEO, said at a congressional hearing in March that access to the data was provided "as-required" to engineers globally for business purposes. He also said some ByteDance employees still maintained access to some U.S. user data, but that would end once Project Texas - the company's plan to siphon off U.S. user data from China - was completed.

The popular social media app has been under scrutiny from Western governments, who've been wary of the company's Chinese ownership and have prohibited its use on government issued devices. Earlier this year, the Biden administration threatened to ban the platform nationwide if the company's Chinese owners don't sell their stakes.

To assuage concerns from U.S. lawmakers, TikTok has been touting its Project Texas plan to store U.S. user data on servers owned and maintained by the software giant Oracle. Last year, the company said it began directing all U.S. user traffic to those servers but also continued to back up data on its own servers.

Chew said the company began deleting all historic U.S. user data from non-Oracle servers in March, and the process expected to be completed this year.

In their letter, the senators also said the recent news reports appear to contradict testimonies from another TikTok official about where U.S. user data is stored.

Atlanta organizers unveil plan to stop 'Cop City' at the ballot box

By R.J. RICO Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Activists announced an effort Wednesday to force a referendum that would allow Atlanta voters to decide whether the construction of a proposed police and firefighter training center should proceed, in a potential last-ditch effort to halt the project that its opponents refer to as "Cop City."

A day after the City Council rejected protesters' pleas to refuse to fund the training facility, the activists returned to City Hall to file a referendum petition, hoping to take the fight to the ballot box. Under the proposed referendum, voters would choose whether they want to repeal the ordinance that authorized the lease of the city-owned land upon which the project is set to be built.

In order for the language to get on the ballot, though, organizers must first gather the signatures of more than 70,000 Atlanta voters over 60 days once the city clerk approves the petition. They would also have to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars to pay canvassers to help them do that.

"The people need to have a voice in whether or not there is a Cop City," community organizer Kamau Franklin said during a news conference. "The City Council has failed over and over again to listen to the masses of people in Atlanta. ... What (the council members) want is what the Atlanta Police Foundation wants, which is to continue to militarize police and to attack our movements and criminalize our people. We don't want that."

Alex Joseph, a local attorney who is helping to lead the legal effort, said the referendum campaign is modeled after a successful effort in coastal Georgia, where Camden County residents voted overwhelmingly last year to block county officials from building a launchpad for blasting commercial rockets into space.

The Georgia Supreme Court in February unanimously upheld the legality of the Camden County referendum, though it remains an open question whether citizens can veto decisions of city governments. Joseph said she expects city officials to file legal challenges to try to halt the effort, but that she and other attorneys are working to ensure that the referendum passes legal muster.

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Opponents of the proposed training center say they need to gather the signatures of 15% of the approximately 469,000 city residents who were registered to vote in the last election, which would be 70,330 signatures. About 97,000 people voted in the first round of the city's 2021 mayoral race. Among the groups backing the effort are the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the Working Families Party.

Construction crews have already begun clearing wide swaths of the overgrown, urban forest in unincorporated DeKalb County ahead of the planned construction of the 85-acre (34-hectare) campus. Project opponents said they plan to seek a court order to halt the work pending the outcome of their proposed referendum.

City officials say the \$90 million facility would replace inadequate training facilities and would help address difficulties in hiring and retaining police officers that worsened after nationwide protests against police brutality and racial injustice three years ago.

But opponents, who have been joined by activists from around the country, say they fear it will lead to greater militarization of the police and that its construction will exacerbate environmental damage in a poor, majority-Black area.

The "Stop Cop City" effort has gone on for more than two years and at times has veered into vandalism and violence, with protesters having been accused of throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails at law enforcement officers.

More than 350 people signed up Monday afternoon to deliver impassioned speeches against the facility, with testimony inside the City Council chamber lasting so long — more than 14 hours — that the 11-4 vote in favor of funding the facility did not take place until around 5:30 a.m. the next morning.

Having been unable to convince the council to halt the project, activists said it's time for activists to make the case to the larger public.

"The exciting thing about the referendum is that it's a silver bullet," Joseph said. "If we win, it shuts down the project."

As approved by the City Council in September 2021, the land is being leased to the private Atlanta Police Foundation for \$10 a year. The proposed referendum would seek to cancel that agreement.

Atlanta native and local organizer Clara Totenberg Green said gathering enough signatures in time will be difficult, but she thinks it's doable.

"There are hundreds, thousands of folks that are mobilized and ready to act," Green said. "We can absolutely get the signatures. The challenge is the fast turnaround, but we can do it. People are ready."

Movie Review: Flamin' Hot Cheetos get a loaded origin story, one that's worth the crunch

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

Flamin' Hot Cheetos get an origin story worthy of any Marvel superhero with Hulu's totally engrossing "Flamin' Hot." It's the tale of how a struggling Mexican American janitor came up with the idea of adding spice to the cornmeal, forever saving after-school snacking.

Is it true? Probably not. Don't let that stop you.

You'll wish "Flamin' Hot" was accurate because it's a winning tale of perseverance, family love, proud heritage and blue-collar success, told with a wink, some Cheetos dust and a ton of love by Eva Longoria, in her directorial debut.

Jesse Garcia stars as Richard Montañez, a one-time Frito-Lay floor-sweeper in southern California who convinced his bosses to make a snack that celebrates the flavors of Mexico despite a seven-layer dip of sceptics.

"New products take years to develop, cost millions to launch and they do not get created by blue-collar hoodlums, who probably can't spell hoodlum," our hero is told.

Nevertheless, Montañez persists, cracking the Latino market and repairing his relationship with his abusive father along the way. "I'm the guy who helped bring the world the most popular snack it's ever seen," he

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says in a voice-over.

It's an unlikely story, for sure. No, really. It's unlikely. The Los Angeles Times has published allegations that Montañez fabricated his role in the snack's creation and Frito-Lay says he "was not involved."

But Longoria and the screenplay by Lewis Colick and Linda Yvette Chávez — based on Montañez memoir — will have you cheering when the gnarled red snacks finally zip along on an assembly line and you'll be ready to gleefully fist-bump Montañez, played understatedly but with deep soul by Garcia.

This is more than just a snack-version "Rocky" story, with the filmmakers exploring the insecurity of factory shift workers, the stress of integrating into white culture, how hard it is for corporations to innovate and the ability to silence the voices in your head that urge you to quit.

In one heartbreaking early scene, Montañez — so poor he waters down the milk for his kids and uses chewing gum to seal holes in their shoes — is wide-eyed at the Frito-Lay factory until he notices all the overcooked chips are tossed. "People are always trying to throw away the brown ones," he says.

The filmmakers enliven their story with wonderful flights of fancy, like when we see Montañez lose it and beat up a manager with a mop after being called Paco. "Nah, just kidding," he says in the voice over. "What you think? It was my first week on the job."

To show the passage of time during the Reagan administration, they've also cleverly got a man on the factory floor holding a box reading "1985," the extruder pumps out "1986" and forklifts carrying boxes that read "1987" and "1988."

There are a few references to Frito-Lay scientists in the Midwest also working on a spicy flavor, but this is strictly a fist-in-the-air portrayal of Montañez alone, set to a soundtrack of Latin artists like Santana, Los Lobos and Ozomatli.

His heroic arc is more than a little unbelievable, especially when he taps his former drug-dealing pals to start handing out free bags of chips like pushers, and for the many times he jumps up on a piece of factory equipment to deliver a "Dead Poets Society"-like speech.

Dennis Haysbert as a gruff engineer, Annie Gonzalez as Montañez's loving wife and Tony Shalhoub as the CEO of Frito-Lay all add welcome flavor notes.

It's the montages that really shine, like the moment in a park when Montañez, eating elote and watching everyone put hot sauce on their food, gets a vision of a spicy snack. "I had been searching for an answer. Or a door to open. And there it was all around me. It had been there the entire time," he says.

There's also the sequence when he and his family try every chile combo — poblano, pasilla, serrano, guajillo and habanero included — until they find the right formula, often hovering around their youngest kid as he samples a chip and gives them the green light.

The final product is credited with opening the door to cool new convenience store flavors and for U.S. corporations to finally respect the Latino market. That's a lot of stuff to put in a bag of chips, even if it's all made up. But it's so fun to watch. It burns so good.

"Flamin' Hot," a Searchlight Pictures release, is rated PG-13 for "strong language and brief drug material." Running time: 190 minutes. Two and half stars out of four.

MPAA Definition of PG-13: Parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Online: <https://www.hulu.com/movie/flamin-hot-b81d7e5b-e244-432c-af28-bedf3f8e7020>

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

For many Southern Baptists, the only campaign question is which Republican candidate to support

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

Southern Baptists form a core part of the white evangelical Christian bloc that has reliably and overwhelmingly voted Republican in recent elections, and is expected to again in 2024.

But Southern Baptists are weighing their options in the GOP presidential primary field — some already lining up behind Donald Trump, others wary of the former president, whom most evangelical voters supported in previous elections despite his vulgar language, serial marriages and sexual bravado. Some are looking at what Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis or other candidates might offer.

But even critics of many Baptist voters' embrace of hard-right politics have little doubt where this is headed in November 2024 — support for whichever candidate emerges from the GOP nomination process. The only question is the extent of the fervor they bring to the polls.

In addition to Trump and DeSantis, other GOP candidates have made a point of proclaiming their Christian convictions, including former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, former Vice President Mike Pence and South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott. Pence spoke to the SBC annual meeting in 2018.

"There is a segment of the white evangelical populace, they're looking for a way to distance themselves with the deal with the devil they made in 2016" in supporting Trump, said the Rev. Joel Bowman Sr. of Louisville, Kentucky, who was among several Black pastors who left the SBC in 2021 in dismay over what they saw as a racial backlash in a denomination that had once formally repented of its forebears' racism.

"Whether that's Ron DeSantis or Mike Pence, one thing you can be assured of is most of the white evangelical populace is going to be in alignment with some GOP candidate, whoever that might be," said Bowman, pastor of Temple of Faith Baptist Church, which maintains ties to SBC churches on the state and local level.

Albert Mohler — longtime president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary also in Louisville, and one of the denomination's most prominent leaders — said he hopes "the Republican Party nominee will be someone not named Donald Trump."

Mohler said opposition to abortion is non-negotiable.

"It's unclear where Donald Trump is placing himself vis a vis that issue," Mohler said. He's looking for someone "sharper on the issues and carrying less baggage."

It's the latest turn in Mohler's response to Trump. In 2016, he said evangelicals' support for Trump undermined their credibility. But he later said he was pleased with Trump's actions in office, particularly in appointing the Supreme Court justices who provided the tipping point needed to overturn the Roe v. Wade decision.

But Trump has since said the abortion issue should be decided by the states, drawing criticism from some seeking a federal ban.

Mohler acknowledged that Democrats have benefited politically from the backlash to the Supreme Court decision. He's looking for candidates who can navigate that political reality without compromising. "I'm not going to support any candidate who is not prolife in conviction and with an honest and straightforward strategy to lead a prolife effort," he said, and noted that the GOP has a "good number of attractive candidates," putting DeSantis at the top of that list.

But if Trump becomes the nominee, "I'll revisit that question" of whom to vote for.

DeSantis formally entered the race last month and is the leading alternative to Trump, who remains the dominant force in GOP politics at the moment. But if the Florida governor were to ultimately capture the Republican nomination and face Joe Biden, two Catholic major-party presidential candidates would face off for the first time in U.S. history.

One of Trump's staunchest supporters in this and past elections is Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas.

"When Trump first announced his re-election bid last November I predicted that some evangelicals would 'kick the tires' of other candidates but would eventually coalesce around Trump as they did in 2016," Jef-

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press said via email. "However, 'eventually' happened even more quickly than even I expected."

Jeffress, who began backing Trump during the 2016 primary season, said evangelicals are concluding that only Trump can defeat Biden. Jeffress cited issues traditionally important to evangelicals in calling Trump "the most pro-life, pro-religious liberty, and pro-Israel president in history."

The political season is heating up even as Southern Baptists head to their mid-June annual meeting roiled by internal conflicts and scandals over the mishandling of sexual abuse — the subject of a Department of Justice investigation. While theological debates will be prominent — particularly over whether to uphold the ouster of churches with female pastors — many proposed resolutions in recent years have reflected debates in secular politics.

A key question is how much energy and fervor Southern Baptists will be able to muster for the GOP presidential primary.

The denomination continues to experience long-term declines in membership and other measures of spiritual vitality, such as baptisms, according to its own statistics. Like other religious groups, it has struggled to regain pre-pandemic attendance levels. And like many historically white Protestant denominations, Southern Baptists are graying, with the average age at 55, according to the 2020 Cooperative Election Study. All this would affect any get-out-the-vote campaign among a flock that is smaller than in previous elections and that has its hands full of challenges.

And Southern Baptists are experiencing the same media fragmentation that the nation is as a whole. Whereas the denominational press and state Baptist newspapers once wielded strong influence, members now get competing views and news from a wide array of social media and niche sites.

Pastor Mike Stone of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Blackshear, Georgia — a candidate for SBC president from its more conservative wing — said he doesn't use the pulpit to endorse candidates.

But as a pastor, "I unapologetically address issues that Christians should consider in making their own personal choices," he said. "These include the sanctity of human life, Biblical marriage and issues of sexual morality, and a Scriptural understanding of the role of government" to punish evil and promote good, he said.

"Christians should prefer righteous men and women for public office," he said. "Because no perfect candidate exists, that often means voting for the better or best of the available options."

SBC President Bart Barber declined to comment for this story.

At the local church level, pastors navigate pressure from members who want them either to be more political from the pulpit — or less.

"These days it's almost impossible to avoid it, more than it used to," said Eric Costanzo, pastor of South Tulsa Baptist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "We've had to cross those lines in different ways because of the issues we're involved in," such as advocating for immigrants or for reforms in how Southern Baptists deal with issues of abuse.

"During COVID it was tricky, and after Jan. 6 it was tricky," he said. "I try to lead by example by not endorsing or not disparaging by name. Sometimes we have to dig into issues that have no choice but to have political implications."

For Bowman, efforts by many in Republican and Southern Baptist circles to focus on criticizing "wokeness" have served to distract attention from realities of systemic racism, as well as the SBC's own internal conflicts.

"If the SBC attaches itself again with the GOP and continues to focus on wedge issues and culture wars, there will begin to be an exodus from the SBC on the part of white members who would be considered more moderate or centrist," he said. "The SBC is in many ways backing itself in to the corner. It is not going to help its professed cause to bring people to Christ."

Associated Press religion coverage receives support through the AP's collaboration with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Andrew Young was at Martin Luther King's side throughout often violent struggle for civil rights

By GARY FIELDS Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Andrew Young's first thought when he heard the Voting Rights Act had been signed into law was not celebratory. It was strategic.

"Where are we going to get the money to get the country mobilized to register these voters?" he recalled thinking at that momentous time nearly 60 years ago.

Now 91, Young is one of the last surviving members of Martin Luther King Jr.'s inner circle. The two were together from their first meeting in 1957 at a fraternity symposium at Talladega College until King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968.

But while King and fellow close adviser Ralph Abernathy were at the U.S. Capitol for the 1965 signing, Young was not.

"That wasn't my part of the movement," he said. "I was maybe a field general."

Young would go on to become mayor of Atlanta, a congressman and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. He was interviewed by The Associated Press as part of a series on the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Ten years ago this month, the court threw out what many consider the heart of that landmark law — the ability of the Justice Department to enforce it in states and counties with a history of voter suppression.

The journey to the Voting Rights Act was an arduous one, Young recalled. In December 1964, Young and King headed to Washington to meet with President Lyndon Johnson after King had just accepted the Nobel Peace Prize. Young recalled they had to wait several hours as the president met with his advisers about what Young believes was the growing conflict in Vietnam.

When they did get in, they were met by a president who appeared weary and stressed.

"He told Dr. King, 'I know you need voting rights. I wish I could do it, but I just don't have the power,'" Young recalled. "Every argument Dr. King gave, President Johnson's answer was, 'I agree with you, but I just don't have the power.'"

Outside the White House, Young told King the president was right and suggested this was a time to take a break from the movement he'd been leading for years. He had been jailed multiple times, stabbed, almost fatally, and his home bombed.

King kept pushing and Young responded, "You're broke, you're poor, you don't have a gun or a bank account, nothing that sounds like power in this country.' He ignored me and kept saying, 'We've got to get the president some power.'"

Two days later, they received a call from Amelia Boynton Robinson, an activist in Alabama who suggested the men start a voter registration push in Selma.

That effort began in January and expanded into surrounding areas, including Perry County and Marion, the county seat. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference sent James Orange, who worked with local activists and helped organize sit-downs and student boycotts.

Orange was arrested in mid-February, ostensibly because one protest included students skipping school. Rumors circulated that he was going to be lynched.

Police violently disrupted the protest of his arrest, and a Black military veteran and church deacon, Jimmie Lee Jackson, was shot by a state trooper while trying to protect his grandfather and died days later.

Young, King, Abernathy and other civil rights leaders came to the funeral and planned to stage a march from Selma to the state capital, Montgomery. March 7 was chosen as the date, but the planners hadn't taken into account that it happened to be the first Sunday of the month, a sacrosanct day for Black pastors, Young said.

King was preaching that day at his church, Ebenezer Baptist in Atlanta, but Young was among several hundred people gathered for the march. In a phone call to King, he described what he saw as the demonstrators approached the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. King told him to let the people march.

"I had been on the other side of the bridge, and I saw the police and there were maybe 100 of them, and there were police on horseback," Young said. "And I made the calculation that they were just going

to turn us back or they would round up a few of the leaders and send everybody else back.”

That’s not how it played out.

“It wasn’t 10 seconds between the time they told them to turn around and when they started throwing tear gas bombs and charging with billy clubs,” he said. “It was a panic, and they were beating up people.”

The images galvanized people across the country, and within days Johnson called the nation to action during a speech in which he echoed the phrase that symbolized the movement: “We shall overcome.” By the end of that summer, Johnson would be signing the Voting Rights Act.

Young said voting rights have always been the vehicle for equality, and notes that progress has never happened in a straight line.

“Every time there seems to be a rise in confidence and equality and things seem to be going better, there’s some backlash that comes and sets it back,” he said.

The Associated Press coverage of race and voting receives support from the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation. See more about AP’s democracy initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

From swords to fishing lures to “sprinklers,” MLB celebrations have become full-scale productions

By WILL GRAVES AP Sports Writer

PITTSBURGH (AP) — There are very few things that make Scott Bonnett panic.

Spending the last 15 years making sure the Pittsburgh Pirates have whatever they need whenever they need it has taught the longtime equipment manager the importance of being prepared for anything.

Well, almost anything.

Bonnett found himself in the dugout in Seattle late last month watching Andrew McCutchen round third following a leadoff home run against the Mariners when joy was quickly replaced by panic. The pathologically meticulous Bonnett scanned the end of the bench looking not for a helmet or a glove or pine tar but ... a rubber sword and a black suit jacket that looks like it got attacked by an overzealous tailor with an affinity for patches.

Welcome to major league baseball in 2023, where an ever-increasing number of homers and big hits aren’t met with simple fist bumps or forearm bashes but a full-on production.

In Pittsburgh, they swashbuckle. You know, as Pirates do. In Minnesota, the fish. In Miami, they drape themselves in bling. In Seattle, they don a tricked-out Darth Vader helmet and brandish a trident. In Washington, they literally wig out. In Arizona, they wrap themselves in leather.

A trend that began with a few rogue teams during the pandemic as a way to bring life to fan-less stadiums is catching on thanks in part to social media and simple competitive one-upmanship.

The surprising Pirates began using a sword — OK, technically a “cutlass” — this season at the behest of a group of fans that call themselves “The Renegades of the Rotunda” and regularly show up to games at PNC Park in full cosplay glory. McCutchen — who was able to flamboyantly parry with an invisible opponent in Seattle after his 295th career homer when Bonnett found the momentarily misplaced prop just in time — figures his club is just trying to keep up with the times.

“You almost feel like an outcast if you don’t have it on a team,” the five-time All-Star said. “It’s just kind of where we are.”

Or more specifically, where they’re going.

Baseball isn’t just evolving on the field but off it. Sure the pitch clock is cool. It just doesn’t go viral like say, players slamming water through a funnel or turning themselves into “human sprinklers” like kids goofing off around a garden hose, as the Baltimore Orioles do after big hits.

“It is very dumb, but it is hilarious,” McCutchen said. “Especially when you get the whole team involved.”

McCutchen pointed to the crowded dugout rail as proof the Orioles are creating the kind of good vibes difficult to quantify but essential to navigating a six-month season that can sometimes feel like a slog no

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matter how well it's going.

"Everyone is watching the game, they're watching what's happening," McCutchen said. "You don't have guys in the clubhouse just wondering what's going on or not paying attention. They're out there."

It's also creating a bond with the people who buy the tickets. The Orioles have labeled a section of left-field seats "Bird Bath Splash Zone" where fans can get doused — thankfully with water from a cannon and not a player's mouth — after extra-base hits.

"They want to feel connected to their team, and I think it gives them a way that hopefully they're enjoying it," Baltimore pitcher Kyle Gibson said. "It gives them a way to get in touch."

There are a handful of unwritten rules — of course, there are unwritten rules, it's baseball — that come with the territory. First off, the props have to be organic, or at the very least on brand. Oh, and they can't upset a league sponsor, like when Atlanta broke out a comically oversized Braves hat, only to be chided by MLB because it wasn't created by New Era, MLB's official hat provider.

The Twins started their "Land of 10,000 Rakes" routine at the urging of pitcher Pablo López, who created an informal planning committee to hatch something symbolic of the region. They came up with a beige fishing vest and a child's fishing pole, with the opportunity for more to be added over the summer.

"Maybe we can add a bucket hat, or a big fish would be good," outfielder Michael Taylor said.

Change can be good. Miami's homer party has morphed from a simple chain with a massive Marlins logo to a full-on ensemble that now includes a giant straw hat and a pair of sunglasses, a nod to a city that's part neon glam, part retirement community.

Arizona used to pull out a stuffed rattlesnake but has since traded it for a "victory vest" that the night's star player can wear during postgame TV interviews.

"Anything you can do to break up the dog days of the season, little things like that, sneak in a laugh," Diamondbacks first baseman Christian Walker said. "We've had a couple of things we've retired along the way, but it seems like the jacket is sticking."

It helps that the Diamondbacks are winning, a key factor in whether something catches on or fizzles out. San Diego Padres star Fernando Tatis Jr. thought he was on to something when he brought a full-size red, white and green sombrero into the dugout during a series in Mexico City against the San Francisco Giants in April. The Padres homered six times that first night, with the sombrero finding its way onto the head of whoever sent the ball over the fence.

A May swoon, however, soon followed. And the sombrero went back into storage after two short-lived weeks.

"It died," Tatis joked, allowing it will "probably" return at some point. "It's in the back. It's resting. He gave everything he had."

Still, San Diego doesn't lack options. The Padres occasionally pose for photos with a baseball — typically with a face drawn on it by bench coach Ryan Christenson — that sports a mini-sombrero up top after homers.

Nearly every player The Associated Press talked to stressed most of the celebrations are generally all in good fun and don't cross the line into something personal, unlike say a particularly showy backflip or the "sword" motion former MLB pitcher Trevor Bauer used to flash after a strikeout.

They're also typically done in the "privacy" of the dugout, out of the sight of the opponent on the field.

Still, that doesn't mean they don't occasionally get under the skin. That's where the beauty of the game comes in.

"It's a two-way street," McCutchen said. "The hitter can do what they want. The pitcher can do what they want. But just know if there's ever a meeting again, that other person is going to feel like, if I get you here, I'm going to do something to where I feel some type of vengeance. I have some time of vengeance against you because you did that. I'm going to really celebrate on this one."

It's not on McCutchen to decide what's good for the game or bad for the game. At 36, he's old enough to be considered "old school," even though there's been a flashiness to his game from the moment he made his major-league debut in 2009. Now a father of three — including two young sons who are already

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playing T-ball — he understands the game needs to adapt or die.

If that means turning every home into a production — within reason — then so be it. Bring on the props. A decade ago he was part of a team that flashed a “Z” in reference to Zoltan, the villain in the early 2000s comedy “Dude Where’s My Car? — perhaps one of the most random “things that became a thing” in the sport’s modern history.

This season, it’s a cutlass and a jacket that’s a little too tight. Next year it’ll be something else.

“It’s going to change,” he said. “For me, you either accept it or you’re just mad. We’re showmen. We put on a show. That’s what brings you to the ballpark. You play the game but you also do some things that make people be like, ‘Man, that was really cool.’”

AP Sports Writers Dave Campell, Noah Trister, David Brandt, Bernie Wilson, Jay Cohen, Tim Booth, Paul Newberry and Kristie Rieken and Associated Press writer Santos Perez contributed to this report.

AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/hub/mlb> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Today in History: June 8, Lincoln is renominated

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, June 8, the 159th day of 2023. There are 206 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On June 8, 1864, Abraham Lincoln was nominated for another term as president during the National Union (Republican) Party’s convention in Baltimore.

On this date:

In A.D. 632, the prophet Muhammad died in Medina.

In 1867, modern American architect Frank Lloyd Wright was born in Richland Center, Wisconsin.

In 1953, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that restaurants in the District of Columbia could not refuse to serve Blacks.

In 1966, a merger was announced between the National and American Football Leagues, to take effect in 1970.

In 1967, during the six-day Middle East war, 34 American servicemen were killed when Israel attacked the USS Liberty, a Navy intelligence-gathering ship in the Mediterranean Sea. (Israel later said the Liberty had been mistaken for an Egyptian vessel.)

In 1968, authorities announced the capture in London of James Earl Ray, the suspected assassin of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In 1978, a jury in Clark County, Nevada, ruled the so-called “Mormon will,” purportedly written by the late billionaire Howard Hughes, was a forgery.

In 1995, U.S. Marines rescued Capt. Scott O’Grady, whose F-16C fighter jet had been shot down by Bosnian Serbs on June 2.

In 2008, the average price of regular gas crept up to \$4 a gallon.

In 2009, North Korea’s highest court sentenced American journalists Laura Ling and Euna Lee to 12 years’ hard labor for trespassing and “hostile acts.” (The women were pardoned in early August 2009 after a trip to Pyongyang by former President Bill Clinton.)

In 2015, siding with the White House in a foreign-policy power struggle with Congress, the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that Americans born in the disputed city of Jerusalem could not list Israel as their birthplace on passports.

In 2020, thousands of mourners gathered at a church in Houston for a service for George Floyd, as his death during an arrest in Minneapolis stoked protests in America and beyond over racial injustice.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama and Chinese leader Xi Jinping (shee jihn-peeng) concluded a two-day summit in the California desert that ended with few policy breakthroughs but the prospect of

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closer personal ties. Serena Williams won her 16th Grand Slam title and her first French Open championship since 2002, beating Maria Sharapova 6-4, 6-4. Palace Malice took charge on the turn for home and won the Belmont Stakes, holding off Preakness winner Oxbow and Kentucky Derby winner Orb.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump joined longtime U.S. allies at the Group of Seven summit in Canada after insisting that the other countries "have been taking advantage of the United States on trade;" Trump also said Russia should be brought back into the group. Special counsel Robert Mueller brought new obstruction charges against former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and a longtime associate, Konstantin Kilimnik, who prosecutors said had ties to Russian intelligence. Celebrity chef, author and CNN host Anthony Bourdain was found dead in his hotel room in eastern France in what authorities determined was a suicide. The Golden State Warriors beat the Cleveland Cavaliers in Game 4 of the NBA finals to complete a sweep; it was their second straight title and third in four years.

One year ago: An 11-year-old girl who survived the mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, told members of Congress how she covered herself in her dead classmate's blood and played dead to avoid being shot. Her account came on the second day of testimony from families of the victims and survivors of mass shootings weeks earlier in Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde. Ukrainian and Russian forces battled for control of a key eastern city, while fears of a global food crisis escalated as millions of tons of grain piled up inside the besieged country, unable to be exported because of the war. Olympian Simone Biles and dozens of other women who say they were sexually assaulted by Larry Nassar filed a lawsuit seeking more than \$1 billion from the FBI for failing to stop the sports doctor when the agency first received allegations against him.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Millicent Martin is 89. Actor James Darren is 87. Singer Nancy Sinatra is 83. Singer Chuck Negron is 81. Musician Boz Scaggs is 79. Author Sara Paretsky is 76. Actor Sonia Braga is 73. Actor Kathy Baker is 73. Rock singer Bonnie Tyler is 72. Actor Griffin Dunne is 68. "Dilbert" creator Scott Adams is 66. Actor-director Keenen Ivory Wayans is 65. Singer Mick Hucknall (Simply Red) is 63. Musician Nick Rhodes (Duran Duran) is 61. R&B singer Doris Pearson (Five Star) is 57. Actor Julianna Margulies is 56. Actor Dan Futterman is 56. Actor David Sutcliffe is 54. Actor Kent Faulcon is 53. R&B singer Nicci Gilbert is 53. Actor Kelli Williams is 53. Former U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-Ariz., is 53. Actor Mark Feuerstein is 52. Contemporary Christian musician Mike Scheuchzer (MercyMe) is 48. Actor Eion Bailey is 47. Former tennis player Lindsay Davenport is 47. Rapper Ye (YAY) (formerly Kanye (KAHN'-yay) West) is 46. TV personality-actress Maria Menounos is 45. Country singer-songwriter Sturgill Simpson is 45. Blues-rock musician Derek Trucks (The Derek Trucks Band) is 44. Rock singer Alex Band (The Calling) is 42. Folk-bluegrass singer-musician Sara Watkins (Nickel Creek, I'm With Her) is 42. Former tennis player Kim Clijsters is 40. Actor Torrey DeVitto is 39. Tennis player Jelena Ostapenko is 26. U.S. Olympic track gold medalist Athing Mu (uh-THING moh) is 21.